

The Watershed Association



*Ephraim and Alexa King's Sacred Springs Kite, Above and Below.
Photo by Abby Jones*

Seasonal Program Updates
Summer 2023





THE
**WATERSHED
ASSOCIATION**
LAND · WATER · CONNECTION

A non-profit organization located in the heart of the Texas Hill Country, born out of a love for water.

Mission

To promote conservation by ensuring communities are aware of their connection and responsibilities to their watershed and are supported in advocating for water policies and practices that promote ecological sustainability for future generations.

Vision

A world where all community members understand the many benefits that flow from a respectful relationship with the land: human health, ecological health, economic sustainability, enriched community life, and the renewal of the human spirit.



Watershed Association Board, Staff, and Rainmakers.

Board of Directors

Parc Smith, President

Scott Price, Treasurer

Jason Pinchback, Secretary

Dorothy Knight

Pokey Rehmet

Dain Dunston

Team

David Baker, Founder and Executive Director


Ellen Evans, Director of Operations

Aliya Rosenbloom, Director of Creative Strategy and Program Implementation

Amber Smith, Communications and Donor Relations Coordinator

Robin Gary, Director of Watershed Protection and Conservation Science

Paul Stuffer, Facilities and Land Manager



Land. Water. Connection.

July 12, 2023

Dear Friend of the Watershed,

With the hot summer months upon us, we are continually looking for rainfall in the forecast. The current drought conditions are a huge reminder that our groundwater is precious and finite and despite some intermittent rainfall in recent months, we remain in an Emergency Drought stage throughout the Hill Country. Conservation measures are more critical than ever before and all outdoor watering should be curtailed. In 2022, Jacobs Well had zero flow for over 30 days—the longest period of zero flow in history. These critical conditions have led to a closure of Jacob's Well for swimming this summer season and for the foreseeable future. The low flow at Jacob's Well tells us our aquifer needs our help and the future of Texas water depends on the delicate balance we as a community must achieve to avoid spoiling what we love.

We at the Watershed Association work to educate and advocate for our land and water by networking across the community and region with stakeholders including local governments and partner organizations to protect our precious resources through watershed planning and land conservation. Our scientific research and water quality monitoring advocate for informed public policy. We believe in the power of collective impact and engage the community in immersive experiences to inspire stewardship that preserve and protect our watersheds. We are proud to share our Seasonal Update with you, full of all the creative ways we are engaging and activating stewardship initiatives across our beautiful and unique region.

In order to ensure our rivers, streams, creeks, and springs are available for future generations, we serve as **protectors of the watershed** and spring flows. This role includes engaging with stakeholders to create task forces, sustainability strategies, new policies, and monitoring the quality and quantity of the Cypress Creek and Blanco River and the regional spring flows to conduct scientific studies to guide conservation priorities across the region.

Additionally, we serve to **nurture and inspire stewardship** of the natural systems that support our watershed. One of the ways that we activate stewards is through experiential programming and creative storytelling and nature based education and our new Art4Water program. This spring was full of unique educational experiences including successfully bringing our Sacred Springs Kite Exhibition to three locations across San Marcos. Featuring several new local artists, the exhibit has now been experienced by nearly 500,000 visitors and will hang through the end of September 2023. Additionally, we hosted workshops and experiences including community watershed workshops, public events and native plant walks in the natural area. Our most exciting new endeavor is the acquisition of the property adjacent to Blue Hole Park in Wimberley to create a model for regenerative net positive development and a water-focused community gathering place For the Love Of Water. We encourage you to read more about this incredible project in the following pages.

For over 30 years, we at the Watershed Association have worked tirelessly to overcome enormous challenges to protect and nurture our environment and health of our community. Our impact has only been possible with the endless support of our staff, board, countless partners, supporters, and volunteers, and YOU! We created this Seasonal Update to keep our community updated and connected to the heart of our work. Thank you so much for your continued investment in our region and our mission.

For the Love of Water,



David Baker, Executive Director, The Watershed Association



THE
WATERSHED
ASSOCIATION
LAND · WATER · CONNECTION

Our Impact

Protect Texas Water



Land Conservation

500 acres of land in conservation



Watershed Protection & Conservation Science

20 years of water quality monitoring with the Clean Rivers Program at 14 sites along Cypress Creek & the Blanco River, 12 bacteria sites monitored monthly



Policy, Advocacy, and Environmental Planning

1.6 million gallon annual wastewater discharge into the Blanco River prevented by the formation of Protect Our Blanco. Settled by Texas Land Application Permit to prevent further discharge



Regenerative Connection and Education

1,700 residents, students, and families reached by over 20 presentations, field trips, and events



Art4Water

447,000 visitors to the Sacred Springs Kite Exhibition at multiple locations in Central Texas



Partnerships and Community Support

167,000 people impacted through experiential learning initiatives and media outreach



Land Conservation

*Sunset at Colemans Canyon
Photo by Jonathan Ogren*

We conserve land to protect water.

The Watershed Association is a regional land trust serving Central Texas and is a proud member of the Texas Land Trust Council. The Watershed Association has worked over the past 26 years to assemble and reunite the land directly surrounding Jacob's Well into a single ownership for the first time since the 1800s. The land had been subdivided into hundreds of parcels for development and was finally placed in a conservation easement in 2010. The Watershed Association worked to remove over five acres of impervious cover and begin restoration of the landscape to transfer to Hays County to establish the Jacob's Well Natural Area.

