

*For Immediate Release
June 24, 2024*

Local Hill Country leaders discuss opportunities for innovative water management

Wimberley, TX - With a growing population, increasing demand on water resources, and recurring drought conditions, community leaders from across the Hill Country are thinking hard about how to manage growth while protecting our water supply. That was the focus of the conversation of a recent gathering of the Hill Country Leadership Institute, a program of the Hill Country Alliance.

“The issue that we’re addressing isn’t one that’s in the future – we’re in it now,” stated Mason City Commissioner Robert Rayburn, at the June 20 meeting of the Hill Country Leadership Institute in Wimberley.

The Institute meeting brought together more than two dozen Hill Country city and county elected officials, staff, groundwater conservation district managers and community leaders at Wimberley’s Blue Hole Primary School last week. Throughout the daylong session speakers discussed innovative water conservation strategies, hurdles to implementation, and the need for more collaborative approaches to managing limited water resources.

The venue itself served as the centerpiece of the program’s discussion. Blue Hole Primary is renowned as Texas' first One Water school, using more than 60% less potable water than nearby Jacob’s Well Elementary. Opening to students in the fall of 2020, the school was engineered with water conservation at its core. A tour of the facility spotlighted features including dual plumbing for potable and non-potable water uses, pervious paving, rainwater harvesting, AC condensate collection and on-site sewage treatment and dispersal.

"What if instead of only thinking of growth as an increase in *demand* on water resources, we start to think of growth as creating new sources of water?" remarked Sharlene Leurig, CEO of Texas Water Trade. "Innovative practices like harvesting AC condensate and rainwater, coupled with wastewater reuse for non-potable purposes, offer significant conservation potential."

Throughout the day, numerous speakers and experts spotlighted these water management strategies, collectively referred to as “One Water” approaches, and gave examples from around the Hill Country. In addition to innovations at the building scale, cities and utilities across the region are increasingly considering how to maximize the conservation of water resources by working collaboratively across departments and agencies. New funding available from state and federal sources makes this a “golden age of funding” for rural and underserved water systems, according to Bill Moriarty, an independent consultant specialized in securing funding for water infrastructure projects.

In New Braunfels, these efforts have culminated in the creation of the collaborative One Water New Braunfels program, agreed to last fall by the City of New Braunfels, New Braunfels Utilities, and the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority. As all three agencies look ahead at future

water supply constraints and opportunities, the partnership allows more effective collaborative management of water resources to safeguard watersheds, waterways and groundwater, according to Robin Gary, One Water Coordinator at New Braunfels Utilities. “In many regards this level of coordination is unique - not only in Texas, but across the country,” said Gary. “Collaboration across departments and across agencies is critical. The waters of the Hill Country support our economies, environment, quality of life, and our future. We have to work together to make sure our waters remain celebrated, sustainable, and protected features of our community for generations.”

About the Leadership Institute

The Hill Country Leadership Institute, launched in 2023, is a leadership program for decision makers and elected leaders throughout the Texas Hill Country, focused on nurturing locally driven, balanced solutions that protect the ecological and economic health of this place we call home. The Hill Country Leadership Institute creates space for city council members, county judges and commissioners, groundwater conservation district officials, and anyone serving in a public leadership role to connect, share, and generate new ideas.

The Hill Country Leadership Institute is a program of the Hill Country Alliance. Hill Country Alliance is a 501c3 non-profit established in 2004, 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.

Photos:



Hill Country Leadership Institute Participants and guest speakers from June 20th meeting at Blue Hole Primary School in Wimberley, TX. Courtesy of Hill Country Alliance.



The Hill Country Leadership Institute met to discuss inspiring and innovative water solutions at Blue Hole Primary School – the first One Water School in Texas. Courtesy of Hill Country Alliance.



The meeting included a tour of water reuse features in action at Blue Hole Primary School - from permeable pavers to rainwater harvest, AC condensate collection, and even an onsite wastewater treatment plant. Courtesy of Hill Country Alliance.

Contact: Leah Cuddeback, Storytelling and Public Engagement | leah@hillcountryalliance.org