

County leaders meet to discuss solutions for groundwater management, aggregate impacts
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County-level leaders from across the Hill Country met to talk about issues with groundwater management, the impacts of aggregate mining and the limited authority counties have to deal with such issues.

Guadalupe County Commissioner Stephen Germann, Comal County Commissioners Jen Crownover and Kevin Webb, Kendall County Commissioner Andra Wisian and Hays County Commissioner Lon Shell welcomed 50 regional of-ficials and staff from 11 counties across the Hill Country to a meeting at the Veteran's Outreach Center in Seguin, where discussion centered on how counties can manage growth and preserve natural resources.

Joined by State Representative Andrew Murr as well as staff from State Representative Erin Zwiener and State Senator Donna Campbell's office, the group included county commissioners, engineers, floodplain administrators and groundwater conservation district managers from Bandera, Bexar, Burnet, Comal, Guadalupe, Hays, Kendall, Kerr, Real, Travis and Williamson counties.

These leaders represent some of the fastest growing counties in the country, all situated within the Texas Hill Country - a region ripe with delicate natural resources and unique communities, both rural and urban. As a whole, the group was interested in discussing the balance of regional needs -welcoming growth, respecting private property and preserving critical natural features and services. Attendees agreed that the region is a great place to live and counties need more tools to preserve quality of life for their residents.

"We've been on the front line of these issues in Guadalupe County," said Commissioner Stephen Germann, who joined the group of host commissioners after June's meeting. "If we continue on our current course, my granddaughter will be 25 when South Central Texas runs out of water. That's unacceptable. It was great to host this gathering of Hill Country leaders who are all thinking about what we need to make sure we leave a Hill Country we can be proud to pass on to our kids and grandkids."

The group discussed critical issues related to sustainable groundwater management, mitigating the negative impacts of the aggregate industry and recent legislative impacts to county planning and resources. Germann and Webb kicked off the day before pivoting to a discussion on county collaborations to support groundwater management. Wisian and Micah Voulgaris, with Cow

Creek Groundwater Conservation District, shared how the district and Kendall County were able to work together to utilize ARPA funds for new monitor wells. Attendees learned how Travis County was able to fund research and support the start of a new Groundwater Conservation District - the Southwestern Travis County GCD from Board President Rick Scadden and Brian Hunt with the Bureau of Economic Geology. Shell and David Baker from the Watershed Association closed out the groundwater discussion with a presentation on a new interlocal agreement in Hays County that has brought together the county, the cities of Wimberley and Woodcreek and two nonprofits to create a fulltime position focused on supporting the long-term health of Cypress Creek.

The focus shifted to managing the impacts of the aggregate industry on the Hill Country, with insights from APO expert Jill Shackelford, Commissioner Rich Paces of Kerr County, attorney Lauren Ice from Perales, Allmon & Ice, P.C., and Texas State Representative Andrew Murr. These presentations spotlighted best practices developed in a Kerr County community advisory group, advice on navigating the APO permitting process and potential protections for riparian areas.

The workshop also covered updates from interim hearings of the Texas Legislature, with presentations from Marisa Bruno with the Hill Country Alliance, Rachel Hanes of the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance and Adam Haynes with the Conference of Urban Counties. Commissioner Crownover presented updates from the state County Judges and Commissioners Association's conference before the group concluded with a session on potential legislative recommendations for 2025, led by Cliff Kaplan and Katherine Romans from the Hill Country Alliance.

"The challenges facing the Hill Country today are unprecedented, so it's encouraging to see so many County Commissioners and staff from across the region demonstrate their commitment to finding solutions," said Grace Gilker, Hill Country Alliance Communities Program Manager. "There's a lot of work ahead, but participants have asked that we continue convening this group to make sure that work gets done."

The Nov. 18 County-to-County Workshop was the third such workshop of the year, following earlier meetings in March and June. This ongoing collaboration is driven by its host commissioners and supported by nonprofit partners Hill Country Alliance, Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance, Comal Conservation, the Cibolo Conservancy and the Cibolo Center for Conservation.