

# Watershed News

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

JACOB'S WELL NATURAL AREA



## Revised: Wimberley Valley Watershed Association Challenges Proposed 30-foot Aquifer Decline at Public Hearing Nov. 16

The Wimberley Valley Watershed Association, a nonprofit organization that owns land along Cypress Creek at Jacob's Well and oversees the education and scientific research at Jacob's Well Natural Area, has filed a petition to the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) appealing the proposed 30-foot decline or Desired Future Condition (DFC) for the Trinity Group Aquifers adopted in July of 2010 by Groundwater Management Area 9 (GMA-9).

The WVWA asserts that the 30 foot DFC is unreasonable and the proposed policy fails to ensure conservation and protection of groundwater in the Trinity Aquifer. The petition outlines the unreasonable consequences for the Trinity Aquifer serving the Wimberley Valley and the majority of the Texas Hill Country.

The association is encouraging concerned citizens to attend the TWDB hearing, which is scheduled for 10 a.m. on Nov. 16 in Johnson Hall at the Wimberley Community Center. Hydrogeologists who have studied the Trinity and Edwards Aquifers over the last thirty years will present scientific data supporting the WVWA position. Local leaders and landowners will also present their concerns about the economic and environmental impacts of the proposed policy for the aquifers in the Wimberley Valley watershed.

Malcolm Harris, Vice President of WVWA and a landowner on Cypress Creek said, "The adopted 30 foot decline will have unreasonably harmful economic impacts on private property rights and the use of private water wells in Hays County. This policy will also cause a massive reduction in spring flow and groundwater availability. The adopted DFC fails to ensure the reasonable and prudent development of the state's groundwater resources and does not prohibit aquifer mining."

Because the DFC is based on "average precipi-

tion," it fails to address the desired future conditions of the aquifer during droughts, which can last more than a decade. After eleven months of the current drought, Jacob's Well has stopped flowing. The braids of Cypress Creek are dry, as are many areas of the Blanco River. This has only happened twice before in recorded history – the first time in the summer of 2000 and during the 2009 drought when the well went dormant for 167 days. Even during the Drought of Record in the 1950s, which lasted ten years, Jacob's Well continued to flow without interruption. According to Section A of the appeal on the impact of private wells, WVWA president



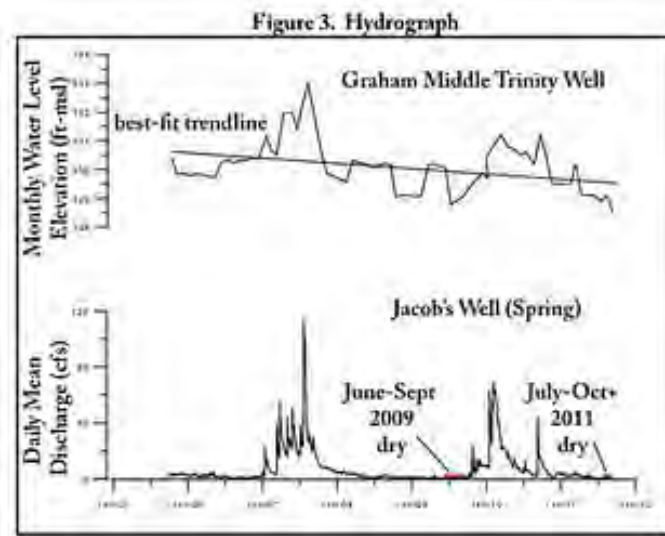
*The Blanco River this month.*

Jack Hollon reports that during the drought of 2009, forty two existing wells were reported dry or had to lower pumps due to declining water levels – forcing residents to purchase or haul water. The estimated cost of drilling a new well is \$15,000 or more.

"If the 30 foot DFC is not amended, Cypress Creek will no longer be the lush, fast flowing perennial stream that draws people to the Blue Hole Regional Park, attracts tourism, and enhances landowner property values. Instead, the creek

will flow only during very wet periods and become an intermittent stream,” Hollon said.

According to the WVWA appeal, the district



monitoring wells at Mt. Baldy and Henly show an average water level decline of one foot per year in the Mt. Baldy Well (Lower Trinity) and two feet per year in the Henly Church Well (Middle Trinity) over the period from 1999-2010. The data provides evidence that aquifer “mining” is already in progress at current pumping levels and aggressive conservation measures are needed to reduce pumping demand to protect property rights and landowner access to groundwater.

