



Word from the Chair

Bills before the Texas Legislature

The old saying that “the most dangerous time in Texas is when the Legislature is in session” is especially true this year. There are literally dozens, and probably hundreds of bills seeking to limit the

rights of Texans to breath clean air, drink clean water, travel safely, protect their health, protect their wildlife, protect their environment, protect their private property, and even to seek judicial redress.

The citizens of Denton, after struggling to get reasonable citizen protections with one especially difficult fracking operator, finally voted last fall to ban fracking in their city. Now all cities in Texas are set to lose their right to limit how close these operations—and virtually all other O&G activities--can be to schools, homes, hospitals etc.

Other bills propose constitutional amendments to guarantee the right to hunt, fish and “harvest” wildlife. What this would do to state wildlife management programs, endangered species, habitat restoration, or private property rights is difficult to imagine. Other bills would prevent state funds from going for any means of travel other than highway, be it rail, bike, pedestrian etc. These are just a few examples.

See the separate article *The Texas legislature poised to strike down environmental protections* on page 2.

The session is scheduled to end May 31st. Lone Star Chapter Sierrans and all Texans who care about the quality of life in our state are urged to get involved. Please make a few calls to their Representatives and Senators in Austin to stop some of these bills, as covered in the separate article below.

Damage assessments will follow this summer...

San Antonio

San Antonio City elections are a month away. The Alamo Group has not endorsed any of the mayoral candidates, who include several persons previously endorsed for various political offices. We expect a run-off for Mayor will occur, and hope to be able to provide an endorsement at that time. We are so far disappointed in the election campaigns. Questions about sustainable growth and sprawl, the Vista Ridge water pipeline project, the several pending huge highway expansions and the need for other transit options including green streets for walkable and bicycle safe neighborhoods—all these important questions about our future seem to receive tepid, clichéd or evasive responses, if responded to at all.

City of San Antonio (COSA) is pushing forward with USFWS for a South Edwards Plateau Habitat Conservation Plan (SEP-HCP) that essentially locks in the status quo of endless sprawl in Bexar County, while providing token mitigation for endangered species such as our Golden Cheeked Warbler, in currently rural surrounding counties. We and Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance are trying to find a way to help this and other species, while providing better protection to the Edwards Aquifer and the rapidly disappearing Hill Country green spaces that this urban region will need in the future for healthy recreation, as well as clean water and wildlife.

-Terry Burns, Executive Committee Co-Chair

Alamo Group Events

For updates on all events check the Alamo Group website, sierraclub.org/texas/alamo, under *Get Involved*.

EcoCentro programs

Third Tuesday each month, 6:30 pm at EcoCentro, San Antonio College, 1802 N. Main, at the northeast corner with Locust St. Free and open to the public.

Lion's Field programs

Fourth Wednesday each month, 6:30 pm, at the Lion's Field Adult Center, 2809 Broadway at Mulberry. Free and open to the public. Service by bus routes 9, 10 and 14.

Save the date: group annual potluck

...July 21 Tuesday. Check the next issue or the website for location and details.

Event Schedule

May 19 Tuesday

Location change this month only! Not at EcoCentro!

Public Forum: *San Antonio's Water Future: Looking at better alternatives to Vista Ridge*, 6:30-8:30 pm.

Location: at Trinity University, in Northrup Hall 040 (on the bottom floor of the administration building); nearest parking lots are Alamo Stadium and Trinity Lot E (beside Parker Chapel, off Oakmont).

Unlike the U.T.S.A. Water "forums," this program questions the appropriateness of a pipeline and inter-basin transfer of water as a sustainable or even viable plan. Speakers will address the problems (such as regional mega-droughts and effects of climate change) that must be anticipated, as well as the lessons we can learn from others' mistakes and from others' successes. Specifics about speakers will be posted on the Alamo Group's website.

May 27 Wednesday

Lion's Field, topic: showing of the 2nd of four DVDs in the documentary series *Cadillac Desert: Water and the Transformation of Nature*. [Here is a summary of the series.](#)

General meetings venue change

No longer at the Witte Museum due to increased charges. Now at EcoCentro, see above.

Exception: May 19! See that date above.

Do we have your e-mail address?

This newsletter will be sent by e-mail only, and accessible on the group website, beginning next year. See *About This Newsletter* on page 4.

June 16 Tuesday

EcoCentro, San Antonio College, Topic: *Teaming With Wildlife: True to Texas*. Talk by Richard Heilbrun from Texas Parks and Wildlife. In March the Alamo Group became a member of this coalition. Here are web pages for more information: teamingtxwildlife.com and teaming.com/state/texas.



