



# Delta Sierran

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april

Delta Chapter Newsletter [www.louisiana.sierraclub.org](http://www.louisiana.sierraclub.org) March/April 2008

## Club Has New Regional Staff Person

Sierra Club Friends – On behalf of the staff of the Sierra Club’s Southeast Office, I would like to welcome Jill Mastrototaro as our new Senior Regional Representative – Manager (Northern Gulf Coast). Jill will manage the delivery of our programs within the states of Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. She will begin her service to the Sierra Club effective March 10 and will be based in New Orleans, LA. Our office in Baton Rouge, LA will then be closed.

A native of Connecticut, Jill has also spent the past decade residing in the New Orleans, LA area. Over the past eight and a half years Jill has led advocacy and outreach efforts for the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation in southeast Louisiana’s 10,000-square mile watershed.

Jill’s experience includes monitoring and lobbying state and federal laws including the Clean Water Act and the National Environmental Policy Act, spearheading a coalition to protect cypress forests, launching a campaign on sprawl using multiple media outlets, leading the state’s first effort to quantify wetland loss from unplanned development, and creating and implementing regional strategic conservation plans.

Her successes include leading a broadly based coalition in getting Wal-Mart to stop the purchase and sale of cypress mulch harvested or manufactured in Louisiana, thwarting proposals such as cell towers, subdivisions, or a 10,000-acre airport in ecologically sensitive



areas, protecting already stressed waterways from receiving millions of gallons of wastewater effluent, and mobilizing hundreds of volunteers to protect natural resources.

Jill has authored a myriad of resources such as, A Citizen’s Guide to Protecting Wetlands in the Pontchartrain Basin, and more recently, Growing Smarter: Guidelines for Low Impact Development in the Pontchartrain Basin, which have engaged and trained thousands of citizens. Jill is the founding Vice-President of the Land Trust for Southeast Louisiana, the only grassroots-based, land conservation group active in the state, and she chairs the Land Committee, negotiating land acquisitions and to-

date securing \$100,000 in endowment funds. She also is working to create a regional Gulf Coast network of land conservation groups. Jill serves on the board of Smart Growth for Louisiana, a non-profit working to encourage responsible land use throughout the state.

She holds a Masters Degree in Environmental Policy from the State University of New York – College of Environmental Science and Forestry (Syracuse, NY) and a Bachelor of Science Degree in Environmental Science from the University of Rochester (Rochester, NY).

We hope that you will join us in welcoming Jill to the Sierra Club family. She can be reached by email at [jillmastrototarosc@cox.net](mailto:jillmastrototarosc@cox.net). I’m sure that Jill would welcome hearing from you.



Earl’s Pearls Returns with a visit from an old friend.



# View From the Chair



Snapshot – Haywood Martin  
Chair – Delta Chapter, Sierra  
Club

Hi, I am Haywood (Woody) Martin and I have been a Sierra Club member since 1978. I joined the club while living in New Mexico and working for the New Mexico Environment Department. While in New Mexico I went on many Sierra Club outings and worked on surface water quality, drinking water quality, wilderness designation, forest

protection issues and on protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve. I retired from full time employment in New Mexico in January 2004, and moved with my wife Clarity to Lafayette Louisiana.

We moved here because we like to play music and there is a great local music scene here in southwest Louisiana. Both of us are fiddle players. We like to play music with friends in the numerous Cajun and other music jams around Lafayette.

On the cultural side my mother's family came over to the mid western part of the US from French Canada so I have studied the language and have always felt comfortable around French speaking people and their music.

As Sierra Club chair I would like to push climate change awareness and remedial action in Louisiana. This includes the coal fight and the potential for city, state, and regional climate protection agreements. I think we have to make films such as "Kilowatt Ours" available to everyone, and continue taking this issue to governing bodies at all levels. The other big issue that interests me personally is the logging and oil industry damage to the Atchafalaya basin and coastal wetlands. Cypress logging and oil field channel cutting and spoils pile deposition are problem areas in which we can engage directly to make a difference for the better.

