

SAN MARCOS RIVER FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

Vol. 16, No.4

Printed Quarterly on Recycled Paper

October 20, 2006

www.sanmarcosriver.org

IMPORTANT FLOOD RISK STUDY UNDERWAY

San Marcos has contracted with engineers Espey Consultants, Inc. to model and study the creeks and rivers in the city, to determine if the FEMA flood maps are accurate in predicting the risk of a 100 year flood. (These days FEMA calls this a 1% risk of flood in any given year, instead of calling it a 100 year flood.) The partial results are in, though the final report will not be on the city's website until November or December. Some creeks have accurate FEMA-drawn flood plains, according to the new study, but some areas are much more likely to flood than previously thought, especially the Blanco River and areas downstream of it. The partial report is on the city's website, in the Engineering Dept.

RIVER SAFETY PROJECT

In August SMRF board members met with county sheriffs of three counties of the upper river to discuss the increased crime, public intoxication, drunk driving, and drug problems on the river downstream of San Marcos. It became clear that the budgets of the sheriffs are so tight that often only 2 or 3 deputies are patrolling an entire county, in the more rural counties. SMRF has been getting reports of many near-drownings, when drunken tubers were rescued only by chance. And a senseless and tragic death in an auto accident on Hwy. 80 this year was attributed to the same kind of behavior.

SMRF decided to hire off-duty deputies to provide security at problem areas along the river, during peak use periods, when the most serious problems usually develop. The extra officers resulted in many citations being issued for littering, underage drinking, drugs, and such violations. More security may need to be hired, if problems continue on this stretch of river. This is the first progress made in a long time on these very serious safety problems on the river. Thanks to the many SMRF members who contributed to the River Safety Fund to provide this extra security.

REMINDER: HELP SMRF UPDATE EMAIL LIST

SMRF's email list has many addresses which are the old San Marcos Internet addresses, which will cease being forwarded at the end of the year since the company has been sold to Grande. Please take the time to email address changes to wassenich@grandecom.net today.



THE CRYPTO THAT WOULDN'T DIE!

The staff at the San Marcos National Fish Hatchery and Technology Center on McCarty Lane has been busy trying to find all the regrowth of crypto plants in the river, now that the big dredging project downstream of San Marcos is over. More scuba divers have been hired to continue removing and monitoring crypto for a length of 12,000 river feet, from the City's wastewater plant to the confluence with the Blanco. Crypto has been found growing in the deeper parts of the lake formed by Cummings Dam to everyone's surprise, and even more disturbing, growing on the riverbanks as well. So divers are having to look on the banks as well as underwater as they patrol for this popular aquarium plant gone wild.

It appears that it is going to be a long battle to eradicate this Sri Lankan scourge. Stay tuned for a meeting for the purpose of learning what it looks like in water and on land, and to explain how volunteers might help. See a close-up photo above, of crypto growing on the bank by the river. Crypto competes with the endangered wild rice for the exact same water depths, so that is why it is being targeted for removal before it completely takes over the riverbed and moves upstream to the preferred wild rice habitat in town, during floods.

HYACINTH VOLUNTEERS WORK ON 4TH SAT.

Help out with fun volunteer work on the 4th Sat. of each month, removing floating water hyacinths on Spring Lake, 9 a.m. to noon. For information call SMRF office at 353-4628 or email wassenich@grandecom.net.

THE SAN MARCOS: A RIVER'S STORY

The new book by Dr. Jim Kimmel about the San Marcos River is even more wonderful than expected. The lovely photos in the book by his wife, Jerry Touchstone Kimmel, are sprinkled heavily throughout the storyline. Jerry is a professional nature photographer, and in order to get more photos in, she created some collage pages of multiple photos. There are also some great historic photographs included. The book is published by Texas A & M University Press and sponsored by the River Systems Institute at Texas State University, with Andy Sansom as general editor. Jim Kimmel is a geography professor at Texas State.

The book is \$30, and there will be a Gala at the River Systems Institute on Thursday, October 26, 5-7 p.m. for those who like to party while getting their book signed. For info or to RSVP, call 245-9200. This festive event will benefit the Research Center for River Recreation at the Rivers Systems Institute, in the historic Aquarena hotel building. (Great view of the lake from the deck!)

There will also be a book signing at the San Marcos Public Library Nov. 5, 2-5 p.m. as part of their Texas Author's Day. The book is going to be a big success and bring well-deserved attention to this most special river, its history and its natural beauty. The gift shop at the Texas Rivers Center at San Marcos Springs (formerly Aquarena) is a convenient place to buy it, any time.

