

The Alamo Sierran

Newsletter of the Alamo Group of the Sierra Club

April, 2015 - Vol. 49 No. 3



Explore, enjoy and protect the planet

Put the Brakes on “Habitat Conservation” Plan

Bexar County & San Antonio, on behalf of developers, have asked USF&W to issue a permit to allow developers to “take” (destroy) habitat in Bexar county and then “mitigate” the destruction in six counties surrounding Bexar (Comal, Blanco, Kendall, Medina, Bandera, Kerr Counties). This permit is to be issued pursuant to the Southern Edwards Plateau Habitat Conservation Plan (SEP-HCP).

Developers are not going to be required to protect any acreage in Bexar. An explosion of development will occur. All current private habitat in Bexar County is at risk.

A developer can destroy X-number of acres of habitat in Bexar County and go buy X-number of acres in far NW Bandera County to “mitigate” their damage. \$20,000/acre is the cost of land in Bexar vs \$500/acre cost of land in far Bandera county. The taxpayers will fund the mitigation on a 25%:75% ratio of developers:taxpayers. The developers will not have to pay full price for what they “take” or destroy.

In a destroyed habitat (bird and caves and cave species) the animals “taken” will die. There’s no place they can go, as the neighboring area is already populated, and there are no signs telling the critters where to go. “Take” means death to the inhabitants and to their descendants. Mitigation is a false idea.

The proposed HCP (the term “habitat conservation plan” is a false term for this plan) has not been properly announced to the general public nor to the seven counties affected. Only two small “public hearings” were held in Feb 2015. From 2008-2011 we held many citizen meetings (CACs), biologic team meetings (BATs), and multiple informational meetings. Those plans failed to please the developers, and the plan was dropped. Suddenly, in November 2014 this new plan slipped into town, and no one has used any of the 2008-2011 citizen input or science for the new 2014 plan.

Only 3 people in the entire city and county or local USFW office are fully aware of the details of this new enormous 7-county, 7-endangered species plan, and at the two small “hearings” no one was allowed to ask questions or speak comments.

The first any of us heard about this 2014 SEPHCP was November 2014 and the deadline for comments are March 19th, 2015. Many of us in NW Bexar and other counties are sending in comments to USFW, and we have had to scramble to understand this plan, since so few know of it or understand it.

Please ask/demand for renewed public hearings and an extension of time for comments. Send online comments to USF&W by going to the [Notice document at Regulations.gov](#). Alternatively, you may mail your comments to:

Public Comments
Attn: FWS-R@-ES-2014-0053
Division of Policy Directives Management
US Fish and Wildlife Service
4401 N. Fairfax Drive
MS 2042-PDM
Arlington, Va 22203
by Myfe Moore, Sierra Club Member

Food for Thought

The Peace of Wild Things

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound in
fear of what my life and my children’s lives
may be, I go and lie down where the wood
drake rests in his beauty on the water, and
the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things who
do not tax their lives with forethought of
grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time I rest in
the grace of the world, and am free.

-From *The Collected Poems of Wendell Berry, 1957-1982*, North Point Press

Next General Meeting

Tuesday, April 21st: *A Sustainability Plan for San Antonio*

Students in the graduate Urban and Regional Sustainability class at UTSA will eagerly present a draft of their sustainability plan for San Antonio. The class is part of the Urban and Regional Planning Program within the UTSA College of Architecture, Construction and Planning. The graduate students have spent the semester reviewing sustainability issues as well as sustainability plans and climate action plans from various cities. Based on their research and their knowledge of San Antonio, they have developed a preliminary plan for San Antonio that is ready for review. The students look forward to getting feedback on their work.

Our new meeting location is [EcoCentro](#), located at San Antonio College, 1802 North Main Avenue at the northeast corner with Locust Street ([map](#)). There is a parking lot adjacent/east of EcoCentro; enter from Locust St. We can also use SAC parking lots 14, 15 and 17 ([map showing SAC parking lots](#)) to the north, west and south of the STIC building across/west of North Main St. from EcoCentro. Parking is also allowed on the residential streets to the east, north and south of EcoCentro.

Our general meetings are free and open to everyone. Socializing and snacks begin at 6:00 p.m., program at 6:30 p.m.. Presentations last about an hour.

Next Lion’s Field Event

Wednesday, April 22nd: *Cadillac Desert*

We will view one of four films in the Cadillac Desert series. A paradigm shift for water usage will be necessary and important in our region in the future.

Our Lion’s Field events are free and open to the public. They occur on the fourth Wednesday of each month at the [Lion’s Field Adult Center](#), 2809 Broadway @ Mulberry. Programs begin at **6:30 p.m.**

Volunteer Work

Volunteer work can command a serious investment of time and energy, so some prior consideration helps. Our parks, wildlife management and wilderness areas testify to a starved public sector. To paraphrase Grover Norquist, the right wing has successfully drained the pond of public purpose. Public workers struggle against understaffing to keep special places intact for our enjoyment and that of future generations. Like our museums, schools, hospitals and social services, the parks need volunteers.

The scale and scope of the work demonstrate the need. Brent Leisure, a Texas Parks and Wildlife Director, noted that over three years thousands of volunteers, including a contingent from the Texas School for the Blind, had joined the reforestation after the Bastrop fire. He emphasized the obvious, that this is a special kind of work, the results of which might not appear for years, even generations.

The 2014 Report of the Hill Country Master Naturalists credits their 174 most active members with 35,216 volunteer service hours. (Incidentally, fifty-nine percent of the Volunteers are female, and seventy percent are retired.) A March, 2014 potluck dinner at Panther Junction in Big Bend recognized volunteers who had given hours equivalent to forty percent of the paid staff.

