

THE EDWARDS AQUIFER: THE NEXT GENERATION



25th

ANNIVERSARY

1996 - 2021

...AND BEYOND

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Photo: (Cover, back cover and right) Comal Springs, New Braunfels



Photo: Hill Country Spring, TX



The EAA is committed to furthering the long-term sustainability of the Edwards Aquifer through a responsible balance of regulatory, education and conservation-focused programming and partnerships that perpetuate shared value in the aquifer among all uses and needs. This comprehensive and collaborative approach to resource management, enhancement, and protection undergirds the mission and vision of our agency's work and is demonstrated in this strategic plan, which we call "The Edwards Aquifer: The Next Generation, and Beyond."

The 10-year planning horizon presented within this plan builds on the initial 25 years of the EAA's successful implementation of the EAA Act, the legislative statute from which our agency derives its legal authority to operate and which provides the premise and purpose of our mission. Our vision for the future, however, looks far beyond the next decade and imagines a legacy of sustainability for the Edwards Aquifer that can lead to unprecedented certainty in the quantity and quality of water available from this resource for future generations to come.

Roland Ruiz
EAA General Manager

OUR MISSION

The Edwards Aquifer Authority manages, enhances, and protects the Edwards Aquifer system.

OUR VISION

The Edwards Aquifer Authority is a regional water management agency that operates with integrity, transparency, respect, and commitment to sustainability of the aquifer.

OUR PEOPLE

We are partners in a mission. People fuel our purpose...from the people of our organization, who carry out our work, to the more than 2 million people across our eight-county region, who rely daily on the Edwards Aquifer as their primary source of water.

Just as we cannot separate ourselves from our impact on the natural resources on which we depend for our sustenance and wellbeing as a people, we cannot separate ourselves from each other as people bound together in the work to manage, enhance, and protect the Edwards Aquifer for the "Next Generation and Beyond."

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

If we reach our intended destination of "The Next Generation, and Beyond," it will be in large part because of a greater commitment to the principles of inclusion, imagination, and innovation.

- **Inclusion** – We invite everyone within our organization to participate in the creation of a shared vision of our future and include the diverse stakeholders from across our vast region to join us on the journey;
- **Imagination** – We visualize the possibilities of what could be by freeing ourselves from the limitations of the past and, instead, embrace a future where what is possible is limited only by our ability to imagine; and
- **Innovation** – We reinvent ourselves through creativity and ingenuity that stretches our minds, our capabilities, and comfort levels toward a renewed sense of purpose in our daily work to create certainty and legacy around our mission.

OUR CORE VALUES



COLLABORATION

We are interactive, diverse, and inclusive in everything we do.



CREATIVITY

We allow for and foster innovation in ideas and practices that lead to solutions in an ever-changing world.



INTEGRITY

We exhibit trust, honesty, transparency, and accountability at all times.



PROFESSIONALISM

We pursue excellence, respect others, and communicate effectively with those we serve, both internally and externally.



SCIENCE-BASED

Science drives and motivates our mission.



STEWARDSHIP

We manage, protect, and enhance the Edwards Aquifer system to ensure its long-term sustainability for the benefit of all users and uses of the resource.

OUR PLANNING PROCESS

In 2020,

we hired Mary Flanagan (Strategy & Leadership, LLC) to assist in the development of a 10-year strategic plan. As discussed below, Ms. Flanagan facilitated focused discussions with the EAA board of directors and management aimed at prioritizing the direction of our work over the next decade. The results of these discussions are captured in her report (Appendix B) and are incorporated throughout this strategic plan document. Additionally, we have identified the compelling need to lead in the area of restorative sustainability initiatives to protect, preserve, and enhance quantity and quality of water in the aquifer and to thus increase relevance and permanence to our mission. These inputs are summarized as follows:

EAA Board of Directors - Through a facilitated discussion, the EAA board of directors conducted an historical scan identifying key events in the life of the EAA within the context of broader groundwater management and protection, as well as within society at large. This exercise resulted in the identification of trends and insights, which served to inform the development of this strategic plan.

EAA Staff - Management, consisting of the EAA's 28 executives, managers, and supervisors participated in two separate facilitated discussions pertaining to the development of the strategic plan. This group of employees met to consider possible modifications to the EAA Core Values originally adopted in 2012. These updated core values are described earlier in this document. Building on the Board's work described above, management also developed the EAA's Practical Vision and its Key Strategies for the 2021-30 planning horizon, which serve as the backbone for this document.

Stakeholder Interests - Stakeholders in the Edwards Aquifer have broadly supported the idea of protecting the Aquifer through non-regulatory and incentive-based approaches that connect and engage private landowners in the mission to manage, enhance, and protect the Edwards Aquifer. The merits of further optimizing aquifer sustainability across the region through these approaches weighed heavily in the consideration of the development of this strategic plan.



