

# Watershed News

from The Wimberley Valley Watershed and The Jacob's Well Natural Area



*On behalf of the Wimberley Valley Watershed Association, we thank you for your support and send warmest wishes to you and your family this holiday season.*



## Citizens and Science Come Together to Protect the Streams and Springs in the Wimberley Valley

It was standing room only at the Wimberley Community Center, with over 200 citizens attending the hearing to appeal the proposed 30' drawdown on the Trinity Aquifer. Not only was every chair filled, but the line to notarize 135 individual letters of support flowed continuously throughout the day. The level of drawdown allowed on Texas's aquifers is called a DFC, or Desired Future Condition, and is the responsibility of Groundwater Management Area 9 in our area.

Wimberley's Mayor Bob Flocke's opening remarks were a call to action, stating that rivers and springs are the "economic engines and lifestyle drivers in the Wimberley Valley."

Andrew Sansom of the River Systems Institute spoke on the economic impact of a dry Cypress Creek. "Assessed property-tax values could be reduced by 30 percent and

sales tax revenues could see as much as a 50 percent decrease if the springs stop flowing."

"The Trinity Aquifer is already over-allocated," WVWA Executive Director David Baker said. "Pumping today exceeds the amount of recharge by over 2,000 acre-feet per year. The Hays Trinity Groundwater Conservation District has issued new pumping permits this past year without a finalized model for available groundwater." Baker compared the HTGCD actions to deficit spending and pointed out that "...at least 42 wells were reported to go dry in 2009, and Cypress Creek has been stagnant all summer."

John Ashworth, who formerly served on the TWDB, cited Kinney County, in GMA- 7, as setting a precedent for protecting spring flow, and he expressed the need for setting DFCs for each of the three Trinity zones.

Douglas A. Wierman, former HTGCD board President, showed that a 2-3 foot drop in the Middle Trinity Aquifer would cause the spring to go dry, and said the Wimberley Valley is already experiencing a 1-3 foot annual decline.

Rene Barker, former participant in the USGS's Edwards-Trinity Regional Aquifer System Analysis, explained how the regional-scale Texas Water Development Board model does not account for the local impacts of droughts.

Woodcreek's Mayor Eric Eskelund said the City of Woodcreek fully supports the Watershed Association's challenge of the 30-foot DFC and the creation of a Jacob's Well-Cypress Creek management area. The City is taking steps to promote rainwater collection and currently limits impervious cover, to take some of the strain off the aquifer.

David K. Langford, member of the Hill Country Alliance Advisory Board, made a personal appeal for property rights. His family has resided on their Texas ranch since the 1880s with wells that held consistent water levels for the past 100 years. Since 1998 levels have dropped more than 50 feet. To add an additional 30-feet of decline would be a taking of his family's property rights, Langford said.

Langford reminded the TWDB that the Texas Legislature stipulates that rivers and streams must be able to flow into the Gulf of Mexico. "The greatest challenge facing rural Texas is the lack of a shared dream," Langford said. "Our family's dream is to protect and honor the land that supports our heritage. To others it's development...the dreams should be able to coexist. Please fix this process so that shared dreams become shared reality," he said. Langford's impassioned testimony brought the audience to its feet with a resounding round of applause.

WVWA Vice President Malcolm Harris also spoke as a property owner on Cypress Creek. His family has lived there since 1938 and 4 weeks ago their well went dry. "We can and should set a desired future condition that does not permanently dewater the Trinity Aquifer but rather allows continued production from our wells and flow from our magnificent natural springs and streams."

Executive Director of Friends of Blue Hole, Steve Klepfer, kept his comments brief, but his statements were powerful. "The DFC will almost undoubtedly ruin Blue Hole Regional Park," Klepfer said, "The economic fallout is unconscionable," Klepfer said.

Ron Fieseler, representing Groundwater Management District-9, said that the GMA-9 agrees with most of the

science presented, but denied claims that the evidence makes the policy unreasonable. Fieseler also reported that because "Drought-of-Record" conditions caused the TWDB groundwater model to "crash," they were removed from the simulation of various DFC scenarios. He did say, however, that he would like to open the door to further discussion.

WVWA President Jack Hollon closed by saying he believed it was not too late to save the spring. "Everyone has a right to clean water," he said. "But a right without responsibility is not the way to deal with this critical problem."

The appeal to revisit the decision was accepted by the TWDB, who will now review all the evidence and make revised recommendations on February 2.

**The impressive outpouring of community support and overwhelming scientific evidence made it very clear why a 30' drawdown was unreasonable and needed to be changed. Congratulations and thanks to all who took the time to voice an opinion. The Wimberley Valley Watershed community is an admirable example of a people who, by thoughtful and active participation, are protecting their most precious resources.**



**Please consider showing your support once again by making an end of the year contribution to Friends of the Well.**

After a decade of work, the Wimberley Valley Watershed Association has put Jacob's Well in the public trust and we can all be proud that this land will now be preserved forever! The Wimberley Valley Watershed Association would like to express our gratitude for your stewardship and ongoing support to keep Jacob's Well and Cypress Creek clean, clear and flowing. It is through your generosity and connection to our vision for prosperous and healthy communities that we will continue to expand the land and water stewardship of the Wimberley Valley and across the Texas Hill Country.

[\*\*Donate Here\*\*](#)

# Recognizing our wonderful volunteers!

Barbara Attwell, Education Outreach Coordinator for Jacob's Well, hosted JWNA volunteers at her home on December 2. Recognition was given to outstanding volunteers and to all those who had worked during the year.

