



Figure 6. Ecologically significant Sabinal River segment (within TNRCC classified stream segment 2111) in Bandera County (Scale: 1 inch = 4 miles; Base map source: TxDOT County files).

Sabinal River

The Sabinal River rises in the northwestern corner of Bandera County north of Vanderpool and flows south about 40 miles into the Frio River in the southeastern corner of Uvalde County. The ecologically significant stream segment runs from the Bandera/Uvalde County line upstream to the most upstream crossing of Ranch Road 187 in Bandera County near the entrance to Lost Maples State Natural Area (SNA) (Fig. 6). The ecological significance of this segment is based upon the following criteria:

1. Biological function – The aquatic and riparian habitats (Figs.7 & 8) associated with the stream support an exceptionally diverse assemblage of invertebrates, fish, reptiles, and birds characteristic of the Edwards Plateau ecoregion. Willows, sycamore, bald cypress, and pecan dominate the riparian gallery forests. The surrounding slopes are dominated by plateau live oak and Ashe juniper.
2. Hydrologic function – This segment of the Sabinal River is spring-fed and is entirely within the Edwards Aquifer drainage area. It crosses the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone in northeastern Uvalde County. The Sabinal flows into the Frio River, which is impounded by Choke Canyon Reservoir. The Frio River flows into the Nueces River that provides freshwater inflow to the Nueces and Corpus Christi Bays, the latter being one of the state’s major estuaries. The fringing riparian habitats of the river function to improve the quality of runoff and groundwater discharge into the river, attenuate peak flood flows, and to some extent, stabilize base flows.

3. Riparian conservation area – Lost Maples SNA is a National Natural Landmark (Fig. 9). The SNA has been recommended for inclusion in the proposed Texas Natural Rivers Systems and the proposed Texas Trails System. It has been nominated for inclusion in the Heart of Texas Wildlife Trail.
4. High water quality/exceptional aquatic life/high aesthetic value – This segment has high water quality and exceptional aesthetic value¹⁴. Sabinal Canyon boasts limestone canyon walls up to 300 feet high. The SNA is renowned for the fall color provided by the only large stand of Bigtooth maples in the Central Texas Hill Country.
5. Threatened or endangered species/unique communities – The following rare species associated with aquatic or riparian habitats occur in or along this segment: the Golden-cheeked warbler (Fed.E, St.E), Black-capped vireo (Fed.E, St.E), and Zone-tailed hawk (St.T) use riparian forests for nesting, although they are not restricted to these habitats. The Tobusch fishhook cactus (Fed.E, St.E) is occasionally found in gravels along creek bottoms. The segment is a genetic refuge for pure strain Guadalupe bass (state fish of Texas). Lost Maples SNA contains a large isolated stand of Uvalde Bigtooth maple; the only good stand in the Central Texas Hill Country.



Figure 7. RR 187 crossing the Sabinal River north of Jones in Bandera County. Note the riparian gallery forests fringing the river (See Fig. 8). Source: Vanderpool DOQ, 1995, 1m CIR.



Figure 8. Sabinal River at RR 187 crossing north of Jones in Bandera County (11/20/00)
(See Fig. 7).



Figure 9. Sabinal River in Lost Maples State Natural Area (11/20/00).