



great springs
PROJECT

ANNUAL REPORT

2021





great springs

P R O J E C T



Photography by Jennifer Ramos



Photography by Jennifer Ramos

A CIVIC GIFT IN THE HEART OF TEXAS



LETTER FROM OUR CEO

Dear Friends,

2021 was a year of continued strong growth for Great Springs Project in all facets of our work.

We made significant progress toward our goal of an additional 50,000 acres of conserved lands in our project corridor through our work on the 844-acre Presa Grande tract near San Marcos, the 2,700 acre Blanco Bend Ranch near the City of Kyle, and, working with our partners, the 1,068 acre conservation area along Purgatory Creek Natural Area in Hays County. We also worked with Siglo Group and a technical advisory team to develop a Land Conservation Prioritization Model and geographic database to identify high conservation priority land parcels in the GSP corridor to support our continued land conservation work.

We developed and released the Great Springs Project Trails Plan, the product of a year-long series of meetings, mapping, public workshops, webinars, comment forms, and plan review, which contains the trail alignments for the connected 100+ mile network of trails from the Alamo to the Capitol. The Trails Plan was the collaborative work of a 22-person Steering Committee representing the cities, counties, river authorities, and nonprofits working to build trails in the I-35 corridor and was underpinned by a set of equity recommendations developed by our 16-person Equity Task Force.

Great Springs Project supported the inclusion of two riders in the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's budget – one for additional state funding for trail projects and the other for a statewide study of the economic importance of regional trails – as appropriated by the Texas Legislature, and we helped develop a variety of land and trail projects that will be funded by City of San Antonio, Bexar County, Edwards Aquifer Authority, City of New Braunfels, Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, City of San Marcos, and Hays County.

Thanks to the support of the community, city partners, and our generous donors, Great Springs Project helped conserve a total of 4,617 acres over the recharge zone of the Edwards Aquifer in 2021.

Thank you, stakeholders, supporters, leaders, and trailblazers for your support.

With gratitude,

Garry Merritt
GSP Chief Executive Officer

OUR MISSION

To protect our precious Texas water resources and the land that watersheds them, and provide greater access to outdoors and healthy activities for all people.

OUR VISION

To blaze the Great Springs Trail, a 100 + mile spring-to-spring network of trails from the Alamo to the Capitol, scheduled for completion by the Texas Bicentennial in 2036, and conserve an additional 50,000 acres of land for the protection of the springs along the trail.

Texas' population will exceed 54M by 2050, expanding at a growth rate four times that of California. In Central Texas, over two million people already depend on the Edwards Aquifer for their drinking water along the GSP Corridor.

In Texas, less than four percent of the state is public lands, and access to the outdoors is often reserved for those who have access to transportation or who own land privately. GSP's mission to protect and connect Texas' beautiful natural surroundings is underpinned by a commitment to equity, inclusion, and access. As our state's population increases, public access to greenspace will only become more challenging.

Booming development in this region – among the fastest growing in the nation – threatens to increase the strain on this vulnerable water supply, increase flooding, threaten the ecology, and limit access to nature for tourists and residents. The Central Texas region must find a way to accommodate the influx of people while still protecting the natural resources that attract and sustain its residents and business community.

GSP promotes healthy community activities through public access to a hike-and-bike trail from San Antonio to Austin. GSP's work provides for sustainable development in our region that will preserve the Hill Country and its iconic springs for generations of Texans to come.

TRAILS

GREAT SPRINGS TRAILS PLAN & STEERING COMMITTEE

In 2021, Great Springs Project developed its primary trail alignments and completed our Trails Plan with the collaborative work of a Steering Committee representing the cities, counties, river authorities, and nonprofits working to build trails in the I-35 corridor. This Steering Committee engaged in the development of the Great Springs Project Trails Plan through a series of meetings, mapping, public workshops, webinars, comment forms, and plan review. Special thanks to those who provided invaluable direction as Steering Committee members and consultants, listed below.

