



# EAHCP STEWARD

News from the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan - June 2020



## Going Viral

*EAHCP adapts to a new way of working amidst a world pandemic*

### **COVID-19.**

Only a handful of months ago, that term would have drawn quizzical looks from most people. Today however, every American life has been disrupted in some fashion by the highly-contagious COVID-19 virus and the impact of its presence is omnipresent. And while virology experts around the world are learning more each day about its capacity to infect the human body, the American society is coping with this pandemic in creative ways. For the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan partners, the show has gone on. Here's how.

“There is no doubt that the overall EAHCP operations had to quickly adapt to the social distancing and other safety guidelines set out by all levels of government entities to protect the people working here and those we come in contact with,” said Scott Storum, senior director of the EAHCP. “Essentially, we’ve had one foot in the digital world and the other in the real world. But, due to the professionalism of the team and our stakeholders, we have been able to forge ahead in all EAHCP research projects.



## COVID-19 - Continued

“The Edwards Aquifer Authority closed its offices in mid-March like most other government entities, and we have all been working from home. But, we moved our meetings to online versions and adjusted field activities to comply with all guidelines. The biggest impact to our operations has been that our group has not been able to physically be a part of the biomonitoring field work with consultants and also to interact directly with the springs communities’ teams. Much of our quality assurance, quality control work has been done that way, so that has been a new hill to climb.”

“Even though the City paused for a bit on closing parks, they eventually did. Our EAHCP partner Texas State University shut down immediately,” she said. “I didn’t pull our contractors off of the jobs they were doing right

away because we considered them essential. However, park police had some issues with the work we were doing because it made it look like the public had access to the park. So, we had to shut down for about a month while we developed a process acceptable for everyone involved. For example, we



Conservation Crew working among tubers making their way back to the San Marcos River after being sheltered in place for three months.

sent photos of all contract employees to park police. We obtained a letter from the City designating contractors as essential employees. And probably most importantly, the contractors stay in constant contact with park police on what they are doing and where they’re working. Unfortunately, Texas State University, which includes the Meadows Center on Spring Lake, is still shut down and we’re a little concerned that if we can’t back to work soon that we will lose some ground in our research there.”

Howard said that while her job is one you can take with you, she has been going into the office two days a week and working from home the other three. She explained that most of her interactions are with contractors and EAHCP staff in San Antonio so much of her work was already being accomplished virtually. One huge difference to normal operations she observed had to do with volunteers and their contributions to the EAHCP.

“We have shut down all volunteer work for now. Our Sessom Creek workdays where volunteers help us remove invasive plants are not happening. The litter cleanups and aquatic invasive plant removal activities in Spring Lake are gone as well. And even when the parks do reopen, we will probably not have the Conservation Crew members, who are Texas State University students, go back out into the public for awhile. Overall, the loss of those volunteer hours is a major issue for us.”

## COVID-19 - Continued


In the City of New Braunfels, EAHCP lead Mark Enders said that the timing of closings mirrored the San Marcos experience fairly closely.

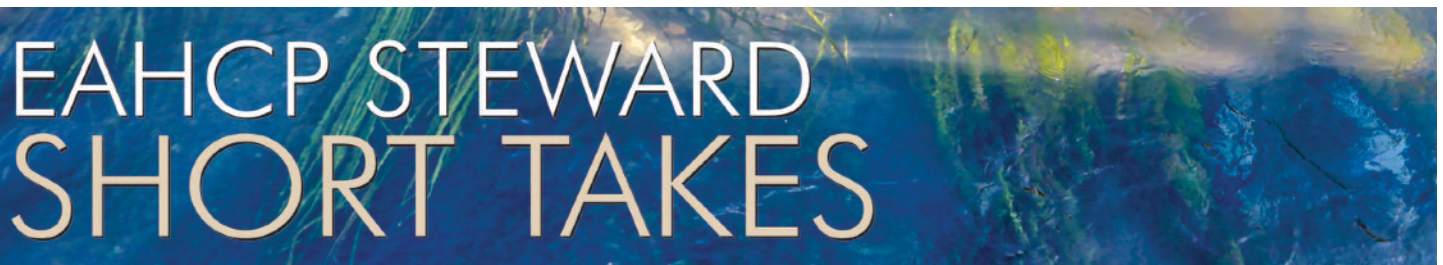
“We got those few 90-degree days in March and the parks filled up, so the City quickly moved to shut things down,” he expressed. “However, one big difference from San Marcos is that the City reopened the parks toward the end of May whereas the parks in San Marcos were still closed. The two employees that work with me on EAHCP business are mostly out in the field, so their daily routines were not impacted much. I have been working mainly from home, but

the City of New Braunfels has had to keep a minimum number of people in the office to supply city services. Overall, I’d say we haven’t missed a beat when it comes to getting our HCP and watershed protection work done either by video conferencing or the occasional field meeting. We huddled up with our contractors immediately and worked out plans for them to continue their efforts. The removal of invasive plants and replanting with native vegetation doesn’t require people working side by side, so we’ve managed to keep things there on task so far. As Melani noted, we also made arrangements with park rangers so they would know who has authority to be in the park at all times. In regard to volunteers, we don’t have the type of ongoing activities and crews that San Marcos has, but we did have to cancel a few annual clean up events we typically hold in the spring.”



New Braunfels contractor working solo downstream of Landa Park.

Stormont summed up the whole experience so far with some positive words for everyone involved. “I’ve been very thankful for the patience people have shown in allowing us to change our methods of operating while we’re actually learning how to do that at the same time. I think that has been a major catalyst for us being able to keep progressing during these truly uncertain and unprecedented times.” 



## San Marcos Parks COVID-19 Visitor Guidelines

Visitors to these areas must practice social distancing of at least six feet between individuals not in your household and are prohibited from gathering in groups of more than ten people. It is important to note that all playscapes/playgrounds and basketball courts within the parks are closed. If you bring in your own play equipment do not share it and remember to pack it out when you leave. Visit the "Park & Court Guidelines" tab above for additional usage guidelines and this page for tips on physical distancing in parks.

[You can read more about the San Marcos Parks safety precautions, click this link.](#)



## Help EAHCP Build Subscribers - Win a Summer Starter Pack

The EAHCP Steward team is looking to increase the number of readers of the newsletter and we're ready to offer you some incentives to help.

The first 10 readers to submit a list of 10 friends and colleagues who you think would appreciate and enjoy the Steward content will be promptly rewarded with a summer starter pack of EAHCP promo items to include sunglasses, reusable water bottle, dry bag and a tote bag.

Just send your list with names and emails to

[EAHCP@EdwardsAquifer.org](mailto:EAHCP@EdwardsAquifer.org) and

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