

The CCCA's June guest speaker was Grant Ellis, Natural Resources Manager for San Antonio's Parks and Rec Department, who spoke about San Antonio's Edwards Aquifer Protection Program (EAPP).

The EAPP began in 2000, when San Antonio officials and stakeholders realized the vulnerability of their water supply and voters approved a one-eighth cent sales tax to be dedicated to purchasing parkland and aquifer protection lands. The first \$45 million (capped) in revenues were used to purchase parkland in and around the city. Since then the sales tax has been renewed three times (every five years), and, in total, \$315 million has been allotted to land acquisition.

In the most recent allocation (2015), which received 75% voter approval, an additional \$10 million was directed toward demonstration and experimental projects, such as using vegetative buffers to filter stormwater. To date the outright purchase of lands (fee simple) has amounted to over 7,500 acres. The objective of more recent purchases has been to create greenways with trails along the city's waterways—both connecting parkland and improving water quality. To protect Edwards Aquifer recharge, the city has focused on protecting lands to the west of Bexar County: 70% of the aquifer's waters originate in Uvalde and Medina Counties. Rather than purchase lands, the city purchases development rights in the form of conservation easements.

The city now holds 90 easements to ~150,000 acres. The minimum easement is typically 80 acres, although smaller properties with special recharge features are considered. The largest property to date is 16,111 acres. The EAPP uses a geographic information system (GIS) spatial model to identify potential properties. Representatives then contact landowners. Lands considered for conservation easements undergo a scientific evaluation and are ranked according to their value to aquifer recharge. To determine the value of a conservation easement, first the fair market value of the property is determined, followed by the value of the land as encumbered by the terms of the conservation easement: the difference between the two is the value of the conservation easement. Typically, the value of the conservation easement is ~40% of the fair market value. The EAPP monitors its conservation easement properties annually to make sure the landowners are in compliance with the agreement.

