

# Model HOA Landscape Guidelines

A tool for reducing landscape watering

Marisa Bruno, Hill Country Alliance

## MODEL LANGUAGE FOR HOAs IN THE TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

A practical guide for protecting and preserving  
water resources, native landscapes, and night skies



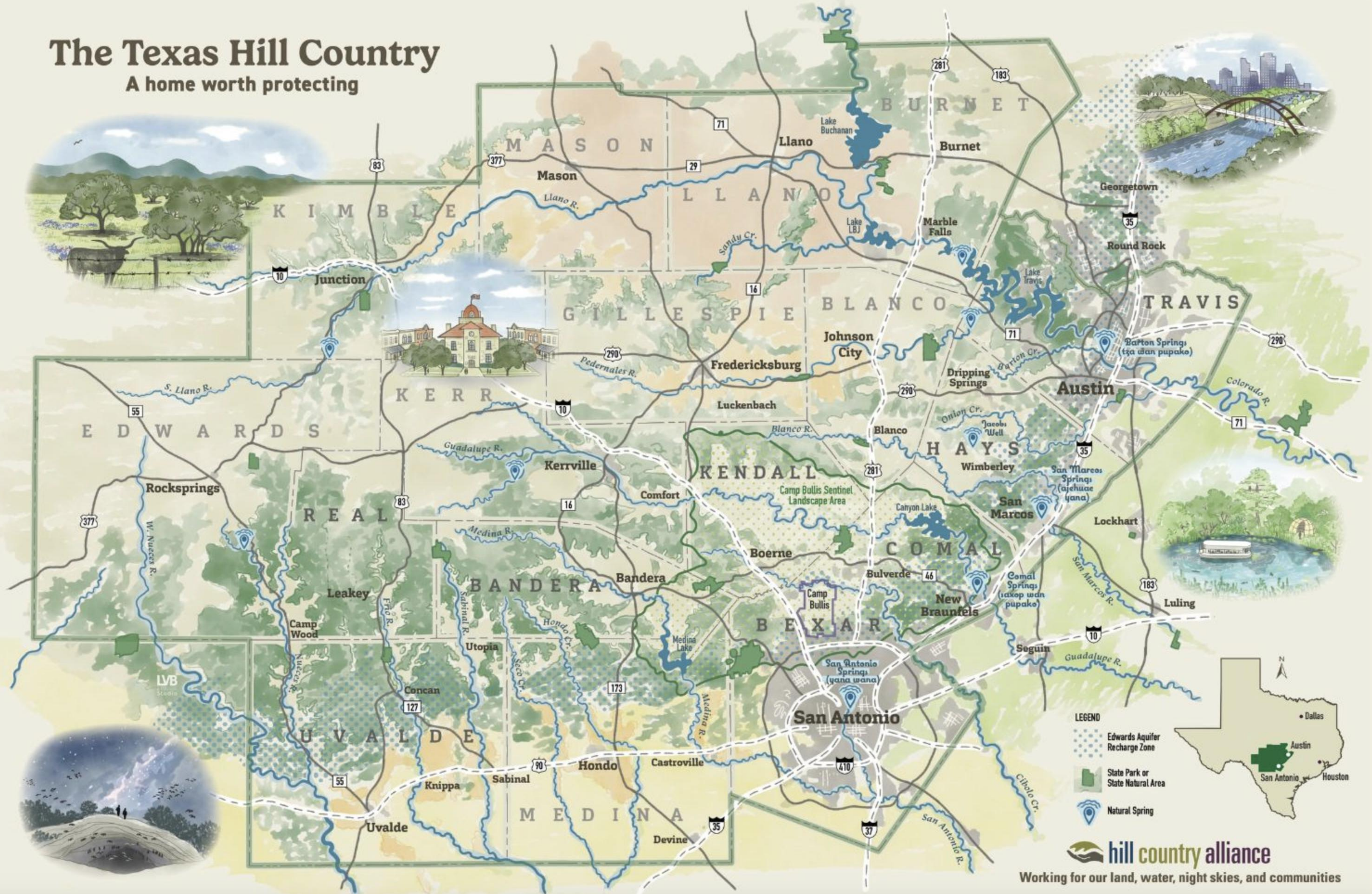


# Hill Country Alliance

The Hill Country Alliance (HCA) is a nonprofit organization working to bring 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.

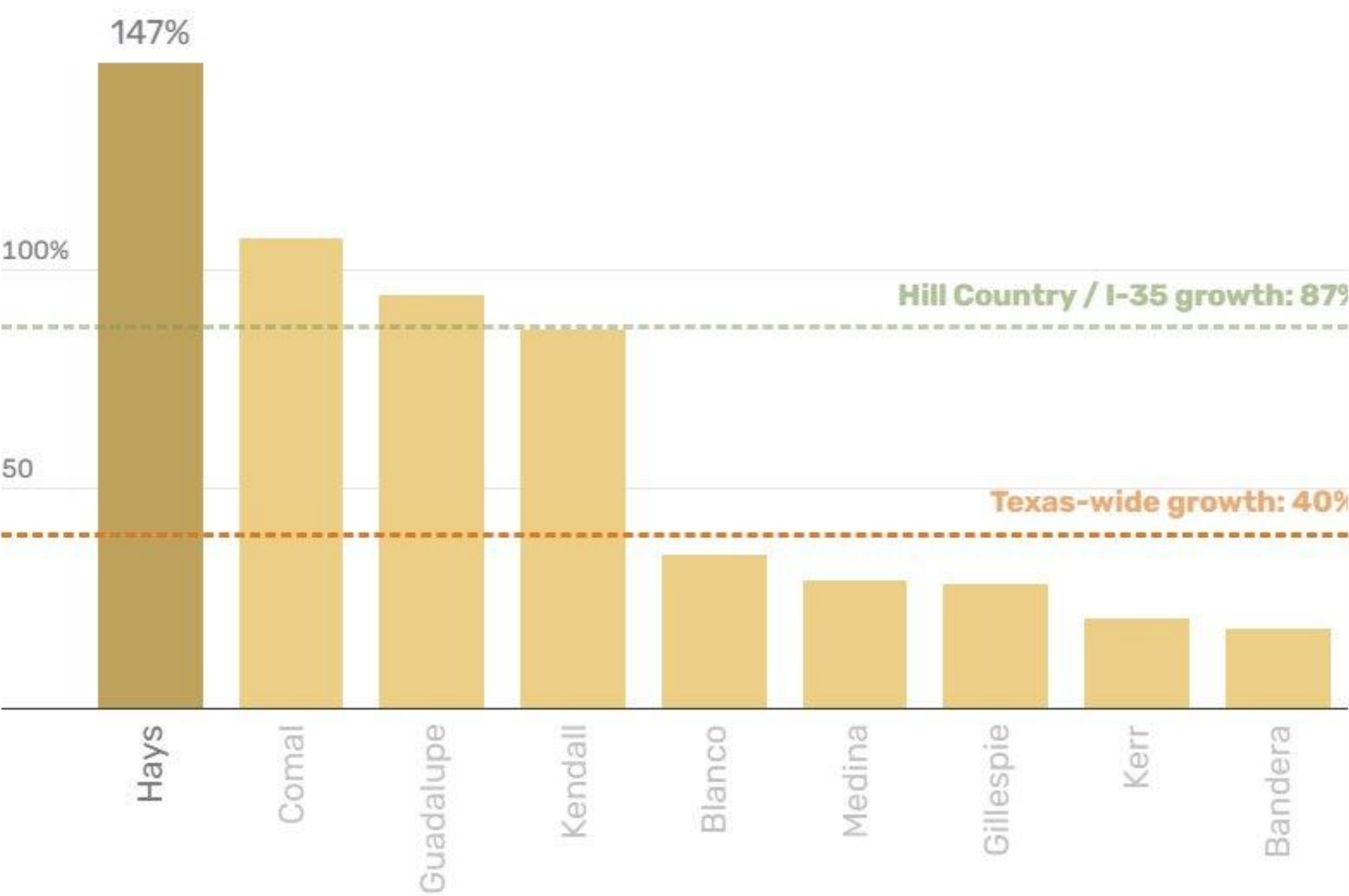
# The Texas Hill Country

A home worth protecting



# Strong population growth in Hill Country and I-35 corridor

Population change, 2000 – 2020



Source: San Antonio Express News, Satellite data shows quickest developing areas in the Texas Hill Country, I-35 corridor, May 2024

Since 1990, the population of the unincorporated Hill Country has more than doubled.

