

Edwards Aquifer restrictions tighten

Many cities go to Stage 3 as water levels drop amid the heat wave

By Barry L. Harrell
STAFF WRITER

The agency that manages the Edwards Aquifer is once again tightening restrictions on pumping water from the ground-water system.

The Edwards Aquifer Authority said this week it is returning to Stage 3 restrictions due to a drop in the aquifer's water levels. The 10-day rolling average for the aquifer was 639.6 feet as of Monday, the authority said.

Stage 3 drought restrictions are put in place when the rolling average falls below 640 feet for 10 consecutive days. The aquifer's water level was 633.6 feet on Wednesday, according to the authority's website.

The authority had only recently eased the restrictions to Stage 2, doing so in late May as increased rainfall totals in the region boosted water levels. But much of Texas has dealt with searing heat in the weeks since, leading to drier conditions.

During Stage 3 restrictions, cities and other entities must reduce the amount of water they pump from the aquifer by 35 percent.

The aquifer provides the San Antonio Water System with only about 50 percent of its water supply, so SAWS users remain in Stage 2 restrictions. But other area water systems would need to tighten their water-use rules as a result of the Edwards Aquifer Authority's decision.

San Marcos said this week that it is moving from Stage 2 to Stage 3 restrictions.

"We have been in drought for well over a year and are experiencing very high tem-

peratures with little relief in sight," said Tyler Hjorth, San Marcos director of utilities. "It's vital that we do all we can to conserve our limited water resources and keep this situation from getting worse."

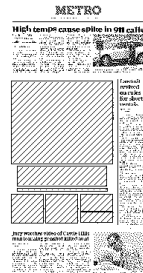
Aquifer continues on A5

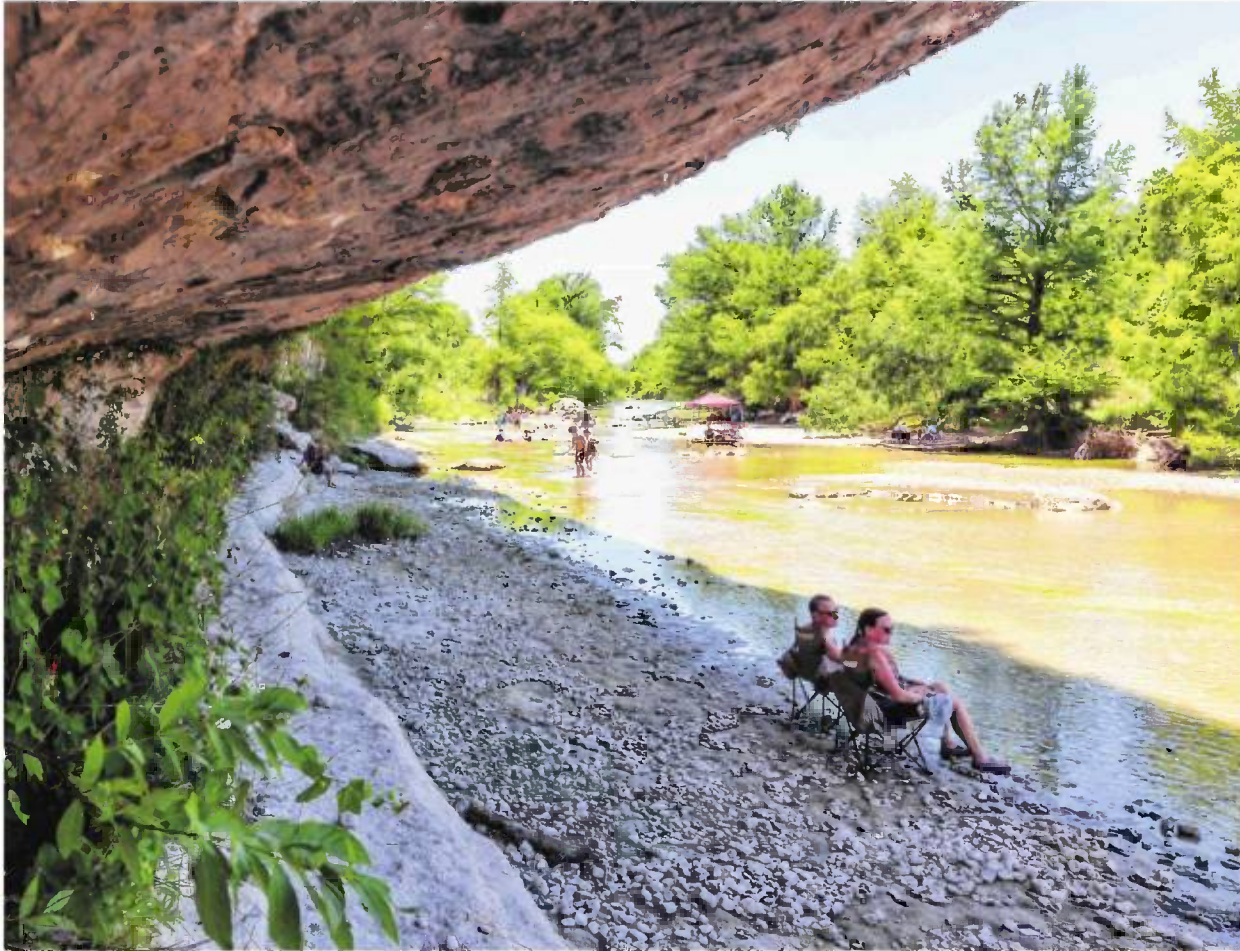
New Braunfels, however, will remain in Stage 2 water restrictions, city officials said. New Braunfels Utilities has worked to add a variety of water sources and is less dependent on the Edwards Aquifer.

New Braunfels will "closely monitor the drought situation" and could impose Stage 3 restrictions "if conditions deteriorate," the city said in a written statement.

More than 2 million people depend on water from the Edwards Aquifer, a porous limestone cavern system spanning hundreds of feet underground and across 3,600 square miles. The aquifer's springs feed a number of local streams, including the Guadalupe River and the San Antonio River.

Although Central Texas conditions eased during the first half of the year, the impact of long-term drought continues to be felt, with lower-than-normal water flow in many streams and springs, low water volume in lakes, and lingering damage to trees and other plant life.





William Luther/Staff photographer

People sit on the bank of the extremely diminished Guadalupe River on Tuesday in the state park in Spring Branch. The river's flow downstream is below 1 cubic foot per second, according to the U.S. Geological Survey's water data website.



Edwards Aquifer provides the San Antonio Water System with only about 50 percent of its water supply, so SAWS users remain in Stage 2 restrictions. But other area water systems will tighten their water-use rules. San Marcos said this week that it is moving to Stage 3 restrictions.

William Luther/Staff