RIVER RANGERS REPORT ON WATER TESTS

Rachel Sanborn, Volunteer Coordinator for the San Marcos River Rangers, reports that a new group of high school students are being trained this month to do water testing on the San Marcos River, joining the 20 terrific volunteers already testing 29 sites. The Prairie Lea River Rangers are moving away, so that location and the 1977 crossing on the river are both needing volunteers.

The Rangers certainly perform a valuable service to the communities along the river, with a steady eye on the water quality in case anything goes wrong. They tested 230 times this year thus far, up from last year's 189. In 2005, they volunteered a total of 594 hours testing their sites on the river. Rachel can be reached at 754-7532.

SMRF really appreciates the volunteer work of these dedicated water monitors, and all the time they take to learn the skills and keep up with regular testing. And the Lions Club is also appreciated for their annual financial support, which helps SMRF pay for test kits and supplies so the River Rangers can concentrate on their work!



GRANDE DONATES OCTOBER SPONSORSHIP

Grande Communications sponsored the October SMRF newsletter, paying for printing and mailing costs. Grande is very visible in San Marcos, showing up to help with a great variety of events every week. For example, they are pictured on the right at the Cottage Kitchen in October, their third time to cook lunch there this year to benefit the Heritage Association. Heritage was the major donor to help establish the SMRF endowment fund in 1985, 21 years ago. Those in the photo are (left to right): front row, Greg Abel, Darlene Hill. Middle row, Susan Sisson and Sonya Kraus. Top, Ben Stendahl. Other Grande volunteers who helped cook and serve that day were Alice Bermea, Chris Doyle, Cyndi Jetton, Nancy Lewis, Paul Lewis, Brandee Otto, Cathy Vaughn, Greg Wurzback, and Libby Malone.

Grande offers Internet, phone, and cable services to the community. They sponsor SMRF's website as well, which helps SMRF save operating costs so that funds can be spent on projects beneficial to the river instead.

SMRF BOARD MEETS 4th THURSDAYS

SMRF's board meets on the 4th Thursday of October, January, April, and July for its regular quarterly board meetings. On other months year-round they meet for the informal Nuts & Bolts work meetings, also on the 4th Thursdays. Special board meetings are called as needed. To receive notice of meetings, contact SMRF at 353-4628 or sign up for the SMRF weekly update emails by emailing wassenich@grandecom.net. Information about river issues, events, and volunteer opportunities are in these weekly email updates as well.

SMRF WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBER

Betty Watkins joined the SMRF board this summer, appointed to fill the spot left by John Hohn's resignation. According to Betty's family stories, she has been an outdoor enthusiast since infancy. Growing up in rural East Texas, she spent many hours exploring and learning about the natural world from her dad. She is proud that all three of her sons are committed environmentalists. After her youngest son started school, Betty worked in Arlington ISD for 22 years in early childhood education and parental involvement. In 2000 her husband Ted took a position at Texas State, and Betty retired. They found a home on the beautiful San Marcos River in the Falls at Martindale, and she was soon involved in SMRF and the Master Naturalist program as an active volunteer. SMRF has appreciated all her help to date and looks forward to having Betty involved even more.

SMRF REGRETFULLY LOSES BOARD MEMBER

John Hohn has been an active SMRF member for many years, serving on the board from January 2004 until his resignation in May 2006. Many will remember John serving hot dogs and chili at the SMRF annual New Year's Day Plunge. His many financial contributions, and projects like the useful river map at the kiosk near the Lion's Tube Rental, are appreciated. His most significant contribution to SMRF, however, was his crucial role on the SMRF water right project. His research enabled SMRF to file a timely application. John moved to San Marcos after retiring from EPA in 1990. He opened a law office on the square to practice environmental law and of course, joined SMRF. He is a native Texan who grew up on his family farm at Nordheim, Texas. John will continue to work with SMRF, and the SMRF board certainly appreciates all his contributions thus far.

SOLVING RIVERBANK EROSION PROBLEMS

SMRF Board President Jack Fairchild attended a 1-day conference in August at Texas A&M International University in Laredo on "Restoration and Management of Riparian Corridors". Fairchild hoped to learn more about techniques for solving erosion problems along the San Marcos River. Erosion often happens during the flood events common to central Texas.

Experts from EPA, USDA (Soil Conservation Service), U.S. Corps of Engineers, Texas Riparian Association and private environmental engineers presented various aspects of the problem and some sensible solutions. A

few of the major points made during the conference are listed below.

