



# EAHCP STEWARD

News from the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan - December 2020



Cindy Loeffler has decided to call it a career. After 30-plus years of making a positive impact on the state of Texas' environment, we would call it a stellar career.

Loeffler earned her bachelor of science degree in engineering from Colorado State University and began her professional career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Instream Flow Group. In 1987, she joined the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) as a coastal hydrologist charged with monitoring new environmental laws passed by the Texas Legislature. In 2001, Loeffler was named Water Resources Branch Chief and took on the duties of managing TPWD's water quality and water quantity programs around the state and coordinating the agency's response to water resource issues affecting fish and wildlife. Her position with TPWD brought her to early participation in the Edwards Aquifer region's work to address the protection and preservation of the Edwards Aquifer. She says that work was some of the most interesting and rewarding of her career. The EAHCP Steward was happy to be able to meet up and talk about those experiences.

## Cindy Loeffler Interview - Continued

**EAHCP Steward** - So Cindy, first of all congratulations on your retirement announcement. Your insights will be missed as the EAHCP moves forward, but we are very happy for you and your family.

**Loeffler** - Thank you so much for the well wishes. While my husband and I will be spending more time in New Mexico, we aren't going to leave Central Texas completely. So, we'll be around watching how the Edwards Aquifer protection programs continue to advance.



Cindy Loeffler at EAHCP Science Committee.

**EAHCP Steward** - Let's talk about some of your early involvement with the Edwards Aquifer and the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program (EARIP).

**Loeffler** - Yes. Actually, I can't remember a time when I wasn't involved with the Edwards Aquifer issues. Back in those days of the early 2000s, water issues were still very contentious with one lawsuit being filed after another over the use of the Edwards Aquifer. State leadership recognized they needed to act to give the Edwards Region a way forward after a federal lawsuit to protect endangered species relying on flows from the Edwards was successful. A section of an omnibus water bill called Senate Bill 3 included the establishment of the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program, better known as EARIP. Initially it was a very

daunting program to get rolling. There were many overall requirements, many people at the table, tons of structural guidelines, and deadlines for deliverables to meet. In hindsight, it was a good thing that we had those deadlines, because we might still be hashing out things today if we didn't make ourselves meet those deadlines.

Additionally, this major negotiation was taking place against the backdrop of a fairly severe drought between 2011 and 2013. No doubt, it was difficult. And in fact, there were points where we thought we would not reach consensus. But we plowed through and lots of credit goes to Dr. Robert Gulley, the original EARIP program manager. He had the experience in thorny and contentious programs like this in other parts of the country. Plus, he had a vision for this particular effort. It was his leadership that kept things moving to what ultimately became a successful habitat conservation plan and incidental take permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

**EAHCP Steward** - What role did the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department play in the EARIP?

**Loeffler** - The EARIP put together a science committee which had very specific questions to answer. Texas Parks and Wildlife had three members on that committee. One was an expert in Texas wild-rice, another expert on instream flows for the bays and estuaries, and then a fresh water biologist. Water needs for the bays and estuaries were particularly a highlight at the start of the science committee's work, and our group had very good experience with that issue. Overall, the scientific answers provided to the specific environmental questions later became the general framework for the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan (EAHCP).

## Cindy Loeffler Interview - Continued

In the beginning, we all knew we had a formidable task ahead. There was lots of history between the EARIP members, some not so successful solutions from the past and many, many moving parts. Essentially, we were trying to find a middle ground as a way of moving forward. So, we all agreed to take our time to get things right in the first steps we took. Our first work included getting to know the various people and organizations at the table and understanding each other's perspectives. We also made sure we understood what U.S. Fish and Wildlife needed for compliance. In the end, as you might expect, everyone gave in a little on their wants and we were able to all accept the program that would define the future for the EAHCP.

