



**HABITAT
CONSERVATION
PLAN**
EDWARDS
AQUIFER

Steward
Newsletter

The Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan e-newsletter, "Steward," is published to highlight the efforts underway to protect the Comal and San Marcos Springs and ensure a healthy habitat for the threatened and endangered species.

Rewarding River Work Earns State Excellence Award



Melani Howard addresses a diverse group of volunteers getting ready to plant a series of native trees along the San Marcos River.

The San Marcos Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan (EAHCP) volunteer program recently won Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) Civic and Community Environmental Excellence Award. So, how would you think San Marcos EAHCP Program Coordinator Melani Howard would celebrate?

"We brought a great group of volunteers out to get their hands dirty in planting trees along the San Marcos River," Howard said with a smile. "The TCEQ camera crew was here to get our story and we just thought it was appropriate to not only celebrate with our wonderful partners, but to make the San Marcos River ecosystem better at the same time."

The San Marcos EAHCP Volunteer Program consists of litter pickup across the watershed, removal of invasive plant species, spearfishing to remove nonnative fish from the river, riparian restoration, community education outreach and overall maintenance activities. Many of the litter pickups are manned by Texas State students, but there are a diverse set of groups who pitch in on river improvement workdays as well.

Tree Folks representative and Texas State graduate Ina Alexatos said she actually acquired her enthusiasm for the San Marcos River conservation efforts by being an EAHCP volunteer a few years back. "The early work I did with the EAHCP was my first exposure to rivers and water resources. So, I expanded my knowledge of river ecosystems to go with my degree which focused on stormwater. My work with the *Tree Folks* organization is not because I know a lot about trees, but because of my knowledge of how trees are integral to riparian, or riverside, restoration."

Alexatos concluded by saying that spending your time planting a tree that you probably won't ever sit under its shade makes a huge statement about making the future river environment better for generations to come. She said the work is personally satisfying and knows that once people are exposed to helping sustain nature, they tend to pass it on as well.

Now that is an award-winning outlook.