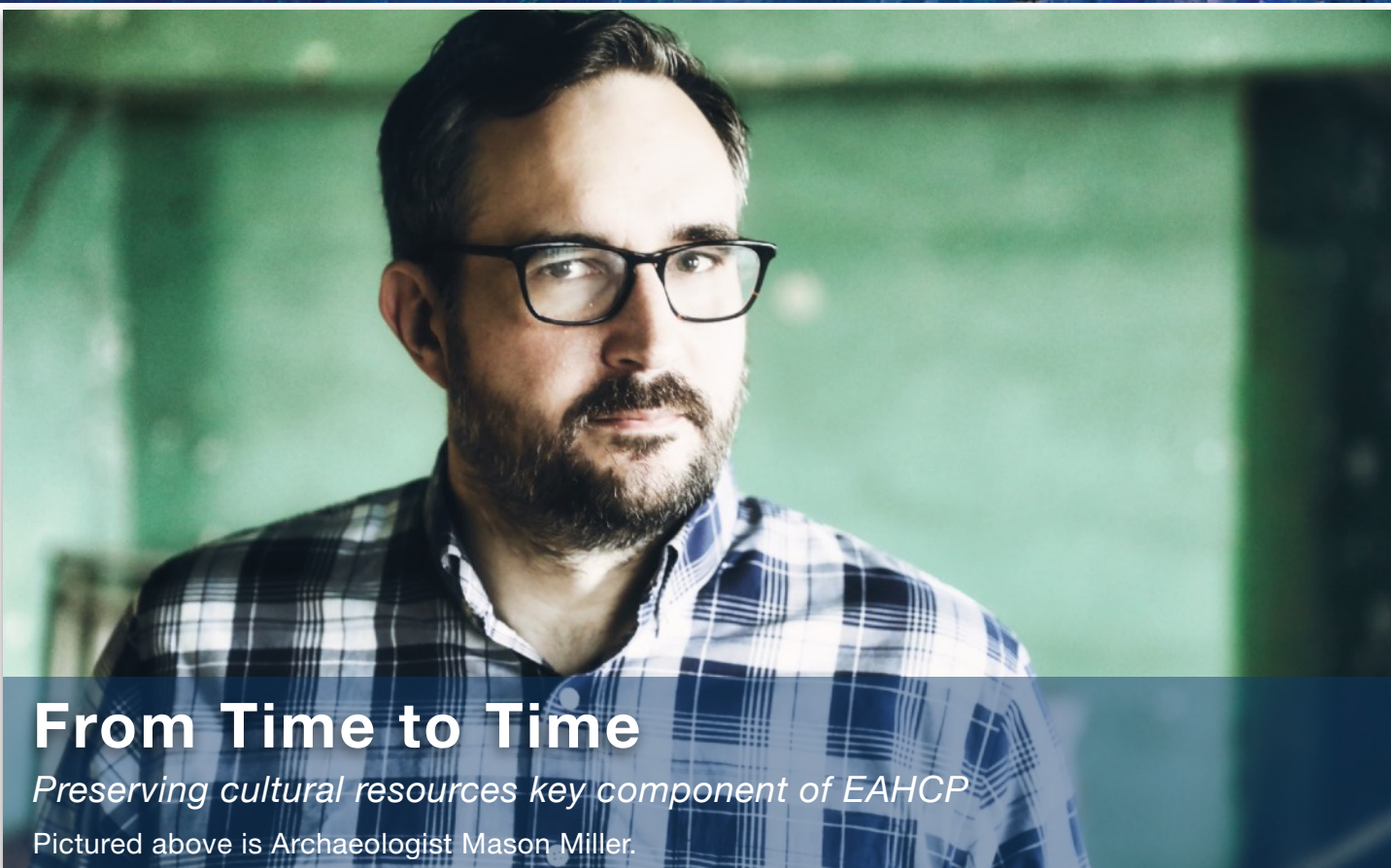




EAHCP STEWARD

News from the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan - June 2021



From Time to Time

Preserving cultural resources key component of EAHCP

Pictured above is Archaeologist Mason Miller.

Where did the time go? Time flies. There's no time like the present. Don't waste your time. People are familiar with the notion that time marches on at its own pace and we express how we deal with that in many ways. And while today's culture seems to be preoccupied with what's coming next due to the meteoric evolution of technology, there are very good reasons to maintain a solid connection to humanity's past. In South Central Texas, that past goes back more than 15,000 years.

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Cultural Resources - Continued

“Not that long ago, the archaeologist community used to look skeptically at any information that claimed humans lived in this part of the state any more than 10 to 12 thousand years ago,” said Mason Miller, an archaeologist and cultural resource specialist for AmaTerra Environmental, Inc. “But as more artifacts are uncovered and our science progresses, that whole notion is changing to accept the fact that people lived here at least 15 millennia ago.”

One of the places archaeologists tend to find historical facts like that are near waterways, especially in areas the Edwards Aquifer delivers clean water through the San Marcos Springs and Comal Springs.

Miller explained that he and his colleagues at AmaTerra have been working with the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan (EAHCP) for nearly a decade. He is called in to review the need for cultural resource



preservation in EAHCP work plans designed to mainly restore and protect the endangered species habitat. Cultural Resource Management typically deals with preserving those resources associated with physical places or things deemed important to documenting human history.

