Public Comment to TCEQ on the Edwards Aquifer Protection Program

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RE: Public Comments, Edwards Aquifer Protection Program Annual Hearing (Texas Water Code §26.046): Request to Extend Edwards Aquifer Protection to the Northern Segment of the Edwards (Balcones Fault Zone) Aquifer in Bell County

Dear Ms. Reyes and Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment at this year's annual hearing. I am a resident of Salado in Bell County, and I am writing to respectfully request that the Commission take action to extend the protections of the Edwards Aquifer Protection Program to the Northern Segment of the Edwards (Balcones Fault Zone) Aquifer in Bell County.

Why this matters to me and my community

The Edwards Aquifer is the primary source of water for my household. The same is true for many of my neighbors, and our town, local agriculture, and livestock operations all depend on this aquifer. If the aquifer were contaminated, losing safe access to clean and reliable aquifer would be a serious hardship for my family and my neighbors.

The aquifer also feeds Salado Springs and Salado Creek, which are part of the identity, ecology, and economy of our community. Protecting water quality in the aquifer protects the springs, the creek, and the families and farms that rely on them.

What I understand about the aquifer

The Edwards (Balcones Fault Zone) Aquifer is divided into three segments: the San Antonio, Barton Springs, and Northern segments. The Northern Segment extends through Travis, Williamson, and southern Bell Counties. It is an important water source for municipalities, industry, and landowners in central Texas. Because it is a karst limestone system, recharge moves quickly through faults, fractures, and sinkholes, and the aquifer responds quickly to changes on the surface. That also means pollutants can reach groundwater with little natural filtration.

The Northern Segment is also under increasing pressure. Rapid population growth along the I-35 corridor has increased development over the recharge zone and heightened concerns about groundwater availability and quality.

The gap in protection

As I understand it, the rules in 30 Texas Administrative Code Chapter 213 regulate development over the contributing, recharge, and transition zones of the Edwards Aquifer, but they do not currently reach the Northern Segment in Bell County. This leaves the recharge zone that supplies my water, my town's water,

and the water for our farms and ranches without the same regulatory safeguards that apply to other parts of the Edwards system.

My requests

I respectfully ask the Commission to:

1. Initiate the process to extend the Edwards Aquifer Protection Program, including the requirements of Chapter 213, to the Northern Segment of the Edwards (Balcones Fault Zone) Aquifer in Bell County.
2. Delineate the recharge, transition, and contributing zones for the Northern Segment in Bell County so that landowners, developers, and local governments know where protections apply.
3. Require water quality protections, such as plan review and best management practices, for new development and other regulated activities over the recharge zone.
4. Provide meaningful public notice and opportunity for comment to affected residents, landowners, and local groundwater conservation districts during this process.
5. Coordinate with Bell County, the City of Salado, and the local groundwater conservation district so that state and local protections work together.

Conclusion

Protecting the aquifer before problems occur is far less costly than trying to clean up contamination afterward, and for those of us who depend on the aquifer for our homes, farms, and livestock, a contamination event could be devastating. I appreciate the Commission's consideration and ask that this letter be entered into the record for the Edwards Aquifer Protection Program annual hearing. I would welcome any updates on the Commission's actions on this request.

Respectfully submitted,

Max Printz

Salado, Bell County, Texas