

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

Senate Research Center

C.S.S.C.R. 9  
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Administration  
4/7/2021  
Committee Report (Substituted)

### **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 1849, Edward Burleson, a former vice president of the Republic of Texas, dammed the headwaters of the San Marcos, 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 the Burleson 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 clear water to the bubbling springs beneath. His son Paul, who succeeded him, established the Aquarena Springs amusement park on the property, and in 1950 he 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, with the submerged theater making it to 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 its work is underscored by the fact that the Edwards Aquifer supplies drinking water to nearly two million people and serves as the principal source of water for agriculture, industry, and recreation throughout the region. The aquifer system sustains over 40 highly adapted species, a number of which are either threatened or endangered, including several found in the San Marcos springs and a stretch of river just below.

In 2016, the Mermaid Society of Texas, headquartered in San Marcos, was created to foster harmony between environmental sustainability, the arts, and economic growth. The society has established an annual Mermaid SPLASH festival, which includes a parade, the Mermaid Art Ball, and the riverside Aqua Faire celebration. Moreover, the city has funded mermaid-themed public art through a program supported by the hotel occupancy tax; among the works underwritten by this initiative are murals and a series of seven-foot-tall statues, each one decorated by a different artist.

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 their community is playing in preserving the water resources of the Lone Star State.

**RESOLVED**

That the 87th Legislature of the State of Texas hereby designate the city of San Marcos as the official 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 the date this resolution is finally passed by the legislature.