State of the Hill Country Report

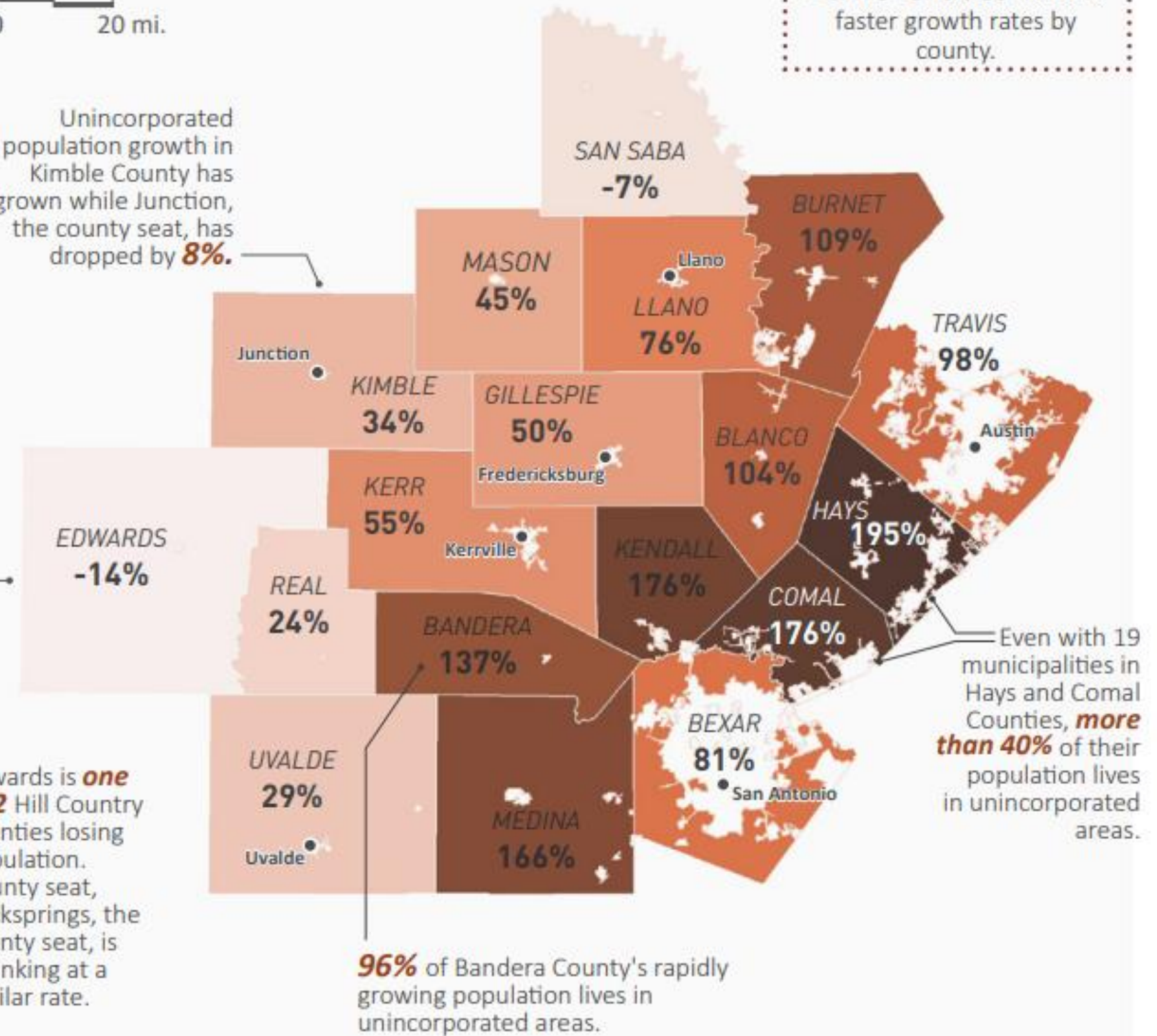
Published: Spring 2022

## POPULATION GROWTH IN UNINCORPORATED AREAS, 1990 - 2020

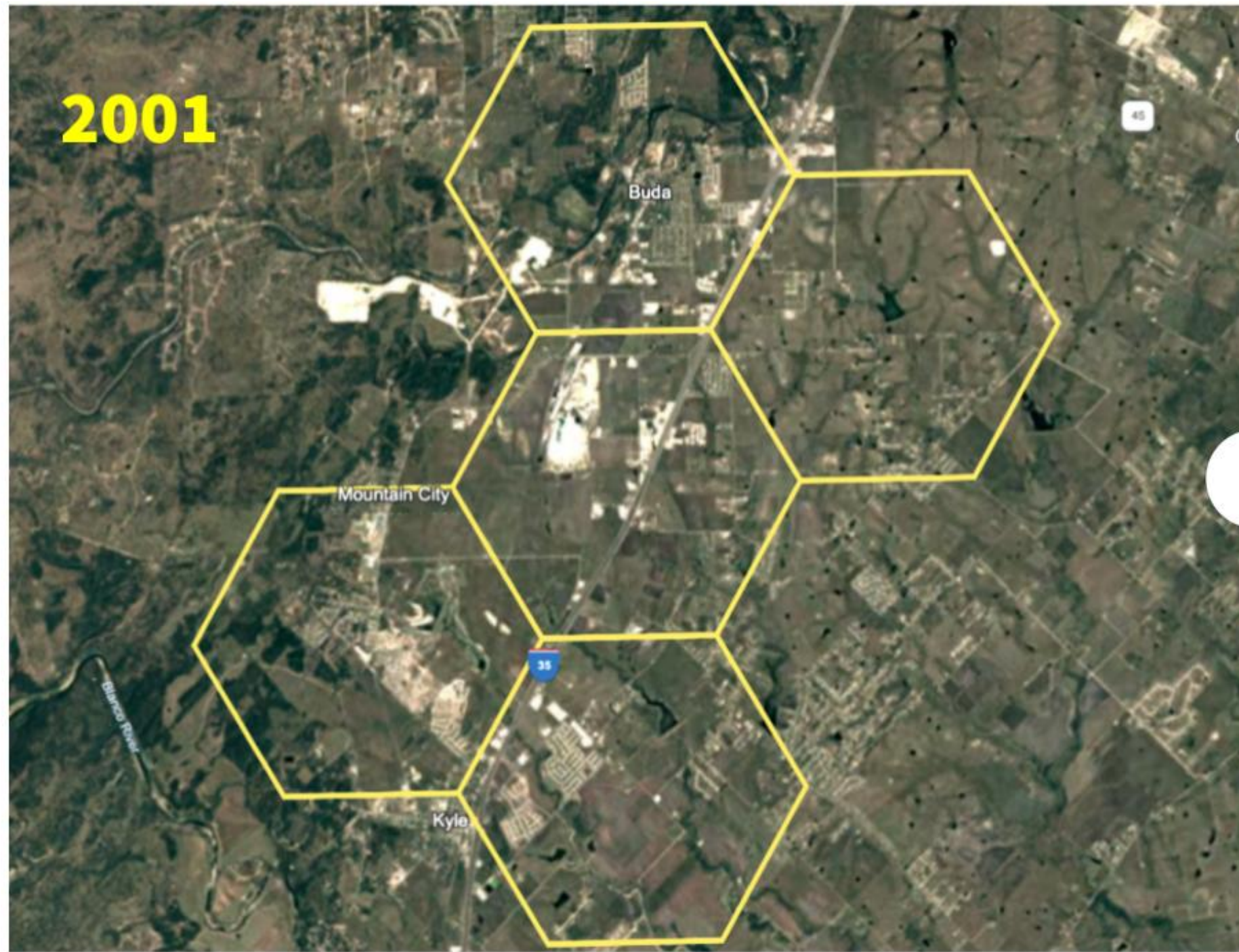
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The Hill Country population in unincorporated areas has grown by **103%** since 1990. **Darker shades** indicate faster growth rates by county.