WVWA Executive Director David Baker said, “On behalf of local stakeholders, the WVWA is asking the TWDB to determine the 30 foot decline for Hays County to be unreasonable and make recommendations for a sustainable DFC that will maintain water levels to ensure that Jacob’s Well and Cypress Creek will continue to flow in the future.”

The TWDB has not allotted time for public comment at the hearing and is asking concerned stakeholders to file signed notarized affidavits to the TWDB. The WVWA will provide example forms for public comments.

To download and view the full WVWA petition and supporting technical documents go to [www.wimberleywatershed.org](http://www.wimberleywatershed.org) and [www.hillcountryalliance.org](http://www.hillcountryalliance.org). Submissions by mail must be postmarked by November 25 to be considered. To send a written opinion to TWDB, write or email the board’s attorney at

the following address:

Joe P. Reynolds  
TWDB  
1700 North Congress Avenue  
P.O. Box 13231  
Austin, Texas 78711-3231  
Phone: (512) 936-2412  
Fax: (512) 475-2053  
[Joe.Reynolds@twdb.state.tx.us](mailto:Joe.Reynolds@twdb.state.tx.us)  
[www.hillcountryalliance.org/uploads/HCA/DFCPublicCommentAffidavitExample.pdf](http://www.hillcountryalliance.org/uploads/HCA/DFCPublicCommentAffidavitExample.pdf)

## Restoration Rangers report

*by Anne Child*

The Restoration Rangers celebrated the coming of autumn with “tree month.” Trimming, receiving, storing, planting, watering (thanks Jean!) and removing trees...

On October 14<sup>th</sup>, we learned about and put into use the practice of Shaded Fuel Break... cutting out smaller junipers and trimming up branches of larger junipers to a height of four feet. This helps prevent fire from candlewicking up the trees and also allows understory growth to flourish. We started this process in the mixed forest near Dancing Waters Retreat. However, we got sidetracked when we spied a large, long-dead tree engulfing the electrical service to the Retreat. This fire hazard was corrected quickly with use of a pulley system and chainsaws. Cleanup of both activities meant hauling tree parts to a brush pile near Camp Jacob.

On October 28<sup>th</sup>, LCRA delivered 50 beautiful trees in 5-gallon pots to Camp Jacob. We unloaded and bundled the Mountain Laurels, White Oaks, Burr Oaks and Red Buds, tied them securely to nearby trees and tucked them in with mulch... all to protect them from wind, cold and dryness. The Bald Cypress went directly into freshly dug holes along the creek near Jacobs Well. We watered them with root starter and fine Jacobs Well water and then fenced them in to protect them from nibbling and antler rubbing creatures.

There are 45 trees awaiting this tender loving care, so expect to hear more about trees in our next monthly report.

# Landowners Watershed Workshop Report

The Nature Conservancy, in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Texas Agrilife and Jacob's Well Natural Area held a riparian class at Camp Jacob on October 26. Riparian simply means riverside. The workshop was attended by about 20 landowners, and addressed questions such as: how and why rivers change over time, how floods and droughts keep rivers healthy, and the function of riparian plants in sustaining water and wildlife habitat. With the help of WVWA board member, Pokey Rehmet, the class had the opportunity to visit Johanna Smith's neighboring property to observe a healthy streamside habitat.

The lands surrounding our creeks and rivers should be thought of as a "water-catchment" landscape rather than a "watershed" zone. The function of a healthy riparian area is to slow down the flow of water. This allows water to be absorbed into the landscape, and stabilizes soil that would otherwise be washed away. Creeks and stream function properly when there is adequate vegetation, landscape formations, and plenty of natural debris in the form of large trees and branches. Straightening creeks and building dams are two of the most destructive practices we do to our waterways.

Amazingly, a single high-quality riparian plant can have a total of one mile of roots if unwound. One knotgrass plant had 67' (yes, feet) worth of root in one cubic inch of soil. This mass of roots is called a riparian sponge and serves to literally hold the river – it surrounds not only the sides but often underneath. These plants are also crucial habitat for water species.