June 24 Wednesday

Lion's Field, topic: showing of the 3rd of four DVDs in the documentary series *Cadillac Desert: Water and the Transformation of Nature*. As above for May 27.

July 21 Tuesday

Annual Alamo Group potluck dinner; check the website for location and details. This month in lieu of a speaker program, and 3rd Tuesday instead of 2nd.

July 22 Wednesday

No Lion's Field event this month due to the potluck dinner same week.

News and Contributions

Speaking of Water...

Here's an article with a good comparison of Vista Ridge to a historical California project, by our Ex-Com Co-Chair and Conservation Committee Co-Chair. -Ed.

-By Terry Burns

SAWS continues to move forward with its Vista Ridge pipeline project, and we continue to raise questions about the wisdom of this investment, the sustainability of its water, and the potential negative impacts of this new water source on San Antonio's water use patterns. As an investment of almost \$900 million just for the pipeline

itself, there are other ways this money could be spent, say on improved recycling/gray water projects, so that good drinking water is not expended in industrial projects, so that "fit for purpose" water is used, and high quality drinking water saved for best purposes.

We are especially concerned about the impact of Vista Ridge on current SAWS ratepayers. Vista Ridge will cost an estimated \$3.5 Billion dollars over 30 years, water expected to arrive in 2019. SAWS must buy the water, in wet years and dry, as long as it is delivered from its origin 143 miles away in Bureson County, east of Austin. SAWS estimates our rates will go up about 18% due to Vista Ridge. SAWS Rate Advisory Committee (RAC) has been meeting over the last year, and we have actively attended and commented on the proceedings. We are very concerned that lower and middle income people in San Antonio will enter into financial hardship if current proposals are finalized.

We are attempting to make changes to mitigate these impacts to the extent we can. COSA will probably vote on the rate structure proposals in June, after they are finalized by SAWS RAC, and approved by SAWS Board of Trustees. We would like COSA to spend some time looking seriously at the financial impacts of Vista Ridge, impacts on ratepayers and also potential liability risks to COSA and our bond rating should it fail.

Vista Ridge could be the first step in a state wide "water grid" of thousands of miles of pipelines moving water around Texas. San Antonio Representative Lyle Larson has a bill right now (HB 3298) authorizing the Texas Water Development Board to study implementation of such a "water grid". This is what California began creating one hundred years ago, at huge cost and environmental damage.

California no longer has enough water anywhere to move around to fill this system, due to its ongoing severe drought. California is now seeking 25% reductions in residential water use statewide, with many communities using far in excess of 200 gallons per person per day.

San Antonio so far has rejected previous remote pipeline projects and focused on water conservation, our per person per day use less than 100 gallons. We believe we can lower our use much more, with simple landscaping changes, proper rate structures, "fit for purpose" water use, recycling, better storm water management, and more rainwater harvesting. We do not think water bottling plants should look to move here from California, which Niagara Bottling Co. has stated interest in doing. We see this as a worrisome sign that Vista Ridge conveys to commercial interests the message that San Antonio now has "abundant" water.

San Antonio is in a semi-arid climate, which climate change predictions all show becoming more arid over the next decades, more like Tucson. People moving here from wetter climes need to learn and adapt very quickly to this reality. This is no longer realistic, and it should no longer be permitted for individuals of any income to use vast amounts of water for lush water sucking landscapes. Beautiful drought tolerant plants and landscaping must be mandated and automatic spray sprinkler systems eliminated.

As California shows, we cannot and should not try to build more Palm Springs. We should support the beauty of our own natural San Antonio and the plants and animals that live here and thrive with us. Sustainability is defined as not making negative impacts on those around us in space, e.g. the people of central Texas from whom Vista Ridge takes water, or make negative impacts on those around us in time, i.e. those who follow us in this place. We are convinced that Vista Ridge will add to the perception that San Antonio has "abundant" water, i.e. it's a non-issue.

We are convinced that Vista Ridge will contribute to sprawl along and west of I-35 between here and Austin, as well as over the Hill Country. We are convinced that Vista Ridge water, at about five times the cost of Edwards

Sierra Club board election: vote now

Our national board needs your vote for its members. Voting deadline is *11 am Wednesday April 29*. Please go on line now to learn about the candidates and vote, if you have not already done so: sierraclub.org/board/election.

Aquifer water and twice the cost of desalination, will be very expensive water harshly impacting many in our community. We are convinced that there are alternatives to meeting our water needs besides Vista Ridge. We are disappointed that COSA accepted Vista Ridge without question, without independent study, without consideration of any alternatives.