I want to complement Leslie March, outgoing chair, for her excellent work on behalf of the Delta Chapter, especially during the time when Katrina greatly increased the number of issues that had to be addressed urgently. Fortunately for us she has agreed to stay on as Conservation Chair. I am impressed with the ongoing efforts of Delta Chapter Sierra Club members in many areas including gulf coast environmental restoration, bringing a stop to cypress logging for mulch, and in developing awareness of the mercury problem and forcing remedial action for oil field mercury poisoning. I look forward to working with an excellent group of committed environmental activists to make progress on issues of importance for all of us.

The Delta Sierran is a bi-monthly publication of the Delta Chapter of the Sierra Club. Members of the Delta Chapter receive the publication as a membership benefit. Non-members may subscribe by sending a check for \$12.00 for one annual membership to the Delta Chapter at P. O. Box 19469, New Orleans, LA 70179-0469. Back issues of the Delta Sierran can be viewed on our website at <http://louisiana.sierraclub.org>.

**Address Changes:** To change your address, send your name, old and new addresses and member number to:

Sierra Club Member Services  
PO Box 52968

Boulder, Colorado 80322-2968

or email the information to:

[address.changes@sierraclub.org](mailto:address.changes@sierraclub.org)

Submissions: Article and photograph submissions are always welcome. Please send submissions to the newsletter editor at [lesliemarch@hotmail.com](mailto:lesliemarch@hotmail.com) or mail to Leslie March, 67017 Dolan St., Mandeville, LA 70471

# COAL CAMPAIGN NEWS

If you haven't been called by Eli Rosenfeld yet, you will hear from him soon so we thought we should introduce him and his dog Charley to you. Eli is a Green Corps organizer. He is spending a year training to organize grass roots around environmental issues. The Delta Chapter is fortunate enough to have him help us out on the campaign against Little Gypsy and Big Cajun. So here is a little information about Eli. As for Charley, Eli adopted him in Budapest last year and he brought him to help our campaign.

Eli was born and raised in Washington, DC and studied at Oberlin College. His dad is a physician and his mom is a lawyer. He is currently living in Baton Rouge working as a Conservation Organizer with the local Sierra Club chapter to prevent the building and expansion of coal-fired power plants.

Entergy Louisiana currently has plans to convert the Little Gypsy power plant from natural gas to coal-fired and to expand the Big Cajun plant right here in Louisiana. The Sierra Club is launching a huge national campaign to pressure Entergy Louisiana to pull its proposals for coal plants and invest in renewable energy. Rallies, publicity events, call-in days to the CEO -- we're doing it all here in Baton Rouge.

Over the past several years, in the absence of any significant public dialogue, plans have emerged to build over 100 new coal-fired power plants across the United States. This departure from two decades of shifting to cleaner energy sources is threatening to derail local, state, and federal efforts now underway to address climate change. This backward policy would also dramatically increase our use of coal, laying waste to communities.

Scientists tell us we need to cut carbon emissions 80% by 2050, starting right away, in order to fight global warming. Building this new generation of plants would add 790 million tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere every year,

carrying us beyond the disastrous tipping point.

These new plants will also have serious implications for public health. Pollution from coal-fired power plants already contributes to more than 24,000 premature deaths every year. Asthma, a condition which can be caused and is aggravated by air pollution, has emerged as a national epidemic affecting 30 million Americans. And, one in six U.S. women of childbearing age has levels of mercury in her blood high enough to put her baby at risk of developmental and cognitive damage. Fallout from coal plants is the largest source of unregulated mercury pollution in the U.S. Despite claims to the contrary, these proposed new plants would not replace the existing fleet of old ones and would not improve air quality.

Central Appalachia now provides a substantial amount of the nation's coal, second only to Wyoming's Power River Basin. As laws and environmental protections have been cast aside, these coal operations are relying more and more on mountaintop removal mining. More than 1,200 miles of streams and 400,000 acres of temperate forests in Appalachia have been destroyed as coal companies blow the tops off mountains and dump millions of tons of waste rock into the valleys below. Mountaintop removal mining has the potential to become a powerful symbol of what is wrong with our nation's energy policies.

Proponents of coal are looking for every possible handout, from loan guarantees for risky new coal plants to subsidies to jumpstart an entirely new liquid coal industry—even though liquid coal releases double the global warming emissions per gallon as regular gasoline.

