

Newsletter

The Alamo Sierran e-Newsletter - January, 2014

* General Meetings *

Tuesday, January 21st: Connections: Streetcar and Comprehensive Plan, Plus Commuter Rail to Austin

Brian Buchanan, Vice President of Operations at VIA, and one of the recognized [40 under 40](#) leaders in San Antonio, will provide an update on the streetcar and our multimodal system, including the comprehensive plan. Go to VIA's [Final Plan](#) to see how connectivity expands across the city. Intercity connections between Austin and San Antonio on the LSTAR commuter rail will be discussed by Rail Director Joseph Black of the Lone Star Rail District. Go to [Lone Star Rail](#).

Times, maps and speaker bios are on our Events page.

A Word from the Alamo Group Chair

Happy New Year to you all.

One thing that makes me happy is to do something nice for nature. I love to collect seeds, propagate plants, and spread them around to provide habitat for fauna. Holy Days move me to reflect and act, so on December 25th my friend Kathy and I tramped through Olmos Basin with our gallon cans of native seeds sowing along the trails at fertile spots. She cast out inland sea oats. I seeded white boneset. Poor Olmos Basin is so choked with noxious invasive species and plastic flotsam. Maybe, if enough of us think to give back, we can restore some of the diversity and magic to this cradle of San Antonio.

Mobi's poignant poem "monarch drought" resounded and brought to mind a recent comment made to me. It was a reminder about the steep decline in the monarch population and the need for habitat restoration of this king of the butterflies, especially here, since the species funnels through Texas on its trip back to Mexican wintering grounds.

For the New Year I checked out a serendipitous patch of milkweed at one of my rental properties by the San Antonio River that is a prolific monarch haven. Why serendipitous? Those of you who have tried will know that the milkweeds are the sole monarch larva food and they can be difficult to grow. They are picky about their habitat. A tropical milkweed in the garden died. Then a bed of them just appeared in a river stone path and has spread throughout the fifteen foot length and around to the east side. It loves this location on the north face of the house with rock mulch. The eaves are guttered, and these plants are not watered regularly. Even though some experts caution about cultivating tropical milkweed, as it is non-native and can harbor a butterfly disease when not cut back in winter, the current consensus seems to support cultivating tropical milkweed because all milkweed habitat is so diminished.

Every year there are many dozens of monarch chrysalises hanging from the porch, sills, siding, and mailbox. It is thrilling to watch the butterflies emerge. Today there are no seeds but there are seedlings to collect. The leggy plants need to be cut back to prevent OE, the protozoan pathogen, and to stimulate more branching and flowers next year. Oh, there is even a queen caterpillar in winter! It is similar to the monarch and also feeds on milkweed.

If you are interested in knowing more and perhaps trying to provide habitat for the monarch and other butterflies, this is a good time of year to seed or transplant milkweed. There are many online sources for help. Go to Monica Maeckles' website, www.texasbutterflyranch.com. For more on the concerns about non-native milkweed, see [her article](#). Another source is www.monarch-butterfly.com. You can get native milkweeds from [Natives of Texas](#) in Kerrville, and from [Native American Seed](#) in Junction. Here is the [propagation protocol](#) from the Native Plant Network.

Margaret "Peggy" Day, ExCom Chair



Streetcars and Connections

The 3.6 mile downtown streetcar is just the beginning of a multimodal system of transportation for San Antonio. Check out the [Final Plan](#) on VIA's website that shows future expansion.

All cities need a vibrant downtown; the streetcar is bringing interest and attention to the core with changes occurring. Broadway, with its new residential structures, is also anticipating the streetcar. The downtown lines will

provide fast service, running every five or ten minutes. Then, when the system is expanded, riders will be able to go to universities/colleges, medical facilities, military facilities, jobs, and cultural amenities, in addition to accessing the revitalized downtown. These intervals would be more like every 15 or 17 minutes. In neighborhoods along the routes, circulating buses could move residents to stations or stops. Bus ridership increases as feeders to trunk lines. Bike lanes could move electric bikes to stations also.