Since then, the Bluffs, Rebecca Springs, Colemans Canyon and Dry Cypress Preserves,

were purchased and conserved to protect critical habitat and aquifer recharge that supports local drinking water and spring flow from Jacob's Well.

With strong community support and stakeholder investment, the Watershed Association has converted over 500 acres into permanently conserved lands.

In addition to the conserved public lands and properties owned by the Watershed Association, we also monitor 294 acres of conservation easements, including the City of Wimberley's Cypress Creek Nature Preserve. Our work to conserve land is central to connecting our communities conservation ethic to these natural wonders, sustaining spring flow and water quality, and growing a healthy economy in the Wimberley Valley and Central Texas region.

Bioswales at the Watershed Association Main Campus. Image by Woody Welch



Bob Mud with Blanco River Academy students.. Photo by Ellen Evans.



Goals of the Living Building Challenge. Image credit: International Living Future Institute.



Bob Mud with Blanco River Academy students.. Photo by David Baker.

A Regenerative Center For The Love of Water

The Watershed Association has recently acquired the property at the Oaks at Blue Hole on Old Kyle Rd in the heart of downtown Wimberley. The property connects the community activity of the square to the entrance of the beautiful Blue Hole Park. We envision a community space that is in harmony with nature that inspires deep connection and serves as a model for restorative and regenerative living. The vision is to create a community village that educates through mindful design and programming that mimics the diversity of a healthy ecosystem and celebrates the connection between people, land, water, wildlife, cultural arts, community, and the environment. Through a comprehensive and collaborative planning process, we will reimagine the environmentally sensitive area as the gateway to Blue Hole Regional Park through creating a landmark project that demonstrates sustainable design and evokes inspiration and a renewed sense of responsibility towards our fragile region. This village center will serve as a link between the built human spaces and the natural world while demonstrating the value of integrated One Water design in the architecture, landscape and programming for the Center.

Recently, we received a grant that will support our initial discovery phase of the planning process. Over the next year, we will begin engaging in site analysis and begin developing a framework for the project to include conservation measures, architectural elements, project parameters and guiding principles, and processes for stakeholder involvement and community engagement. The project will serve to further the Watershed Association's impact areas and will incorporate community gathering spaces that will function as a hub for environmental education, artistic expression, cultural and performing arts, gardens, and shared contemplative spaces to experience nature. Additionally, the project will utilize the principles of the Living Building Challenge and be a model for One Water design, an intentionally integrated approach to water management that values water at all stages of the water cycle—rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge, stormwater, greywater, and wastewater reuse—as a single resource.

"This new project is an exciting opportunity for the Watershed Association to reflect the community's values of land and water stewardship and nature-based education at this unique site in the heart of Wimberley," stated Parc Smith, Board President for the Watershed Association.



Conservation Easements

The Watershed Association holds [three conservation easements](#) that protect 251 acres in Hays County; we work closely with conservation easement holders through stewardship, monitoring, and annual assessments. One of the conservation easements is the [Cypress Creek Nature Preserve](#), seven acres of land along Cypress Creek stretching from just east of Wimberley Square to the southwestern edge of Blue Hole Regional Park. This offers visitors the opportunity to experience a pristine riparian ecosystem with a wide variety of plants and wildlife. The Watershed Association continues to work in partnership with the Nature Conservancy, Texas Land Trust Council and other partners to expand conservation lands throughout the region.



*Biologist in Wimberley Bat Cave
Photo by Zara Environmental*

Hays County Parks and Open Space Bond Projects

The Watershed Association proposed [five projects to the Parks and Open Space Bond Committee \(POSAC\)](#). The POSAC recommended county funding for 4 of 5 Watershed Association proposed projects. Although the POSAC ranked the \$20 million Regional Conservation Fund Project as Tier Three with no current term recommendation for funding, the content of the proposal is serving as the basis for both the Greater San Marcos project and One Water Utility project development. The top tier projects with recommended funding include Coleman's Canyon Preserve with a \$2.6m recommendation to conserve 163 acres in the recharge zone for Jacobs Well, Dry Cypress Creek Trail with a \$1.5m recommendation to create a regional trail and add to recharge protection, Cypress Creek De Cordova Trail with a \$2.625m recommendation to preserve critical Cypress Creek riparian habitat, and Roy Creek Canyon with a \$1m recommendation to preserve a pristine one of a kind spring in northern Hays County.



*View from Coleman's Canyon.
Photo by David Baker*



Watershed Protection & Conservation Science



*The Blanco River.
Image by Robin Gary.*

Healthy spring flows directly influence water quality—especially in the Hill Country. As flow declines, dissolved oxygen levels also decline and pollutant loading from direct wastewater discharges and non-point sources increases, which can impact the health of fish and aquatic communities. Since 2003 the Watershed Association has financially supported monitoring efforts. Currently, the Watershed Association funds ten quarterly and two monthly Clean Rivers Program water quality sampling sites along Cypress Creek and the Blanco River to document water quality conditions in these sensitive areas.

