

The Bandera PROPHECY

July 12, 2021

Young Life Wastewater Permit opposition continues to grow - petition poised to achieve 25,000 signatures

The Save Our Sabinal petition launched earlier this year on Change.org by the Bandera Canyonlands Alliance is close to achieving top-tier status on the on-line platform. More than 24,000 people have signed the petition and with approximately another thousand signatures it will become one of the most-signed petitions on Change.org. The petition may be viewed at: <http://chng.it/6DNz6f5RXr>

The Bandera Canyonlands Alliance petition is part of an effort to provide information about the controversial wastewater discharge permit applied for by the Colorado-based Young Life organization at their new camp between Vanderpool and Utopia, along the Sabinal River. Leaders of the Young Life LoneHollow Ranch are asking for legal permission to build a wastewater treatment plant and release up to 60,000 gallons of treated sewage per day into a tributary of the Sabinal River.

“We find it hard to understand why Young Life, a valued, well-respected Christian organization with stated high environmental values would consider such an approach to deal with their wastewater,” BCA President Merry Langlais said. “This proposed permit puts the Sabinal River and others in the Upper Nueces River Basin at risk. If this permit is granted it will set a concerning precedent because it would be the first ever permit to allow the release of treated wastewater into the Upper Nueces River Basin which includes the Sabinal, Frio and Nueces Rivers. Unfortunately, with the Texas Legislature’s failure to pass legislation to protect our last pure rivers this permit poses even more risks for the future of the Sabinal River.”

When treated sewage is introduced into a low-flow Hill Country waterway like the Sabinal, it creates algae blooms that rob the aquatic ecosystem of oxygen and make the water cloudy and unappealing to

both humans and wildlife. This is because treated sewage contains higher levels of nutrients, such as Phosphorus and Nitrogen, than exist in these naturally nutrient-deficient waterways. There are numerous examples of this damage occurring in other rivers in the Hill Country. In fact, the nutrient levels that Young Life proposes discharging are many times more than what is presently in the waters of the Sabinal.

“It’s all about the precedent. This Young Life permit would open the doors for others to obtain similar wastewater discharge permits and cause severe damage to our river,” Langlinais said. “Many local businesses depend on visitors to the area who are attracted by the clear waters and abundant wildlife. We want Young Life to respond to community concerns and adopt a Zero Discharge plan with binding restrictions that would prevent any treated sewage discharge into these waters.”

The group has also launched an informational video outlining the issue and the risk to the Sabinal River. The video can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/526591042>

Area landowners, small businesses, and those who enjoy recreation in this area are opposed to these plans because of potential damage to the river. There are proven options that would allow the camp to manage its wastewater without having to damage the Sabinal.

Recently, the Bandera County Commissioners joined the Uvalde and Real County Commissioners in passing resolutions opposing the Young Life permit application. These local governments along with the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, Friends of Lost Maples, the Nueces River Authority, Keep Utopia Beautiful, Sabinal Canyon Coalition and the Bandera Canyonlands Alliance all either oppose the permit or have raised serious questions about the Young Life permit application.

The Young Life Texas Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (WQ 0015892001) permit is in the technical review stage at the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). Once that is complete it is expected that the TCEQ will schedule a Public Meeting to allow citizens a chance to ask questions of Young Life and declare opposition. BCA encourages those who are opposed to this permit to file official

comments asking that the permit be denied by the TCEQ. Information about how to do that can be found here: [https://banderacanyonlandsalliance.org/q- a](https://banderacanyonlandsalliance.org/q-a).