

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.C.R. 63
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AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

For thousands of years, the mermaid has been one of the most striking symbols of humanity's connection with the natural world, and over the past century, this legendary figure has come to represent the city of San Marcos and its special relationship to the water resources of Central Texas.

The story of the mermaid in San Marcos begins with the abundant springs that every day release 100 million gallons of freshwater from the Edwards Aquifer into the San Marcos River. Considered a sacred place by Native Americans, and regarded as the creation site of the Coahuiltecan, the springs have drawn people to their banks for more than 11,500 years, making this area what is thought to be one of the oldest continually inhabited sites in North America.

In 1845, Edward Burleson, a former vice president of the Republic of Texas, dammed the headwaters of the San Marcos River, thereby creating Spring Lake. Over the ensuing years, the water from the lake powered gristmills, sawmills, an ice factory, and an electric light works. The San Marcos River also constituted an important water stop along the Chisholm Trail.

A. B. Rogers bought Edward Burleson's homestead in the 1920s and built a resort hotel on the shore of the lake. He later began offering rides in glass-bottomed boats that allowed visitors to see through the crystal water to the bubbling springs beneath. His son Paul, who succeeded him, established the Aquarena Springs amusement park on the property and in 1950 built an underwater theater, where young women known as "aquamaids" staged exhibitions of synchronized swimming and underwater ballet. At the peak of its popularity, the park drew up to 350,000 visitors every year and was featured in Life magazine, and the submerged theater was featured on the cover of Popular Mechanics. In time, the show came to include Glurpo, a pipe smoking clown, and a swimming pig named Ralph.

The performances continued until the 1990s, when Texas State University acquired the park and set a new course for the property. Today, the site hosts the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment, which conducts research and educational programs focused on promoting sustainable water management and environmental stewardship. The critical nature of the center's work is underscored by the fact that the Edwards Aquifer supplies drinking water to several million people and serves as the principal source of water for agriculture and industry throughout the region, while waters discharged by the aquifer also support recreation and tourism. In addition, the aquifer system sustains over 40 highly adapted species and a number that are either threatened or endangered, including five found in the San Marcos Springs and a stretch of river just below the springs.

In 2016, the Mermaid Society of San Marcos was created to foster harmony among the varied interests of environmentalism, the arts, and economic growth. The society has established an annual Mermaid Week, which includes a parade, the Mermaid Society Ball, and the Mermaid SPLASH Festival.

Through its arts program and with revenue from its hotel occupancy tax, the City of San Marcos has funded a number of mermaid-themed works of public art, including a mural and a series of seven-foot-tall statues decorated by various artists.

By adopting the mermaid as a symbol of the city, the people of San Marcos are encouraging public interest in the natural environment and highlighting the central role that their community is playing in preserving the water resources of the Lone Star State.

RESOLVED

That the 86th Legislature of the State of Texas designate San Marcos as the Mermaid Capital of Texas.

That, in accordance with the provisions of Section 391.003(e), Government Code, this designation remain in effect until the 10th anniversary of its designation.