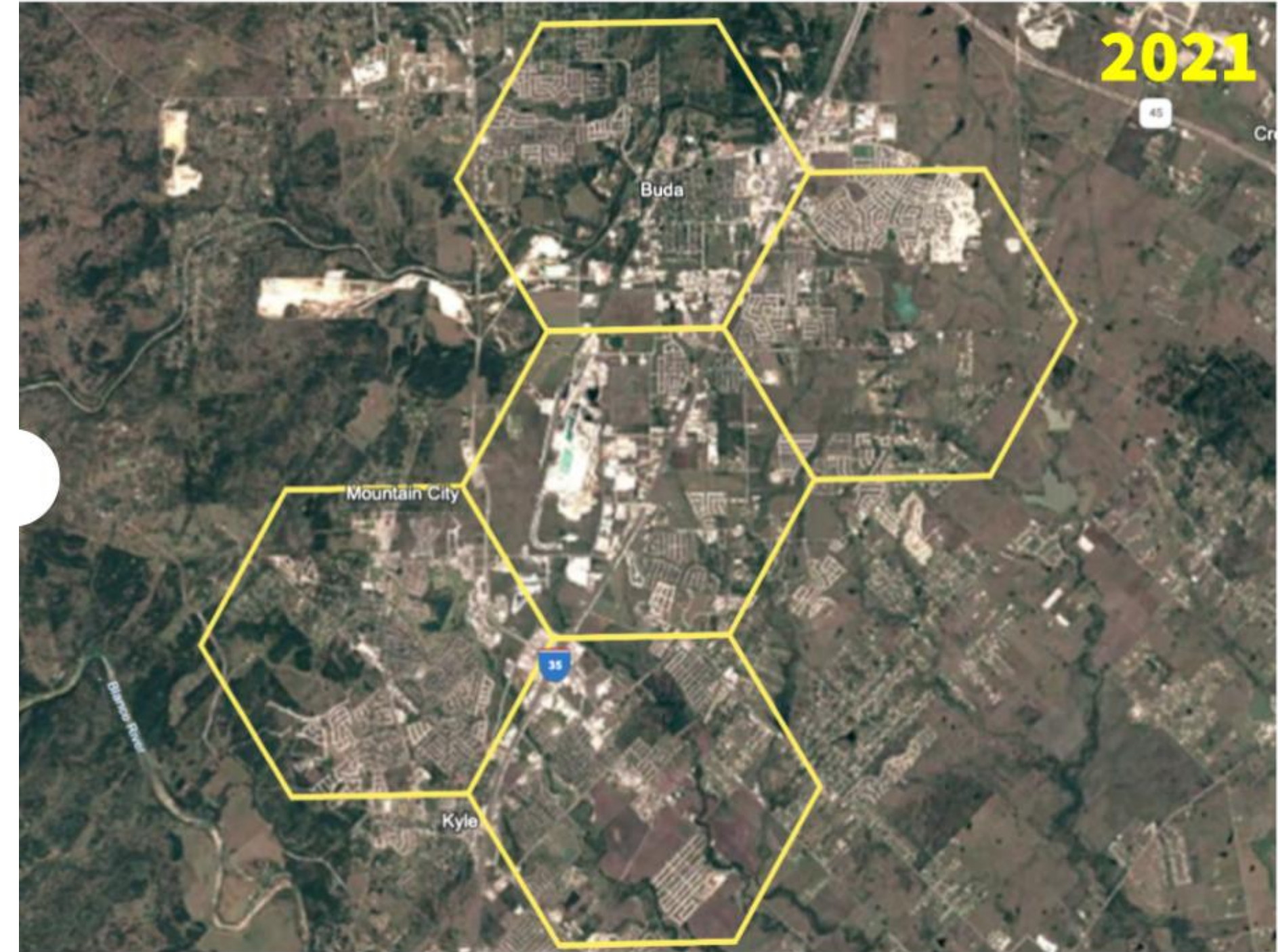
Unincorporated population growth in Kimble County has grown while Junction, the county seat, has dropped by **8%**.



White spaces indicate incorporated areas.

