



The Blue Hole

Bexar County

Compilation and layout by Robin Gary, Watershed Association, July 2022

Water Source: Edwards Aquifer

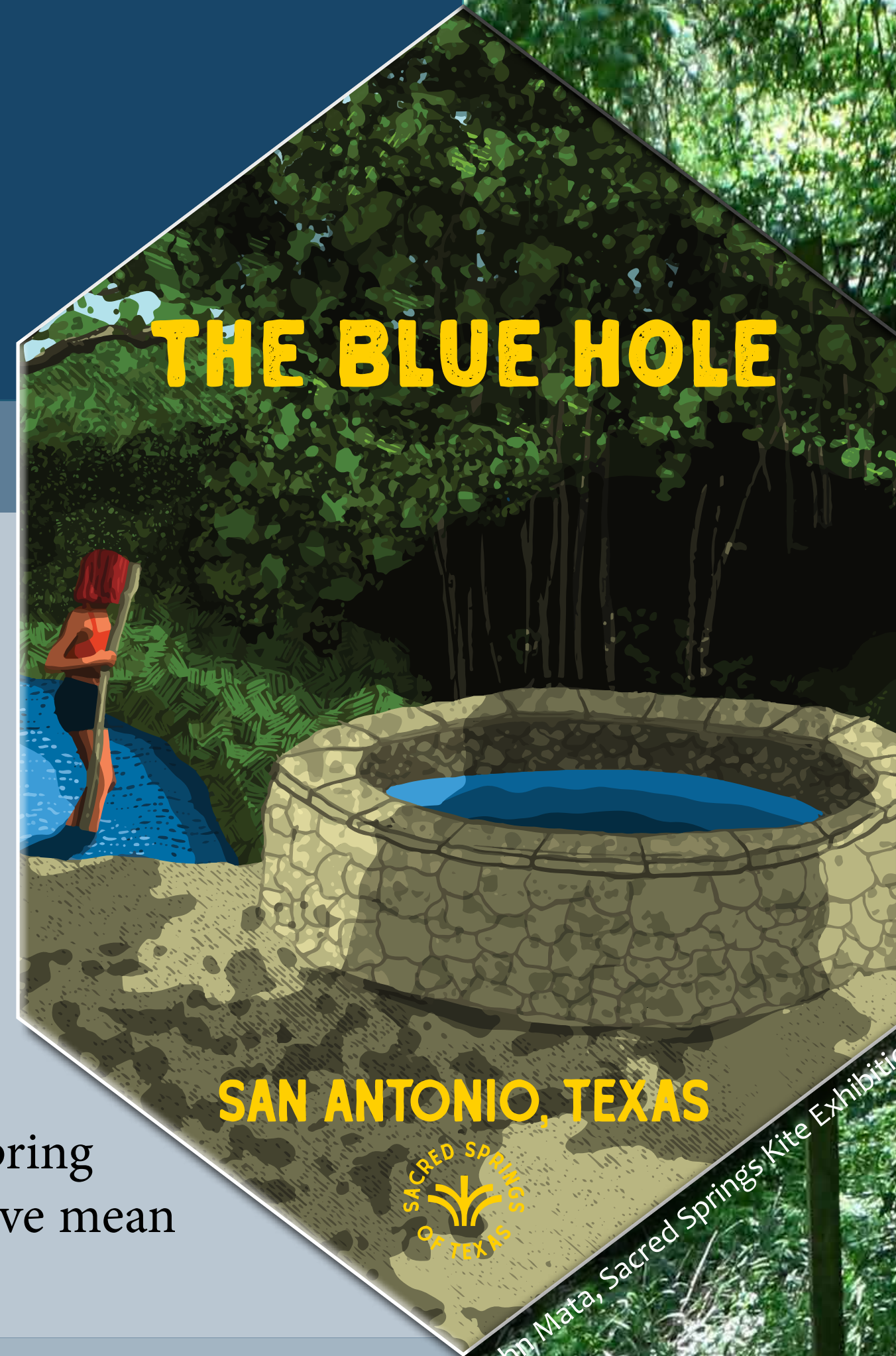
Description



Trails map of the Headwaters Sanctuary

Just minutes from downtown San Antonio, sits the Blue Hole, a spring that is the headwaters for the San Antonio River. A rock wall circles the spring, which was reportedly once a geyser rising several feet in the air frequented by Native Americans, explorers, and settlers. Now, the Blue Hole provides the centerpiece for the Headwaters at Incarnate Word, a 53-acre urban riparian forest nature sanctuary protected by a conservation easement and maintained by staff and dedicated volunteers.