The downtown needed to enter the 21st Century with streetcars on steel tracks and powered by electricity. It is necessary to look forward decades, not just five years, to plan a sustainable city. According to Brian Buchanan, Vice President of Operations at VIA, the core was becoming too congested with buses, and more congestion is anticipated.

A livable downtown and bumper-to-bumper buses aren't compatible. Better air quality downtown is livable, along with less noise. With streetcars, there will be more sidewalk restaurants popping up, interesting shops to visit, and people meeting in coffee houses exchanging ideas. Multimodal stations will serve as hubs of connectivity for buses, VIA Primo, hybrid electric buses from west campus of UTSA, the new all-electric, battery-operated buses, hotel vans, and taxis. Connectivity will be all important - what is the best way for me to get to major locations in the city that is most efficient, reliable, and most cost effective?

If you are looking at reducing emissions for climate change and saving money on that front, and if you are looking at ways to have a more compact city that is cheaper for the city to maintain and service, then you are looking at 21st Century transportation that is running on a larger supply of renewables, because once we have more solar and wind to provide power, the fuel - the sun and wind - will be free.

Other reasons streetcars and future light rail will be cost effective to move residents to those places we need to visit are the following: The steel tracks last a long time. The streetcar vehicles also last 30 to 50 years; buses may need to be replaced every 12 to 20 years. A light rail system moving up Broadway past the new Children's Museum and other places of interest, may have three or four vehicles. Each vehicle on the train has twice the capacity of a bus. Would you rather have four car trains moving frequently up main arteries such as Broadway, or the equivalent of eight buses per train? Remember these trains are reliable; they have to run on time. Steel tracks move them down the line and electricity propels them. That is why Broadway is filling its vacant lots in a hurry. It is ease of use and permanency that make them dependable and reliable to get to where one lives, works, and plays.

Now let's consider more cost effectiveness: salaries. Salaries account for 70% of the cost of operation and maintenance of the 21st Century transportation. One driver is needed for a train of four cars versus eight drivers needed for the equivalent bus capacity! Eight salaries versus one salary. Salary, steel tracks, sun and wind power in the future, vehicles that last longer--which makes more sense for the city to invest in? It is better to invest more up front and have lower long term operating and maintenance costs. And for residents who make connections on transportation that is multimodal, it is cheaper, more relaxing, less stressful. Connections and fun riding is what is in the future.

Also, there will be commuter rail to Austin and back and that connection will come to a hub. The January 21st general meeting will focus on streetcars, the comprehensive plan, and on the LSTAR commuter rail.

Barbara McMillin

Lion's Field Events

[Monthly films and presentations for your edification and enjoyment](#)

Wednesday, January 22nd: *Coal Tar Based Pavement Sealants*

Stephen Kale is a member of the San Antonio Citizens Environmental Advisory Committee and is leading its effort to persuade the City to prohibit the application of coal tar based pavement sealants. He will explain why the chemicals in these sealants pose unacceptable risks to human health and the environment. See Mr. Kale's bio.

Wednesday, February 26th: *Bees, Beekeeping and Colony Collapse*

A film will be shown on these topics. In addition, the Sierra Club encourages you to take action by supporting the "Save America's Pollinators Act."

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.**

Visit our [Lion's Field Events page for a map and additional information.](#)

Great ideas around harvesting and recycling plastic waste

Read [this interesting article](#) about initiatives for harvesting plastic trash and turning it into a commodity. There are also lots of other green ideas there for the home, garden, health, art, and entertainment on [the main page](#). The motto on the website is "more ideas, less waste".

Social Events

[meet and greet your Sierra Club friends](#)

- **Friday, January 24th, 6-8 PM — Candlelight Coffeehouse.** One of our favorite places, it features good food and a nice quiet atmosphere. 3011 North Saint Mary's Street, 738-0099.
- **Friday, February 28th, 6-8 PM — Little Italy Restaurant.** Join us for good



Italian food and wine selection. 824 Afterglow Street.

