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OPINION // COMMENTARY

San Antonio must not squander its water in Edwards Aquifer

By **Michael Schick**, *For the Express-News*

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A large sink hole is seen in May 2016 as about 500 cubic feet per second of water flow through the hole into

William Luther/San Antonio Express-News

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San Antonio must not squander its water in Edwards Aquifer

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Water is becoming a rare commodity in South Texas.



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With prolonged drought conditions and increased demand from new development, the freshwater tank of Texas is running dry.

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Right now, a half-million residents of Corpus Christi are on the verge of a very real water catastrophe as their aquifers and other limited sources are depleted.

It's no wonder that Kerrville is resorting to what some would call a desperate plan to dump treated wastewater into the Guadalupe River, then pull it out, treat it again and serve it to a thirsty public.

What about San Antonio and the surrounding counties that depend on the Edwards Aquifer?

More than 2.5 million people rely on the fresh water that comes from the Edwards, considered one of the most pristine aquifers in the world. The water is so pure that no filtration is needed. It's one of nature's greatest gifts to us.

But that could change very soon, as government agencies like the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, San Antonio Metropolitan Health and San Antonio Water System are allowing Lennar Homes and its partner, Municipal Operations LLC, to dump 1 million to 4 million gallons of sewage effluent onto the Guajolote Ranch.

That filthy water will contain forever chemicals like PFAS or PFOS, and dangerous pharmaceuticals like fentanyl, microplastics and other toxins, and it will pass rapidly through the Swiss cheese-like karst limestone.

Within weeks, it will end up in the Edwards Aquifer permanently.

To put this crisis in perspective, consider that 71% of the Earth's surface is covered by water, with oceans holding 96.5% of all Earth's water. You can't drink salt water, and desalination plants are expensive and energy-intensive. Transporting reverse osmosis water from the Gulf Coast to San Antonio via a massively expensive pipeline would unnecessarily raise taxes on average residents.

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Only 2.5% of Earth's water is considered the kind of fresh water that is necessary for life. Of that, 69% is locked in ice caps, glaciers and snow, 30% is in groundwater, and less than 1% is in rivers, lakes and rain clouds.

So, if a mere 0.75% — 30% of 2.5% — of the planet's fresh water is found in groundwater like the Edwards Aquifer, why would anyone in their right mind risk polluting such a rare and precious source of life-giving water?

Desperate communities have little choice but to drink repurposed toilet water like Kerrville or reprocessed seawater like Cancun.

San Antonio isn't desperate quite yet.

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We are blessed with some of the purest water on the planet, but if the Guajolote Ranch development proceeds, we are perilously close to squandering it all away.

Whatever happened to the near-sacred warning of “Don’t mess with Texas”?

The TCEQ, San Antonio Metro Health and SAWS must think it doesn’t apply to them. So much for them taking seriously their jobs of protecting the public health, safety and wellness.

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At this rate, the day is coming when parents will be reading their children a bedtime story about San Antonio's great waste of water: "Once upon a time there was water so pure that you could actually drink it."

Michael Schick lives in Northwest San Antonio. He is a former spokesman for the president pro tempore of the U.S. Senate.

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Michael Schick



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