To move beyond coal, we need smart energy investments, not polluting and risky coal power. Numerous scientific studies addressing both national



*Eli and Charley*

and state needs have shown that a combination of energy efficiency and renewable fuels can readily meet future energy demand. Public demand for green power and advocacy for an aggressive national Renewable Energy Standard will help further market those opportunities. The potential for job creation for manufacturing, installation, and maintenance of renewable power stations is enormous.

For more information on the campaign and how to get involved call Eli at 703-627-2378.

Monroe/Bastrap and Environs

***Be watching for a postcard about an important meeting in your area.***

***Are you an Entergy LA consumer?***

***Please email [cleanenergy2008@msn.com](mailto:cleanenergy2008@msn.com). We need to know how many of our members are ratepayers.***

# Chapter News

Have you ever considered getting involved with the Sierra Club on a state level? Do you live in an area where there isn't an active group? Here is your chance to get more involved with the club. We are looking for volunteers in a variety of roles.

We need activists to serve on all of the chapter issue committees. A list of committees and contact information is on the back of the newsletter.

In particular, we are looking for these positions,

## Chapter Outings Leaders

Would you like to share your love of the outdoors with other Sierrans? Work with the group outings leaders to revitalize our state-wide outings program. We will provide all necessary training you will need, both leadership and medical.

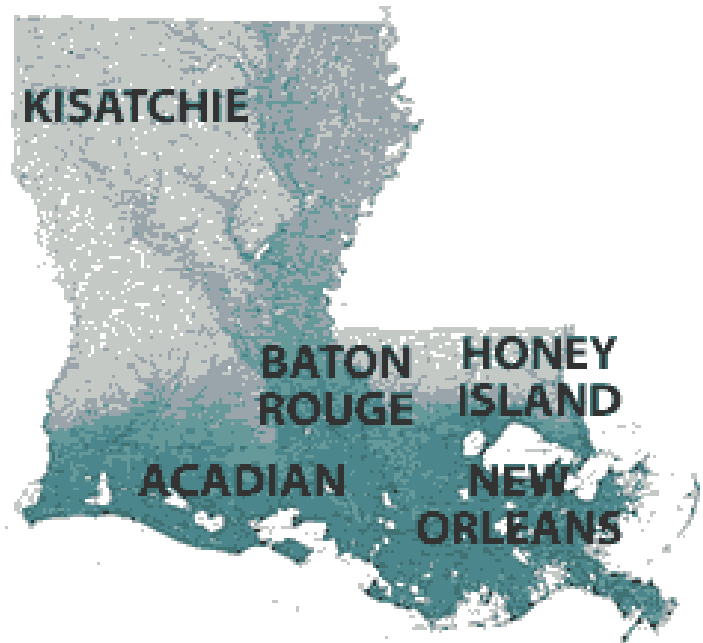
## Newsletter Committee

We need a person with a sense of humor, patience and dedication to the environment to layout, edit and do some writing for a quarterly mailed and web newsletter. The newsletter is mailed out by a mail house so no mailing parties. This person will work with the chapter's web masters to put out a short e-newsletter bimonthly. Person needs regular access to a computer with XP or Vista on it. Desktop publishing experience is useful but not necessary. We will be glad to teach you.

## Chapter Assistant

We need two or three retired or just have some extra time to volunteer to answer phones, help with some computer input and light clerical work in our soon to be opened New Orleans office. We would ask the person to commit to come in once a week for 2-3 hours. This position would start in April.

If you are interested in any of these positions or want to get more involved in another capacity with the club, please contact Woody Martin at [hmartin2sc@cox.net](mailto:hmartin2sc@cox.net) or Leslie March, 985-871-6695 [llesliemarch@hotmail.com](mailto:llesliemarch@hotmail.com).