- Impervious cover (IC) is the main problem. It reduces groundwater recharge, increases runoff flooding, decreases evaporation. IC is paved roads, driveways, and sidewalks, plus rooftops and other manmade structures. Growth results in high IC which increases flooding, causing stream erosion, steep banks, wide channels, and shallow streams.
- Concrete structures as a solution are expensive and ineffective for erosion control. Bio engineering (deep rooted plants and trees and mitigated riverbank slopes) is labor intensive but the most effective solution for erosion control if cared for during the first year until roots are well established.
- It is crucial to maintain the "toe" area where river contacts bank so it is not undercut by currents. Large boulders are excellent for this purpose. Boulder size is determined by stream velocity.
- Rivers meander. Attempts to stop meander are futile---the river always wins.
- U.S. Corps has primary responsibility for river erosion and modification permits, but several other agencies have overlapping jurisdiction.

The meeting was very instructive and gave attendees a lot to think about in trying to solve erosion problems. An excellent field manual on how to implement various erosion control methods was obtained and is available to SMRF members who ask for it.

Fairchild was surprised how much work has been done on the subject and yet how little of it has been made available to riparian landowners, who need this information to care for and preserve their riverside land.

CHECK THE LABEL DATE ON NEWSLETTER

Take note of the date on the mailing label of this newsletter, to see if it is time to pay dues. Some people prefer to pay before the end of the year to take advantage of the tax deduction then. The label date enables members to decide when to pay dues, at a convenient time. If there is any correction needed to that date or anything else on the label, please alert SMRF at 353-4628 or mail a note with the dues check. SMRF member dues are very important when matching grants. Lifetime members may ignore these reminders.



CHILI COOKS DONATE TO SMRF ANNUALLY

Year after year the Purgatory Creek Chili Pod, after having a well-run July benefit chili cookoff at the Grumbles home at Staples Dam, donates to the SMRF water right project. This year, the photo above shows the \$500 check being handed from Karen Reinke, their Great Pepper, to Ann Allen, Treasurer of the Board of SMRF. Members of the Chili Pod and SMRF stand with these two, at the barn at Grumbles riverside home. Pictured below are chili judges (including Jim Motherall, Jack Fairchild and Tom Wassenich) getting ready to dive into 17 cups of chili, rating each one very carefully while savoring the flavor. The July cookoff is attended by chili cooks all over Texas. A silent auction, which SMRF assists with, is one of the ways that money is raised. Anne and Craig Jensen also had the pleasure of judging chili, and jumping in the river afterwards. Imaginative items were donated for auction by SMRF members Courtney Lyons-Garcia, Pat and Amy Kirwin, Jim Motherall, Cynthia Castle, Anne and Craig Jensen, Price Seniors Center, Dianne and Tom Wassenich. And thanks to all the SMRF members who came out just to bid on items. It was a fun day, and excellent chili.



WATER RIGHT CASE IS APPEALED

SMRF's water right application to preserve river flow, and the legal case about it, is ongoing, but at this point, SMRF is still waiting to hear if a court date is announced about the appeal of SMRF's win at District Court. Stacks of legal briefs and responses were prepared by SMRF attorneys over the summer, and also by the many attorneys opposing SMRF's application. Legal work is expensive. Members can assist by checking the Water Right Project blank on the form on page 7, when donating to SMRF to carry on this effort to preserve flow in the river for future generations.

EARTH SHARE OF TEXAS

SMRF has been hearing from people all over Texas who are excited to find SMRF on the list of charities to which they can donate at their workplaces. This is the fall season, when decisions are being made by employees about payroll donations for the coming year. SMRF has been invited to speak at dozens of state agencies and businesses about payroll donations, to give details about the good work done by SMRF and the rest of the 70 groups in Earth Share of Texas. SMRF is proud to be one of the carefully screened and approved charities listed in the State Employee Charitable Campaign, under the Earth Share of Texas federation, an umbrella for Texas' leading environmental and conservation groups. Pledge cards are usually found from September through early November at workplaces, or by asking Human Resources departments for them. Look for Earth Share in campaign literature and on pledge cards at all state agencies, all state colleges and universities (like Texas State), many school districts and municipal offices (like City of San Marcos pictured below). Many private employers also offer the Earth Share option including Edwards Aquifer Authority, American Airlines, Dell Inc., Green Mountain Energy, Vignette and many more. See www.earthshare-texas.org or call 1-800-GREENTX.