**EAHCP Steward** - Give us some thoughts on the difference between the early days of the EAHCP and where we are now.

**Loeffler** - Once the Implementing Committee was formed to be the oversight of the EAHCP operations, Texas Parks and Wildlife became a member of the Stakeholder Committee. The Implementing Committee is made up of those entities pumping from the Edwards Aquifer and Guadalupe Blanco River Authority as a downstream beneficiary of the springflows. Consistent throughout has been the science committee. The committee's membership has changed a bit, but that committee is still helping guide the direction of the program due to EAHCP's science focused decision-making process. Now, since we have procedures and programs in place, we're going through an adaptive management process to monitor how well the programs are working, looking for things we might have missed and assessing programs for whether they're needed for compliance. This is all leading up to a renewal of the Incidental Take Permit in 2028.

There really has been lots of groundbreaking science accomplished through the EAHCP. Sometimes I liken it to the space program for aquifer protection science in Texas. In the beginning, we felt like there really needed to be some sort of peer review for our work. That turned out to be an invitation to the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) because we needed a group with varying technical backgrounds. NAS did a comprehensive, three-phase review of the EAHCP over a couple of years. The good news is that they found we were headed in the right direction, asking the right questions and doing a good job of implementing the programs. There were a couple of areas they said needed more research, especially regarding the Comal Springs riffle beetle, but overall, they were very complimentary. But, when you think about it, we are studying endangered species not found anywhere else in the world. Many of them, like the riffle beetle, live inside the aquifer which would lead to us not having a lot of background on them just yet. And what I find totally fascinating is that there are dozens more species in the aquifer we just know nothing about.

**EAHCP Steward** - Well, everyone involved with the EAHCP knows you've contributed greatly to the success of the program. And we sincerely want to wish you all the best in the next chapter of your life.

**Loeffler** - Thank you for that. It has definitely been a real honor to be able to work on the EAHCP with all of the truly good people and fine professionals dedicated to preserving the Edwards Aquifer. I feel very fortunate to have been in the right place at the right time and this has been one of the highlights of my career.

*Editor's Note* - Loeffler has been a member of numerous water and environmental committees around the State of Texas including the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Subcommittee on Water, Texas Water Conservation Advisory Council, Texas Water Data Initiative Advisory Committee, the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan Stakeholder Committee, and the South Central Climate Science Center Stakeholder Advisory Committee.



# EAHCP STEWARD SHORT TAKES

## Help EAHCP Build Subscribers - Win a Holiday Prize Pack



The EAHCP Steward team is always looking for new subscribers who would be interested in learning about the great environmental work being conducted through Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan. So, here's a little incentive for you to send us a few referrals.

The first 10 readers to submit a list of just three friends and/or colleagues you think would appreciate and enjoy the Steward content will be promptly rewarded with a holiday starter pack of EAHCP promo items to include a coffee mug, reusable water bottle, dry bag, tote bag, plus some other goodies.

Just send your list with names and emails to [EAHCP@EdwardsAquifer.org](mailto:EAHCP@EdwardsAquifer.org) and we'll take it from there. We will contact your perspective subscribers to make sure it is OK to add them to our list. That's it.

We'll even save you a trip to San Antonio and mail your winnings to you. Don't delay! Prizes go to the first 10 readers to weigh in.

## Mark Your Calendars - Final EAHCP Meetings for 2020

### Joint Implementing and Stakeholder Committees Meeting

When: December 17, 2020 - 10:00 AM

Location: Teleconference via Microsoft Teams

### San Marcos Clean Up Days Scheduled

The upcoming volunteer workdays at Schulle Canyon N.A. are scheduled for the Jan.16 and Feb. 20 from 9-11 a.m. Tasks will include removing invasive trees and grasses, building contour terraces, broadcasting native seed, and piling brush for future mulching. The group will be meeting at the trailhead at 100 Ridgewood Dr. (dead end of Alamo St.).

[You can RSVP at this link.](#)

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HAPPY  
HOLIDAYS!



We've saved you a seat for all  
things EAHCP in 2021.