*Switchgrass*

Steve Nalle has shared his list of plants. (It will be posted soon on the Jacob's Well web site ([www.jacobswellspring.org](http://www.jacobswellspring.org)) under "Explorer.") He has offered a high priority list for our area: Switchgrass, Eastern Gammagrass, Knotgrass, Emory Sedge, Sawgrass, Water Willow, **Black Willow**, **Buttonbush**, Cypress,

and Sycamore. These plants are often hard to find, but these nurseries regularly carry them:

- Southwest Aquatic Services (Altair, TX, 512-667-4275)
- Native American Seed Company (Junction, TX, 1-800-728-4043) has quality live roots
- Native Texas Nursery (Austin, TX, 512-276-9801) and Natives of Texas (Kerrville, 830-896-2169)
- Bluestem Nursery (Arlington, TX, 1-817-466-2271)

## New Master Plan

Hays County has hired RVI ([www.rviplanning.com](http://www.rviplanning.com)), an Austin landscaping firm, to create a Master Plan for the JWNA site. An advisory committee has been formed with representatives appointed by Hays County commissioners (Winston Porterfield, Naomi Navaiz, Jim Camp, Sara Dishman, Pamela McAfee); the Nature Conservancy (Rachael Ranft); Hays Trinity Groundwater District (Jimmy Skipton, Dr. Joan Jernigan); Texas State University/River Systems Institute (Andrew Sansom); Cities of Wimberley (Bob Flocke), Woodcreek (Erik Eskelund), and Woodcreek North (Will Conley); and Hays County Parks and Open Space (Gary Amoan). Jeff Vasgaard and David Baker are representing WVWA.

RVI is currently in the phase of collecting information about the history, flora and the fauna of the site. We are compiling this information into a portfolio with the help of the Wimberley community and our researchers. Research partners include Tom Toporowski and Steve Flocke (birds), Chad Norris (fish), Leeann Linam (amphibians), Gregg Tatum (scuba), Greg Wierman (geology), and Adrian Vogel (Cypress Creek).

We are very much looking forward the master planning process, with built-in protection for the spring and native plants and wildlife. Once the plan is formed, it will enable out volunteers to move forward with their habitat restoration plans.



# Fresh Water

## Notes for Volunteers

### Next Volunteer Training

Springboard (our Volunteers Program organization) has decided to conduct only one volunteer training per year. Trainings will be held in early spring, and will be as informative and inspiring as always. If you know of anyone wanting to sign-up, have them contact Barbara Attwell, [battwell@earthlink.net](mailto:battwell@earthlink.net).



### Airstream Owners tour site

The Texas Hill Country Unit Airstream Club came out in force for a tour in early November. Several visitors had been to an Airstream Rally at the site years before, and were awestruck at how much better the land looked. They were totally on board with water conservation – a must while living in a trailer.

### Revised Teaching Scripts

Chris Middleton, with the help of Mimi Boelter and Jane Dunham, has completed scripts



Chris Middleton demonstrates the watershed model.

for both the aquifer and watershed models used by many groups to teach the concept of watersheds. We have 2 of these models in our front room. Her new scripts make the watersheds local, which makes the information more relatable. They will be housed on

the JWNA website under Get Involved/Volunteers/Educational Materials/School Visits.

### Trail Addition

After heading out towards the spring from Camp Jacob, and taking a right at the dry streambed, you will soon find new native plants have been added to those already there, with labels. This is already a stopping point on the Saturday tours where we talk about cedar management, plants succession, and habitat management for wildfire.



The cedar-log steps and handrail. The new planting area with signs is to the right.

Photo by Jeff Vasgaard

### Wearing it Well

There are still some T-shirts left, well priced at \$15. You can buy them at Camp Jacob.



Melinda Ellisor at the Jacob's Well Fall Festival, wearing one of the Jacob's Well t-shirts.



## Deb Bradshaw: Lighting a Spark

Deb Bradshaw is no stranger to anybody who has been around Jacob's Well over the last few years. You can find her clearing paths with the Restoration Rangers, planning special events, showing a Master Naturalist training class how to test water or telling stories to schoolkids.

Deb grew up on the Hudson River in upstate New York. Her father helped inspire her love of nature when he woke up his kids to see raccoons eating corncoobs or to witness the first snow of the season. Deb and her brothers rode around local orchards and farms with their grandfather on his honey truck, checking on beehives.

Her family moved to Texas (Clear Lake City) when she was 15 but it wasn't love at first sight for Deb. "I cried for a month," she says. "It was hot, flat and the lakes were thick mud. It was the golden age of NASA but I was plotting to escape."