C.J. NELSON MEMORIAL TREE PLANTING

Pictured above is the gathering of family and friends of Christopher James Nelson gathered at the Wildlife Habitat Park between Cheatham Street and IH 35, on Labor Day weekend. They planted a cypress tree on the riverbank in C.J.'s memory, at a lovely quiet bend of the river, where wild rice leaves wave in the blue water.

C.J., the beloved son of Tom and Kathi Nelson of Leander and brother to Nick, was in a car accident on July 4th this summer that cut short his life. He attended college here at Texas State, so his family wanted to have a get-together that his friends could attend when school started and the students came back to San Marcos from their various home towns. The big crowd pictured above attended the tree planting and dedication.

His parents told how C.J. loved the water, saying "a day spent tubing was a perfect day for him." Friends were a top priority for him. He was born in Idaho but loved California where he grew up, and dreamed of returning there after college. He loved sports and cared deeply for animals. He had a hearty laugh and an infectious smile, and he will be missed by all who knew him.

The cypress tree was grown by Madrone Nursery from local seeds, and will help hold the riverbank soil during flood events with its strong and stable roots. Several inland sea oats were planted around the tree, and those plants will spread and help hold the bank soil as well. The fence will stay in place for several years to protect the tree from mowers, and nutria and general damage.

Cypress are long-lived and beautiful, tall trees that withstand floods. Thanks to SMRF members Judy Telford, Jack Fairchild, Jim Motherall and John Schmidt who planted the tree.

ENVIRONMENTAL FLOWS MEETING

The committee appointed by the Legislature to study and prepare recommendations on ways to protect the rivers and bays of Texas (while assuring water for human needs) will meet November 13 at the Capitol Extension, Room E1.012, in Austin at 1 p.m. The group had a day long meeting in September that was obviously very difficult, with many critical subjects left on the table. The group has apparently been talking among themselves and have a final report ready to consider at this meeting in November. The report is due to go to the Legislature by the end of '06. All the formal meetings are on the Texas Water Development website, at the very top of the list of hot topics. The meetings are recorded and there is a lot of attached written information as well about their deliberations, that can be reviewed on this website.

GROUNDWATER FESTIVAL COMING NOV.3

The annual gathering at the Texas Rivers Center at San Marcos Springs (formerly known as Aquarena) of 600 or so elementary schoolchildren, teachers and parents, will happen Friday Nov. 3. SMRF Board Member Betty Watkins and Executive Director Dianne Wassenich are leading groups of children on 30 minute tours of the boardwalk, birding, learning binocular use, seeing plants and wildlife, and more. Any SMRF members who wish to volunteer to assist, can work either 9-11 a.m. or 12-2 p.m., by calling the SMRF office at 353-4628 or emailing wassenich@grandecom.net. This event is always very well attended and worthwhile, as part of the massive education effort the Texas Rivers Center does year round. Volunteers are also needed on Nov. 3 in the restored historic hotel on the property, which has displays in the lobby about springs and natural water systems, aquifers, caves, etc.



MEMORIAL TREE FOR SHERI DE CAMP

Friends of Sheri gathered a huge crowd (pictured above) for the memorial tree planting in August, on the trail downstream of Cheatham Street. A cypress tree was planted along with several wildflower plants, in hopes that the wildflower seeds would spread and multiply in future years. Friends brought special wreaths and stepping stones they made to add to the site, and her friends gathered from other cities for the day to be with her three children.

Sheri had lived at the Gulf Coast for several years and it had a special place in her heart, so her friends chose a spot along the San Marcos River, which also flows to the Gulf of Mexico, as appropriate for Sheri's memorial tree. Sheri's three children attended and many friends took part in the planting, and in placing a protective fence around the tree. SMRF members have been watering the tree since August and giving it a good start.

Her good friend Lynn Howard of San Marcos gives Sheri's story: Sheri loved San Marcos, having moved from Luling many years ago to make this her home. She also loved the coast so when the opportunity arose, she moved to live with her daughter Shannon in Surfside. After working all day, she'd head straight for the beach. She missed her friends and her boys Jason and Ryan, though, so she moved back to San Marcos about 2002. She was very close to her three children, Jason, the youngest, and Shannon and Ryan, the twins. She lived in a small historic home on San Antonio Street and she loved it.

Her friends, family, and co-workers loved her very much. She was kind-hearted and always had a smile or a shoulder to cry on. Howard went on to say, "We appreciate the chance to plant a living tribute to Sheri and our thanks go to SMRF for their help in making this happen."