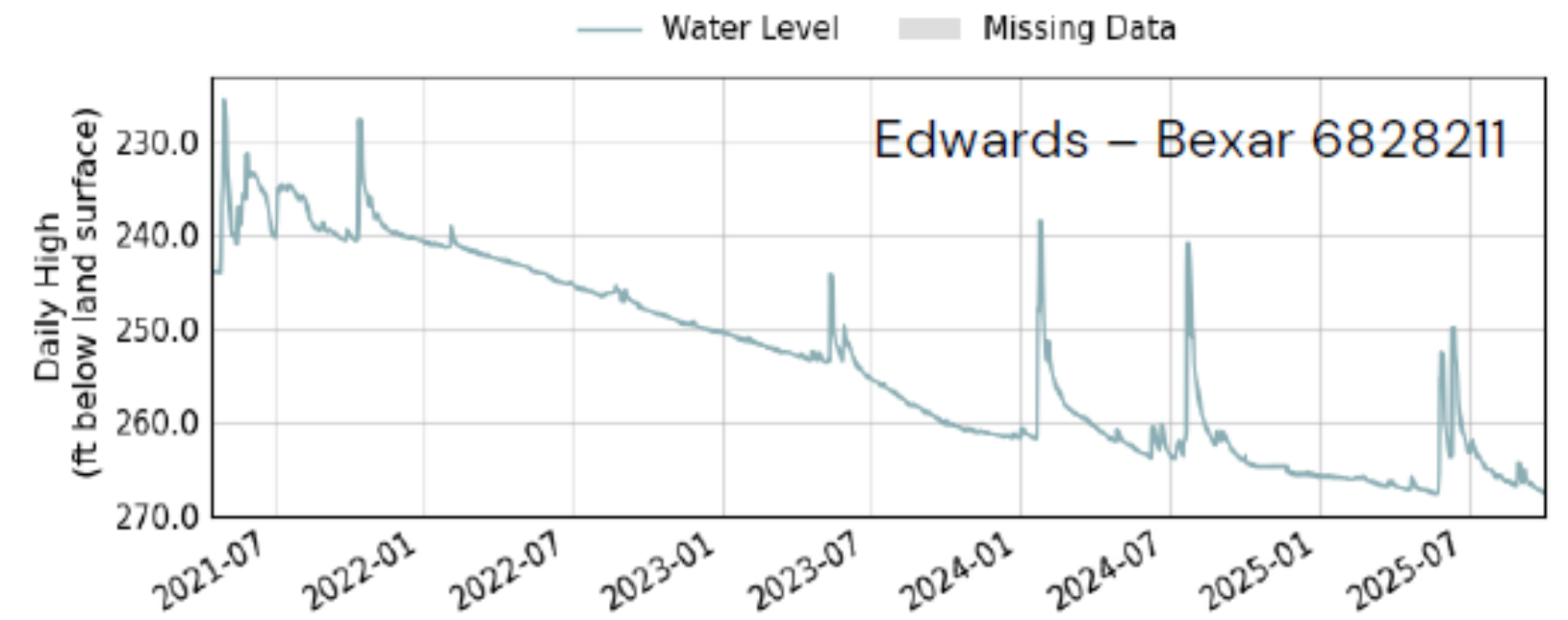
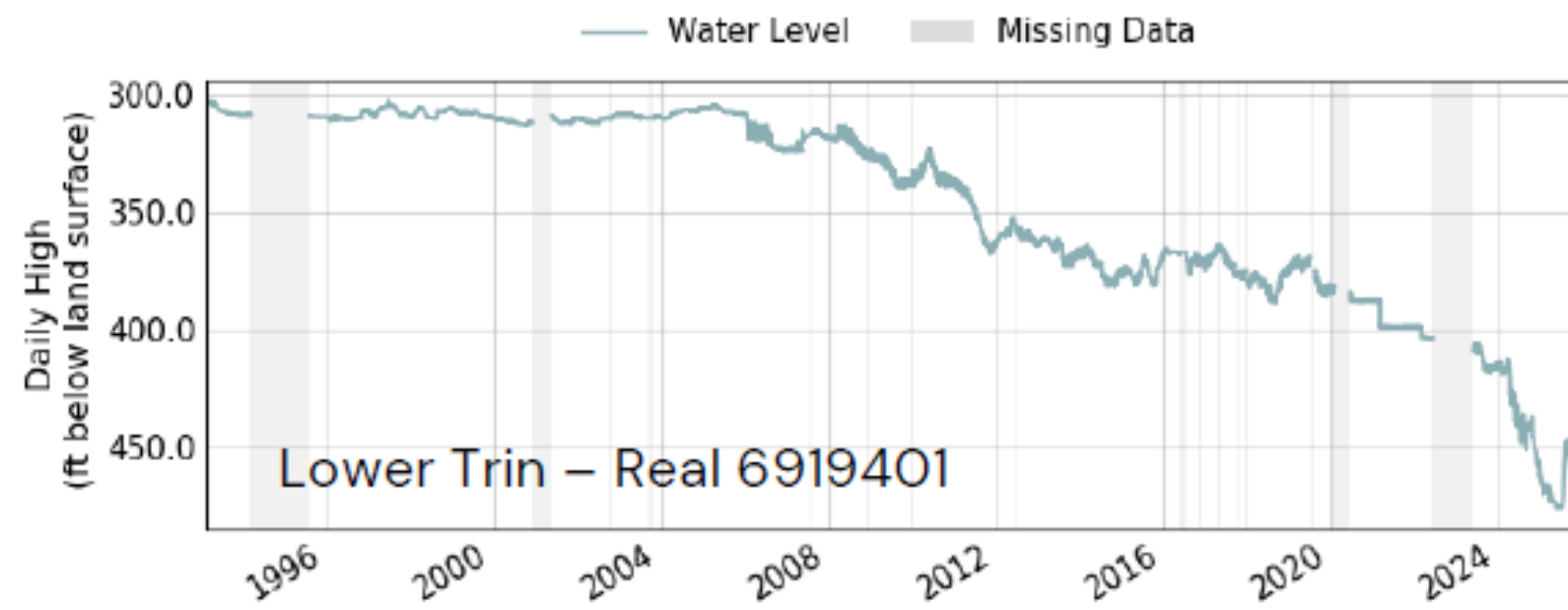
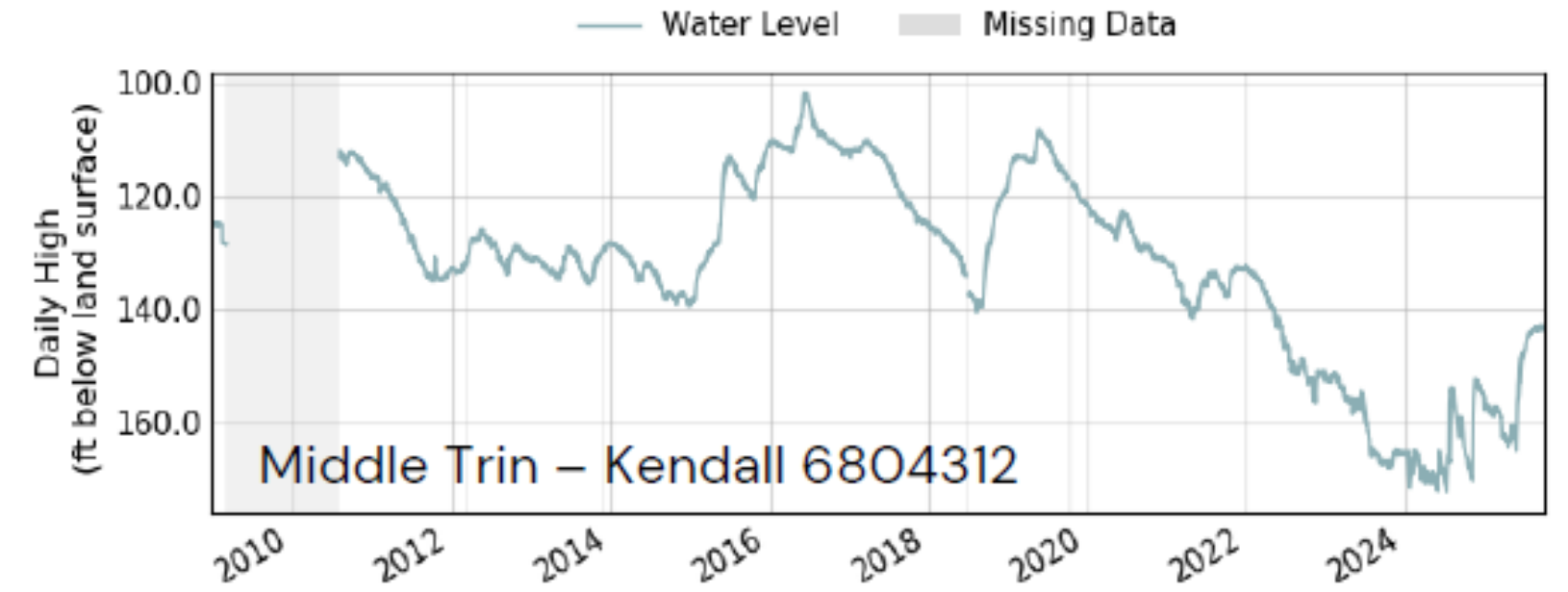