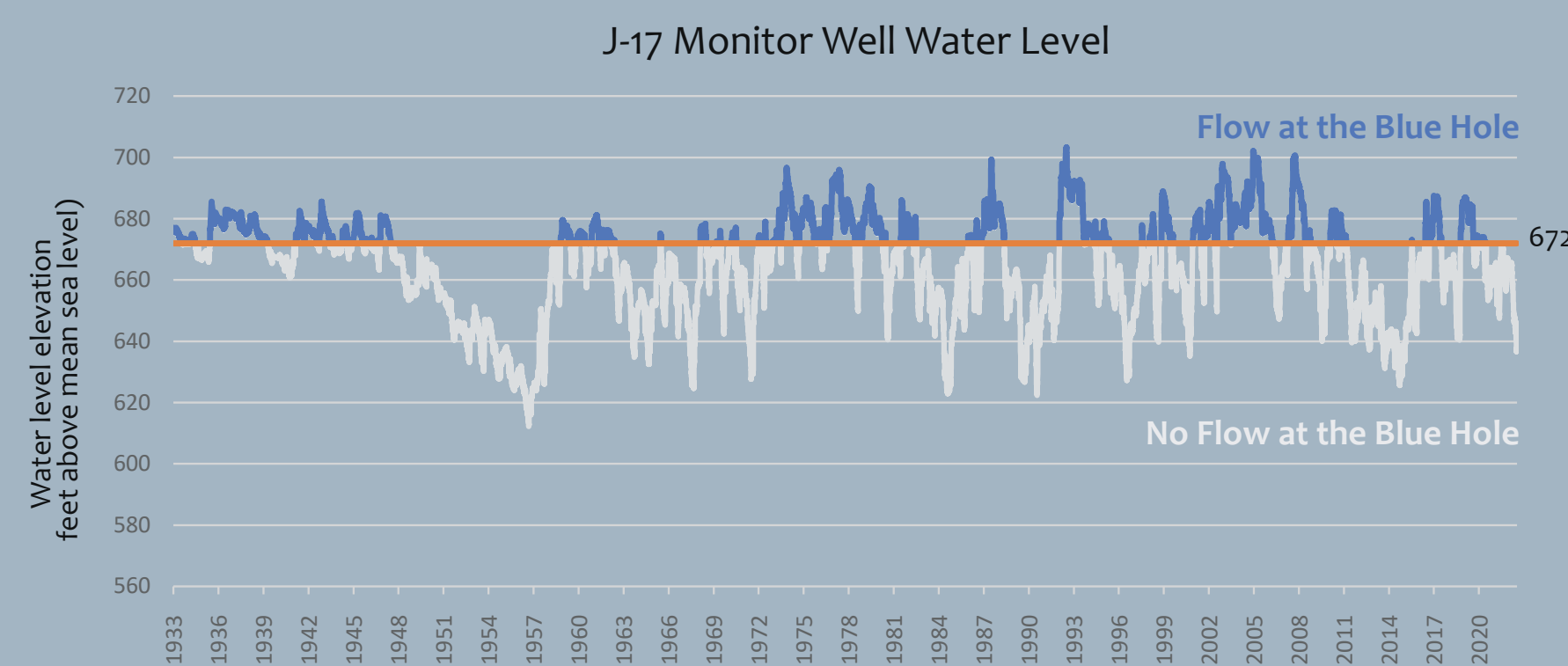
Water flowing from the Blue Hole comes from the Edwards Aquifer, and the spring flows when surrounding groundwater levels reach or rise above 672 feet above mean sea level at the nearby Edwards Aquifer Authority J-17 monitor well.