SPECIAL DONORS DESERVE SPECIAL THANKS

The big news this summer was a very welcome \$7,000 grant from the Whooping Crane Conservation Association, an international group which helped SMRF's water right project with a grant in 2003, and again this year. Their website is great, see it at www.whoopingcrane.com. George Mitchell also assisted SMRF with a grant for \$5,000, adding to the generous grant he gave SMRF last year, so that boost from these two really helped SMRF out in a major way.

The San Marcos Lions Club also gave SMRF \$2,500 to help with water quality projects and river cleanups. The Lions Club is one of the major donors (with the Heritage Association) who set up the SMRF endowment fund over 20 years ago, and have continued their support.

Jim Smith of Houston, and Steve and Martha Hixon of San Antonio also gave \$500 each, and sent along thanks for SMRF's good work. Tom and Kathi Nelson donated \$2,000 which is a big help this fall while SMRF waits to hear about grant proposal decisions.

MORE WAYS TO HELP SMRF, YEAR-ROUND

---Collect aluminum cans at home and work, and turn them in at Green Guy Recycling. Ask them to donate the proceeds to SMRF. Aluminum is worth a lot now. Help SMRF find businesses that are willing to save cans to benefit the river projects.

---Collect computer cartridges, laptops, and old cell phones and turn them in at SMRF's office to be recycled. These things should not go into the garbage. Check offices to see if cartridges are being recycled at work, and if not, donate them to SMRF regularly.

---And spread the word, far and wide, that if family members or friends shop at a Randall's or Tom Thumb grocery store, they can sign up for a discount card which is coded to benefit SMRF, #1808. It costs the shopper nothing, actually giving them major discounts on groceries as they check out.

WILL SPRINGS CONTINUE TO FLOW?

When Texas legislation passed to establish the Edwards Aquifer Authority in the early 1990's, everyone breathed a sigh of relief, thinking that maybe the San Marcos and Comal springs would not be pumped dry after all. But there is still great concern about how protected the springs really are, in drought. EAA announced plans to ask the Legislature to raise the "cap" on pumping to a higher number. In return they promise to do a better job of managing the aquifer so that the springs are protected sooner by stricter water restrictions during drought. They are also pledging to build recharge structures to increase the amount of rain passed into the aquifer during wet periods. But concerns remain about whether management will do as much to preserve the springs as curtailing the total amount pumped.

San Marcos and New Braunfels are not the only ones affected and concerned---the downstream communities on the Guadalupe River are also worried. When the original legislation about the Edwards passed, there were assumptions made about the amount of pumping rights that should be granted to agriculture and other pumpers. Now that litigation is over regarding the pumping rights, it is clear that WAY more rights have been given out, than the aquifer can provide during dry periods.

This is the basic conflict in the original legislation---too many rights given, while pumping totals were set at a lower number to protect spring flows.

Added to the conflict is disagreement about the legality of reducing all the rights held by the many different users, by the same percentage, across the board. Would this be fair to all, or should this reduction only be done through payment for those rights? Reducing the rights to a level that is protective of the springflows is one way that has been proposed to deal with the basic conflict in the original legislation about how much can be pumped sustainably.

The lawsuit that prompted the legislation years ago was filed by the Sierra Club, and joined in by City of San Marcos, New Braunfels, and the Guadalupe/Blanco River Authority, among others. Protecting endangered species in the springs were the basis of the suit, and that is why it is often said that the endangered species are the only reason why San Marcos River still flows.

The Edwards Aquifer issues will remain a hot topic at the Legislature in '07, if another process is not found to work out these conflicts. There is talk about another kind

of collaborative process that U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has found successful in other states. Stay tuned.

FRESHWATER HYDRA IN SPRING LAKE

These unearthly looking creatures (see below) were photographed by Ethan Chappel, Lake Manager at the Texas Rivers Center at San Marcos Springs. Chappel describes them as follows: "They are freshwater hydra, relatives of the salt water hydra and jelly fish in the ocean. They have a gastropod (stomach foot) that clings under boulders in the old river bed section of what is now Spring Lake. At the end of the stomach is the mouth opening surrounded by 5 or 6 arms. That is why they are named after the mythological Hydra. At the end of each of these regenerative arms are tiny stinging cells, used to paralyze micro-invertebrates and pass them into the stomach. Swimmers in the river need not fear the sting of these monsters, as the largest of them is a mere 5 millimeters tall."