## Volunteer Opportunities Save the Date for Earth Day 2008

Check with your local  
group website

### April 22, 2008



Sierra Club Outings

**ANNOUNCEMENT**  
**Get your newsletter online...saves postage and time. email [llesliemarch@msn.com](mailto:llesliemarch@msn.com)**  
**Get the news first.**

**Hiking, Canoeing,  
Campfires  
Great Company and Good  
Food.**  
**Come join us!**  
Check your local group

# Chapter Excom Meets



*Left to right back row Sandra Thompson, Aaron Viles, front row Dean Wilson, Nancy Grush, Leslie March, Woody Martin and Barry Kohl*

The first chapter meeting for 2008 was held at the Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center in Baton Rouge. The meeting was hosted by the Baton Rouge Group. Thank you to Charlie Fryling, Sandra Thompson and Nancy Grush for taking care of the arrangements. The meeting was held January 13th and 14th. Excom members, Sierrans and invited guests discussed various environmental issues facing the state including the conversion of natural gas plants to coal, saving cypress trees from mulch machines and concerns about the Army Corps of Engineer's practices for obtaining Borrow among other state-wide issues. A presentation was given on the Multiple Lines of Defense study by its author John Lopez of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation.

The chapter business meeting commenced on the morning of January 14. The election commit-

tee announced that Leigh Haney, Leslie March and Dean Wilson were elected as chapter representatives at large for the 2008-2010 term. In addition the board elected the new officers for 2008. Haywood "Woody" Martin of Lafayette was elected Chair, Nancy Grush of Baton Rouge will serve as Vice Chair. Aaron Viles will remain as Secretary. Leslie March was appointed Conservation Chair. For a full list of issue chairs, you can access our issue chairs list on

[www.clubhouse.sierraclub.org](http://www.clubhouse.sierraclub.org) on the Wild database. User Wild User Password Chorizo.

The next chapter meeting will be hosted by the Honey Island Group on May 17th and 18th in Mandeville, LA. May 17th at the Causeway Branch of the St. Tammany Public Library, 3457 Highway 190, Mandeville, LA 70471. May 18th at 67017 Dolan St., Mandeville, La 70471

All members and interested parties are welcome.

see page 11 for more pictures

## **SPRING GARDEN TIP FRIENDS DON'T LET FRIENDS USE CYPRESS MULCH**

**PROTECT OUR COASTAL FORESTS BY USING  
ALTERNATIVES LIKE PINE STRAW AND  
EUCALYPTUS**

# Spotlight on Membership

*Contributed by Aaron Viles, New Orleans Group*

Member profile: Byron Almquist

History of membership: Sierra member since 1969. First joined in Houston, Texas. Moved to New Orleans in the early 70's. First New Orleans Group Outings Chair. Recently New Orleans Group Program Chair.

Byron, like many members, first got involved because of the outings program. As a NASA Budget Analyst in Houston, he was bitten by the wilderness bug. Byron joined a canoe club, bought a canoe, a backpack and a sailboat. After learning the Houston Sierra Club had an outings program, he joined up with them as well.

Thinking back to those first trips and outings, Byron recalls, "I remember I really enjoyed it, and continue to enjoy it, more than any other thing I can imagine - there's so much beauty in the out-of-doors that cities just can't offer. I remember a misty paddle on the Guadalupe River in the Central Texas High country west of Houston. It was just so gorgeous. I was hooked."

Shortly after getting involved with the Club, Byron moved to New Orleans. "The New Orleans Group was just getting started, and since I had been on maybe one outing with the Club in Houston, I became the Outings Chair."

Byron is currently one of the biggest advocates for paddling in New Orleans, and after being profiled in the Times-Picayune a number of times, he's developed a certain amount of credibility on the issue. "I love New Orleans because there's more canoeing in two hours than any other city in the country." Byron breaks the canoeing into three different categories:

Flowing rivers, like the Bogue Chitto River, Tangipahoa River, and Black Creek in MS. "These are easier to get from point a to point b; simple to put in at one location, and pull out at a set point down the river."

Forested flood plains, or cypress swamps like Honey Island Swamp and the Atchafalaya Basin. "These are terrific adventure locations - no trails, no obvious path, you can strike out and explore."

Wetlands around New Orleans. "The



*Byron in his element*

close-in wetlands and swamps, these are great. There is more visible wildlife like birds—especially in the winter”.

