

Edwards managers say water-saving efforts are working

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Yes, it's been dry. But conservation and efforts to manage the Edwards Aquifer have been paying off, the head of the agency that regulates the aquifer said Tuesday.

Pumping from the aquifer was down 14.5 percent in 2005 compared with 1999 — both of them drought years — although population in the region grew by more than 12 percent, Doug Miller, chairman of the Edwards Aquifer Authority, told about 200 people gathered at the Witte Museum for the 2006 Conference on the Edwards Aquifer.

Rainfall in both 1999 and 2005 was about 16.5 inches at San Antonio International Airport and 21 inches in New Braunfels, Miller said. With rainfall about half of normal, 2005 was the ninth-driest year ever at the San Antonio airport, while 1999 was the 10th-driest.

Miller said that in 1999, the first year the authority began its groundwater withdrawal permit program, authorized pumping from the Edwards totaled 429,190 acre-feet for a population of 1.6 million. Last year, when the authority completed the process of issuing permits, pumping was 366,404 acre-feet while population had risen to 1.8 million.

"These indicators identify a trend that shows we are achieving our goal of using the aquifer in a sustainable manner," said Miller, who addressed the conference during a luncheon speech. "We are also accomplishing our legislative mandate to manage the Edwards for the benefit of this entire region."

Although some aquifer pumpers have gotten water elsewhere during that time and are drawing less from Edwards, Miller said steps taken by the authority are having the intended effect of encouraging permit holders to use groundwater more carefully and wisely.

Those steps include installing meters on all wells to measure withdrawals, requiring groundwater conservation plans, implementing drought management rules, creating a water market, assessing aquifer management fees and stepping up compliance efforts.

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