



The EAA Mission: The Next Generation

Conceptual Overview: A Case for Regionwide Conservation

The following is an overview of a concept by which the Edwards Aquifer Authority (EAA) with support from the Edwards Aquifer Conservancy (EAC) and others could undertake the significant role of managing and operating a new program for the purpose of aquifer protection and enhancement. This initiative would serve as a legacy program of the EAA for the next generation around the mission of managing, enhancing and protecting the Edwards Aquifer system. If undertaken, such a program would demonstrate in real and meaningful terms the EAA ideals of imagination, innovation, and inclusion in preserving and enhancing the sustainability of the Edwards Aquifer.

- Imagination – imagine the next iteration of the EAA mission; an era where the agency's knowledge, experience, science and resources are leveraged to build legacy programming around aquifer protection, preservation, and enhancement initiatives in the recharge and contributing zones of the Edwards Aquifer.
- Innovation – consider the ways by which our science-based programs could be interconnected to efficient, proactive and creative approaches to aquifer conservation and enhancement solutions, which offer the potential to give greater impact and permanence to the EAA mission well into the future.
- Inclusion – consider the opportunities to engage with others in the region and beyond as partners in ways that build support for and engagement with the EAA mission for a lasting effect and impact.

The Opportunity: Embrace the opportunity to *complement, enhance, and eventually succeed the Edwards Aquifer Protection Program (EAPP)* currently under administration of the City of San Antonio. Establish a viable, self-sustaining method (program/coalition) to replace and expand upon the initiatives and mission of the EAPP. In other words, proactively fund, enroll, manage, monitor, and maintain land and water conservation properties for the preservation, protection, and enhancement of the Edwards Aquifer and its spring systems, with a particular focus on the full extent of the Contributing and Recharge Zones.

The Model: The EAA would add to its individual efforts *by seeking partner organizations across the Edwards region*, beginning with the EAC and others which share in concern for preserving, protecting, and enhancing Edwards Aquifer water quality and quantity. Independently and through collaborative approaches, the EAA would work to secure more conservation easements, fee-simple purchases, etc., of lands, and groundwater estates as well as the establishment of groundwater markets/trusts for the long-term sustainability and enhancement of the Aquifer. Where applicable, utilize the program to further assure and satisfy long term economic and environmental concerns yet to be identified in the next iteration of an Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan.

The Purpose: (1) Identify, negotiate, and secure control of the most environmentally sensitive and economically beneficial lands for *the multi-generational preservation, protection, and enhancement of*

the Edwards Aquifer and utilize such lands to study and demonstrate innovative natural resource management solutions addressing various issues of particular impact to the aquifer such as climate change, groundwater inter-formational flow, issues of water quality, and recharge preservation. (2) Identify and establish creative solutions to the increasing demands upon the Edwards Aquifer and implement those solutions in programmatic ways to maintain and enhance the aquifer's sustainable use.

The Resources: The EAA would work together with the EAC and other partners to build capacity – in relationships and in fiscal resources – to **establish and grow a support network and a fund base** for achieving functional status within the next 3-5 years such that the model is operational prior to the transition to a new Incidental Take Permit/HCP (2027-28).

Framework For Operations: Science-based Solutions Through Creative Collaboration

Programs and Initiatives: All programs and initiatives associated with the plan, including any new opportunities that arise that provide an opportunity to enhance and protect springflow, water quality, and the continued, reliable use of the Edwards Aquifer in the face of various threats such as future demand and droughts.

As the EAA explores the viability of existing programs and the opportunity for new initiatives, they will do so with a recognition of emerging impacts from climate change and population growth and with a goal of designing and establishing multifaceted measures that, when combined, will be capable of providing interrelated benefits to the Aquifer, to participants, and all stakeholders of the Edwards Aquifer.

This overall goal can be accomplished through combination of:

Securing conservation easements in strategic locations, including the Contributing Zone;

Introducing, implementing, and promoting beneficial land management practices;

Introducing, implementing, and promoting beneficial and creative preservation and enhancement practices; Securing additional, functional groundwater trusts;

Exploring appropriate ownership and/or management of groundwater estates;

Exploring fee simple purchases and other strategies that meet multiple goals;

Participating in nontraditional markets, such as mitigation banking and carbon sequestration; and

Seeking additional revenue streams that may be generated by expanding current programs.

Funding Strategies: All actions require capital. Recognizing this fact, the EAA will be creative and fiscally responsible, identifying and exploring every available funding opportunity through the EAC and its fundraising capacity and other sources. To be successful, the EAA will need to maximize available capital – combining, leveraging, and augmenting existing funding with additional revenue opportunities and strategies, including:

Exploring all alternative means of financing program costs; ;

Seeking relationships and partnerships with private donors;

Exploring federal, state, and private grant opportunities, especially through collaboration with like-minded organizations;

Aggressively seeking nontraditional funding through state and federal sources;

Facilitating and exploring impact investments / social impact ventures; and

Re-prioritizing internal goals and funding initiatives.

Relationship Network: Relationships can bring value to the initiative and will be built through open-minded collaboration. Efforts will be made to:

Nurture existing relationships and partnerships – seeking ways to build a supportive network and achieve common goals;

Actively seek new and non-traditional relationships, with a goal of identifying mutually beneficial partnerships for achieving programmatic success and securing alternative sources of funding; and

Engage key participants in field of conservation and aquifer and watershed management, both regionally and nationally, to learn from their successes and failures and to take advantage of concepts, opportunities and resources that have differing perspectives and reach;

Internal Support: All existing expertise will be developed and maximized to efficiently facilitate and achieve programmatic success.

An appropriate structural support staff for this endeavor will require the EAA to fully embrace a cross-functional, collaborative approach from all programs and from all staff. Even with cross-functional support, a great deal of time and effort will be required to facilitate the planning and implementation of the program. A thorough re-evaluation of new cooperative opportunities that could exist between the EAC and the EAA will be in order as well as an analysis of current EAA workloads, programmatic elements, and internal expertise.