STEERING COMMITTEE

Jim Bailey, *ActivateSA*
Sherwood Bishop, *San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance*
Ylda Capriccioso, *City of New Braunfels Parks and Recreation*
Jamie Lee Case, *City of San Marcos Parks and Recreation*
George Cofer, *Hill Country Conservancy*
Janet Coles, *Travis County Parks*
Mariana Espinoza, *City of Kyle Parks and Recreation*
Steven Gonzales, *El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association*
Stephen Graham, *San Antonio River Authority*
Aaron Mahr, *National Park Service - National Trails*
Nancy Pappas, *Comal Trails Alliance and Headwaters at the Comal*
Nathan Pence, *Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority*
Margo Richards, *Lower Colorado River Authority*
Maria Rocha, *Indigenous Cultures Institute*
Brandon Ross, *City of San Antonio Parks and Recreation*
Steven Schauer, *San Antonio River Authority*
Scott Sellers, *City of Kyle City Manager*
Lauren Shrum, *City of Schertz Parks and Recreation*
Kenny Skrobaneck, *City of Buda Planning Department*
Butch Smith, *Hill Country Conservancy*
Robin Stallings, *Bike Texas*
Mark Taylor, *Emerald Crown Regional Trail Work Group*
Joshua Tuck, *National Park Service*
Katie Wettick, *City of Austin Public Works*

EQUITY TASK FORCE

Melissa Ayala, *Waterloo Greenway*
Monica Borrego, *New Braunfels Food Bank*
David Buggs, *Texas Parks and Wildlife Department*
Mariana Espinoza, *City of Kyle*
Arnold Garcia, *(late) Austin American Statesman*
Dr. Ana Gonzalez, *City of Austin*
Angelica Holmes, *Black Outside, Inc.*
Jeanette Honermann, *REI, Inc.*
Reverend Addae Kraba, *Unitarian Universalists of New Braunfels*
Pablo Montes, *Indigenous Cultures Institute*
Maria Rocha, *Indigenous Cultures Institute*
Sister Cindy Stacy, *Headwaters at Incarnate Word*
Dr. Marla Torrado, *Community Powered Workshop*
Joshua Tuck, *National Park Service*
Rocío Villalobos, *City of Austin*
Dr. Skyler Walkes, *University of Texas*

ALTA PLANNING + DESIGN

Chris Allen, *Senior Engineer*
Steve Bzomowski, *Associate Planner*
Chuck A. Flink, *Senior Advisor (Greenways Inc)*
Matt Hayes, *Principal-in-Charge*
Jason Reyes, *Project Manager*
Will Roberts, *Senior Planner*
David Wasserman, *Data Science Practice Leader*

LAND CONSERVATION

2021 Highlights

PRESA GRANDE

844 ACRES | WATER QUALITY & INFLOW

Great Springs Project led the way for the permanent protection of the extraordinary Presa Grande tract in Hays County. **This 844-acre tract was one of the last large-acreage properties available for conservation near the City of San Marcos, and was threatened with imminent subdivision development.**

Heavily forested, with significant karst features and drainages into Little Sink Creek and Sink Creek, the protection of this property is crucial to water quality and quantity inflows into the Edwards Aquifer and San Marcos Springs, the headwaters of the San Marcos River. This recharge-to-spring cycle occurs under flood conditions within 24-48 hours, such is the immediacy of the property to San Marcos Springs. Presa Grande substantially increases the necklace of parks and open spaces that encircle the City.

The conservation easement protection effort, to be funded in part by Hays County Proposition A and the City of San Marcos, also provides for public trail access along its southern and eastern boundaries with a proposed future connection to the 18-mile San Marcos Loop and Check Trail, and a potential trailhead leading north to the proposed Emerald Crown Trail and existing Violet Crown Trail.



Photos Courtesy of GSP

BLANCO BEND RANCH

2,705 ACRES | WATER SOURCE

Just minutes from downtown Kyle lies a ranch of historic interest and significant scale. Here, in the fastest growing region of the U.S., Great Springs Project has secured an ownership interest in this 2,705-acre property, bounded to the north by over two miles of the Blanco River. This property, known as the Blanco Bend Ranch, sits directly atop the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone, and includes several tributaries to the Blanco River. This section of the Blanco is considered the second-most-remote stretch of river in the Hill Country, after the isolated Devils River in West Texas.

In wet years, water from the Blanco River supports in part San Marcos Springs in San Marcos; during periods of drought the Blanco River is the single most important source of water for Austin's favorite swimming pool at Barton Springs. The ranch includes evidence of Native American habitation, was part of a wagon train route to Wimberley for European settlers, and has remnants of a historic mill dating to 1860.

Great Springs Project is working with Hays County and the City of Austin to place a conservation easement over this first phase of the project to provide for its permanent protection, as well as to connect this remarkable property by trail to the cities of San Marcos, Kyle, and Austin.