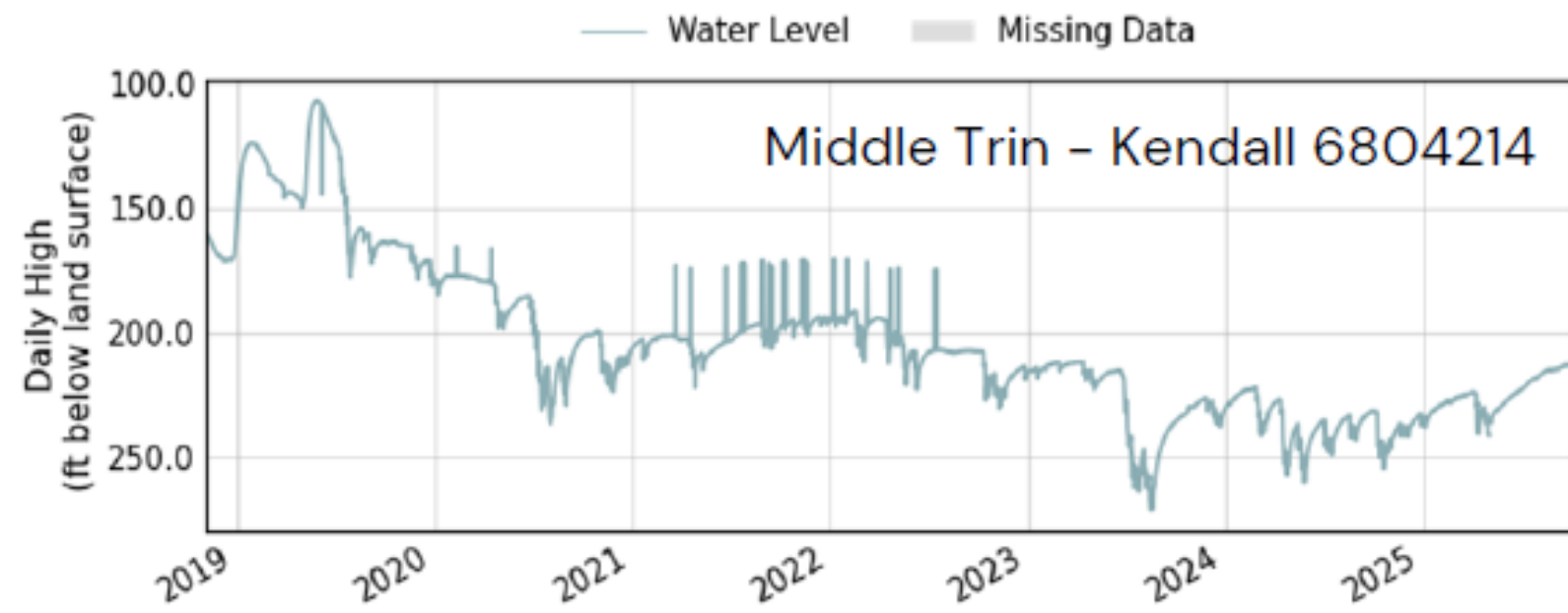
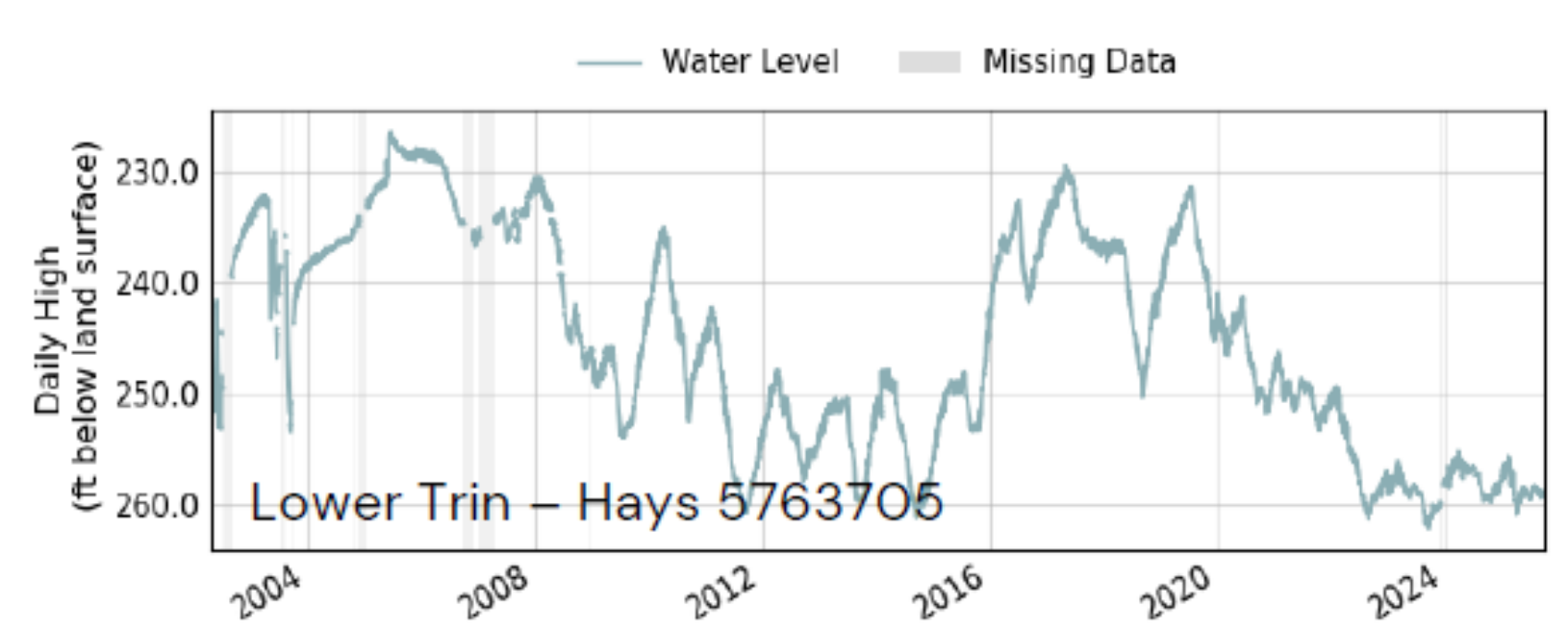
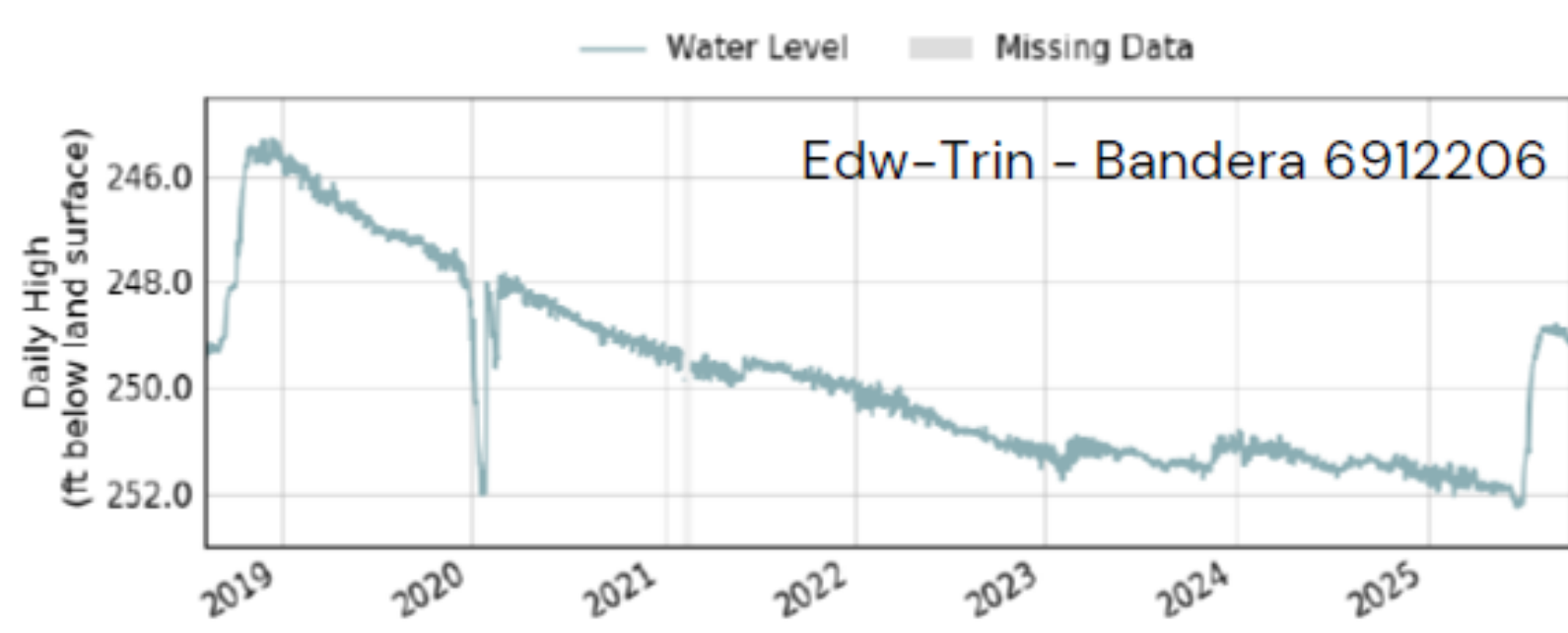


