

Springs trails to connect S.A. to Austin

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A new parks project in Central Texas aims to connect four natural springs from San Antonio to Austin.

The National Parks Service announced in December that it would provide community planning and technical assistance to the Great Springs Project.

The goal of the project, founded in 2018 and still in the planning stage, is to add 50,000 acres of protected land in areas that feed the Edwards Aquifer connected by trails that will link San Antonio Springs, Comal Springs, San Marcos Springs and Barton Springs in Austin.

The San Antonio Springs, the southern end of the project, is a cluster of springs primarily on and near the University of the Incarnate Word campus at Broadway and Hildebrand Avenue. The largest spring, known as the Blue Hole, is considered the headwaters of the San Antonio River.

The hike-and-bike trails would ensure that residents throughout the San Antonio-Austin corridor have access to outdoor experiences. The project also is intended to protect natural resources for endangered species and water quality for the more than 2 million

people who rely on the Edwards Aquifer for their drinking water.

The project anticipates a completion date in 2036.

As Texas' population booms, the Great Springs Project also aims to ensure that some natural areas between San Antonio and Austin are saved from cities' ever-expanding urban sprawl. Rapid urbanization in the area threatens to

Trail continues on E8 increase flooding and harm the ecosystem if not balanced with conservation efforts.

"The communities are built around the springs," Garry Merritt, Great Springs Project CEO, said in a Chron.com report. "The mission to continue to protect those springs for the iconic public spaces

that they are is really important to us."

Deborah Morin, Great Springs Project co-founder and board president, is a San Antonio native. Hope Andrade, board chairman for VIA Metropolitan Transit, is a member of the board. Former Tesoro CEO Mike Burke and San Antonio architect Ted Flato are on the advisory board.

"We're putting a project together that will be for Texas for hundreds of years. It's for the future of Texas," Merritt told Chron.com.

Follow the progress of the Great Springs Project on Instagram, @greatspringsproject
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Staff file photo

Barton Springs Pool at Zilker Park in Austin would be on the northern end of the Great Springs Project.