PURGATORY CREEK NATURAL AREA

1,068 ACRES | HABITAT & WATERSHED

Fully over the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone and rich in Golden-cheeked warbler habitat, this expansive conservation effort is a candidate for Hays County Proposition A funding and, if protected by a conservation easement, will also offer the opportunity to expand the network of trails in and around the City of San Marcos.

Great Springs Project is working closely with our conservation colleagues at Hill Country Conservancy and with Hays County to add an additional 1,068 acres of critical watershed lands to the Purgatory Creek Natural Area, using Proposition A funding. Once funded and completed, this project will nearly double the size of this remarkable natural preserve in San Marcos.

“Protecting water quality in environmentally sensitive areas—and doing so in a way that still allows people to use and experience the land—is a win-win. Not only will the [Great Springs] project raise awareness of our region’s vital water resources, it will also have a valuable economic impact by offering recreational opportunities that also will bring tourism dollars to the area.”



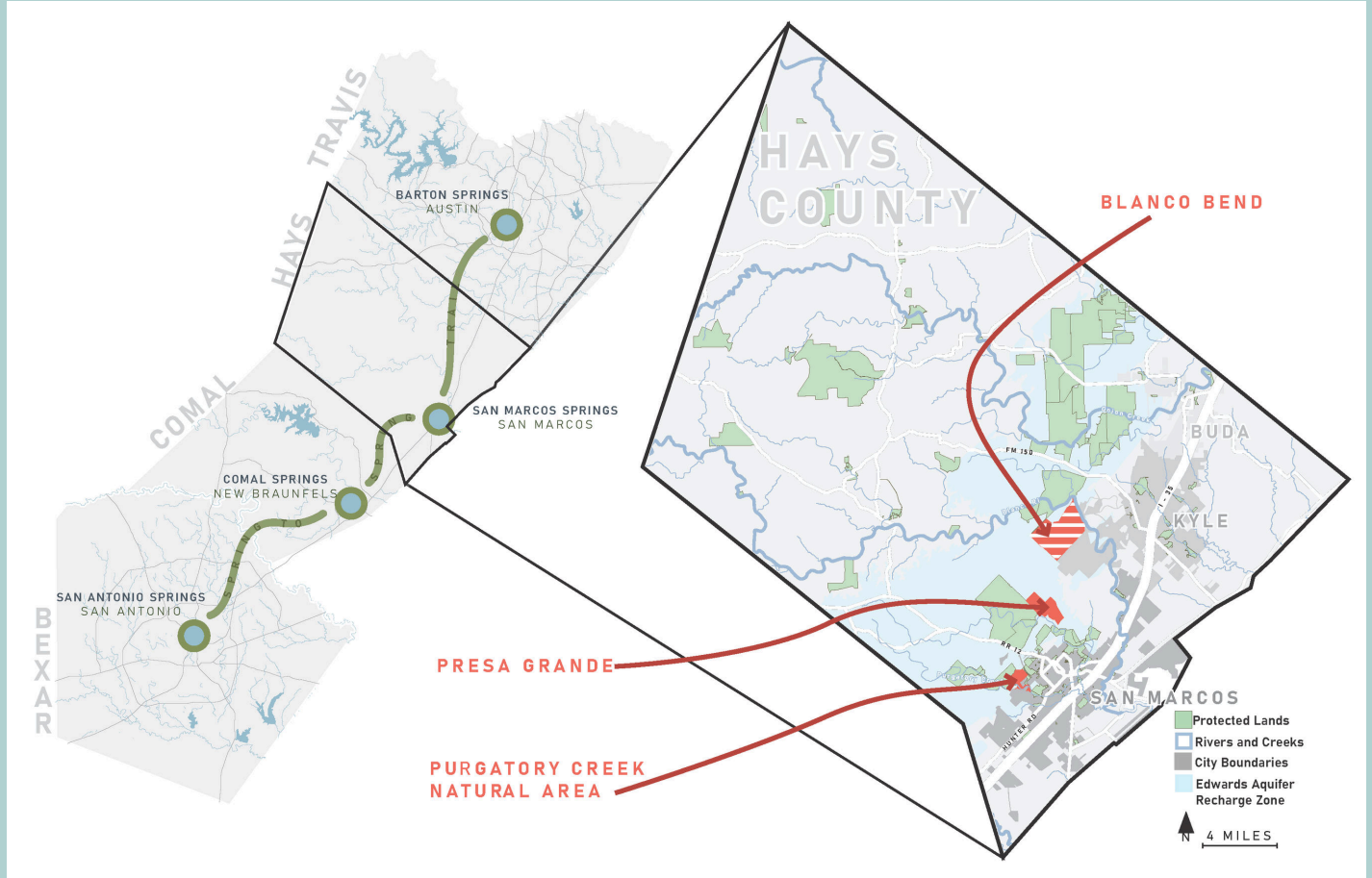
PHIL WILSON

General Manager, Lower Colorado River Authority



4,617

TOTAL PROJECT ACRES IN 2021



STATE STUDY ON REGIONAL TRAILS AND ADDITIONAL FUNDS FOR TPWD RECREATIONAL TRAILS GRANTS

GSP advocated for the inclusion of two riders in the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's (TPWD) fiscal year 2022 budget as appropriated by the Texas Legislature. One of those riders direct TPWD to work jointly with the Texas Historical Commission and the Texas Department of Transportation to conduct a study to determine the potential for historic, scenic, and/or recreational trails to be created in Texas to identify potential partners to promote local and regional preservation efforts related to the trail studied.

TPWD shall provide a report on that study to the Legislative Budget Board by December 1, 2022. The other rider allocates an additional \$1,000,000 in fiscal year 2022 and an additional \$1,000,000 in fiscal year 2023 from state sporting goods sales tax to be used for grants for TPWD's Recreational Trails Program.

"Texas Parks & Wildlife is proud to support this regional vision that honors and protects the rich history, culture, and natural resources of Texas' famed Hill Country."



CARTER SMITH

Executive Director, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

LAND PRIORITIZATION STUDY