With increases in population and associated groundwater use complicated by frequent droughts, flow at Jacob's Well has stopped several times within the last decade. The Cypress Creek Watershed Protection Plan was established by the Watershed Association, Meadows Center and community stakeholders in 2008 in response to water quality impairments

and to proactively address water challenges through stormwater best management practices, green infrastructure, alternative supplies, beneficial reuse, conservation development and other One Water design concepts that protect spring flow and water quality.

Thanks to robust monitoring, quality assured science is available to community leaders and stakeholders to inform public policy.

Recently, the Watershed Association utilized water quality data in the formation of the Blanco Water Reclamation Task Force to facilitate policy changes that prevent direct wastewater discharge into the Blanco River. With innovative solutions such as One Water, and the creation of groundwater management zones, **we will continue to protect spring flow and maintain the pristine quality of our water supply through informed decision making and public policy based on sound science.**



*Cypress Creek Project Riparian
Workshop. Photo by Matt Ryan,
Mister Films*



*Clean Rivers Program sampling near
Blanco. Photo by Dr. Sandra Arismendez*

Cypress Creek Watershed Protection Plan

Since the formal adoption of the Cypress Creek Watershed Protection Plan in 2014, city, county, civic organizations, and citizens of the Wimberley Valley have actively collaborated towards conservation and preservation efforts for the Cypress Creek Watershed. The community-led, Environmental Protection Agency approved Watershed Protection Plan is a valuable tool used to help guide efforts to exceed federal Clean Water Act standards by setting water quality goals and effectively manage the Cypress Creek Watershed by utilizing Best Management Practices (BMPs). The partnership has celebrated significant improvements in incorporating stormwater controls into site planning, implementation of numerous best management practices, and enthusiastic participation in workshops and meetings. Significant progress has been made since the inception of the watershed protection plan, but many challenges remain ahead. Development pressures and persistent drought conditions and overpumping of the aquifer warrant continued collaborative effort toward safeguarding water availability and water quality.

Cypress Creek watershed stakeholders need sustained community investment to continue to ensure a clean, clear, and flowing future for Cypress Creek. With federal funding for the Cypress Creek Watershed Protection Plan concluding in August 2023, a broader commitment and financial investment from local stakeholders is critical to meet the intense challenges of rapid growth in our region and to continue and build upon the strategic watershed planning, water quality monitoring, and education initiatives of the last decade.

Water Quality Monitoring

For over 20 years, the Watershed Association has been collecting water quality data through the Texas Clean Rivers Program. Currently, the Watershed Association funds 14 quarterly monitoring sites along Cypress Creek and the Blanco River. In collaboration with the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment and Protect Our Blanco, the Watershed Association sponsors two monthly monitoring sites on the Blanco River above and below the Blanco Wastewater Outflow to measure changes in water quality associated with direct wastewater discharges. With recent discharges, data from these two sites are critically important.

The volunteer Wimberley Water Advisory Group has monitored both Cypress Creek and the Blanco River near Wimberley for E coli bacteria for decades. Bacteria sampling began in May for the 2023 swim season. This program is further supported by the Wimberley Chamber of Commerce, The Wimberley Community Civic Club, and The Wimberley Lions Club. Results are published in the Wimberley View and posted on the Bacteria Monitoring webpage.



*Bacteria Sampling at Jacob's Well,
May 2023. Photo by Robin Gary*



Drought and Groundwater Management

Our watershed has faced exceptional challenges in the last year. The Wimberley Valley received only half the average rainfall for the year, which impacted groundwater recharge, spring flow, and rivers. In August 2022, the Hays Trinity Groundwater Conservation District (HTGCD) declared an Emergency Stage Drought for the first time in history. Pumping reductions aim to reduce water withdrawals, extend water supplies, and protect spring flow until adequate rainfall returns. Permitted groundwater users were under pumping reductions for a total of 11 out of 12 months, with 5 of those months falling under the most aggressive pumpage reductions.

Despite the HTGCD's coordinated conservation efforts, Jacob's Well stopped flowing for 35 days in 2022. Low spring flow created water quality concerns at Jacob's Well and downstream at Blue Hole, which led to Jacob's Well Natural Area and Blue Hole Regional Park suspending swimming. The County suspended swimming at Jacob's Well on June 29, 2022 due to high bacteria counts brought about by heavy recreational use and low flow. The City of Wimberley suspended swimming on August 1, 2022 for similar concerns.

Regarding 2022 drought compliance, staff reported at April HTGCD Board meeting that about 80% of permittees met drought targets, and 20% received Notices of Alleged Violations (NOAVs). Through a public information request, the Watershed Association learned that the three Aqua Texas systems in the Wimberley Valley exceeded their drought-adjusted allotments by over 100 million gallons and Aqua received notice of a \$448,710 penalty for overpumpage in 2022. Given that the three Aqua Texas systems rely on the same aquifer that provides spring flow to Jacob's Well (headwaters of Cypress Creek), closely adhering to drought reductions is imperative to protecting water supplies, aquatic habitat, our economy, and way of life in the Wimberley Valley.

Drought restrictions are designed to minimize effects of pumping on spring flow and protect water availability for our groundwater-dependent community. We believe the established District-declared drought reductions are an effective and essential tool to coordinate conservation. Aqua Texas' overpumping and noncompliance with water restrictions, along with over 2000 undeveloped lots pose an ongoing threat to the health of our water supply and economic health of our community. The Watershed recommends the formation of a Regional Water Task Force in order to address the complex challenge of providing adequate water supply and to protect spring flow and water quality.