The Texas legislature poised to strike down environmental protections

-By Richard Alles

It is important for Sierrans to stand up and take action against the Texas Legislature's dramatic and far-reaching assault on our environment. Today, the House passed a bill ([HB 40](#)) overturning rules governing drilling and fracking operations inside cities. Yesterday, the Senate passed [SB 709](#) to make it more difficult for citizens to contest TCEQ permits.

This may be only the beginning of the Legislature's attack on cities' environmental protections and local control. What happens in the next few weeks could make it virtually impossible to take local action to protect the environment.

San Antonio's aquifer protection and tree ordinances would be nullified by proposed bills. Plastic bag bans would be overturned. Your rights to petition the city to put an issue on the ballot could be taken away. Your ability to contest permits for power plants, nuclear waste dumps and landfills could be severely limited.

I encourage you to refer to:

- [Lone Star Chapter's Important bills in the 84th Legislature](#)
- the [Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance's Legislative Agenda](#)

Local Control Texas

Then, contact your [State Rep and Senator](#) today to voice your strong opposition to these bills. Finally, make sure you are subscribed to our Action Alerts email list by sending a message to loydortez@earthlink.net, our Action Alerts coordinator.

Our new website!

-By Richard Alles

We are pleased to announce the launch of our new website. It is still at the same address, alamosierraclub.org.

Non-technical Alamo Group leaders can now edit the website using web browsers such as Internet Explorer or Safari. This is a huge advantage over the old site which required website development software to maintain. If you are interested in publishing content on the Alamo Group website, please [send me a message](#) or call 494-2088 to request login credentials and a user manual. I am also planning informal training sessions, so let me know if you're interested.

In addition, the new website displays content fed from the National Sierra Club. Our events will be displayed to any SC member who [logs into their Sierra Club account](#) and searches for events in this area. Smartphone users will notice the website adapts itself to fit your display.

The website runs on the Drupal content management system. Working out of San Francisco, Sierra Club technical gurus built the theme and functional modules that form the framework of the new site. All local entities that have opted to use the Drupal platform share a common theme, which gives a uniform, visually appealing look to the Club's many websites.

-Richard Alles has been our webmaster for many years. Thanks to Richard for managing this and sometimes helping with the newsletter also. -Ed.

Got an accounting background?

We are looking for retired or active CPAs to tackle a Sierra Club Conservation Committee project with far reaching implications for San Antonio and beyond. Please contact Alan Montemayor 342-9721, alan.montemayor@sbcglobal.net.

Water Sentinels - Protecting America's Waters

Given the many areas of concern about waters across Texas, this is an interesting Sierra Club national program looking for local people. See web page sierraclub.org/water-sentinels. The program starts with volunteer training. From the web page:

The best way to defend our waterways is to empower committed local activists with accurate information and train them in water-quality monitoring techniques and grassroots advocacy. Standing knee-deep in the local waters they love is a powerful position from which to advocate for the strongest protections and proactive changes. That's what we do.

With several thousand trained volunteers working at over 40 project sites all over the country, the Sierra Club's Water Sentinels are monitoring about 48,000 square miles of watersheds that are home to 184 million Americans, with efforts that range from protecting pristine streams to cleaning up heavily degraded Superfund sites.

Sierra Club Membership

Are you a member? Please [join or renew!](#)

About this newsletter

Due to the high costs for this paper newsletter, beginning 2016 it will be available only by e-mail and on the website. The e-newsletters have been produced eight times annually anyway, and the paper editions only four times a year.

So if you wish to continue to receive this newsletter we must have your preferred e-mail address. Please update your info if necessary by e-mail to Loyd Cortez at lcc227@earthlink.net. Provide your name, address, and membership id if possible.

We apologize for any inconvenience this change may cause. But this will streamline our website and publishing efforts, and reduce administrative costs and save trees.

Thanks!

...To SA Offset Printing, Inc. 4115 Gardendale, San Antonio, 692-9166 for our nominal newsletter cost.

Food for thought

As we passed on it seemed as if those scenes of visionary enchantment would never have an end.

-Meriwether Lewis, May 31 1805, at the Missouri Breaks, from his journals of the journey of the Corps of Discovery. Quoted by Dayton Duncan in *Scenes of Visionary Enchantment - Reflections on Lewis and Clark*.

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Alamo Group of the Sierra Club

Website: alamosierraclub.org

The Alamo Group is one of 13 regional groups within the Lone Star (Texas) chapter of the Sierra Club. National website: sierraclub.org

The Alamo Sierran (publication # 018-475) is published quarterly by the Alamo Group of the Sierra Club, 615 Willow, San Antonio, TX 78202. Periodical postage paid at San Antonio, Texas.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sierra Club Member Services, Sierra Club, PO Box 42104. Palm Coast, FL 32142; or e-mail address.changes@sierraclub.org.

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