Source: Landsat7, Landsat8



Source: Landsat7, Landsat8

Source: *San Antonio Express News*, Satellite data shows quickest developing areas in the Texas Hill Country, I-35 corridor, May 2024



# GALLONS PER CAPITA PER DAY BY WATER USER GROUP 2018

Under 100 100 to 300 Over 300

The highest-consuming Water User Groups are *clustered on the outskirts of Austin*. The City of Austin is one of the lowest per capita water users in the Hill Country.

Water use within rural counties is consistently *between 100 and 300 GPCD*.

## METRIC BASELINE:

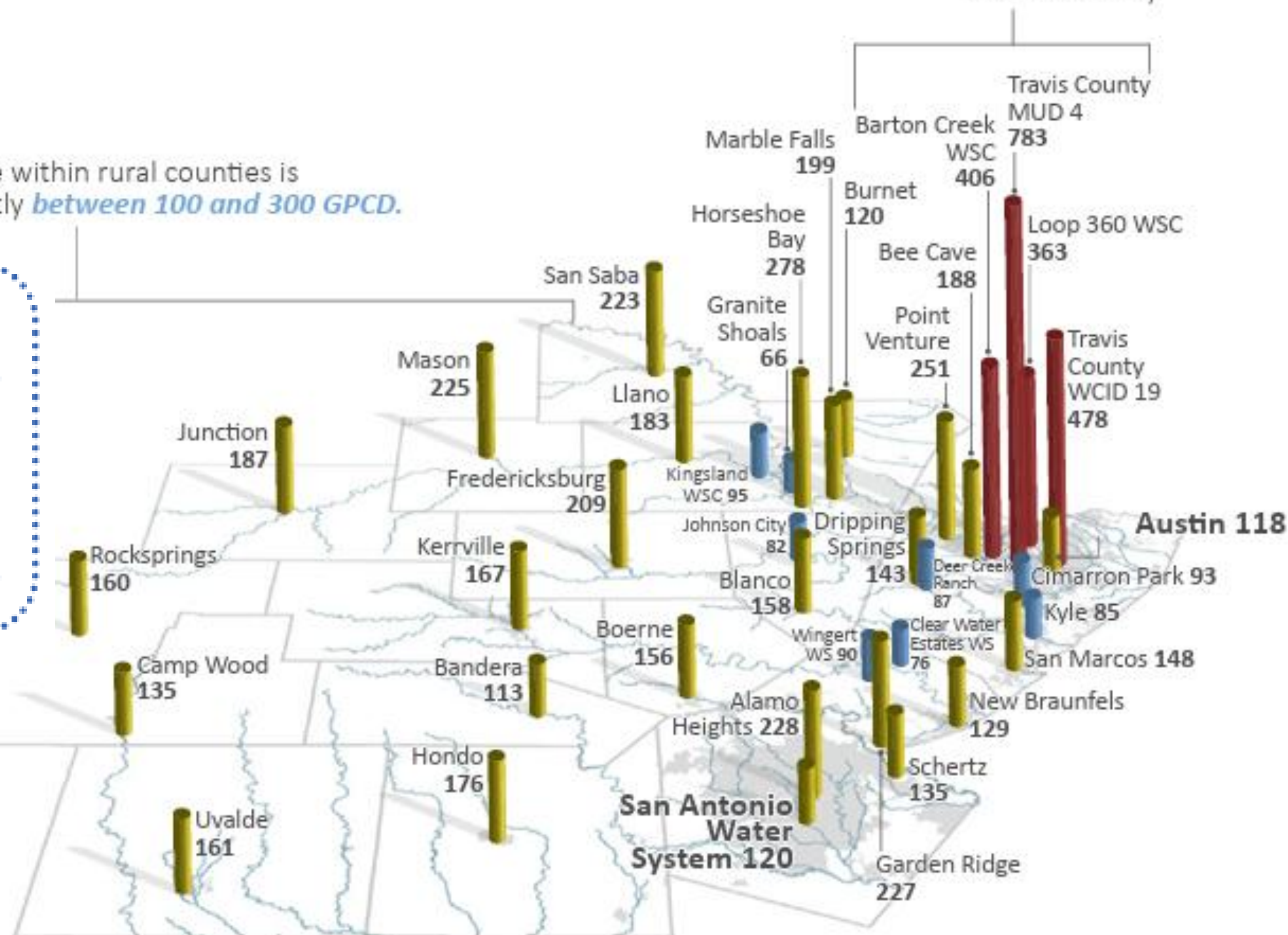
Max GPCD 2018:

783

(Travis County MUD 4)

Average GPCD 2018:

191



State of the Hill Country  
Published: Spring 2022

Water managers estimate that 60-70% of residential water is used for outdoor irrigation in the summer. Households with automatic irrigation systems use 47% more water than those without.

# Water-Wise Landscaping Ordinances

In the Texas Hill Country, up to 70% of potable water is used for landscaping, especially in the summer. This presents a huge opportunity to conserve water by shifting landscaping practices in the region. **By implementing landscaping ordinances that promote water-wise landscapes, cities can achieve huge water savings and maximize the long-term sustainability of the community's water resources and outdoor spaces.**

This guide is part of the "Leading by Example" guidebook, which can be found online at: [hillcountryalliance.org/leadingbyexample/](http://hillcountryalliance.org/leadingbyexample/).

## BEST PRACTICES

**Require new developments to choose landscaping plants from an approved list of drought-tolerant plants.** The City of Austin's code includes a great example of native and adapted plants in their [Preferred Plant List](#), though adapting the list is appropriate for different parts of the Hill Country.

**Require irrigation efficiency measures** such as setting day limits, installing smart controllers, and incorporating rain sensors. The City of San Marcos' code provides a good example of effective irrigation management through these practices.

**Focus on new developments and residences.** By requiring that landscapes in new developments and residences use drought-tolerant plant species and efficient irrigation systems, cities are taking a proactive approach that is more cost-effective than retrofitting systems down the road.

**Compliment regulation with incentive programs targeting existing landscaping.** The City of Austin offers rebates to help homeowners convert healthy turf grass to native plant beds and install rainwater harvesting systems. San Marcos offers rebates for rainwater harvesting, irrigation upgrades, and soil improvements.

### BENEFITS OF LANDSCAPE ORDINANCES

- WATER CONSERVATION
- COST SAVINGS
- INCREASED CURB APPEAL
- HEALTHIER ECOSYSTEMS



Contrary to popular belief, drought-tolerant landscapes can be very green, with major curb appeal.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DIANA KIRBY

## EXAMPLE ORDINANCES

### SAN MARCOS, TX (SEC. 14.126)

- **Requires separate meters for landscape irrigation** and a master valve on new irrigation systems to prevent leaks.
- **Restricts turf grass areas** to 50% of landscaped areas for single-family residential homes, and 25% of landscaped areas in all other developments. Turf grass areas must be planted in drought-tolerant species approved by the city.
- **Allows use of reclaimed water for irrigation.**

### AUSTIN, TX (ENVIRONMENTAL CRITERIA MANUAL, SEC. 2)

- Requires that new commercial sites choose plants from a **Preferred Plant List** for at least 90% of landscaped areas.
- **Restricts use of potable water for irrigation on commercial sites.** 50% of landscaped area must be undisturbed natural area or be irrigated by rainwater or stormwater runoff conveyed from impervious surfaces on the site.
- **Permanently restricts irrigation to once-per-week watering** for automatic irrigation, though a 40-day variance applies if installing new low-water use turf grasses and plants.

## RESOURCES

**City of Austin** and **Texas A&M AgriLife Extension** have produced a comprehensive guide to native and adapted plants for Central Texas lawns.

- ▶ [Native and Adapted Landscape Plants: an earthwise guide for Central Texas](#)

**Texas Living Waters Project** conducted a statewide analysis of the water savings potential of reducing outdoor watering. It is estimated that homeowners overwater their lawns by two to three times the amount needed. See the full report below.

- ▶ [Water Conservation by the Yard: A Statewide Analysis of Outdoor Water Savings Potential](#)

But what do we do about  
existing developments and new  
developments in  
unincorporated areas?

There are 935 registered HOAs  
in Bexar county alone.

Through their CC&Rs and Landscape  
Guidelines, HOAs have the authority  
promote landscapes that preserve water  
resources, native landscapes, and night  
skies.

Most new developments have HOAs.

# HOA CC&Rs & Landscape Guidelines

## Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions (CC&Rs)

Legally binding documents outlining property restrictions within a development. They govern properties and common areas. Changing them requires approval of a super majority (two-thirds vote) of property owners.

## Landscape Guidelines

Exist outside of the CC&Rs. Changing them requires either majority approval from the HOA Board or ACC. The board or committee in charge of reviewing homeowner landscape plans will refer to these guidelines.

# Impact of Regionally-Specific Landscape Guidelines



## TURF

Turf areas shall be limited to 50% of the total front yard area. All grass must be a drought-tolerant species developed for use in the Texas Hill Country. Common Bermuda and St. Augustine grass is not permitted.



**Lot Type C (refer Detail Attachment 9):**

- Minimum of 150 square foot mulched landscape bed in the front yard.
- Front yard and rear yard shall be fully sodded, except for landscape bed(s).
- Minimum of fifteen (15) one (1) gallon plants in the front yard.
- Minimum of ten (10) five (5) gallon plants in the front yard.
- Minimum of one (1) fifteen (15) gallon plant in the front yard.
- Minimum of one (1) two inch (2") caliper hardwood Yard Tree.
- Minimum of one (1) three inch (3") caliper hardwood Street Tree in the Lot Front.
- Landscape irrigation system for entire front yard shall be installed.

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## Our Goals

- Make it easier for **new developments** to adopt landscaping policies that conserve water.
- Help **established HOAs** adopt water-wise landscaping guidelines.

We worked with 30+ water utility leaders and conservation experts to craft CC&R best practices and regionally-specific Landscape Guidelines.

