

For Immediate Release

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Hill Country elected officials and staff meet to discuss water availability, flood management, and tools to manage growth

On June 21, 2024, Commissioners Jen Crownover and Kevin Webb (Comal County), Andra Wisian (Kendall County), and Lon Shell (Hays County) welcomed 50 county officials and staff from across the Hill Country to a meeting at the Herff Farm in Boerne, where discussion centered on how counties can manage growth and preserve natural resources.

Joined by State Representative Carrie Isaac, as well as staff from State Representatives Ellen Troxclair, and Erin Zwiener, and State Senator Donna Campbell's office, the group included county commissioners, engineers, floodplain administrators, and groundwater conservation district managers from Bandera, Bexar, Burnet, Comal, Guadalupe, Hays, Kendall, Kerr, Real, Travis, and Williamson counties.

Attendees represented leaders from some of the fastest growing counties in the country, all situated within the Texas Hill Country – a region ripe with delicate natural resources and unique communities, both rural and urban. As a whole, the group was interested in discussing the balance of regional needs - welcoming growth, respecting private property, and preserving critical natural features and services. Attendees agreed that the region is a great place to live, and counties need more tools to preserve quality of life for their residents.

"Kendall County was proud to host this group of leaders," said Commissioner Andra Wisian. "Despite our different duties and jurisdictions, this gathering helped us learn from each other to determine what it will take to manage the impacts of development so that we will all have a Hill Country we can be proud to pass on to our kids and grandkids."

The group discussed critical issues related to water availability, flood management, and legislative impacts on county planning and resources. Commissioners Wisian and Shell kicked off the day before pivoting to a discussion on managing surface and groundwater resources, featuring presentations by Darrell Nichols from Guadalupe Blanco River Authority (GBRA), Burnet County Commissioner Damon Beierle, and Mitchell Sodek from the Central Texas Groundwater Conservation District. The group then explored tools available to help counties manage floodplains, featuring presentations from Half's Troy Dorman and Saul Nuccitelli from the Texas Water Development Board, both of whom highlighted state and federal funding tools, as well as new opportunities in floodplain mapping.

After lunch, the focus shifted to the impacts of SB 2038 and HB 3697 on counties, with insights from Commissioner Jen Crownover as well as Rachel Hanes and Annalisa Pease from the Greater Edwards

Aquifer Alliance. The workshop concluded with a session on potential legislative recommendations for 2025, led by Commissioner Kevin Webb and Katherine Romans from the Hill Country Alliance.

“It’s not often that elected leaders from nearly a dozen Hill Country counties have the opportunity to gather together, comparing notes and sharing what has worked – or not worked – within their communities,” said Grace Gilker, Hill Country Alliance Communities Program Manager. “Being able to have these conversations is a crucial step for proactive and collaborative regional planning.”

The June 21 County Tools Workshop built off a March meeting of county officials and is not expected to be the last meeting of the group. This ongoing collaboration is supported by nonprofit partners Hill Country Alliance, Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance, Comal Conservation, the Cibolo Conservancy and the Cibolo Center for Conservation.

About: *The Hill Country Alliance is a nonprofit organization, bringing together a diverse coalition of partners to preserve the open spaces, starry night skies, clean and abundant waters, and unique character of the Texas Hill Country. Learn more at hillcountryalliance.org.*

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Photos:



GBRA CEO Darrell Nichols presents to County-to-County participants.



Commissioner Lon Shell of Hays County speaks in a breakout discussion.



Half Water Sustainability Leader Troy Dorman presents on floodplain management at the County level.