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## Development limits proposed

[By Colin McDonald](#) - Express-News

The board of the Edwards Aquifer Authority on Tuesday moved toward limiting development over the entire recharge zone of the aquifer from Hays to Uvalde counties.

Controlling the amount of impervious cover, or the square footage of parking lots and roofs, on top of the recharge zone is a step the authority has contemplated since 2003 to protect water quality. The board previously backed down under pressure from some legislators.

“Impervious cover, it's just one of those emotional issues,” board chairwoman Luana Buckner said. “People just have very strong opinions about it both for and against.”

The board directed the staff to draw up rules that would limit impervious surface to 20 percent on land in the recharge zone. In some cases, 30 percent would be allowed.

The rules would be in addition to those set by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and cities and counties in the recharge zone.

In 2003 and 2006, the board declined to consider impervious cover rules. At the time, it was trying to convince legislators to increase the amount of water that could be pumped from the aquifer, Buckner said.

With that resolved, the board is ready to take on limiting development, she said.

To help guide the process, which is expected to take a year, the board voted to offer the authority's general manager job to Karl Dreher, Idaho's former director of water resources, who is now a water consultant in Colorado.

If he accepts, Dreher would replace Velma Danielson, who is retiring after 17 years in various management roles.

Buckner said Dreher's experience balancing the environment with municipal and agricultural water uses will be crucial as the EAA tries to protect water quality and allow for development.

A strong opponent of EAA rules about development in 2006 was then-state Rep. Robert

Puente, now CEO of the San Antonio Water System.

In a letter last month, the utility stated that the added regulation would be unnecessary. Steve Clouse, SAWS senior vice president and chief operating officer, wrote: “The proposed rule if adopted will significantly impact area governments in the land planning and use, will impact the ability of private landowners to use property for currently permissible purposes ... and may result in significant legal challenges.”

Those concerns were echoed by Michael Moore, spokesman for the Greater San Antonio Builders Association.

“In the past, the Texas Legislature has maintained the position that the EAA does not have rule-making authority over water quality but only over water quantity,” Moore wrote in an e-mail. “Therefore, it would seem likely that any rule regarding water quality might be challenged at the state level.”

The authority disagrees, citing the power given by law in 1993 “to prevent the waste or pollution of water in the aquifer.”

The EAA cites studies that show watersheds in San Antonio and across the country with more than 10 to 20 percent of impervious cover have decreased water quality.

Annalisa Peace, executive director of the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance, said the EAA, not counties and cities, has the ability to protect a resource as vast as the aquifer.

“We need regionwide management of water quality,” she said. “And they are the best agency to do this.”

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