“Add the streams, the flood lands and the near wetlands - there's just far, far, more paddling within two hours than any other city, and so few people realize it.” When pressed, Byron will admit that he's extremely prejudiced. “For the past thirty years, I've been trying to get people out of doors locally, to make sure people know they don't have to go to Yellowstone or Yosemite to have an amazing out-of-doors experience.”

Byron's passion for the outdoors led him to start a small retail, outfitter store - “Canoe and Trail Shop,” selling canoes, camping gear, etc. at Bayou St. John, and leading trips on the side. But he learned he was a “terrible retailer and didn't really enjoy it, but I loved the trips and taking people into the wilderness.” So now he spends his time leading “Canoe and Trail Adventures.”

One of the most important ways Byron has been getting folks outside is his “Wilderness Skills” courses at the University of New Orleans. “This is by far the best way to learn the skills of canoeing, backpacking. I've done that for 25 years, training hundreds of people

in these skills.”

But it's definitely not the only way Byron gets folks outside. He also keeps supremely busy leading commercial trips, moonlight paddles, weekend backpack and canoeing trips, a handful of week long, out-of-state, backpacking trips, as well as educational outings sponsored by the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, both for adults and students.

While Byron spends as much of his time as possible outside, he realizes that the areas he enjoys so much took a lot of people a lot of time inside, attending hearings, writing comments and advocating for conservation of these important areas. “Hopefully people will be aware that it takes work, and political stances to preserve or enhance these outdoor areas. It takes supporting politicians that are supportive of the outdoors. Commercial interests, whether it's timber or oil have greater resources and are very focused on what they want. They can influence our politicians with contributions and lobbying.” Byron understands the challenges of working to defend the environment. “The folks who love the outdoors and are sympathetic are fragmented, diverse and an unorganized community - vs. the very focused interests for example, of an

*cont on page 11*



# Acadian Activities and Meetings

## Group

### ACADIAN GROUP BOARD & CONSERVATION COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Acadian Group of the Sierra Club holds its' Board and Conservation Committee meetings on the 2nd Wednesday of every month at the Acadiana Symphony Building (412 Travis St., Lafayette, LA) at 6:30 PM.

### ACADIAN GROUP GENERAL MEETING & LECTURE SERIES

Acadian Group of the Sierra Club has a general meeting and hosts a guest lecture on the 3rd Wednesday of every month at the Acadiana Symphony Building at 6:30 PM.

The Acadian Group of the Sierra Club is always looking for speakers. Past speakers have talked about wildlife, native plants, invasive species, reforestation, environmental education, the news media, and environmental concerns of local or global nature.

Wed, Mar 12 @ 6:30 pm Acadian Group Conservation Meeting at 412 Travis St., Lafayette

Sat, Mar 15-16 @ 1:00 pm Atchafalaya Basin Overnight Canoe Trip Call Harold 337-234-4042

Wed, Mar 19 @ 6:30 pm Acadian Group General Meeting at 412 Travis St., Lafayette

Sun, Mar 23 @ 7:00 pm Ecologic, Acadiana Open Channel 5, Live Call-In

Wed, Apr 9 @ 6:30 pm Acadian Group Conservation Meeting at 412 Travis St., Lafayette

Wed, Apr 16 @ 6:30 pm Acadian Group General Meeting at 412 Travis St., Lafayette

Sun, Apr 20 @ 1 pm Vermilion, Cameron,

Calcasieu Marsh tour – Weenie roast at Rutherford Beach – Watch Sunset over the Gulf of Mexico Call Harold 337-234-4042

Thurs-Sun, Apr 24-27 Festival International – Downtown Lafayette, Sierra Club table display

Sun, Apr 27 @ 7:00 pm Ecologic, Acadiana Open Channel 5, Live Call-In

*Curious about national policies, issues. Need tools for arguments or to recruit activists. Want to know who to talk to ?*

*Check out Clubhouse*

[www.clubhouse.sierraclub.org](http://www.clubhouse.sierraclub.org) user name is clubhouse password explore



**SIERRA CLUB**  
FOUNDED 1892

Explore, enjoy and protect the planet



### SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SIERRA CLUB

We send out an appeal in March to each of our members, asking for contributions directly to our Chapter. These contributions really do make a difference to us, and are an important part of our Chapter's budget.