Zero flow at Jacob's Well again, July 10, 2023. Photo by Robin Gary

Aqua Texas Aquifer Test and Coordinated Monitoring

With the intention of reducing pumpage rates in the Jacobs Well Groundwater Management Zone (JWGMZ) of the Middle Trinity Aquifer, Aqua Texas and Wet Rock Consulting performed a 48-hour aquifer test to determine whether two new test production wells located just outside the JWGMZ would influence hydrostatic pressure within the Zone and flow at Jacob's Well. The test will enhance our understanding and management of the aquifer and give further insights to this complex groundwater system.

A work plan was developed by Wet Rock Consulting and Aqua Texas with Hays Trinity Groundwater Conservation District (HTGCD.) Due to the geographic scope of the monitor well system, the HTGCD, the Edwards Aquifer Authority, The Watershed Association, and the Barton Springs Edwards Aquifer Conservation District all contributed in-kind to the monitoring portion of the test. The two-step, 48-hour pumping phase of the test started at 10:30am Monday, June 12 and ended at 10:30am Wednesday, June 14, 2023.

The HTGCD summarized initial observations at their July 6 meeting:

- An initial review of monitoring data shows that pumping from two existing Aqua Texas wells (Well 21 and 22) and the two Aqua Texas test wells (wells 24 and 25 when pumped in unison) negatively affect Jacob's Well spring flow
- Pumping from the two Aqua Texas test wells caused measurable drawdown at several public supply and private wells in the monitoring network.
- Water levels in area wells and spring flow at Jacob's Well recovered after the pumping phase occurred. Recovery rates were variable but happened within hours to a few days after pumping stopped. The spring flow at Jacob's Well dropped during the pump test and recovered when the pump test was completed on June 14th. Jacob's Well stopped flowing completely on June 23rd and remains at zero flow today.
- Data is currently being compiled and processed for 20+ monitoring sites. Drought conditions, groundwater pumping, and complex geology means that a comprehensive hydrogeologic analysis of the pumping and monitoring data will take time. Analysis and results will be presented at a future Hays Trinity Groundwater Conservation District public meeting.

The bottom line is that collectively our community is pumping out more than is recharging under current drought conditions and more must be done to conserve groundwater during this emergency drought period. Please consider ceasing all outdoor watering to help maintain current aquifer levels until sufficient rains return.



Drilling rig. Photo by David Baker.



Policy, Advocacy, & Environmental Planning



One Water School Tour.
Photo by Robin Gary

In the Hill Country, there is a need for innovative approaches to provide more investment in parks and open space, protecting aquifer recharge, water equity and regional planning for conservation-based development. These strategies prevent wastewater pollutants from impacting local streams, encourage rainwater harvesting through incentives and forward sustainable groundwater management.

Our region is characterized by a state of prolonged drought punctuated by extreme rain events. As a result, providing affordable and reliable wastewater treatment systems that prioritize reuse and prevent groundwater depletion is critical to sustain water availability and water quality. Through promotion of decentralized water management “One Water” design, **the Watershed Association encourages an integrated planning and implementation approach** to managing finite water

resources for long-term resilience and reliability, meeting both community and ecosystem needs.

Given the rapid population growth in Central Texas and our finite water resources, **One Water principles are becoming critically important to extend and protect our vulnerable water supplies.** A core principle of One Water is the reuse of treated wastewater for irrigation and other beneficial use. The Watershed Association is a founding member of the No Dumping Sewage Coalition that has been a driving force to identify and investigate alternatives to direct discharge into the last remaining pristine streams in Texas through both legislation and a rulemaking petition to TCEQ. The reuse of treated effluent will protect water quality and will also help offset groundwater use for irrigation and be more protective of spring flows to balance community and ecosystem needs for a sustainable water future.

NATURAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE TEXAS HILL COUNTRY



WOODLANDS / FORESTS



GRASSLANDS



FARMS &
RANCHLANDS



WETLANDS &
RIPARIAN ZONES



WATERWAYS



AQUATIC SYSTEMS



PARKS / OPEN SPACE



URBAN FORESTS



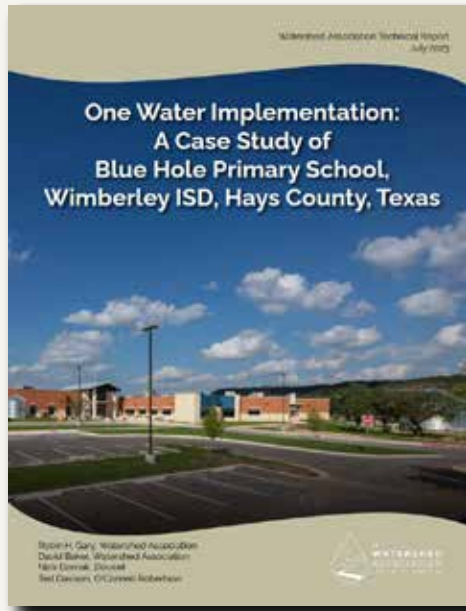
RAIN GARDENS



Image by Texas Hill Country
Conservation Network

One Water Implementation

The Watershed Association and the Wimberley Valley are leading the movement for sustainable Hill Country development and One Water design. Stakeholders across the region and state are adopting One Water principles as a result of the model set forth by the collective effort here in the valley at the One Water Blue Hole Primary School. Recently, the Wimberley Village Library Expansion



