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Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program Receives 2013 Partners in Conservation Award

Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell today presented the Department's 2013 Partners in Conservation awards at a ceremony in Washington, DC. The Secretary honored 20 partnership projects that have demonstrated exemplary natural resource conservation efforts through public-private cooperation. Four partnerships nominated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service involving nearly sixty individuals and organizations located in California, Oregon, Kansas and Texas received awards. In Texas, the 2013 award went to the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program.

"The Department of the Interior is proud to recognize the accomplishments of those who are innovating and collaborating in ways that address today's complex conservation and stewardship challenges," Secretary Jewell said at an awards ceremony at the Interior headquarters in Washington today. "These partnerships represent the gold standard for how Interior is doing business across the nation to power our future, strengthen tribal nations, conserve and enhance America's great outdoors and engage the next generation."

"Partnerships are vital to wildlife conservation efforts nationwide as they allow us to combine the strengths of our stakeholders with the resources and abilities of our staff," said Service Director Dan Ashe. "Almost anything is possible when you leverage the skills, talents, dedication and abilities of diverse groups of stakeholders that share a common conservation agenda."

Located at the edge of the Texas hill country, the Edwards Aquifer is thought of as one of the most biologically diverse aquifers in the world. The Edwards Aquifer is home to species found nowhere else in the world, including eight species that are listed under the Endangered Species Act. This

prolific aquifer is also the source of the two largest springs in Texas and perhaps the Southwestern US – the San Marcos and the Comal springs – and flows into the Guadalupe River, ultimately providing freshwater inflows to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, home to the Whooping Crane.

For over a century, the Edwards Aquifer has provided clean drinking water to more than 2 million residents of San Antonio, the nation's seventh largest city, in addition to providing water for farming and ranching communities, the rapidly growing cities of New Braunfels and San Marcos, and communities downstream of the springs all the way to the Gulf of Mexico.

Eight years ago, the Service, along with the Department's U.S. Geological Survey, approached stakeholders in an effort to balance human needs and species recovery. This resulted in development of the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program's (EARIP) Habitat Conservation Plan (Plan), which was supported by a diverse partnership of more than 40 groups and individuals and was approved by the Service in early 2013. Five stakeholder groups – the Edwards Aquifer Authority; the cities of New Braunfels, San Marcos and San Antonio through the San Antonio Water System; and Texas State University – agreed to jointly lead implementation of the Plan.

“The EARIP stakeholders worked to develop and implement a Plan that balances the needs of both listed and non-listed species with the needs of the community serves as a shining example of how the Endangered Species Act can and does work,” said Benjamin Tuggle, the Service's Southwest Regional Director. “The work of those involved in the EARIP will help ensure that millions of Texans continue to have water and the species dependent upon the Aquifer will survive into the future.”

"This project has been successful because of the hard work and collaboration of stakeholders with varied interests and goals," said Bob Joseph, USGS Texas Water Science Center Director. "This partnership is a wonderful example of how to address complex topics that involve endangered species and water resource issues."

Additional information on the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program is available at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/AustinTexas/>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

The USGS Texas Water Science Center provides scientific data, interpretive studies, and other resources that EARIP stakeholders and resource makers can use to make informed decisions. The USGS serves the nation by providing reliable scientific information to describe and understand the Earth; minimize loss of life and property from natural disasters; manage water, biological, energy, and mineral resources; and enhance and protect our quality of life.

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