Visit our Social Events page for maps, times and more information about these gatherings. If you're not busy on these days, then get out of the house and join us for a meal and a chance to "meet and greet" some of your fellow members.

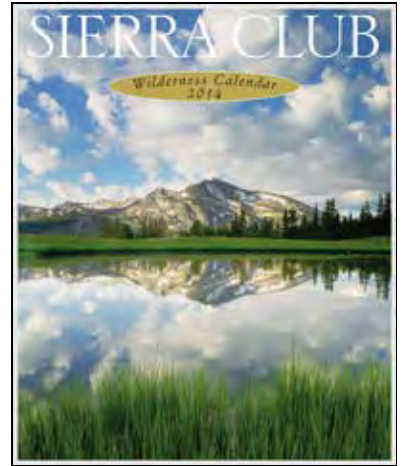
If you would like to be reminded about our upcoming Socials, email [Loyd Cortez](mailto:Loyd.Cortez). Then one week before the next Social, you will receive an email notice reminder

Buy Your 2014 Sierra Club Calendars and Support Inner City Outings

Support your local Sierra Club's Inner City Outings group by purchasing your 2014 calendars from us. Contact Gay Wright 210-343-0222 or Anne Pearson 210-408-6321 or just bring your money to the next membership meeting.

Remember, you can't go wrong with a Sierra Club Calendar as a gift. The engagement calendar is \$15 and the wall calendar is \$14.

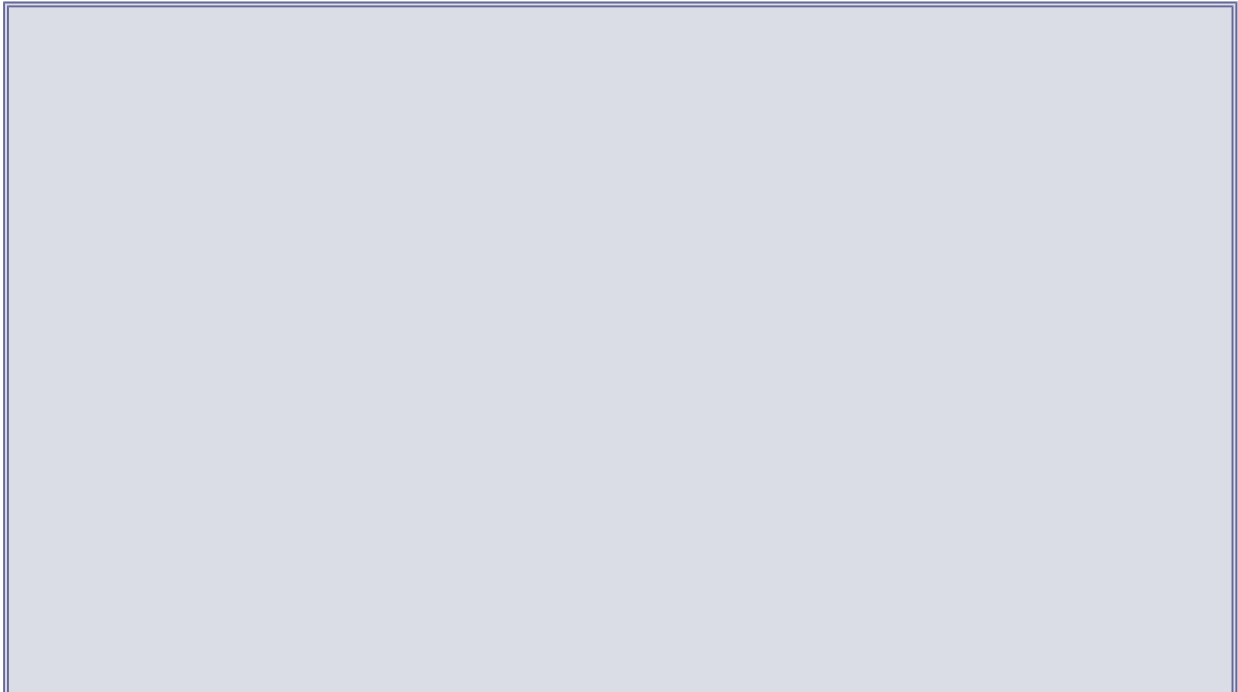
These will be available at our meetings and events until they are sold out.



