

## ENDANGERED SPECIES:

### FWS approves multispecies habitat plan for south-central Texas

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has approved a multispecies habitat conservation plan designed to offset impacts from groundwater pumping in drought-stricken south-central Texas.

The [plan](#), to be published in today's *Federal Register*, and an accompanying incidental take permit are designed to allow cities and farms in the area to continue tapping the Edwards **Aquifer** while ensuring the long-term survival of eight species that depend on two large springs fed by the aquifer: Comal Springs and San Marcos Springs.

The species included in the plan are the fountain darter, San Marcos salamander, Texas wild rice, Texas blind salamander, Peck's cave amphipod, San Marcos gambusia, Comal Springs dryopid beetle and Comal Springs riffle beetle.

The approval of the habitat conservation plan "marks a significant conservation achievement for the Edwards **Aquifer** region," said Southwest Regional Director Benjamin Tuggle. "The organizations and individuals involved in the development of the HCP clearly demonstrated that it is possible to come together and develop a consensus-based solution to a very complex water issue in Texas." The plan will protect the eight listed species while "providing certainty" to people who depend on the **Edwards** Aquifer, he added.

As the population in south-central Texas has grown over the past few decades, pumping to supply cities in the region, including San Antonio, New Braunfels and San Marcos, has increased, intensifying pressure on the aquifer.

"The Edwards **Aquifer** provides water for approximately 2 million people, agriculture and municipalities," said Adam Zerrenner, field supervisor for FWS's Ecological Service Field Office in Austin. "What this HCP does is to make sure the springs will not go dry -- there will be continued spring flows for these species if there was another drought of record," like the one that hit the region in the 1950s, he added.

The plan, which took 20 years to hammer out and involved input from 40 entities, lays out mitigation measures the cities and agricultural users must undertake to offset the effects of pumping. They include restoring habitat and banking water during times of plenty to use during times of drought.

Ken Kramer, water resources chairman for the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club, said the plan is good news for both the species and water users.

"We're thrilled that that HCP is going forward," he said. "I think it's a major step forward for protecting the species, and the water ecology they depend on."

Reese writes from Santa Fe, N.M.

<http://www.eenews.net/gw/2013/2/14>

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