OUR PRACTICAL VISION

We have developed a Practical Vision to define the broader aspirational concept of how we imagine our future (*What want to see in place in 2030*); hence, the idea of **"The Edwards Aquifer: The Next Generation, and Beyond."**

This practical vision consists of a series of strategic objectives that support two over-arching, thematic goals within the context of multi-generational impact and stability, which speaks to longevity and permanence of mission.



Photo: Night sky, Texas Hill Country




THE NEXT GENERATION

AND BEYOND

OUR THEMATIC GOALS



An underwater photograph of a riverbed. In the foreground, there are green, leafy plants growing from a rocky and pebbly substrate. A single fish is swimming in the middle ground. In the background, a bird is visible near the water's surface. The water is clear and blue, with light rays filtering through. The overall scene is vibrant and natural.

A LEGACY OF SUSTAINABILITY

The intent is to ensure the aquifer remains a sustainable resource in perpetuity for all users and dependents of its waters.

To realize this goal, we will deploy the concept of a region-wide aquifer sustainability initiative, focused predominately on identifying and implementing non-regulatory conservation and protection measures that contribute to the maintenance and, where possible, the enhancement of historical water quantity and quality for the South Central Texas region.

As such, the EAA will expand resources and partnerships to better protect and improve the land surface within watersheds most conducive to affecting recharge to the aquifer—that is, watersheds within the recharge and contributing zones of the Edwards Aquifer.

A photograph of a waterfall in a dense, green forest. The water is captured with a long exposure, creating a soft, white, misty effect as it falls over dark, mossy rocks. The surrounding vegetation is vibrant green, with many ferns and other plants visible. The overall scene is serene and natural.

CERTAINTY THROUGH CREDIBILITY

The focus is to foster greater certainty around the EAA mission by building unquestioned credibility in our work, the people assigned to carry out the work, and our united purpose.

The outcome will be trust and assured reliability around the management, enhancement, and protection of the aquifer. Ultimately, such credibility will lead to further certainty in the prospect that this aquifer will remain sustainable and continue to provide value to the overall wellbeing of the greater Edwards region in perpetuity.

OUR KEY OBJECTIVES

We will strive to achieve these two primary thematic goals, **sustainability** and **credibility**, by building and/or creating the following:

PARTNERSHIPS FOR CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

We will put into place innovative and incentivized programs to encourage private-public partnerships and to instill buy-in and trust with our stakeholders and regulated community.

These programs will be designed around the purpose of ensuring a secured and protected Edwards Aquifer system.

GREATER UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGEMENT THROUGH SCIENCE

Relying on our scientific research, we will reinforce and solidify our position as the trusted leader in managing, enhancing, and protecting the aquifer.

We will utilize scientific data, combined with lessons learned from experience, to foster public policy that ensures the highest possible water quality and sustainable water quantity.

To this end, we will draw scientists from near and afar to conduct research and collaborate on a myriad of studies to better inform our understanding of the Edwards Aquifer to identify and validate solutions to better manage, enhance, and protect the system.

EXPANDED AND DIVERSIFIED FUNDING

Through collaborative and innovative relationships, we will expand and diversify our funding sources to build shared value without burdening permit holders.

We will be active stewards of our financial resources, continually seeking collaborative partners to help offset aquifer management fee revenues as our primary funding source.

Critical to this effort is the Edwards Aquifer Conservancy (EAC), which will be robust and sustainable, raising enough funds each year to achieve operational status independent of the EAA budget.

ASSUREDNESS IN REGULATORY PROGRAMMING

Wherever possible, we will work toward permanence in core programs to further assurance and reliability in the economic, environmental, and regulatory optimization and general conservation of the aquifer system.

This includes securing a long-term incidental take permit issued by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service that balances certainty and flexibility for the aquifer-dependent endangered and threatened species for the next 30 years.

GREATER INFLUENCE THROUGH INCLUSION

We will become a more inclusive organization such that the EAA becomes a model for collaboration, transparency, and accessibility.

This means we will invite and partner with others when and where our mission intersects with various segments of our community.

We will be user friendly, including developing fully integrated centralized information systems that will make vital data easily accessible for all of our employees, our permit holders, our stakeholders, our partners, and the public at large.

OUR FOCUSED STRATEGIES

We have identified **six strategies** that will be the agency's focus to meet the objectives of this plan.

These strategies will serve as the basis of our annual work plans.

REINVENT WORK PROCESSES

We will create continuous learning cultures that innovate and adapt to changing needs and environmental conditions to ensure the long-term viability and relevance of the EAA mission.

Accordingly, we will regularly evaluate our formal and informal processes to identify ways to continually improve how we do our work and to ensure the permanence of its impact.

INTEGRATE HOW WE MANAGE AND SHARE DATA

We will enhance existing information infrastructure, tools, and competencies to refine the data management and sharing process so as to foster greater transparency and credibility; ensuring all data are appropriately collected, validated, stored, and made accessible.

