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OPINION // COMMENTARY

Hill Country residents not backing down from out-of-state developer Lennar Homes

Every landowner has a responsibility to safeguard the water that sustains all of us. That sense of mutual obligation is woven into our Texas culture.

By **Randy Neumann**, *For the Express-News*

March 16, 2026





The yet-to-be developed Guajolote Ranch property is seen in March 2022. The Edwards Aquifer is the

William Luther carries a responsibility to safeguard the water that sustains every other Texan.

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For years, the quiet beauty of Scenic Loop and the Edwards Aquifer contributing zone has been taken for granted — a place where heritage oaks still stand, where water still runs clear and where development pressures felt distant.

That era is over.

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Our community is now confronting a development threat larger and more consequential than anything we have seen in decades.

Two weeks ago, a signboard appeared on a 63-acre parcel connecting Scenic Loop Road to Guajolote Ranch.

Florida-based Lennar Homes, one of the nation's largest homebuilders, has announced plans for 76 homes on half-acre lots with aerobic septic systems on that parcel. Yet no septic permits have been pulled.

Land clearing has begun, including the removal of heritage oaks, in a race to beat a March deadline that would force Lennar back to the city of San Antonio for renewed approvals.

Clearing has also begun on Guajolote Ranch. The Guajolote parcels are too small for septic systems under the existing master development plan, and Lennar has not built — nor is it likely to build — the \$13 million wastewater plant originally proposed.

That wastewater permit is now under judicial review, with the very real possibility of remand or vacatur. A remand would suspend the permit for up to two years; a vacatur would force Lennar's plant operator to start the permitting process over again.

The obstacles don't end there.

Both the Edwards and Guajolote tracts lie within the federally recognized 15-mile military buffer zone surrounding Camp Bullis, an active U.S. Army training installation. This buffer exists to protect national security, prevent encroachment and preserve the low-density environment required for military readiness.

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Federal officials have consistently opposed incompatible development in this zone.

The Guajolote development also faces unprecedented political resistance. The entire Bexar County legislative delegation, along with all four state senators representing the region, have expressed opposition to high-density development over the aquifer contributing zone.



Part of Guajolote Ranch is seen in April 2023. Lennar Homes' proposed development at Guajolote Ranch has many neighbors worried about the impact on the Edwards Aquifer contributing zone, our guest

columnist writes, as out-of-state developers' interest begins and ends with profit, not with the long-term health of our water or our communities.

Josie Norris/San Antonio Express-News

Multiple U.S. representatives have raised similar concerns, citing risks to Camp Bullis, regional water security and long-term environmental stability. It is a unified governmental stance against a project that threatens critical natural and military resources.

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Meanwhile, the Texas Legislature is signaling new bills aimed at restricting development over sensitive aquifer zones — legislation that could directly impact the Edwards and Trinity aquifers.

Local authorities hold powerful tools as well.

The city of San Antonio can enact ordinances that prohibit pollution of the aquifer. These may not override a Texas Commission on Environmental Quality permit, but they can render it functionally useless.

San Antonio Water System can withdraw water service, and Bexar County can deny access to Scenic Loop Road on traffic and safety grounds — fatal blows to any subdivision.

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With newly approved four-year City Council terms, only two seats are likely to change in the next four years. Lennar cannot simply “wait out” the current council.

Perhaps the most important development is not legal or political, but human. The population is finally waking up to the scale of the threat. Residents who once assumed the aquifer was protected are now seeing bulldozers, scraped land and felled oaks — they are angry.

The Edwards Aquifer is the lifeblood of San Antonio, and the Hill Country is not a blank canvas for speculative development.

In a region where the Trinity and Edwards aquifers form a shared resource, every landowner carries a responsibility to safeguard the water that sustains every other Texan.

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That sense of mutual obligation is woven into our culture.

Out-of-state developers often fail to understand that interdependence. Their interest begins and ends with profit, not with the long-term health of our water or our communities.

Randy Neumann is a Helotes resident and chairs the steering committee of the Scenic Loop/Helotes Creek Alliance.

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Randy Neumann



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