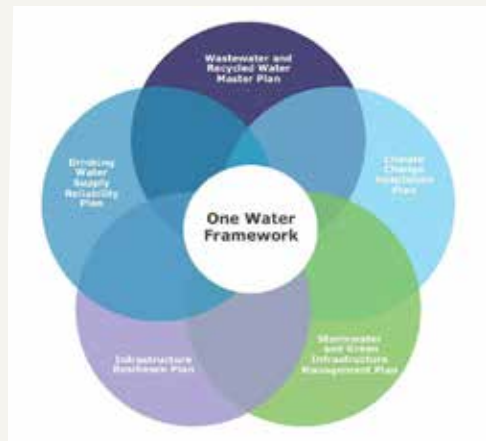
Project, inspired by Blue Hole Primary's site harvested supply, has adopted the One Water innovation to use AC condensate and rainwater for non-potable uses like toilet flushing to minimize impact to local groundwater supplies.

This summer, Watershed Association staff coordinated a One Water Tour of Blue Hole Primary. Participants from Hays, Comal, and Travis Counties continue to be inspired by the innovation, implementation, and educational opportunities created on the campus. Additionally, staff

facilitated presentations and a tour for an esteemed group of guests and leaders in water. The report, One Water Implementation: A Case Study of Blue Hole Primary School, Wimberley ISD, Hays County, Texas serves as an important resource inspiring and informing One Water projects across the Hill Country.



Staff leads One Water tour.
Photo by David Baker.

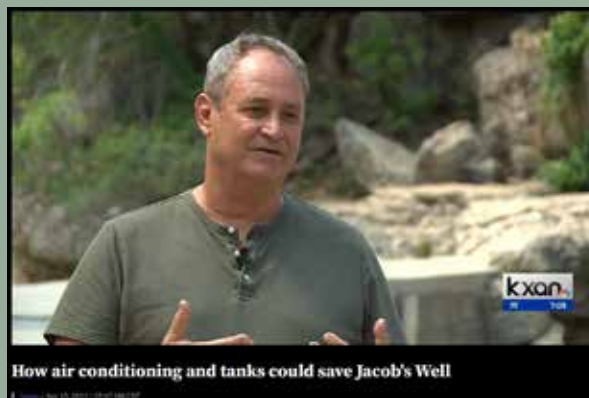


One Water Framework Elements.
Graphic by US Water Alliance.

In the Media

KXAN Earth Day Feature: Wimberley's One Water

In April, KXAN Meteorologist Nick Bannin featured Wimberley's One Water innovation in a drought-focused Earth Day segment. David discussed the importance of Jacob's Well spring flow to community water supplies, creek flow, and recreation opportunities. During this historic drought, Wimberley's One Water School remains proudly in the spotlight, saving the community's shared potable water supply with each flush. The recent Wimberley Library Expansion project shows how One Water concepts are being adopted locally.



News segment by KXAN.



Doucet Engineering staff with One Water tour. Photo by David Baker



*Algae growth on the Blanco River near FM 165, March 2023.
Photo by Robin Gary.*

Land, Water, Sky, and Natural Infrastructure Plan

The [Hill Country Land, Water, Sky, and Natural Infrastructure Plan](#) aims to provide data-driven solutions and priorities for conserving natural resources within the Texas Hill Country and includes a written report, maps, and recommendations for a path forward. The development of the Plan drew from the feedback of thousands of central Texans, including natural resource professionals, residents, elected officials and landowners within the region. A central theme throughout the new plan is the reframing of infrastructure to move beyond built systems and include the natural systems that sustain Hill Country communities. From rivers and aquifers that provide our communities drinking water to the rolling hills that provide flood mitigation, these natural features provide vital services and protections throughout the region. The Plan highlights where protection of these resources is most needed, and identifies opportunities for improving recreational access to nature, mitigating urban heat island impacts, and protecting our precious water resources.

Blanco Water Reclamation Task Force

On May 16, the Blanco City Council voted to renew the MOU with the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment to facilitate the Blanco Water Reclamation Task Force. This task force is composed of City of Blanco Council and Staff, Executive Director David Baker and other board members of Protect Our Blanco and has been working to address the need to expand the City of Blanco's wastewater treatment capacity and protect the quality of water in the Blanco River. The City of Blanco has had to make several controlled discharges of treated wastewater in the last several months and the Watershed Association and Meadows Center for Water and the Environment have been coordinating to collect water samples above and below the discharge point. The City of Blanco is preparing to resubmit an updated wastewater permit to the TCEQ and the Watershed Association and POB will be reviewing the permit to ensure it abides by the terms of 2022 vote by council to transition the permit from a Direct Discharge to a Texas Land Application Permit and to ensure adequate treatment allows for a 210 Reuse Permit to avoid putting wastewater in the Blanco River. In addition to the wastewater problems the City of Blanco is facing an emergency water supply shortage with the drought not allowing use of the Blanco River for water supply the city is dependent on water from Canyon Lake. There is sufficient water from Canyon Lake but a recent malfunction of the transmission line and water treatment plant has left the City with only a few days of storage in reserve. The City needs immediate financial assistance to repair the water treatment plant, build irrigation pipes to adjacent lands to avoid discharge and investment to repair aging water and wastewater infrastructure.

