**Protecting Water Is Key To Our Future
October 6, 2019**

Since 1960, New Braunfels has grown about 40% in each decade.

We are still on that trajectory, and we are not alone. The planning agency for the greater San Antonio Area, which includes Comal County, estimates the region will add 1.5 million people by 2040.

The greatest challenge that we will face with this growth is the quantity and the quality of water.

Most of the water for the region comes from two aquifers, the Edwards and the Trinity. The Edwards has been the main source of water since the founding. It is near the surface and recharges fairly quickly. The Trinity lies deeper and recharges very slowly.

Someone described our climate as drought interrupted by periodic floods. The Edwards Aquifer relies on the floods to recharge.

Rain falls over a large area. Some soaks into the ground and may eventually reach the aquifer. Some runs off.

When the runoff reaches what is known as the recharge zone, it may hit cracks, sinkholes, caves, and caverns that will lead it to the aquifer. If water cannot reach the features of the zone that allow it to pass to the aquifer, it will simply keep on running off.

As a bunch of people come to an area, they build houses, roads, shopping centers and parking lots.

Large areas that were once open land, able to collect water and allow it access to the recharge zone, are now covered with impervious surfaces. The floods, when they come, have nothing to do but runoff.

Just as we are demanding 80% more water for 80% more people to bath, flush toilets, water lawns, and more, we are making it harder for the natural processes to replenish the primary source of that water.

The other thing that large numbers of people bring is pollution.

Most don’t intend to pollute, but gunk falls from their cars onto a hard surface and washes away and may make it to the ground water.

Or they really want green lawns with no weeds, so they apply fertilizers and use weed killers.

These, too, tend to run-off and can reach the groundwater. And, people turn fresh water into sewage. That sewage goes into private septic systems or treatment plants.

Septic systems that are not properly designed, constructed, or maintained tend to leak; again, hurting ground water. Only the very best treatment plants produce effluent so clean we would be willing to drink it, but, after it reaches the groundwater, that’s often what we do!

Water quality is of particular concern in our area because the Edwards Aquifer is so near to the surface and so fast in recharging that it has little in natural filtering cover.

If surface water is contaminated, or if a source of contamination is near the surface, the chances are very high that it will reach our water source.

One solution to this problem of growth and water is to protect the land that protects the water.

Most of us who live in the Eastern half of Comal County live in the recharge zone. We are already impairing the ability of nature to recharge our water supply.

We must save remaining open land, particularly land in the recharge zone, from development and the impervious surfaces that development brings.

Austin and San Antonio, our neighbors to the North and the South, have already defined important watershed areas and taken steps to protect key parcels of land. We of Comal County and New Braunfels have done little. We must do more.