
Hualde Leader-News

Editorial: Rivers are lifeblood of region

January 10, 2021

The owners of a youth camp near Vanderpool have filed a request for a permit to discharge 60,000 gallons of treated wastewater per day into a tributary of the Sabinal River. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, which has jurisdiction in the matter, should deny the requested permit out of hand.

Young Life purchased the former Camp Lonehollow on Ranch to Market Road 187, just south of Vanderpool, in 2019. The new owners want to build a wastewater treatment facility that would discharge the effluent into a nearby stream, which eventually connects with Long Hollow Creek and the Sabinal River just north of Utopia.

Details: The permit request is under review, and community members can submit a comment and request that TCEQ hold a public meeting by visiting the website at tceq.texas.gov.

The Young Life permit number is WQ0015892001.

One has to wonder why camp management feels compelled to seek the discharge permit when, if those in opposition are correct, a septic system is already in place. And if the current system is no longer viable, why not install a zero-discharge system similar to the ones being used by the majority of other camps – as many as 81 – already operating in the area?

These are questions being posed by Utopia land owner Greg Walton, other community members and a long list of stakeholders that includes the Nueces River Authority, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Friends of Lost Maples, the Bandera Canyonlands Alliance, Keep Utopia Beautiful and Hill Country Alliance, per Save our Sabinal.

Anne Rogers Harrison, Water Quality Program leader with TPWD, detailed in a letter to TCEQ last month reasons to reject the discharge permit. She included the fact that rapid development of the Hill Country requires increased vigilance of the region's rivers to avoid polluting them.

Also, the Nueces River Authority maintains there were five wastewater permits in the Upper Nueces River, of which Long Hollow and the Sabinal are part of, none of which allowed for the discharge of wastewater into the streams of the Nueces headwaters. Instead the entities are using wastewater effluent for irrigation.

Granting the requested permit to Young Life would set an unwelcome and completely unnecessary precedent for wastewater discharge into one of our pristine rivers. The rivers that course through our region of the Hill Country are our most precious natural resource. We should leave no stone unturned in protecting them.