Roy Creek Canyon Spotlight

Over two years have passed since the Mirasol Development at the intersection of Hays County, Travis County and the Pedernales River, started raising eyebrows. Developers have intentions of creating a conservation development, and they also have intentions to bring a commercial project including restaurants, a farm and resort hotel to an area with dwindling groundwater resources, and cherished natural features such as Hamilton Pool, Reimers Ranch, and the Roy Creek Canyon. In many ways, this project is a good example of low-impact development for the Hill Country region, with 1000 acres promised for a conservation easement, best practices such as water-reuse, rainwater harvesting, native landscaping and restricting residences from using groundwater for irrigation.

There is no denying the risk to Roy Creek, springs, and wells nearby. A recent study revealed the connections of these systems and the fact that significant water withdrawals will have an impact on the health of these springs. Questions remain about the effect of pumping the Pedernales River for a primary water supply and turning to groundwater in times of low-flow and drought. Local watershed leaders are collaborating on science and evaluation of permits that are currently under review. The Watershed Association has been providing comments and questions every step of the way to assure the best possible outcomes. Much will be decided in the coming weeks and months related to groundwater permits, county development approvals, TCEQ wastewater permit and a TCEQ diversion permit related to the Pedernales River water right.

Walking Softer

In the early months of the year, our executive director attended a summit on climate change in Antarctica. David was invited to the summit as recognition of his groundbreaking work in collaborative conservation, network development, and watershed protection in Texas. The summit was organized by Walking Softer, a nonprofit organization engaged in supporting environmental advocates across the world for a healthier planet (www.walkingsofter.org).



*Antarctic expedition participants.
Photo by Walking Softer*

Walking Softer's mission is to inform, inspire, and support changemakers to take bold and immediate action in the conservation and regeneration of the planet. Their vision is an inclusive, biodiverse world where all life thrives, and they aim to challenge the current hyper-consumerism mindset by highlighting the economic opportunity in reinventing how we live sustainably. Walking Softer raises awareness of the current state of the planet, funds changemakers through awards, investments, and scholarships, and encourages individual and collective action with the planet in mind. The Walking Softer team shares a common vision of designing a better, more sustainable future for our planet, and their disciplines and expertise are diverse. The summit was an incredible opportunity to connect with other powerful advocates to discuss critical strategies to the challenges we face. We look forward to further collaboration with this incredible organization in the future!

*Roy Creek Canyon
Photo by Lew Adams*



Regenerative Connection & Education



Image by Erich Schlegel

Like the pristine water flowing from springs across the region to form deep connections throughout the entire Hill Country and beyond, connection and education are key pillars to the work we do.

Forming a connection with nature isn't just beneficial, it's vital for our human health. Increased time in nature shows clear positive associations with overall physical and psychological health and emotional wellbeing—it even makes us more productive.

Research tells us that when people simply view images of nature, “they are inclined to be more social, more caring towards others, more community-oriented, and more generous.” More time in nature tends not only to make us healthier, but better people in our communities with more inclination to recognize and respond to planetary health and concern for threats to our natural systems.

It has been said that humans are becoming the first indoor species, with our children spending more time with devices than in unstructured, outdoor play. Since most of our bodies are made up of the same elements found outside, when we become distant from nature, we also become separated from fully knowing ourselves.

The Watershed Association's nature-based programming focuses on regenerative and experiential practices where humans realign our relationship with nature. **We offer diverse opportunities for people of all ages to better understand themselves through the lens of the natural world.**

When we return to our rightful place in the natural world, we are healthier, we better understand nature and we are more likely to take care of it.



Photo by Ellen Evans



Photo by Ellen Evans

Jacob's Well Community Garden

The [Jacob's Well Community Garden](#) was created in Spring 2014 as a collaboration between the Watershed Association and passionate local community members. The garden has continuously expanded and improved over the years to become the vibrant community gathering space it is today. Located on conserved land at Logans Run in Woodcreek North, the garden sits on the former site of condo tennis courts. The community garden provides an affordable way for local gardeners to grow healthy, organic produce while giving back to the community. The space features 36 garden beds. For the last 5 years, four of those beds have been devoted to growing food for the Wimberley Crisis Breadbasket, with additional contributions from gardeners.



*Harvest at the Community Garden
Photo by David Baker*

Gardeners utilize organic growing methods, create abundant compost, and rely on rainwater collected in four cisterns as the primary water supply. Current initiatives at the garden include installation of solar panels and a solar pump that will connect to the rainwater collection tanks and ultimately the installation of drip irrigation in the garden beds to conserve more water. We are grateful and honored to partner with the gardening community and the volunteer leadership that make this garden thrive!

Beers Made by Walking

Our friends at Beerburg Brewing launched a program called "Beers Made By Walking." Based on a national program, Beers Made by Walking invites brewers to get to know their region more intimately and make beer inspired by their respective regions and the plants they find on local nature hikes. Each walk is different, and each beer brewed from that walk is a portrait of that landscape.