Tara Bushnoe, Upper Guadalupe River Authority  
Christopher Charles, City of Austin  
Banks Chisum, JB Chisum Construction, Inc.  
Charlie Flatten, Hays Trinity Groundwater Conservation District  
Clay Forister, Kendall County  
David Foster, Clean Water Action  
Kory Foster, New Braunfels Utilities  
Marcus Gary, PhD, PG, Jackson School of Geosciences  
Robin Gary, New Braunfels Utilities  
Matt Greene, City of New Braunfels  
James Grizzard, Harvest Rain  
Karen Guz, San Antonio Water System  
Rachel Hanes, Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance  
Jeff Harkinson, Harkinson Investment Corporation  
Michael Homes, City of Kerrville  
Kim Klausner, New Braunfels Utilities  
Kevin Kluge, Austin Water  
Denise Livingston, Texas Water Development Board  
Ted Maas, Maas Verde Landscape Restoration  
Whitney Milberger, BGE, Inc.  
Erin Moeller, Harvest Rain  
Blake Neffendorf, City of Buda  
Debbie Reid, Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance  
Mary Ellen Schulle, Kendall County  
Sherry Sultenfuss, PhD, Environmental Scientist  
Shelby Taber, Upper Guadalupe River Authority  
Stephanie Threinen, Lakeway MUD  
Jennifer Walker, National Wildlife Federation  
Matt Welch, Mirasol Development  
Dieter Werner, Bandera County  
Andra Wisian, Kendall County

Legal Review by Crist Law Firm

# CC&R Best Practices

1. Set a goal of preserving and enhancing the property's natural resources in the Declaration.
2. Include non-negotiable rules in the CC&Rs.
3. Create a committee focused on landscape improvements and grant the committee the authority to adapt to landscaping best practices in their **Landscape Guidelines**.

# Landscape Guidelines

Landscape Plan

Landscape Planting

Shade Trees

Turf Areas

Irrigation

Rainwater Harvesting

Nonliving Groundcover

Mulch

Pre-Existing or Native Property Rock Features

Outdoor Lighting

Outdoor Water Features

Oak Wilt and Tree Maintenance

Chemical Pesticides and Fertilizers

Other Maintenance



# Landscape Guidelines at a Glance

- Plant and turf species must be native or drought-tolerant
- Non-native turf limited to 50% of yard
- Minimum mowing heights are 3 inches, recommended is 4 inches+
- Rainwater harvesting is encouraged with minimal requirements
- Automatic irrigation is discouraged but allowed, and irrigation best practices like hydrozoning are promoted\*

Our guidelines are a starting point.

Landscape Guidelines for [Insert Development]

Purpose

The goal of these Landscape Guidelines is to promote low-impact landscaping practices that reduce water usage while maintaining aesthetically pleasing and consistent environments. Homeowners are encouraged to use native or drought-tolerant plants, efficient irrigation systems, and water-conserving techniques such as mulching and proper soil management. Additionally, homeowners are encouraged to make landscape lighting choices that do not permit light escape into the night sky.

By implementing these guidelines, homeowners can conserve water resources, reduce water bills, and create landscapes that are resilient to drought conditions. Additionally, these guidelines may contribute to environmental conservation efforts by minimizing water runoff and promoting biodiversity. Overall, the goal is to strike a balance between beautiful landscapes and responsible water usage within our communities.

Definitions

To ensure the potential for misunderstanding, commonly used terms in the landscape guidelines are defined below:

- **Adaptive Plants:** Species or cultivars of a plant that, while not native, grow well in a given climate with similar maintenance and water needs as plants that are native to the same area, and that do not pose an invasive risk.
- **Hydrozones:** Specific landscaped areas that are serviced by the same irrigation zone. The most efficient landscape designs will include plants with similar water needs planned within the same irrigation zones, or irrigation zones designed according to the plant needs in the landscape and allowing the least amount of water to be applied to each zone.
- **Invasive Species:** Aggressive and undesirable plants—whether native, introduced, or exotic—which are detrimental to the health of native plant populations as they outcompete desired native plants and create monoculture systems that reduce biodiversity and local habitat.
- **Irrigation Systems:** A system of pipes and emitters that delivers water from a possible or non-potable source to the landscape either from above or below the surface.
- **Native Plants and Trees:** Plants, grasses, and trees that live or grow naturally in Central Texas without direct or indirect human intervention. They are adapted for Texas' drought and heat and are an essential food source and habitat for native animals.

 Click to download  
Landscape Guidelines  
template - Word

Landscape Guidelines

=

Opportunity for Education

# 2013 Texas Property Code Change

It unlawful for HOAs to "include or enforce a provision in a dedicatory instrument that prohibits or restricts a property owner from:"

- 1.composting
- 2.installing rain barrels or a rainwater harvesting system
- 3.implementing efficient irrigation systems
- 4.using drought-resistant landscaping or water-conserving natural turf

# Benefits to Community Members

1. Clear policies that are consistent with the law.
2. Lower utility bills.
3. Higher survival rate of your landscaping during drought.
4. With rainwater harvesting, retain control of your watering schedule.

# Rolling out the Guide

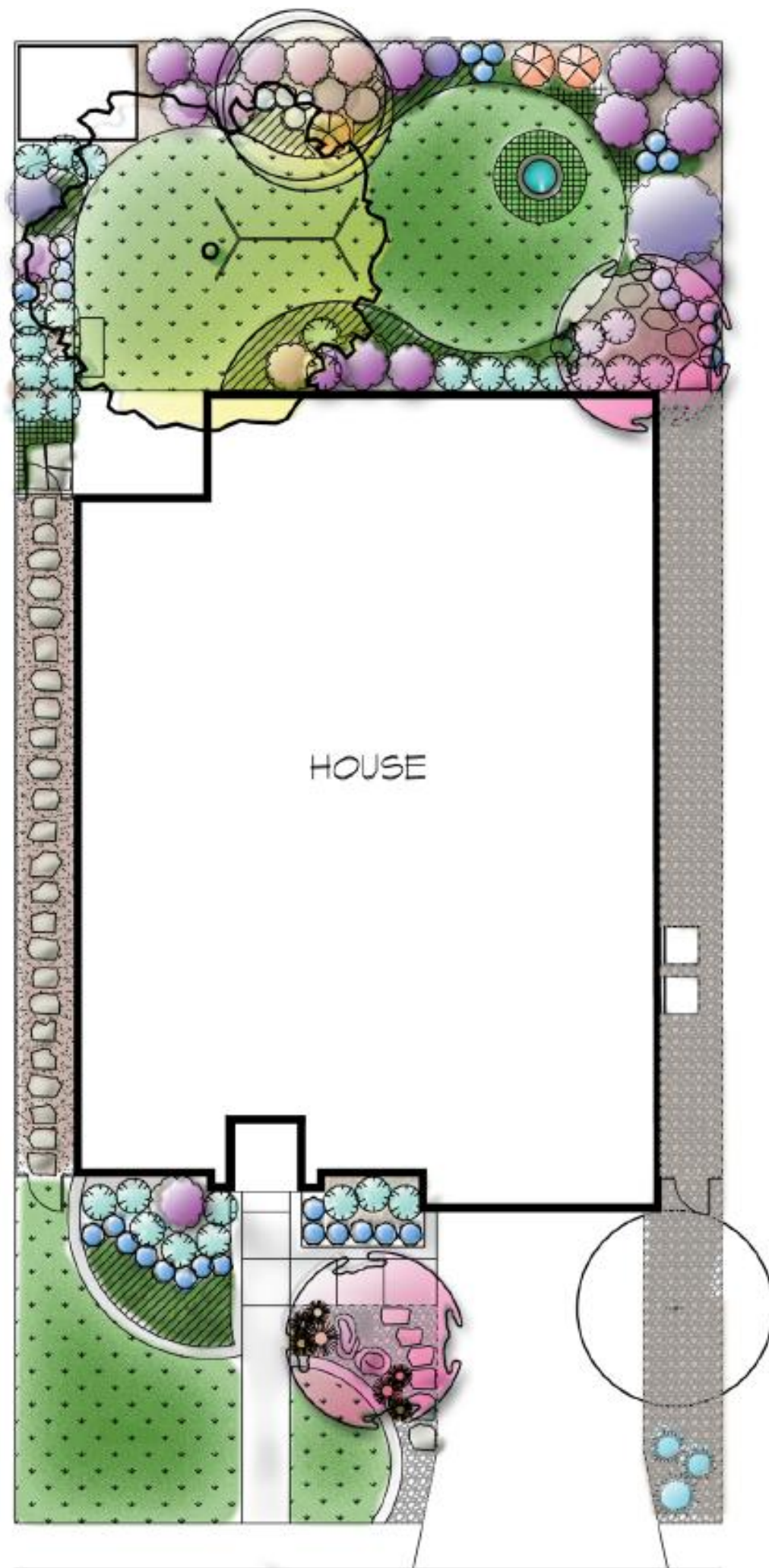
1. Get this guide in front of new developments – and have the conversation about landscaping policies *early* in the process
2. Support established HOAs, especially those with undeveloped lots, update their Landscape Guidelines
3. Partner with cities and counties to share the resource

# Initial Learnings

- It is very difficult to get new developments on board – often need something to force the additional investment (gutters, new landscape designs)
- Many HOAs don't have any Landscape Guidelines. For the HOAs that do, they often have a good foundation– but there are opportunities to improve them
- There is demand for guidelines that prohibit automatic irrigation

# Next Steps

1. Continue to partner with grassroots groups and other local partners on the roll-out of the guide.
2. Partner with Native Plant Society, SAWS, and Native American Seed on templates for landscapes that would thrive without automatic irrigation. Plus, developing optional language prohibiting automatic irrigation.