PRIORITIZE AND INTEGRATE RESEARCH

We will focus research on subject areas that further our understanding of the aquifer system so we can inform and enable science-based policy and best management practices recommendations to address prevalent threats to aquifer sustainability.

This will include but not be limited to a refined understanding and application of the conceptual model of the aquifer, analyses of technologies and nature-based strategies for protecting and enhancing historic aquifer recharge, and studies informing programmatic approaches to ensuring the uninterrupted long term compliance with laws protecting aquifer-dependent aquatic species listed within the EAHCP.

ENHANCE PRESENCE AND INFLUENCE

We will expand our influence in the community through proactive presence, informational persuasion and creative partnerships that foster understanding and build community around our mission and support for its long-term viability.

We will do this through inclusive programming in education, science, conservation and regulation, including but not limited to the opening and operation of the Education Outreach Center and the Field Research Park.

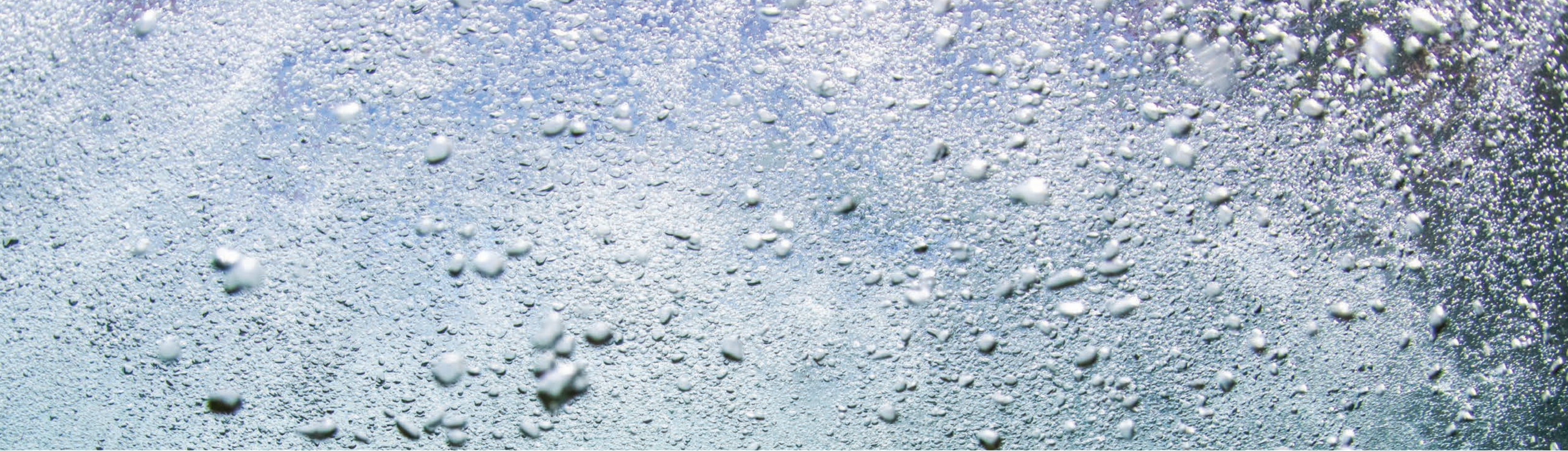
CHAMPION INNOVATION

We will invite and motivate creative thinking by embracing the power of imagination in all of our work. We will do this by designing and implementing programs that promote professional development through on-the-job creative thinking, problem solving and cross team collaboration, and by prioritizing innovation as a hiring and evaluation criteria.

OPTIMIZE AQUIFER SUSTAINABILITY

We will optimize the aquifer's long-term sustainability by implementing our own region-wide initiative to introduce and incentivize nature-based approaches to protecting, preserving and enhancing the water quality and quantity of the aquifer.

In particular, we will focus on the contributing and recharge zones of the Edwards Aquifer system and will use this work as opportunities to include others in our mission through research, best management land and conservation practices, and shared funding.



"If you want to go **fast**, go **alone**

If you want to go **far**, go **together**"

- African Proverb





ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the EAA Board of Directors and EAA staff for their significant contributions to the development of this strategic plan.

Also, thanks to the many men and women, whose contributions made throughout the history of the EAA and its predecessor organization, the Edwards Underground Water District, have brought us to this purpose in this time. It is they – those who devoted themselves to the higher ideals of excellence in service, stewardship through balance and consensus, and leadership through science-based decision-making – upon whose shoulders we stand to enable our vision of **"the next generation, and beyond."**

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**EDWARDS AQUIFER AUTHORITY
900 E QUINCY ST, SAN ANTONIO, TX, 78215
210.222.2204 • EDWARDSAQUIFER.ORG**