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For immediate release

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Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance Submits Comments to TxDOT on Proposed Expansion of Loop 1604

(San Antonio, Texas) On Monday, July 10, 2006, the thirty member organizations of the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance (GEAA) and others sent comments to the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) regarding the proposed expansion of Loop 1604 from SH 151 to IH 10E. That roadway traverses the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone - considered to be the most environmentally sensitive area in Texas.

“When you look at where this road is, you see the recharge zone for the sole source of drinking water for over a million people, the home to numerous threatened and endangered species, an already-polluted airshed, and a flood-prone area rapidly losing its rural nature and character”, said Annalisa Peace, GEAA’s executive director. “As such, even slight impacts rank as intense.”

The letter also voiced concerns about the effects that expanding roadways into this environmentally sensitive area will have on the adjoining communities and residents in terms of water, noise, air, and light pollution. “Clearly, there are going to be significant environmental impacts resulting from the expansion of Loop 1604”, said Dan Gildor, an attorney with GEAA member group Save Our Springs Alliance. “You only have to look at the Conceptual Toll Feasibility Analysis for the improvements to Loop 1604, which identifies such significant impacts as paving over 13 miles of probable habitat for endangered karst invertebrate species, filling in eleven acres of riparian wetland, destroying fourteen previously recorded and up to 74 previously unrecorded archaeological sites, and impinging on one historic marker and up to 10 potential architecturally historic sites. Such impacts are significant.”

Despite this, TxDOT is only conducting an environmental assessment, a cursory review of such impacts that is only appropriate under federal law where there is not likely to be a significant environmental impact. “GEAA and the other signatories are just calling upon TxDOT to do the right thing and prepare an environmental impact statement instead of engaging in the current process that circumvents the procedural safeguards set forth in the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA)”, says Peace.

In addition to submitting these comments, GEAA provided individuals with the opportunity to submit comments via the internet through the Hill Country Roads website, which described a list of alternatives that should be considered in the proposed expansion of Loop 1604, including access management, advanced traffic signal coordination, metering and variable speed limits, HOV and reversible commuter lanes, dedicated rapid mass transit, and other state of the art alternatives that, if implemented, could negate the need for expansion of the roadway over this extremely sensitive area.

The comments are available at <http://hillcountryroads.com/wordpress/?p=29>

The Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance is a coalition formed to protect the Edwards Aquifer and its contributing Hill Country watersheds. See www.AquiferAlliance.org.