

Our Water Future Is Not For Sale

By MEREDITH MCGUIRE, Co-Chair of the Alamo Sierra Club Conservation Committee

San Antonio's business-as-usual is putting our water future at risk. Last week Brooks City Base sought rush-rezoning approval to allow Niagara Bottling to put San Antonio's water in plastic bottles to sell nationwide. This, while San Antonio Water System (SAWS) wants us to spend \$3.4 billion on the Vista Ridge pipeline to bring incredibly expensive additional water to San Antonio. City Council fortunately paused the zoning deal, but it did not kill it. It should; it is a bad deal for our community.

The first problem is the very idea of having a bottling company in San Antonio. Despite recent rains, we are not a water-rich region. No water bottling company is sustainable here, no matter how much water we pipe in from other areas. Niagara is trying to get out of the Los Angeles region precisely because of California's water crisis. Why should San Antonio allow Niagara to come here to hasten our own?

If we are to be prepared for the impacts of climate change and the very real likelihood of severe droughts, San Antonio must protect our water supply vigilantly. We live in a semi-arid region that is going to experience, in the foreseeable future, what researchers call "unprecedented drought conditions." New data, reported this March in

the New York Times, suggest the strong probability of a 35-year-long drought before the end of this century. How can we withstand such a drought? Not by increasing consumption of water. Not by exempting existing commercial, industrial, and institutional SAWS customers from having to take appropriate measures to increase their water-efficiency. And certainly not by allowing water to new businesses whose profits come only from selling our water elsewhere.

SAWS' "solution" to our regularly dry circumstances is the costly Vista Ridge pipeline, which would bring supposedly "excess" water from Burleson County at a much higher price than water we already have. SAWS expects current residential rate-payers to pay for that pipeline, while giving new businesses like Niagara cut-rate access to the water that is already here.

SAWS calls Vista Ridge water "drought-proof." That is a gross misrepresentation. Water from the Carrizo-Wilcox aquifer is already being overcommitted and might not be there for us if drought conditions persist. Rather than encouraging increased conservation and water efficiency — especially from San Antonio businesses — SAWS and the

SAN ANTONIO'S SACRED WATER

By Kamala Platt

There are strong environmental, social justice-based and economic reasons for City Council to reject plans to bring a California Water Bottling Co. to San Antonio, but my words below speak to the deep history of waterways—interactions of peoples and water—in an attempt to understand what is more deeply at stake.

I came to live in San Antonio to teach at the University of the Incarnate Word. I had not been there long when someone told me about the Blue Hole—an ancient deep, deep spring on what is now UIW campus that has been visited for centuries by those seeking to live in league with the earth. The rising flow of waters—Yanaguana springs—reflect the health



The Blue Hole at the University of the Incarnate Word

of this place's water and her peoples' relationship to her. Understanding this, as a newcomer in 1997, I perceived I was a straggler on an ancient waterway.

After I decided to find a house here, I spent time in the neighborhoods I favored and found that in the heart of the city's west side, on an island and along the shores of Elmendorf Lake, a gathering of herons, egrets, and cormorants roosted in front of Our Lady of the Lake University. These birds may have helped me find a house 6 blocks away because once I noticed them I kept returning and eventually saw the "for sale" sign on my home, of now nearly 14 years. Over the years, the herons at the lake have offered a sense of solace when I was sad and celebration when I was happy, a sense of belonging to a world ordered by a balance of natural and cultural integrity; this "place of