Volunteers paint benches and clean restrooms, plant trees and restore grassland, clear brush for fire control, maintain trails, survey the flora, fauna, geology and topology, answer phones and lead hunters to their blinds. They recover the record of human activity: pictographs and projectile points, barbed wire strands and cedar heart posts, the rubble of a native stone dwelling or the shell of a 1941 Chevy sedan.

So does our volunteer work only help justify the starvation of the public sector? Perhaps, but the simple pleasures of volunteering make the realpolitik seem only correct. Volunteers are like-minded people: naturalists, environmentalists, conservationists, preservationists. Or people who simply prefer to be outside. To share their company is to escape the despair of isolation, to befriend a non-electronic being.

The volunteer learns new skill and knowledge. What are GPS coordinates? Are bears or raptors or succulents making comebacks? If so, to what extent and where?

And these are not "jobs." Staff offer choices; they do not force or cajole volun-

teers into the unpleasant.

And volunteer work offers more than a glimpse into the Paleolithic and historic. It provides perspective on the present, and the reality of an impoverished public sector. Somehow our political economy can turn on a dime and construct a thirty-six inch diameter pipeline from Midland across the Devils River to Houston, but not so much for a one-mile interpretive trail for the disabled. Attentive volunteers get to go backstage: the nooks and crannies of planning, politics, policies and personalities that become a park or protected habitat. In particular, they can witness the inevitable dialectic of conservation versus preservation. Do we tell everyone to drive to Lost Maples or McKittrick Canyon in Autumn so that they hopefully rediscover and revalue the sacred places? Or do we tell the minimalist hikers to avoid a special spot in the backcountry because some birds are raising families there?

One caveat, before rushing to volunteer in the city parks, the state natural areas, the Big Thicket and Big Bend, the Guadalupe Mountains, Padre. Volunteers do have to take the bureaucratic prep work through waivers and background checks. These can be thorough, especially for the National Park Service. The Club's service projects, however, eliminate even that hassle.

by Tom Denyer, Sierra Club Member
Tom is one of our serious Alamo Group outings attendees. He has been a hard working volunteer at the new Albert and Bessie Kronkosky State Natural Area in Boerne, which is not yet open to the public. See the section below for links on this new SNA and on volunteer opportunities. -Ed.

For more information

If you are interested in outdoors volunteer work here are some sources. -Ed.

Here is a [TPR.org article](#) on Kronkosky SNA.

There are lots of Sierra Club service projects nationally; go to the [national website](#) and search with *service project*.

There are lots of volunteer opportunities with TPWD and the National Park Service. Both are heavily dependent upon volunteers at some locations.

There are also volunteers at work at [Nature Conservancy preserves in Texas](#). And also at [Texas Land Conservancy preserves](#).

Help With Our Tables at Fun Events

Volunteers are needed for tabling events. We go to many "green" events and distribute information about the Sierra Club and provide petitions about environmental concerns to be signed by the events' participants. For more info or to sign up contact [Gay Wright](#), 210-362-1984.

Volunteers are needed for info tables at the following events in April:

- 10 "Fresh Air Friday" Main Plaza; 11:30-1:00; Park in Frost Bank bldg
- 18 "Viva Botanica!" San Antonio Botanical Garden; 10:00-2:00
- 22 NW Vista College Earth Day 3535 N. Ellison Drive; 9:00-1:00
- 23 UTSA EarthFest Downtown or 1604; 10:00-2:00; (Not confirmed)

by Gay Wright, Tablings Chair

Big Bend National Park Outing, Feb 26-Mar 3

Severe gusting winds first night. Temps down to 24 degrees first and second nights. Then mostly sunny and warm! Some people arriving on the second day reported glare ice and crashed vehicles along I-10 west of Ozona, they were wondering what this was turning into, but then the sky was sunny south of Marathon.

Feb 27 did Lost Mine Trail, arguably the most scenic short trail in Texas. Clear and sunny when we left the Basin, then ascended into fog which lasted till 2/3 of the way up the trail. Some of us had done this trail several times but these views with the fog below and clear above were new.

Feb 28 one group hiked to the South Rim of the Chisos Basin, 12 mi loop. Some of us started with a solid buffet breakfast at the lodge. Perfect weather.

Mar 1 we took a break from the long hikes with a drive down to Hot Springs historic site. Great 5.5 mi hike east to an overlook of Rio Grande Village, and back. This trail crosses a very typical section of Chihuahuan Desert including a nice little canyon. Wound up back at the hot spring.

Mar 2 one group went to Santa Elena Canyon, in the southwest corner of the park, and stopped at a bunch of scenic spots on the way to/from. Another group was dropped off at the bottom of Blue Creek Trail and hiked up into the Chisos and back to the campsite.

Mar 3 we packed up and drove back out, through some of the most scenic major highway in Texas (my opinion). Some of us did the short hike to Dog Canyon near the north park entrance. Maybe you can join us on the next trip to this national park!

In addition to the photos included here there are a few others at the [web page for this outing at meetup.com](#). And if you want more info about this national park and a list of trails, the trip info detail document that was provided to the participants is available, [contact the editor](#).

by Kevin Hartley, Newsletter Editor



At the South Rim, looking southeast, by Michael West



Mexican jay, by Michael West



Santa Elena Canyon from Castolon, by Michael West



From the River Trail, near Hot Springs historic site, by Kevin Hartley



The Window from Laguna Meadows Trail, by Kevin Hartley