Joby Mata, Sacred Springs Kite Exhibition

Challenges

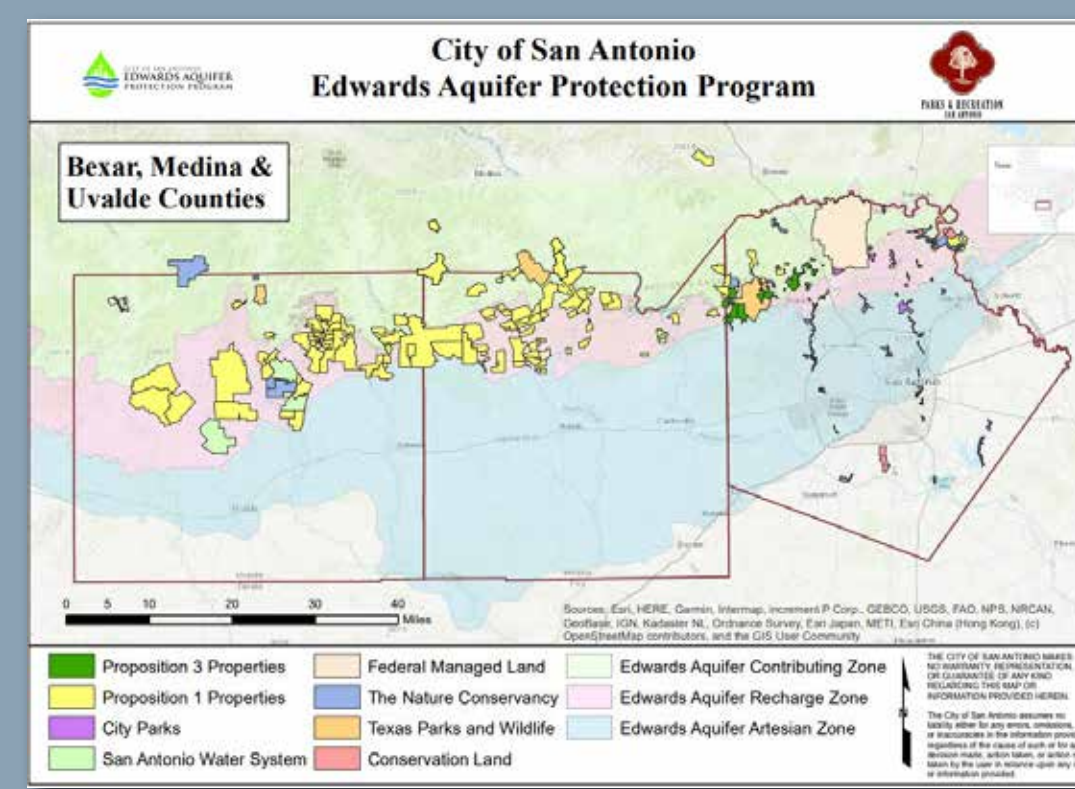
The City of San Antonio relies heavily on water from the Edwards Aquifer to supply residents and businesses. Groundwater use and frequent droughts lower groundwater levels within the aquifer, which directly impacts spring flow at Blue Hole. The water level in the J-17 monitor well has been above 672 feet allowing the spring to flow only 24% of past 10 years. Additionally, development increases the amount of impervious cover which limits the ability of water to soak into the ground to recharge the aquifer and increases rates of runoff that can lead to more severe flash floods.



Blue Hole flows when the water level at the J-17 Monitor Well is at or above 672 feet above mean sea level. Data from the Edwards Aquifer Authority. Graphic by Robin Gary, Watershed Association

Protection

The Edwards Aquifer Authority manages pumpage in the San Antonio segment of the Edwards Aquifer and coordinates pumpage reductions for permitted water users based on several drought triggers, including the water level at J-17. As a proactive conservation measure starting in 2000, San Antonio voters approved several rounds funding for the San Antonio Edwards Aquifer Protection through a one-eighth cent addition to the local sales tax. Over 21 years, the program has raised \$300 million in conservation lands; through conservation easements, land purchases, and matching investments has successfully protected over 240,000 acres to date. In celebration of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word's 150th anniversary, the Congregation and its ministry, Headwaters at Incarnate Word, established a conservation easement to permanently protect the Headwaters Sanctuary in 2022.



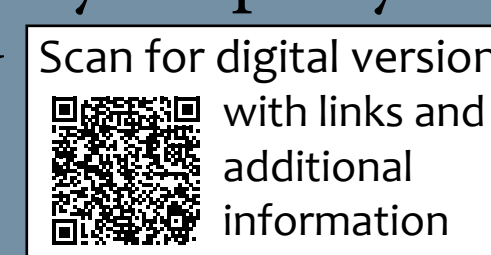
Conserved lands and the Edwards Aquifer Contributing, Recharge, and Artesian Zones. Map by the City of San Antonio Edwards Aquifer Protection Program

Access and More Information



Trail sign for San Antonio Spring 'Blue Hole'. Photo by the Headwaters at Incarnate Word

Guests are welcome to enjoy the trails, see the Blue Hole and visit the headwaters of the San Antonio River within the Headwaters Sanctuary while respecting established guidelines and restrictions. No swimming or wading is allowed. The Sanctuary is open year-round during daylight hours. Parking near the Sanctuary entrance is courtesy of the University of the Incarnate Word; please respect their parking restrictions.



Art4Water is a program of the Watershed Association, a 501(c)(3) non-profit



Photo by Gregg Eckhardt , courtesy of the Headwaters at Incarnate Word