



IT'S ALL ABOUT WATER AT GOVERNMENT CANYON STATE NATURAL AREA. AS A KARST PRESERVE, WE'RE HELPING PROTECT FRESH WATER FOR CENTRAL TEXAS. AS A STATE NATURAL AREA, OUR MISSION IS PRESERVING THIS KARST ENVIRONMENT AS WELL AS MANY OTHER RESOURCES, INCLUDING ENDANGERED SPECIES HABITAT, DINOSAUR TRACKS, AND MANY HISTORIC SITES.



As a State Natural Area, our mission is to protect our natural and cultural resources, including the Recharge Zone and accompanying karst landscape, wildlife habitat, native plants, sensitive archeological areas, ancient dinosaur tracks, and more.

Get to know your site! Attend an interpretive program, go on a hike, join our family of volunteers or chat with staff. You'll gain a greater appreciation of your natural area and you may even want to get involved!

Government Canyon State Natural Area
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INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

GOVERNMENT CANYON

STATE NATURAL AREA





Karst does not filter water, making the aquifer vulnerable to pollution.

WHAT IS KARST?

In San Antonio, most of our fresh water comes from the Edwards Aquifer. Rain recharges this aquifer when it falls on a karst landscape. “Karst” describes a landscape where rainwater dissolves a type of limestone, forming connected cavities that store and move rainwater underground.

The Edwards Aquifer has three zones: the Contributing, Recharge, and Artesian zones. The Contributing Zone catches rain and moves it downhill to the Recharge Zone. There, cracks and caves swallow vast amounts of water. Underground water flows to the Artesian Zone through pores and caverns. Finally, the rainwater resurfaces in springs or man-made wells.

Government Canyon State Natural Area protects thousands of acres of Recharge Zone, and portions of the others.

The San Antonio skyline
from Chula Vista Overlook

IT'S ALL ABOUT WATER

Water has always shaped the stories of this landscape. Around 104 million years ago, during the Cretaceous Period, water brought dinosaurs here. Two species left their tracks along the ancient shores of the Gulf of Mexico. Today, you can take a strenuous hike to see the tracks of theropods, two-legged meat-eaters, and sauropods, long-necked four-legged giants.

Much later, Native Americans temporarily began camping near springs. By the 1700s, Europeans began looking for minerals and farmland in the canyon's floodplain area. In the early 1850s, government surveyors established a military supply route through this area. Locals nicknamed it the “government road” in the “government's canyon” which stuck to this day.

The abundant water and grass supported farming and ranching in this area from 1860 until relatively recently. Families like the Hoffmanns, Kallisons and Zizelmans depended on fresh water to support their livelihood.

San Antonio's dependence on the aquifer Recharge Zone caused concern about development in the 1980s. Water started connecting people through common causes. Civic and environmental groups formed the Government Canyon Coalition in 1991, hoping to purchase this property and protect a section of rapidly disappearing Recharge Zone from further development. A State Natural Area was about to be born.



PARTNERS IN PRESERVATION

Government Canyon State Natural Area is a model for the future of public lands in Texas. In 1991, 45 civic and environmental organizations, called the Government Canyon Coalition, partnered with the Trust for Public Land to preserve this area. The Coalition and its community partners acquired 4,717 acres in 1993, creating what would eventually become one of our nation's largest metropolitan wilderness areas. This collaboration has continued, expanding the Natural Area to over 13,000 acres by 2025.

THANK YOU, PARTNERS

*Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Government Canyon Coalition
San Antonio Water System
Edwards Aquifer Authority
Trust for Public Land
City of San Antonio
Bexar County*