When you make a donation to the Chapter, you support the Sierra Club's work in your own backyard. You allow us to continue our work to protect wilderness and wildlife, to improve the quality of life in our cities, and to promote the enjoyment of nature.

Please be as generous as you are able - and remember, these funds directly affect your way of life in your neighborhood.

Contributions, gifts and dues to the Sierra Club are not tax-deductible.

**Mail your contribution to:**  
PO Box 19469, New Orleans, LA 70179-0469

# Baton Rouge Group News



Mayor-President Melvin "Kip" Holden spoke to the local Sierra Club at Jones Creek Library on Wednesday, January 30, 2008. About 50 people attended. Holden updated the club on accomplishments of this administration including efforts with Baton Rouge Green and other similar organizations.

Of special interest to the Sierra Club is the "Cool Cities" initiative begun after the Kyoto agreement was signed in 2005. Over 700 mayors, in conjunction with the U.S. Conference on Mayors, have signed the Cool Cities resolution, which includes ideas for involving the public in the environmental effort. Mayor Holden, along with three other Louisiana mayors, signed the resolution several years ago. At the meeting he stated that he would appoint an advisory committee to work with the Tree and Landscape Commission to work on an inventory of the city's achievements and to make a plan for public involvement. A representative of the Baton Rouge Group will be appointed to this committee.

On another front, the Baton Rouge Loop project has residents in the neighborhoods on the proposed route very upset. In addition a coalition of groups including the Sierra Club is concerned about the consequences of the route on Spanish Bayou. The Baton Rouge Group is opposed to the Loop and will need the support of area members to campaign against it. Members will be needed to help plan this campaign, write letters, make signs etc. Please contact Nancy Grush at 225-381-9440 or [nancygrush@bellsouth.net](mailto:nancygrush@bellsouth.net) if you can lend a few hours to help.

Next Baton Rouge Group meeting is at the Jones Creek Library  
7PM March 26th - Two guest speakers on solar systems for your home. Solar tour bus will be on site.  
April 30th - Next General Meeting.

Serving St. Tammany, Washington, Tangipahoa and Livingston Parishes. Honey Island Group members work on diverse issues from stopping cypress clear cutting, preventing household hazardous waste from being sent to landfills, promoting curbside recycling and protecting wetlands. We are also educating the public on energy efficiency and applying conservation to our own lives. Our community meets on the third Thursday of the month, alternating between Excom meeting and General meetings. All members welcome at all meetings. We are in transition for a meeting place right now so check our website or call Warren Zimmermann at 985-871-6695 for meeting information.

## Northshore Residents

We are looking for members that are interested in energy conservation and climate change, who would like to get together for dinner or coffee to share ideas and learn more about how we can make our own lives more energy efficient. We can do research together and invite experts in to give us hands on skills so we can go home and apply them. If there is enough interest we could form a buying club and buy materials like radiant barrier, insulation and other relevant materials at a wholesale cost. If this piques your interest please contact [cleanenergy2008@msn.com](mailto:cleanenergy2008@msn.com).

The Baton Rouge group is located in and around our State Capital. Our members have been active in the Save Our Cypress Coalition, alternative transportation and trying to get East Baton Rouge signed on to the Cool Cities campaign. Our group is going through a reorganization and needs your volunteer help. If you would like to become more active on conservation issues or lead an outing or just want to come to a meeting check out our website at <http://batonrouge.sierraclub.org>





In case you haven't noticed the New Orleans Group is meeting in a **NEW LOCATION** at the Audubon Zoo, Dominion Auditorium near the main entrance, 6500 Magazine St. Drive to the front entrance to the Zoo, just off Magazine St. Walk to the right of the Zoo's main public entrance, go through gate and bear right to the Dominion Auditorium. Map and directions can be found on our web site here: <http://louisiana.sierraclub.org/neworleans/calendar.htm>

New Orleans Group Meetings are held on the second Sunday of the month at 7PM. Admission is free and all are welcome.

The Group Excom meets monthly. If you would like to attend contact Paula Cannon at [paulaocannon@gmail.com](mailto:paulaocannon@gmail.com) for information.