GSP worked with Siglo Group and a technical advisory team to develop a Land Conservation Prioritization Model and geographic database to identify high conservation priority land parcels in the GSP corridor. This GIS model and database allows GSP to evaluate and rank each individual land parcel in our project area for its conservation value, connectivity to spring locations and existing land protection, threat of land transformation, endangered species habitat, ease of acquisition, size, and opportunities for conservation impact. The database includes other actionable information, including landowner data and tax value information. GSP's technical advisory team for this project is:

- **Marcus Gary**, Karst Hydrologist with Edwards Aquifer Authority
- **Doug Wierman**, Fellow at Meadows Center for Water and the Environment
- **Scott Parker**, Land Transactions Director at Great Springs Project
- **Jason Singhurst**, Botanist and Plant Ecologist with Texas Parks and Wildlife
- **Jenny Blair**, Certified Wildlife Biologist
- **Butch Smith**, Trail Project Manager at Hill Country Conservancy
- **Mark Enders**, Watershed Program Manager at City of New Braunfels

GSP IN THE NEWS

2021 Top Headlines

1

AUSTIN'S 10 HOTTEST STORIES OF 2021 CAPTURE THE SOUL OF A CHANGING CITY

BY CHANTAL RICE | CULTUREMAP AUSTIN | DEC. 30, 2021

"100-mile nature trail connecting Austin to San Antonio springs forward. Nature-loving Austinites breathed a breath of fresh air when they learned about the Great Springs Project plan to protect and connect the four major springs between the two cities with a network of trails."

2

PROPOSED 100-MILE TRAIL COULD CONNECT AUSTIN, SAN ANTONIO

BY LAUREN DUE | SPECTRUM LOCAL NEWS | JAN. 20, 2021

"For me personally this is the work of my lifetime," said Garry Merritt, CEO of the Great Springs Project."

3

EFFORTS INCREASE TO ADVANCE MASSIVE GREAT SPRINGS PROJECT IN COMAL, HAYS COUNTY

BY BRYAN RASH | COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER | MAY 4, 2021

"Leaders of the GSP have been working with city and county governments in Hays and Comal Counties, where the majority of the trail will exist, to help solidify funding toward the definition and construction of smaller trails that will ultimately come together to form the GSP."

4

A PATH TO CONNECT: GREAT SPRINGS PROJECT COMBINES NATURE, CONSERVATION, PROTECTION

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS | ROCK & VINE MAGAZINE | JULY 2021

"On a sunny May morning, Parker and I talk about the vision as he follows Tonkawa Trail, a wide dirt path that winds through the woods. Along the way, we pass scarlet buckeyes, agaritas, turk's caps, velvet-leaf mallows, soft-hair marbleseeds and other native plants."