“I’ve found that while the EAHCP is doing excellent

environment preservation work, they are also well attuned to preserving the cultural resources, that human history, associated with their primary focus. Much of the work being done by the EAHCP team has to do with riparian restoration, some construction and various types of aquatic preservation of the natural environment,” Miller noted. “When that happens, you can’t avoid disturbing what could be areas of rich historical significance. And, the places they are working are typically parklands, easements and such which are subject to State of Texas antiquities laws and federal statutes as well. So, as an EAHCP project is developed, they contact us as their cultural resources contractor to guide them on whether that project needs a cultural resources protection component or not. Sometimes we will recommend alterations to projects in order to avoid disturbance of resources in the project area. For example, we might ask if the project could be wider rather than deeper to preclude deeper digging into the soil where cultural resources reside. Additionally, we facilitate communications between the regulatory agencies to ensure we comply in all aspects of the law.”

One of Miller’s primary projects, which is a coordinated effort with the EAHCP, the City of New Braunfels and New Braunfels Utilities, has been the development of the Headwaters at the Comal facility and bioretention basins. He explained that there are thousands of years of human history preserved at that location which is adjacent to the Comal Springs. There are archaeological resources such as limestone rock ovens, various

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Cultural Resources - Continued

types of tools and animal remains which have been unearthed through careful excavations that show large groups of people inhabiting the Headwaters site. Then there is the City of New Braunfels' first municipal water well and utility buildings dating back to the 1930s located on the property to be accounted for.



The arrowhead on the left is an actual artifact, the one on the right is a copy made for display purposes.

“We did our first walkthrough at the Headwaters facility in 2015,” Miller recalled. “This used to be a utility yard of New Braunfels Utilities before they enabled the transformation to an environmentally restored public place. So, before that transformation began, a team of archaeologists completed a site survey by digging in various locations on the property to determine the importance of the artifacts found. And we did find that there were many important resources still there. Additionally,

the architectural group took a look at the original water well and connected facilities. Overall, we documented several different historically significant aspects of the Headwaters site, and because of that, we also stayed on through construction to monitor the work being done.”

Many times, there can be misconceptions about the role of the federal and state governments' priorities for requiring archaeological work before a construction project begins. Miller explained that the agencies responsible for preserving cultural resources aren't interested in stopping projects because someone finds a random arrowhead or old bottle. They focus their attention and management priorities on those cultural resources that are important. They then try to find ways to avoid impacting them or mitigate for their loss if avoidance isn't possible.

“There is plenty of historical evidence in the area of the Edwards Aquifer that this has been relatively densely populated in part because of the bountiful supply of water,” Miller said. “Additionally, there was good hunting, a good supply of plants and trees and fishing to provide other essentials for surviving. With that knowledge, I was really expecting to find historical evidence of human habitation going back 10,000 years or so. But, our excavations only turned up artifacts dating to 5,000 years. I still think there are probably resources at the Headwaters site that would point to earlier inhabitants, but we just didn't find those types of deposits in the areas we analyzed.”

“Often, people think that archaeologists are just itching to dig up anything and everything we can. But in reality, the best archaeological site is one that is left alone and the artifacts not disturbed. I say that because there could be people and technology in the future that could learn more about previous societies than we can now. And one thing you can't get around in my line of work is that by studying a site, we are destroying it, in a way, because as we dig we can never put it back. So, our job is to learn as much as we can about the cultural resources located in the areas we dig up to mitigate for the act of digging up those areas in the first place.”

Miller concluded by emphasizing that today's society studies these resources because they give our history and culture tangible substance. People's lives become physically real rather than just pages in a book. They are objects and places that tell the good and the bad of who we are and where we came from. It's that physical presence that connects us with these long-gone lives and voices.

Each generation can learn from the ruins and the objects of the past. These are the souvenirs of societies linked together by...time.

EAHCP STEWARD SHORT TAKES

Download the EAHCP Cultural Resources Brochure

To learn more about Cultural Resources in the San Marcos and Comal springs and what to do if an artifact is found, please follow the link to the EAHCP Cultural Resources Brochure.

<https://user-qzm76pf.cld.bz/EAHCP-Cultural-Resources-Brochure>

EAHCP Summer Intern – Megan Crinklaw



Megan Crinklaw

The Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan (EAHCP) has continued the Summer Internship program with Southwestern University student Megan Crinklaw. Currently, Megan is pursuing a Bachelor of Science in environmental studies and a minor in political science with expected graduation in May 2023. Her work with the EAHCP includes creating StoryMaps using the ArcMap GIS applications and helping EAHCP staff on communication projects. “Studying environmental science and interning with the EAHCP has been very eye-opening,” Megan said. “Moving forward, I hope to learn more about environmental law, conservation, climate change and environmental justice in respect to waterways and wetlands in third world countries.”

Find out more about Megan at: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/megan-crinklaw-725450203/>

Now available to view: EAHCP StoryMaps of Covered Species and Conservation Measures:

- Fountain darter: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/bc6f77162849491580838c24d191c216>
- San Marcos salamander: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/bc6f77162849491580838c24d191c216>
- Texas wild-rice: <https://eaa.maps.arcgis.com/apps/StorytellingSwipe/index.html?appid=a759cd062e3c40c998a0601941c8d2d2>
- Comal Springs: Interactive Comal Habitat Restoration Overview: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/c1d898cfc4e4439aba8fddc92116f705>
- San Marcos Springs: Interactive San Marcos Habitat Restoration Overview: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/473bb7901749482d94081b233dd738dd>