At UT, Deb took degrees in Anthropology and Behavioral Science, but her career has been a mixture of jobs and creative occupation. Her husband, Nick, works overseas, and Deb had the opportunity to work on archaeological digs when they first lived in London, including a project for Oxford in a wet, windy field in Scotland. "I worked for many years at a legal lobby and publishing house as an event planner/seminar coordinator," she says. "I organized seminars on legal issues for lay advisors all over England."



Deb talks about water resources to a group of children visiting Jaob's Well.

How did she find Wimberley? "Our Wimberley home found us," she relates. "We came to the Blue Hole when we were at UT. My husband had visited a friend who lived here, in what he felt was his "dream hill country house." "Nick told Steve that he wanted first dibs if it was ever sold," she says. "Steve called one day and said he'd taken a job in Oregon; were we serious about the house?"



What brings Deb to Jacob's Well so often? "The well is beautiful, mysterious, peaceful – though sometimes rowdy. Its geology and history are fascinating. It has been the center of the community for generations and now it has brought together a talented group of volunteers committed to preserving it for the next generation." Her work with schoolchildren is a natural for her. "I suspect I was given the job of storytelling at the well because I'm the only one willing to be stranded on the rock all day," she says, "or maybe it's that I love the stories as much as the kids do."

Her training as a Jacob's Well interpreter really touched her. "I was inspired by the concept of 'interpretation' of natural areas -- lighting a spark, rather than filling a bucket."

And Deb Bradshaw DOES light a lot of sparks!

You could write the story of man's growth in terms of his epic concerns with water.  
- Bernard Frank (American forester)

# Calendar

## November

- 16 DFC Petition Hearing (See article on page 1)
- 18 8:00 – 11:00 am Restoration Rangers workday
- 19 9:30 – 11:30 Saturday tours
- 26 9:30 – 11:30 Saturday tours

## December

- 2 8am – 11am Restoration Rangers workday
- 3 9:30 – 11:30 Saturday tours
- 4 9:00 - 1:00 Mendez Elementary, San Marcos

Sign up to help by signing in on the website calendar, under the tabs "Get Involved," followed by "Volunteers." If you haven't gotten a log-in and password yet, it is easy to do. Or you can send Barbara ([battwell@earthlink.net](mailto:battwell@earthlink.net)) an e-mail.

**Please lend your support and attend the TWDB hearing on November 16, 10:00 am, Wimberley Community Center.**

## Becoming a Friend of the Well

Membership in Friends of the Well is through either an annual donation of money to the Wimberley Valley Watershed Association, or a donation of labor through being a volunteer. Benefits include invitations to special events, our newly revamped Watershed News newsletter, and the assuredness that Jacob's Well is actively and passionately being protected.

<http://jacobswellspring.org/jwdonate.html>

Plans are underway by the FTW organizing committee to create several outreach events that raise money to support the programs at Jacob's Well and raise awareness around stewardship. Watch for details for upcoming ways to become involved in the adventure.

## 2012 Texas Hill Country Calendar

As you enjoy this calendar, we hope it helps you reflect, slow down and smile. In addition to spectacular photography, we have included meaningful words of Hill Country authors. The combination of art, literature and nature is intended to inspire new and creative ways of protecting this fragile region.

The Hill Country Alliance is a passionate community caring for the unique features, spring-fed streams, heritage ranch lands, spectacular beauty and culture of the Texas Hill Country for the benefit of future generations.



Join the conversation. Join us on our journey. Join us in our mission. \$13.99 per calendar. Order on the HCA web site: [www.hillcountryalliance.org](http://www.hillcountryalliance.org).

## A thing of beauty

"Jacob's Well in Flood-Clearer Water" is a youtube video made of the well in 2007. Note how full the well was then!  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USt\\_dJcbF0k&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USt_dJcbF0k&feature=youtube_gdata_player)

Thanks to the filmmaker and to Jeff Vasgaard for sharing this link on YouTube.

## International Film on Water Issues

"One Water" is a collaborative project at the University of Miami aimed at engaging the media to bring awareness to the global water challenge. See [www.OneWater.org](http://www.OneWater.org) for more details.

Screening of "One Water," with an introduction by Joseph B. Treaster, will be held in Austin on Wednesday, November 30, at 7:00 p.m., in the Jones Auditorium, Ragsdale Center St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. A discussion will follow.