OUR SUPPORTERS

2021 Donors

Hill Abell
Gordon Achtermann
Edward Aguilar
Eduardo Alcocer
Alice Kleberg Reynolds
Foundation
Jordan Allen
Angela Allerman
Amazon Smile Foundation
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Natalie Arroyo
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John Reider
Susan Resendez
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Sally Smith
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Tina Weintraub
Kurt Weiss
Tera Weiss
Todd Werner
Karen Werth
Bill West
Larry Whatley
Elizabeth Wolfe
Allison Wood
Megan Yeager
Scott Yeager
Shannon Zamora

ORGANIZATION FINANCES

January 1 - December 31, 2021

REVENUE AND SUPPORT

	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions
Contributions	\$1,221,197	-
Grants	\$425,000	\$177,500
Forgiveness of debt income	\$122,900	-
Other income	\$5,000	-
Net assets related from restrictions	-	-
Total Revenue and Support	\$1,774,097	\$177,500

EXPENSES

Program Services

Green Corridor	\$1,061,050
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Supporting Services

Management and General	\$272,024
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Fundraising	\$418,772
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Total Supporting Services	\$690,796
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Total Expenses	\$1,751,846
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MARKETING METRICS

2021 was a year of continued growth in public engagement for Great Springs Project. We developed new programming for Facebook and Instagram, including our popular #TrailTuesday segment.

Here are some metrics worth highlighting:

Social Media Highlights

INSTAGRAM



853%

INCREASE IN FOLLOWERS

GSP started 2021 with 372 followers. We finished the year with 3,175 followers.



33,295

ESTIMATED REACH
(INDIVIDUALS)

Approximately how many individuals saw a GSP story or post. We had a 227% increase in reach from 2020.

FACEBOOK



259%

INCREASE IN PAGE LIKES

GSP started 2021 with 379 page likes. We finished the year with 981 page likes.

Website Highlights

21K

TOTAL USERS



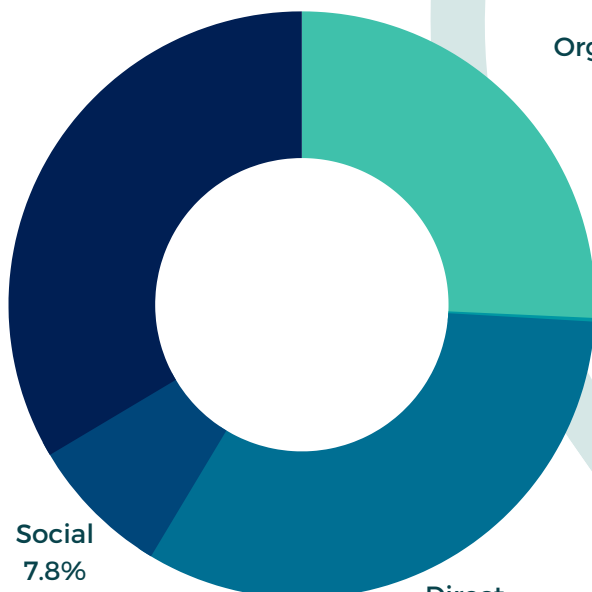
27K

TOTAL SESSIONS

Referral
33.6%

Organic Search
25.7%

Other
0.2%



Social
7.8%

Direct
32.7%

Board of Directors

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Dianne Wassenich, Secretary

Kyndel Bennett, Treasurer

Hope Andrade

April Ancira

Advisory Board

Anne Ashmun

Ray Brimble

Mike Burke

Ted Flato

Phil Hardberger

Cindy M. Matula

Bill Johnson

John Mackey

Les Shephard

Lee Walker

Bill West



Staff

Garry Merritt, Chief Executive Officer

Emma Lindrose-Siegel, Chief Development Officer

Lyda Creus Molanphy, Chief Strategy & Operations Officer

Bill Barker, FAICP, Regional Transportation Planning Director

David Bemporad, Trails & Transportation Planner

Jennifer Berrong, Grants Manager

Jess Gadis, Data Coordinator

Courtney Lyons-Garcia, Parks & Trails Specialist

Scott Parker, Land Transactions Director

Kristi Shepperson, Senior Executive Administrator

Kenny Skrobanek, Trails & Transportation Planner

“As the Central Texas region grows together, [the] Great Springs Project is absolutely the best hope for a permanent, unifying, and essential greenspace that demonstrates our respect for our land, our natural resources, our history, our outdoor spirit, and our commitment to the common good.”



The Honorable **HENRY CISNEROS** of San Antonio





Front and Back Photography
by Jonathan Vail