Government Canyon Hike January 4th

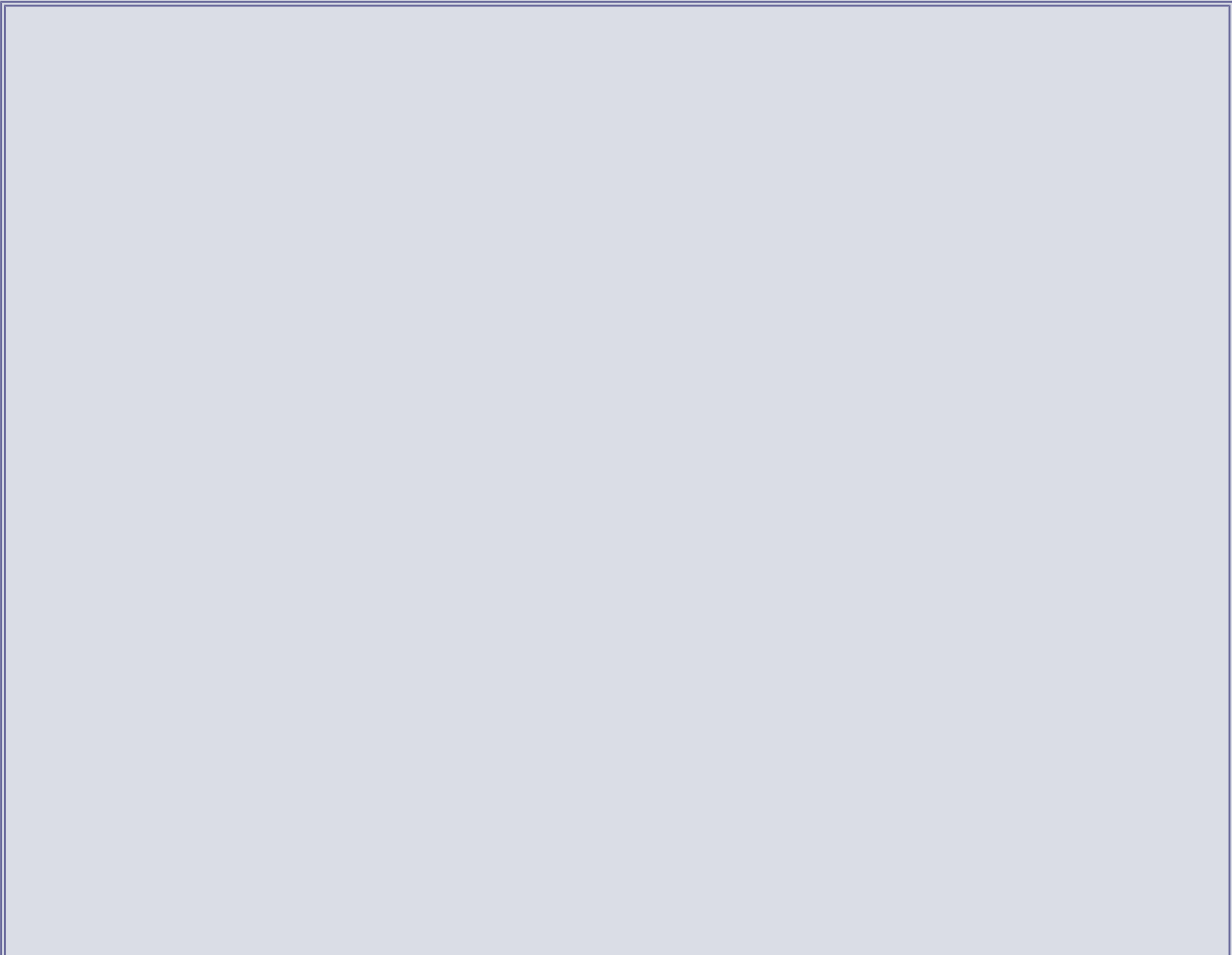
This was a great hike, 13 mi total to the far end of the protected habitat area. Good trails! Perfect weather! Our Sierra Club outings leaders have lead hikes there before and will do so in the future; this one was lead by Government Canyon Trail Patrol folks, well trained volunteers who know all the neat stuff to look at. We were able to see the dinosaur footprints in Government Canyon Creek, see the photo below.

