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For Immediate Release

Symposium Underscores Importance of Watershed Planning to Protect Texas Water for Future Generations

Austin, Texas (March 23, 2012) – Hill Country residents, policymakers, scientists, water experts, and regional leaders met yesterday in Junction for a highly informative conversation about the inescapable need for healthy watersheds (or “catchments”), those life nourishing land areas where the surface and subsurface water drains.

The symposium’s distinguished speakers shared their considerable expertise in discussing the critical role *watershed planning* plays in protecting our state’s limited water resources. Watershed planning provides a framework for actions to preserve this invaluable resource.

The symposium’s moderator was Tim Birdsong, Chief of Freshwater Habitat Conservation, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). For those who did not attend last night’s symposium and missed hearing about the many things going on in watershed planning, it will air on Texas Public Radio at 7:00 p.m. on Friday, March 30, on KTXI 90.1 Kerrville/Fredericksburg, and at 8:00 p.m. on Sunday, April 1, on KSTX 89.1 San Antonio. After broadcast, the symposium may also be heard online at www.tpr.org.

As stated by Birdsong, watershed planning “represents a strategic approach to conservation that supports the ability of local partners to identify conservation needs across the landscape, identify shared interests and priorities, leverage resources, and take action at a scale that is meaningful.”

Many of today’s important water planning initiatives are taking place at the local level – “The key to sustaining our water resources for future generations lies in the hands of local stakeholders. Watershed-based plans that engage local stakeholders and outline ways to preserve or restore watersheds have been shown repeatedly to be the most effective approach to preserving water resources,” said Kevin Wagner, the Texas Water Resources Institute’s Associate Director.

It was emphasized how today’s decisions will determine the water that will be available for future generations. “Given the drought, exploding population growth, energy demands and the cost of water, proactive planning at the watershed scale is a smart way for protecting our limited natural resources, and at the same time improving science literacy” said Tom Arsuffi, Director, Texas Tech University Llano River Field Station. This was reinforced by Gary Garrett, Director Watershed Policy and Management, TPWD, who expressed the view that conservation at the watershed scale is an effective and holistic approach to ensuring our natural resources will still be around for future generations.

A common theme was that it is so much easier to “help keep things good” than it is to fix problems in a watershed after they have occurred. “We’re faced with restoring water in several hundred water bodies across the state. If we can work to protect our healthy watersheds with socially acceptable and economically viable solutions, the challenges we face to ensure clean and abundant water will be surmountable.” (Aaron Wendt, Statewide Watershed Planning Coordinator, Texas State Soil and Watershed Conservation Board.)

Christy Muse, Executive Director, Hill Country Alliance, talked about the many watershed planning efforts (e.g., the South Llano Watershed Alliance) now underway in the Hill Country. She also said “We need to change the way we think about watersheds – we can't afford to "shed" away precious water. Let's value our "water catchment areas" as places to naturally capture, store and cleanse water supplies for future generations.”

The Hill Country Alliance is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to raise public awareness and build community support for preserving the natural resources and heritage of the Central Texas Hill Country. Learn more at www.hillcountryalliance.org.

This website also provides more information about the 5th Annual Watershed Symposium series and upcoming symposiums, which are sponsored jointly by Hill Country Alliance, Schreiner University, Texas Tech University, and Texas Public Radio. Upcoming symposiums will address “Hydraulic Fracturing and the Energy/Water Nexus” and “Groundwater for Texans: A discussion of the recent ruling of the highly publicized ‘Day’ case, how it affects all stakeholders and the complex water policy framework in Texas.”

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