



EAHCP STEWARD

News from the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan - October 2022



Happy to Help

Hundreds of volunteers show up for river cleanups in New Braunfels and San Marcos

If you're ever looking for some words of inspiration, just search for "quotes about volunteering." You'll find thoughtful sayings from famous writers, heads of state, religious leaders, entertainers and from people you might not know like Elizabeth Andrew who said, "Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they have the heart." But when you want to see those words translated into action, you should plan to attend the annual river clean ups held by the Cities of San Marcos and New Braunfels. You have to really love your community to wake up early on a Saturday morning, don a pair of rubber gloves and venture out into the streets and creeks to pick up trash someone else left behind.

"Yes, it's truly inspiring to see people come out by the hundreds to help us clean up New Braunfels each year," said Mark Enders, City of New Braunfels Watershed Program Manager. "You see age ranges from 2-82, families, company groups, church groups, high school and college students. And they are all here to

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contribute their time and energy to picking up litter so it doesn't enter the Comal River and other water bodies around the area. It's definitely not a glamorous job, but you wouldn't know it by the enthusiasm you find among the volunteers."

On a large cleanup day like the Dos Rios event, volunteers will collect about 1,500 pounds of trash. Enders said that mountain of litter reminds people about the problem itself and the need for creating awareness about pollution prevention throughout the community as well the number of smaller drainages and tributaries that citizens might not be familiar with.

Litter is one of many types of pollutants that can damage the habitat for the endangered species found in the Comal Springs and Comal River. When pollutants such as nutrients and fertilizers enter the aquatic environment, algal blooms can occur. This excessive growth of algae can create a carpet-like layer on the surface of the water and choke out native vegetation, create water temperature variations and prevent oxygen from diffusing into the water.



Family outing at the Dos Rios cleanup in New Braunfels.

"On the morning of the big event, volunteers sign up at the Headwaters at the Comal facility, enjoy some breakfast, pick up a t-shirt and then head out to locations throughout the city," Enders explained. "We have dumpsters situated where the cleanup areas are so volunteers don't have to come back here after they've filled their trash bags. The cleanup happens rain or shine, but a cool October morning like this one always helps bring out a few more people. We welcome everyone, whether they're from New Braunfels or not. The Comal Springs and Comal River are special places and so we're very grateful to every single person who comes out to help us protect these natural resources."

This is the sixth year for the Dos Rios Watershed Cleanup event. And, about 20 miles north on I-35, the City of San Marcos recently concluded its sixth annual Fall River Clean Up day. establish water pollution prevention programs to get those out-of-compliance waterways back to healthier water quality levels.

"For our first event six years ago, we had about 250 people gather at the Recreation Hall at San Marcos City Park. The second year we had 500 people show up and that became a bit hectic," said Amy Thomaides, Community Enhancement Initiatives Manager. "After that, we decided to spread out to nine different locations around town and have people meet where they chose to pick up trash for the day. That change in logistics has really worked well for us and made it easier for our volunteers to sign in and get to their locations."

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For the San Marcos clean up, they designate watershed leaders and crew leaders to help volunteers understand the specifics of their locations, safety guidelines to follow and who to turn to if they need help. Before the event, volunteers sign up on line and choose a location they want to work. To create awareness about the cleanup, the leadership team pounds the social media pavement, sends out press releases and connects with students at Texas State University.



Left to right, Brittany Moore, Amy Thomaides and Melani Howard show off this year's swag.

“Sometimes people see San Marcos as two communities...Texas State and then the City of San Marcos. But the San Marcos River is really the thread that binds those two perceived groups together,” Thomaides noted. “The river is beloved by all who come here and many people move here because of the river. It’s that true connection to the river and this beautiful environment that brings people together and inspires them to come out and pick up trash for several hours. It really is a beautiful sight to see.”

Melani Howard, who manages the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan (EAHCP) for the City of San Marcos, says the river clean up fits perfectly with the work being done to protect endangered species. “There is a specific conservation measure in the EAHCP about removing litter from waterways. In addition to the large annual cleanup events, Amy and I work together each month in gathering people to clean up various ‘hot spots’ which need attention. Those efforts also help us meet our requirements in the EAHCP.”

In assessing the source of the trash, Thomaides explained that the pollution prevention topic can get a bit complicated. “The San Marcos River is famous for tubing and other recreation activities and so we do get litter from the thousands of people who visit here. As the City of San Marcos has expanded its city limits, we’ve found illegal dump sites to deal with. When we get flooding, trash washes into the river from lots of places. We’ve even discovered that wildlife can get into trash disposal bins and drag items around the parks. Then, like much of the country, we’ve experienced an increase in homeless encampments which are typically located near the waterways. While the trash issue is one that isn’t easily solved, we have taken numerous steps to prevent litter accumulation such as ‘animal-proofing’ trash containers and working with our city leaders to pass ordinances to make it expensive for people to litter. These large clean up events also help us manage the problem more effectively.”

“While we have lots of formal type programs for litter clean up throughout the year, one of the most gratifying sights we see almost every day is watching citizens enjoying the river and parks and picking up litter on their own,” Howard concluded. “They know it’s the right thing to do and so they do, and often with a smile on their faces.”



EAHCP STEWARD SHORT TAKES

Melani Howard Retires from City San Marcos, EAHCP Work



The EAHCP Steward Newsletter would like to congratulate Melani Howard on her upcoming retirement from the City of San Marcos. Thank you, Melani, for your years of service, leadership, and dedication to the EAHCP and your immense contributions to the health of the San Marcos River.

At her last EAHCP Stakeholder Committee meeting, Howard thanked the EAHCP staff and all of the stakeholders for their support over the years. "This has truly been an interesting and fulfilling part of my life and I especially want to thank Dr. Arsuffi for encouraging me to take on this challenge in the first place."

Last Day to Sign Up for National HCP Coalition Conference is Oct. 21

The last day to register to attend the National HCP Coalition Conference is Oct. 21, 2022. The conference will be held in Austin and run from October 24-27. You can sign up and find complete event information at the [NHCP website](#).

Here's a brief overview of the NHCP itinerary:

- Evening Welcome Reception on October 24
- Day 1: October 25 - Welcome and lecture series
- Day 2: October 26 - Field Trip Day (Texas Cave Tour, Springs and Songbirds (ADA accessible), or Edwards Aquifer Tour)
- Day 3: October 27 - Lecture series and closing