In May, Beerburg partnered with The Watershed Association to host a walk through the Jacob's Well Natural Area to educate brewers in the unique features and native plants of the area and gather for a discussion of creative strategies for incorporating water conservation measures into the brewing process. We are grateful to our friends at Beerburg Brewing for their ethos of sustainability and the use of local ingredients and dedication to community conservation through education.



*Harvest during the Beers Made by
Walking event
Photo by Ellen Evans*



Image by Robin Gory

"Art shapes culture, and changes people and communities. Art tells a universally powerful story that communicates the value of water beyond words." - David Baker, Art4Water Founder

The Watershed Association launched an exciting new program in 2022 to engage artists as powerful advocates for our springs, creeks and rivers. Artists have always served society as visionaries, translators and storytellers—they help share powerful stories and elements of the human experience that are limited by spoken language. Art4Water is a program that advocates for environmental protection through the lens of art.

The program is focused at the intersection between the human experience of art, culture

and expression to policy, conservation, environmental stewardship, and education. Art4Water is a pathway to engage and educate both the artists and the art appreciators in a way that is memorable, unique and experiential. Charts, graphs, and statistics can only inspire to a point but when we personally feel and experience something, we are more likely to understand it, care about it, and alter our behaviors on its behalf.

The Sacred Springs Kite Exhibition made its debut in Austin in May of 2022, featuring the work of 35+ national and local artists to raise awareness of threatened Texas springs and the vital connection of water to life. Thanks to the inspiration and support of the San Marcos Arts Commission, The Sacred Springs Kite Exhibition has moved to three San Marcos locations.



Photo by David Baker

Earth Day Celebration at Meadows Center

This year, we celebrated with The Meadows Center For Water and the Environment with a community event that drew visitors from across the region. The beautiful Texas spring day was an opportunity to celebrate our planet and share our work and Art4Water initiatives with visitors from San Marcos and surrounding areas. The Earth Day Celebration also served as the launch for the Sacred Spring Kite Exhibition's debut in San Marcos! With several kites newly installed in the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment, visitors were able to get a sneak peek at the first site of the San Marcos Exhibition. The Watershed Association, with the help of dedicated volunteers, also offered an interactive experience to visitors to build and fly kites.

Artistree's Ten Year Anniversary Event at Cypress Valley

Artistree and the beautiful Cypress Valley Treehouses serve to connect humans with nature. A vital part of the Artistree mission is stewarding and sharing beautiful places, which stems from the belief that nature is medicine for the modern world. The Watershed Association and Hill Country Alliance were both part of the origin story for this project ten years ago and were so honored to be the beneficiaries of this anniversary event for their stewardship and education programs that benefit local landowners and sustainable projects in the Hill Country region.

The event held in early June was filled with music performances, tours of the incredible property, and conversations about land and water conservation with our partners and guests. The evening included comments from project founders Will & Amy Beilharz, David Baker and Katherine Romans about the challenges we face and the need for small but powerful and consistent actions we can all take to make an impact. Heavy rain fell as the event reached its conclusion to the delight of the hosts and attendees!



Earth Day Celebration
Photos by Ellen Evans



Art4Water artist, Rene Perez with his kite, Gaurdians of the Springs.
Photo by Erich Schlegel.

San Marcos Sacred Springs Kite Exhibition Gallery Opening

On May 5th, Art4Water presented The Sacred Springs Kite Exhibition Gallery Opening at the San Marcos Public Library! The opening attracted over 300 people from across the region. It was a noteworthy time to honor our Sacred Texas Springs through the lens of art and an inspiring way to gather with our community and plant seeds of hope around the critical state of our water. We are so grateful for the support of the Harry L Willett Foundation, Terry Zee Lee, our partners, the artists, donors and dedicated staff and volunteers that helped make this incredible exhibit possible. It was truly a collaborative effort of hearts and hands. We encourage everyone to come experience The Sacred Springs Kite Exhibit this summer, as the one of a kind exhibit will be displayed in the San Marcos Public Library, The Meadows Center for Water and



David Baker during the San Marcos Library Kite Exhibition Opening Celebration.
Photo by Eric Schlegel

What's Next For the Sacred Springs Kite Exhibition?

We are thrilled about the continued excitement that surrounds the Sacred Springs Kite Exhibition. Our hope is that the collection will not only grow but will serve as a vehicle to communicate the needs of our watershed across broader and more diverse communities.

Sponsoring kites from the collection is an amazing way to support our work and to identify yourself and your company as a leader in environmental stewardship. Interested in showcasing your commitment to Texas water by becoming a Sacred Springs Kite Sponsor? Reach out to aliya@watershedassociation.org for more information regarding sponsorship opportunities and levels.

Psst... curious where you can see some of the kites hanging after October? Look for them showcased anytime you take a flight from Austin!



Terry Zee Lee, Curator of the Sacred Springs Kite Exhibition.
Photo by Kara Buse

Featured Artist: Dayann Pazmino, Austin, Texas

Dayann is one of the most recent Sacred Springs Kite Exhibition artists. In their painting "I Saw Myself in the Water Hyacinth" they explore the relationship between



Dayann Pazmino

self and physical landscape and how they experience a disconnect due to being a first-generation American. Their piece was inspired by quite literally seeing themselves in the Water Hyacinth, a plant that comes from the Amazon and now resides in the San Marcos River.