An introduction to special features on Barbara's beautiful five-acre west Austin property started off the evening. Visitors had the opportunity to see a 27-foot bat house, walk down into a deep gorge, and see other examples of Nature being highly valued.

A hearty dinner, served by teens for community service points at Westlake High, kept the volunteers in good spirits. A cake made by Barbara in the shape of Jacob's Well was reluctantly cut into but eagerly devoured.

It was an evening without work gloves, posthole diggers, water models, and rain gauges -- a great time to get to know each other, enjoy great food, and celebrate the holiday season together.

Board members Dorothy Knight, Jeff Vasgaard, and Malcom Harris and family joined in honoring the volunteers, along with Executive Director David Baker and his wife Ellen. Other non-volunteers in attendance were Burgess Jackson (WVWA's lawyer along with Malcolm Harris), Cypress Creek Project's Adrian Vogel, and Nico Hauwert,



*Above: Barbara leads a tour of her property. Right: Barbara's 27-foot bat tower awaits winged residents.*



who through his work with the City of Austin Watershed Protection Department, has been studying how Jacob's Well water gets to Barton Springs.

-- Jane Dunham



*Volunteers honored at the dinner party for going "above and beyond" for Jacob's Well were: Front, l to r: Margaret Baker, Nancy Russell, Linda Lang and Don Wallace; Back, l to r: Jane Dunham, Deb Bradshaw and Jeff Vasgaard.*

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*Jacob's Well work produces great friendships: Helen Marsh, Don Wallace, Linda Lang and Jeri Porter.*



*Jeff Vasgaard looks for amphipods in his globe. The globes were hand-made by Barbara Attwell.*



*The Jacob's Well cake made by Barbara.*



*Teen volunteers helped with parking, food service and clean-up: Aiden Sivy, David Alvarez, and Barbara's son, Cade Ritter.*



*Tom Hausler and his wife Emily enjoyed the dinner and the evening.*



*Barbara chats with Alicia Nelson while teen volunteers wait impatiently for dessert to be served.*

## Avoiding the **Wrap Trap** at the holidays

It's tempting to splurge on cards and wrapping paper at Christmas, but it doesn't do the planet any favors. Here are some ideas for saving 8,000 tons of wrapping paper, or 50,000 trees, this year. Estimates say that if each American family wrapped only three presents in reused materials, they would save enough paper to cover 45,000 football fields.

Brown Paper Grocery Bags  
Coffee Bags and tea boxes (they smell great)  
Dated maps (one book of road maps can last several seasons)  
Magazine pages  
Berry baskets  
Fragments of too-small wrapping paper collaged together  
Cookie containers  
Cereal Boxes  
Comics and newsprint  
Baskets  
New Cloth Shopping bag  
Pillowcases tied with ribbon (forever reusable and you can hop around in it afterwards)  
Scarves and bandanas



Last year's Christmas Cards – great for tags  
And if you use gift bags, don't write on them directly but on a removable tag so they can be reused.

### Calendar

#### December

17 Saturday Tour  
19 Restoration Rangers Workday  
24 No Tour - Holiday  
31 No Tour - Holiday

#### January

(January Restoration Rangers workday dates TBD)  
7 Saturday Tour  
14 Saturday Tour  
21 Saturday Tour

Read the November 15 article in the Austin American Statesman which shares a landowner's view about the disappearing waters in the Wimberley Valley. Written by David Langford, David Baker, and local contributors.  
**Our Treasured Spring Needs Protection**

## So, Just What is MISTLETOE?

Mistletoe is not a disease, but should be viewed as a natural component of a healthy forest. It spreads at the snail's pace of 2' a year, has been around for millions of years, and offers tremendous benefits for wildlife. There are over 1300 species of Mistletoe, the most common in the US being the American Mistletoe. Globally more than 20 species are endangered. Mistletoe *may* shorten the life of a tree over the long run, but its value to the larger picture may outweigh this negative trait.

Mistletoe is actually hemi-parasitic, meaning that it derives some of its nutrition from the host plant. They do bear evergreen leaves, which allow them to do some photosynthesis. The seeds sprout from bird feces deposited on the trunk of the tree, which feeds it in its early stages. Mistel is the Anglo-Saxon name for "dung." The dwarf mistletoe acts like a tiny holiday popper, shooting seeds up to 50' away.



*Three species of butterflies are entirely dependent on mistletoe and, like people, the adults use mistletoe for mating rituals.*

Mistletoe has been recently recognized as a keystone species. Many forms of wildlife depend on it for food, as it provides a high protein diet in winter. Here in Texas, some ranchers consider it as a back up insurance crop when fodder is scarce. The silky flycatcher relies exclusively on it for food, and other birds such as the Spotted Owl use it for nesting. As many as 3 times more birds have been observed where mistletoe is abundant. There are possible medicinal uses for treating cancer, and chewing the berries creates a glue, but don't eat them – they are poisonous to humans.

*Thanks to: USGS. "Not Just for Kissing: Mistletoe and Birds, Bees, and Other Beasts". <http://www.usgs.gov/newsroom/special/mistletoe>*

**Want to Explore the Trinity Aquifer?** This video features Jacob's Well.

### Exploring the Trinity Aquifer

*Courtesy of the Hays Trinity Groundwater Conservation District*