The New Orleans group publishes a monthly e-newsline. To receive this newsletter join [SierraClub\\_NewOrleans@yahoo.com](mailto:SierraClub_NewOrleans@yahoo.com). Here are some upcoming events available at press time. Members from other groups are always welcome to participate.

**Service outing at Bayou Bienvenu.** Trail clean-up and viewing deck waterproofing, all are welcome. Thursday, March 20 – Saturday, March 22. 10am-3pm each day Caffin Ave at Florida Ave. For more info contact Darryl 504-427-1885

**March 21st Canoe Outing at Bayou Bienvenu**  
The Sierra Club New Orleans Group in conjunction with Canoe and Trails Adventures will have a day of canoeing at the Bayou: Caffin Ave at Florida Ave in the lower 9th Ward on the 21st of March from 10 am till 3pm as a part of the "Spring Greening" events. Contact Byron Almquist at [byron@canoeandtrail.com](mailto:byron@canoeandtrail.com) to sign up.



## RECYCLING AT JAZZFEST

If you missed the opportunity to volunteer at Jazzfest, contact [lesliemarch@msn.com](mailto:lesliemarch@msn.com) for details. There may still be a few spots open.

### ACT NOW AND SUPPORT THE ENVIRONMENT

Make a commitment to the next generation by remembering the Sierra Club in your will. Your support will help others preserve the intricate balance of nature

For more information and confidential assistance Please complete the form and send it to:

John Calaway, Director, Gift Planning  
#5 Second Street, 2nd Floor, San Francisco, CA  
94105 (435) 973-5639

Email: [planned.giving@sierraclub.org](mailto:planned.giving@sierraclub.org)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

# Smokey Finds New Work



When last the Delta Sierran met Smokey the Bear, decades-long symbol of the U. S. Forest Service, the amiable ursine was on a quest for new employment. He had been the advocate, the voice, the powerful icon of the “no fires” policy that became part of American culture in the 1940s and 1950s. For several generations Smokey, wearing his ranger hat and blue jeans, stared out from posters at millions of citizens urging, warning, demanding “ONLY YOU CAN PREVENT FOREST FIRES.” Alas, experience and science caught up with Smokey and the Forest Service, and now there is much lamentation as forests burn all over the country. For years and years they pursued the policy of preventing nature from incinerating the forest floor as a means to dispose of the build-up of leaves and fallen branches and dead shrubs, thereby preventing larger fires and opening space for new trees to take root from fallen seeds. Smokey and his slogan became passé, so “yesterday,” as trendy-speak might explain it. He was shuffled out of sight to where he might not have to answer hard questions. As he has done so many times in the past, Smokey made it to New Orleans, although this time it wasn't for Mardi Gras or Jazz Fest. He was hard at work gutting Katrina-flooded houses in the Lakeview neighborhood. His ranger hat was gone, replaced by a white hard hat. The jeans and hairy torso were

covered with white haz-mat coveralls, and his snout was stuffed into a paper face mask. He removed the mask, the gloves, and the goggles to talk to a reporter from the Delta Sierran.

Delta Sierran: Smokey, it's good to see you again. You're an angel of mercy, doing relief work.

Smokey the Bear: There's a lot of it to go around. Since I'm not preventing forest fires anymore, I figure I ought to be doing something useful. This mold is a mess!

D.S. : You're not with the Forest Service anymore, I take it?

S.T.B.: I'm on what you might call an extended leave of absence. I think I was becoming an embarrassment to the government as more and more scientists were shaking their fingers at the bureaucrats – and me by extension – for keeping the fires suppressed for a long time. You might say I was too good at what I was doing. Now the forest service is trying to figure out how to manage a kinder, gentler fire so as to repair the problem I created by stopping fires. It was definitely time for me to look elsewhere for work.

D.S.: So where were you looking before you starting gutting houses in Lakeview?

S.T.B.: The government didn't want me spilling inside information, so they tried to sign me up for big-bucks work in Iraq where I would be away from reporters. Vice President Cheney offered me a job with his colleagues at Halliburton, KBR, or Blackwater – lots of money, just stay quiet. I figured that bears have been shot at throughout history, and I wasn't interested in going someplace where everybody shoots at everybody else.

D.S.: We're glad you're here, Smokey, doing important work to help people return to their homes.