They proposed painting the Water Hyacinth because it brings up controversial perspectives on the ethics of biology and the ethics of man. "Although I understand the reason why environmentalists want to get rid of it, Dayann says, there are some perspectives that should be analyzed more deeply and compared to why we think foreigners should also be removed from the US despite their beauty and assimilation into our communities." The beauty of the Water Hyacinth reminds us that beauty comes from diverse places, and it is our duty to conserve our dynamic environment." "I Saw Myself in the Water Hyacinth" was fabricated by Jim Day & Stan Swanson.

For more information about our featured artists, including Dayann's inspiring poem, please visit



watershedassociation.org/art4water-artist-bios
or use QR code.



Sacred Springs Kite by Dayann Pazmino

Staff Spotlight: Paul Stuffel

Paul joined the Watershed Association team last April as our Land and Facilities Manager. Paul has quickly become an invaluable member of our team overseeing facilities and maintenance at the Center property and coordinating land management and restoration efforts on the Watershed Association conservation lands. We are so grateful for all of Paul's hard work and ingenuity to manage the land projects and contribute to our programs these last several months. Welcome to the Team!



Paul Stuffel with David Baker and Trail Tamers
Kevin Dieters & Butch Smith
Photo by David Baker



BRAC Student at Bob Mud Earth Art Workshop
Photo by Ellen Evans

Artist in Residency: Bob Mud from Brisbane Australia

Art4Water programming seeks to inspire a deeper connection to the earth through creative expression. This spring, The Watershed Association hosted Bob Mud, our first Art4Water artist in residency. Bob Mud is an artist, poet, and activist from Brisbane Australia who creates from his heart. At Northey Street City Farm, in Australia



Bob Mud with Watershed Association Staff.
Photo by David Baker

(<https://www.nscf.org.au/home/learn/youth-education/bob-mud/>)

Bob offers programming that builds community connection, teaches alignment with nature, and helps people tap into their creativity as a means to connect, heal and inspire. Bob has dedicated his life to environmental advocacy, permaculture and stewardship through deep service to the earth and its people and creates earth arts exclusively from natural and found materials from the environment. Bob ignites a passion in his students, young and old, to love and respect nature and adopt an ethos of regenerative stewardship.

As Art4Water's first artist-in-residence, Bob came to Wimberley to commune with the land and stressed water system here in the Texas Hill Country. He came to share a message of enduring stewardship with our community and its youth. The culmination of his residency was hosting an experiential art workshop for the students of Blanco River Academy and Tiny Trees Preschool. Thirty students and teachers gathered to participate in the hands-on earth art class. The class included painting with a locally sourced palette of earthen 'mud paints', natural clay hand building, and musical instruments made from found materials.

Special thanks to Bob Mud, Kristie Kimbell from Blanco River Academy, Robin Weeks from Tiny Trees, and David Baker and the Watershed Staff for a remarkable and memorable day of creativity and inspiration. We look forward to more collaborations with Bob Mud and other artists in future programming for Art4Water.

Support Your Watershed!

Introducing our newest initiative, the Rainmakers Club!

Our donors play an invaluable role in making our on-the-ground work possible. The Rainmakers Club is designed to recognize and honor the generous individuals who have contributed significantly and consistently to our cause. By joining the Rainmakers Club, you become a part of an exclusive group with special perks. You will receive VIP invites to our events and a special annual gathering just for Rainmakers where you can enjoy a firsthand experience of the impact of your contributions.

The Rainmakers Club creates a sense of belonging and community among our donors. It allows you to forge stronger connections with our organization and be actively involved in our ongoing initiatives. By providing you with unique access and insights, we ensure that you remain connected to the heart of our mission.

Our sponsorship levels offer added benefits and special donor perks!



To learn more, visit: watershedassociation.org/membership



A Special Thank You to the Harry L Willett Foundation and our 2023 Rainmakers:

Alan & Valerie Nies
Dain & Jean Dunston
David Gibson
David Latchford
Elise Winchester
Gorge Preservation Society
John Messenger & Kira Dell
Kimberlin Family Partnership

Marissa Kimberlin
Nancy Kendall
Ozona Bank
Robin Rather
The Ann & John Newman
Family Fund
The Way Family Foundation
TreeGarden

Rainmakers Club

Al & Jean Ann Sander
Art Crowe
Barbara Turley
Cari Marshall
Charles Lamme
Charles McCord
Cynthia Beath
David & Ellen Berman
David Bamberger
Dodee Crockett
Environmental Fund of Texas
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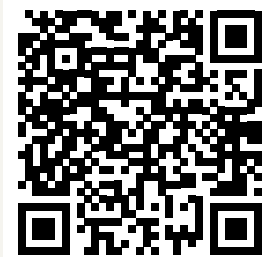
Get Involved



Image by Carl Griffin

Support the Watershed Association to inspire responsible stewardship of our watersheds. Your investment is vital to engage communities to preserve and protect the land and water of Texas Hill Country for future generations. Follow the Watershed Association and Art4Water at watershedassociation.org and on social media Facebook: [@watershedassociation](https://www.facebook.com/watershedassociation) and Instagram: [@watershedassociation](https://www.instagram.com/watershedassociation) [@_Art4Water](https://www.instagram.com/_Art4Water) to stay informed of the latest news and events.

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Image by Andy Heatwole