

EAHCP STEWARD

News from the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan - June 2019

The “Eyes” Have It

Eyes of the San Marcos River Clean Up Group Growing a Following



Zach Halfin

If you read reviews from tubers on the San Marcos River, you'll be inundated with descriptions such as, "This beautiful river never ceases to impress me," and "Love the San Marcos River, the water is crystal clear and beautiful." After the City of New Braunfels implemented a can ban in 2013, a lot of the river recreation traffic shifted to the lower reaches of the San Marcos River near the City of Martindale. The increase in tubers also brought about a spike in trash. That problem caught the eye of Zach Halfin, Derek Lee and Nathan Lawrence, and so they took some bold steps to keep cans and other trash out of that stretch of river.

"After the can ban became effective in the City of New Braunfels, the lower portion of the San Marcos River got very busy," Halfin said. "A group of friends and I decided to start an organization that would focus on telling people to be responsible for carrying out any trash they brought to the river. At first, we were going to occupy a gravel bar, known as Shotgun Island, just above

Martindale, call ourselves the San Marcos Peaceful River Militia and patrol that area. But, we opted for naming our group the "Eyes of the San Marcos River" and sought to educate tubers about the importance of keeping the San Marcos River clean. Essentially we went with the carrot instead of the stick and that has worked out for us."

To illustrate that philosophy in action, Halfin explained that at the group's first official event, they grilled hot dogs and exchanged them for empty cans from tubers. But the group soon realized that people would give

them their trash when asked for it, and that the cookouts weren't necessary. Those trash collecting efforts have been so popular, that they now have a highly visited Facebook page, which gives them a means to solicit volunteers.

Halfin has lived in San Marcos for about 15 years. He is a graduate of Texas State University and now owns a landscaping business and is the Garden Manager of an 18-acre demonstration garden called "Thigh High Gardens." That acreage sits on the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone, not too far from the university.

"I have been an avid gardener since I was 18 years old, and it is what I studied in college," Halfin explained. "Our goal with this property is to create a sustainable homestead and also an educational center. For example, we have about 10 kilowatts of solar power installed and we are making steady progress each year in achieving goals that make the property a more sustainable model."

Halfin and the other founders of the Eyes of the San Marcos River are also moving toward making their group an official nonprofit organization. He described it as currently under-organized, but still effective in garnering volunteer support. However, they think that creating the nonprofit will give them better direction and the ability to bring some other resources to their own clean up events and others they take part in.

"Our focus now is to be on the river for major holidays, like the 4th of July during the summer heavy recreational months. We will talk to people about not littering and also do some clean up while we're out there. We let people know that most parts of the river are also people's back yards and that they should care about keeping the river clean. We also participate in two river-wide clean up events each year, sponsored by other groups, that are held in the spring and fall."

Halfin characterized their clean up events as hard work. Because they mainly work in the river and not along the banks, people are in the flowing water, navigating river bottom rocks and grabbing cans and other plastic from the river bed. Sometimes a volunteer will have to swim out to where the trash is. So, by the end of the event, people can be very tired and typically a bit sunburned. But, Halfin says they are clear about what type of work they're doing and still can get up to 50 people to attend.

In looking at trends over the last few years, Halfin says there has been some real progress in certain areas. "Overall, we've seen some improvements with tube outfitters providing mesh trash bags for people to use. In fact, over the past Memorial Day holiday, we saw more people with the mesh bags than those who didn't have them. We were there to hand out bags, but many people already had them."

"Our feeling is that most people don't want to litter, but they also don't come prepared to handle their trash," Halfin noted. "We often see people floating with their coolers, but no mesh bags for empty cans. They put the cans in the coolers or next to them in their tubes. Then, as a group of tubers go over some rapids, the cans, other trash, and personal items go everywhere. So over time, we want people to know how to manage their trash while still having a great time on the river."

If you are interested in finding out more about the Eyes of the San Marcos River group, Halfin says that their Facebook page is where the action is.

"The Facebook page continues to grow every year, and it is a great way for the public to keep up with activity on the San Marcos River. It has proved to be a great forum for ideas and conversations as well. We keep spam off of the page, but we let people air their opinions about whatever the issues affecting the San Marcos River are. We just ask that it happens in a constructive manner."

Short Takes

Volunteer Opportunities

We hope you enjoyed the article on the Eyes of the San Marcos River above. You can become a member of this group for only \$10 and you can connect with them on their [Facebook group](#).

Here are some other groups you might consider contacting to volunteer to help the EAHCP keep the Comal and San Marcos Springs and Rivers clean.

New Braunfels

Headwaters at the Comal Springs - www.headwatersatthecomal.com

Comal County Master Gardeners - www.txmg.org/comal

Comal County Master Naturalists - www.comal.agrilife.org/master-naturalists

Comal Trails Alliance - www.comaltrails.org

Native Plant Society of Texas-New Braunfels Chapter - www.npsot.org/wp/newbraunfels

Native Plant Society of Texas - Lindheimer Chapter - www.npsot.org/wp/lindheimer/

Comal County Conservation Association - www.comalconservation.org

San Marcos

San Marcos River Foundation - www.sanmarcosriver.org

San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance - www.smgreenbelt.org

Hays County Master Naturalists - www.haysmn.org

Hays County Master Gardeners - www.txmg.org/hays

Discovery Center - www.sanmarcostx.gov/873/Discovery-Center

Conservation Crew - Email Eric Weeks at EWeeks@sanmarcostx.gov

EAHCP Science Committees Meeting Set for Thursday, June 27 - San Marcos

A meeting of the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan (EAHCP) Science Committee will be held Thursday, June 27, 10 AM, at the San Marcos Aquatic Resource Center.



Resolution Signing

Pictured (left to right): Robert Mace (Stakeholder Committee Secretary), Mark Enders (Implementing Committee Chair), Scott Storment (Program Manager), Darcy Frownfelter (Implementing Committee Parliamentarian and General Counsel).

At the May 23, 2019 joint EAHCP Stakeholder and Implementing Committee meeting, Resolution No. 05-19-001 was signed effectively validating the transition to the second phase of the EAHCP program and confirming the Conservation Measures that will be implemented through 2028.

To view the Comprehensive Phase II Work Plan and Resolution visit: www.eaahcp.org/administration/adaptive-management/



San Marcos River Education and Awareness Event

The EAHCP Team volunteered at San Marcos River Education and Awareness Event to inform the public, locals, and river tourists the habitat conservation and restoration activities occurring in the San Marcos River.

Eight local organizations participated including the Blanco River Regional Recovery Team, Mermaid Society SMTX, The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment, TreeFolks, San Marcos River Foundation, the Eyes of the San Marcos River, San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance and Ecosystem Regeneration Artisans.

A special thank you to the San Marcos Lions Club for hosting such an important event!