S.T.B.: Yeah, well, somebody's got to do it. I checked in with the Road Home Program to see if I could help. I found out that you don't get to go home and there ain't no road. At least not yet. Maybe if they ever figure out where the road is supposed to start and go,

they might get something moving. I also checked in with my cou-sins in the Atchafalaya Swamp. Those Louisiana black bears do know how to catch and serve crawfish for a relative!

D.S.: So you have relatives among the Louisiana black bear community?

S.T.B.: Yes, indeed. And they are very grateful to all the people who are doing so much to protect them, including those speciality license plates that say “Save The Louisiana Black Bear.” We've sent a letter to the Office of Motor Vehicles to get them to issue a specialty license that says “Save the Louisiana Humans.” Y'all need a lot of help; there are people in other parts of the country that don't care whether South Louisiana disappears into the Gulf. They need some schooling about what's important. They might sit up and pay more attention if a bunch of wild bears started whooping and hollering.

D.S.: I think you're on to something, Smokey. How do you think you can help us? You have years of experience all over the country and still have a lot of contacts in the federal government.

S.T.B.: Yeah, you right. Listen to me good and tell me what you think of this idea: I go back into the poster business, back into my blue jeans, but no ranger hat. In place of it I'll wear a straw hat and white rubber boots like the shrimpers in Louisiana do. I won't be holding a shovel like I did in the old poster. Instead I'll point with my finger and stare out of the poster with the caption “ONLY YOU CAN PREVENT LOUISIANA FROM DISAPPEARING.” And there will be another line under that slogan that'll read “Wetlands Protect Us All.”

D.S.: I like it. If I may say so, it bears serious consideration. Go for it, Smokey!

– Earl Higgins

# Byron Almquist cont...

owner of a specific tract of land in Lake Maurepas that wants to log cypress to turn it into garden mulch.”

While many support protecting and conserving our natural environment, not all are aware of the constant research, organizing and action that conservation demands. “From my standpoint, I’m a member of untold environmental organizations, and every day I get letters urging me to take action; from the Yellowstone buffalo herd to protecting rainforests in Equador, let alone fighting to get David Vitter to be more responsible to the environment, it takes work. While there is an amazing unharnessed potential to support the outdoors, to get it organized is hard. The vast majority of people would be supportive of protecting the Lake Maurepas cypress, even if they will never go there. People know it doesn’t make sense to log huge tracts of cypress for garden mulch, they know it’s an extraordinarily bad idea; but to get that support organized and focused is a massive undertaking. That’s why supporting environmental organizations and their staff that are the counterpoint to these industrial interests is critical. Wild areas need the folks with forestry and biology backgrounds to do the research, and then the folks who understand how the political process really works to get these short-sighted projects stopped.”

Byron is convinced that the fight never ends. “It’s a constant struggle to find the right balance. We’ve been very much put on the defensive by the Bush Administration which is appalling in it’s attitude and actions toward the environment. The average Sierra club member needs to get more politically active, get on a first name basis from the city councilman, the parish representatives, on up to the State level, to speak out, and support the national groups so they’ve got the resources and backing to do the work - testifying in congress, lobbying, and winning important victories for the out-of-doors.”

Examples of these victories literally surround us. “New Orleans to the North and East is ringed by Wildlife Refuges; Big Branch Marsh, Bogue Chitto National Wildlife Refuge, Bayou Sauvage - actually inside the city limits of New Orleans, South of town is Jean Lafitte National Park. All of these are public areas, managed by professionals - we’ve got much greater educational and recreational opportunities than there were 20 years ago. Add land managed

by the state (wildlife management areas), private interests like the Nature Conservancy, there are thousands and thousands of acres open and accessible to people to experience. Each of these areas represents a victory by people hoping to conserve a special part of our state.”

Byron wraps up by reminding folks to remind themselves why it’s worth working in the political arena for our environment. “I urge people to go experience what their tax dollars are paying for - the canoeing areas, the birding areas, go out and take advantage of them. There are a lot of means to get outdoors, if the desire is there, there should be no stopping you.”

Check out Byron’s opportunities to go take a hike, paddle, or class: <http://canoeandtrail.com>



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