- A. Large Trees**  
 Bur Oak  
 Cedar Elm  
 Live Oak  
 Mexican Sycamore  
 Monterey Oak  
 Pecan  
 Texas Red Oak
- B. Small Trees**  
 Afghan Pine  
 Anacua  
 Ash Juniper  
 Black Cherry  
 Honey Mesquite  
 Japanese Persimmon  
 Lacey Oak  
 Mexican Plum  
 Red Bud  
 Texas Ash  
 Uvalde Maple
- C. Small Ornamental Trees/Large Shrubs**  
 Anacacho Orchid Tree  
 Desert Willow  
 Texas Redbud  
 Mimosa  
 Loquat  
 Mexican Red Bud  
 Possumhaw  
 True Buckeye  
 Texas Mountain Laurel  
 Texas Persimmon  
 Youpon Holly  
 Wax Myrtle
- D. Palms**  
 Texas Palmetto  
 Windmill Palm  
 Mexican Fan Palm  
 Mediterranean Fan Palm  
 Dwarf Texas Palmetto
- E. Large Shrubs**  
 Carolina Buckthorn  
 Evergreen Sumac  
 Flame Leaf Sumac  
 True Buckeye  
 Wax Myrtle  
 Bottle Brush  
 Althea
- F. Large Perennials**  
 Blue Plumbago  
 Cigar Plant  
 Giant Spider Lilly  
 Gay Feather  
 Hill Country Aster  
 Indigo Spires  
 Mexican Bush Sage  
 Mexican Oregano  
 Pavoia  
 Rosemary  
 Shrimp Plant  
 Standing Cypress  
 Trailing Lantana
- G. Medium Perennials**  
 Autumn Sage  
 Bearded Iris  
 Calyophus  
 Day Lilly  
 Holly Fern  
 Lantana  
 Lindheimer's Guarra  
 Mealy Blue Sage  
 Moonbeam/Zagreb b. Coria  
 River Fern  
 Scarlet Bavardia  
 Tropical Sage  
 Winecup  
 Yarrow
- H. Small Perennials**  
 Baby Sun/Sunray Coreopsis  
 Blackfoot daisy  
 Damianita  
 Katie Petunia  
 Lamb's Ear  
 Prostrate Rosemary  
 Silver Dalea  
 Skullcap  
 Verbena
- I. Groundcovers**  
 Asiatic Jasmine  
 Lamb's Ear  
 Blue Shade  
 Calver Fern  
 English Ivy  
 Frog Fruit  
 Katie Petunia  
 Liriope  
 Mondo Grass  
 Pigeonberry  
 Prostrate Rosemary  
 Santolina  
 Silver Pony's Foot  
 Trailing Juniper

# Appendix Spotlight: Lots of Resources!

## Irrigation & maintenance best practices

Resource Name	Description
<a href="#"><u>International Irrigation Association Best Management Practices</u></a>	Best management practices for irrigation installation and maintenance for turf and landscape.
<a href="#"><u>A Field Guide to Healthy Landscapes (English)</u></a>	Healthy landscapes can be attractive and in balance with the local climate and environment, requiring minimal resources.
<a href="#"><u>A Field Guide to Healthy Landscapes (Spanish)</u></a>	
<a href="#"><u>How to Prune Trees</u></a>	A good guide for pruning trees from the US Department of Agriculture and the US Forest Service.
<a href="#"><u>A Watering Guide for Texas Landscapes</u></a>	A watering guide to ensure that water is applied only where and when its needed, from the Texas Water Development Board.
<a href="#"><u>Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Website</u></a>	A guide to common sense management of outdoor pests that uses the least toxic controls. From the City of Austin.

## Plant lists

Resource Name	Description
<a href="#"><u>Grow Green: Native and Adapted Landscape Plants, Texas AgriLife Extension</u></a>	A list of beautiful native and adapted plants for Central Texas which are naturally drought tolerant and resistant to pests and diseases. Invasive species to be avoided can also be found in this useful book.
<a href="#"><u>San Antonio River Authority Plant List</u></a>	A recommended plant list for the San Antonio River Basin.
<a href="#"><u>Texas A&amp;M Turfgrass Selection for Texas</u></a>	A list of turfgrasses adapted for different parts of Texas, with information about their drought tolerance and suitability for Central Texas landscapes.
<a href="#"><u>Garden Style San Antonio Grasses and Groundcovers</u></a>	A list of native and adapted grasses and groundcovers for Central Texas.
<a href="#"><u>Native American Seed - Native Seeds by Ecoregion</u></a>	A search tool for native seeds, including for turfgrass and wildflowers, that lets you filter based on Ecoregion, Sun Exposure, Soil Type, and Soil Moisture.
<a href="#"><u>Native Plant Society of Texas Plant Lists by Ecoregion</u></a>	A website that lets you view recommended native plant lists based on where you live in Texas.
<a href="#"><u>Native Plant Society of Texas Plant List for Kerrville</u></a>	This list contains colored photos of native plants suitable for Kerrville and the surrounding area.
<a href="#"><u>GEAA Watershed Stewardship Manual, Appendix C</u></a>	A plant list for the Edwards Aquifer region with colored photos. Plant list can be found starting on page 78.
<a href="#"><u>Invasive Species to Avoid</u></a>	The City of Austin has a good guide on managing invasives species, including a list and photos of invasive plants to avoid or remove.

We also provide a template to file a landscaping policy change with the county.

**Appendix A**  
**Landscaping Policy Change**  
**in Response to Texas Property Code 202.007**

The document below provides example language for existing HOAs to shift their landscaping policy to comply with section 202.007 of the Texas Property Code. Updates to an HOA’s landscaping policy should be filed in consultation with your lawyer.

**LANDSCAPING POLICY for the**  
**[insert name of HILL COUNTRY DEVELOPMENT]**

**STATE OF TEXAS**                   §  
   §  
**COUNTY OF [COUNTY]**       §

**WHEREAS**, Section 202.007 of the Texas Property Code was amended effective September 1, 2013, regarding the regulation of xeriscaping; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board of the Association desires to hereby establish a Landscaping Policy consistent with the provisions of Section 202.007 and to provide clear and definitive guidance to its members.

**NOW THEREFORE**, the Board has duly adopted the following Landscaping Policy (the “Policy”):

**LANDSCAPING POLICY**

**1. Background.**

Pursuant to Section 202.007 of the Texas Property Code, Association’s must not unreasonably restrict Owners who desire a landscape that saves water.

The advantages of native landscaping include: (a) Substantial cost savings on water bills; (b) Conservation of diminishing water resources; (c) Prevention of pollution from environmentally harmful run-off; (d) Reduced yard maintenance requirements; (e) Pride in knowing that you are protecting our fragile environment and limited resources; and (f) Aesthetic beauty and increased options for plant material.

**2. Approval for Changes.**

Prior to changing their landscape, a property owner must receive the advanced written approval of the ACC in accordance with the Declaration, subject to this Policy. When submitting the ACC request, the Owner must include the applicable processes and projected timelines. The request must include an outline of the project and a design plan, as well as details on the types of plants, the ground covers, border

# Questions?

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[Hillcountryalliance.org/hoaguide](http://Hillcountryalliance.org/hoaguide)