For more information see [Friends of Government Canyon](#) and the [Texas Parks and Wildlife web page for this state natural area](#). Want to know about scheduled hikes such as this with the Alamo Group of Sierra Club? Check out our [hikes web page](#).





Sierra Club members at Government Canyon January 4th





Dinosaur footprint at Government Canyon, about 11" long

Diospyros texana (Texas Persimmon)

A poem by [Mobi Warren](#)

For Emilita

Mother and daughter, because you walk
beneath the summer sun in a state
of adoration, your steps slow and light,
come eat the black plums of my body; rest
your cheeks against my smooth skin
peeled to shades of dove and primrose.

Press your ears to the polish of my trunk,
and listen to the ebony wood of my heart
where mandolins are sleeping.

Watch my palette of fruit as it ripens,
astringent green to sweet jammy black,
the way the deepening years pledge you
to the earth and bind you to each other.

The Texas Persimmon

The following is from the [webpage on the species](#) at the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center, UT Austin. There is a wealth of information on Texas native plants at the Wildflower Center's website. Check it out!

Diospyros texana

Texas persimmon, Mexican persimmon, Black persimmon, Chapote, Chapote prieto



Shrub or small tree with very hard wood, usually multi-trunked. Normally 10-15 ft tall but can reach 35 ft in the southern parts of its range. Common in brushy areas on level uplands, stony hillsides, and lower slopes from Houston and Bryan, Texas, in the east, west to Big Bend in west Texas and south to Nuevo Leon in northeastern Mexico. Very common in central and south Texas. Bark light gray to white, smooth, thin, on some trunks peeling in rectangular flakes and exposing a pinkish layer beneath. Leaves up to 2 inches long, but most about half this length, firm textured, rounded or slightly notched at the tip and tapering to the base; margins smooth, rolled down. Flowers urn shaped, whitish, about 3/8 inch wide, arranged singly or in small clusters among the new leaves; male and female on separate plants, appearing in March and April. Fruit fleshy, round, up to 1 inch in diameter, black and sweet when ripe, ripening from late July into September.

This well-shaped, small tree is valued primarily for its striking trunk and branches, which are a smooth, pale greyish white or whitish grey, peeling off to reveal subtle greys, whites, and pinks beneath. The fruits, borne on female trees, are edible once soft, with a flavor some liken to prunes, and are favorites of many birds and mammals. It is extremely drought-tolerant and disease-resistant and is ideal for small spaces in full sun. The heartwood, found only in very large trunks, is black, like that of the related ebony (*Diospyros ebenum*), while the sapwood is clear yellow.

Sign Up for Action Alerts

The Sierra Club is all about citizen action on critical issues. Quick citizen input often spells the difference between victory and defeat for important measures at the local and state levels. Sign up now to receive our local e-mail Conservation Action Alerts and let your voice be heard. **Call (674-9489) or email Loyd Cortez** and we'll add your name to our growing list of environmental activists.

Thank You! 2013 Fundraising Appeal Contributions

Thank you to those who donated to our November fundraising appeal. This year we had a number of very generous contributions for which we are very appreciative. Between the auction sales and this appeal we have raised all the funds we need to pay for our newsletter, educational tablings and Witte Museum rental. We also received a Sierra Club Foundation donation from a member that will help Inner City Outings and other charitable efforts. Without this beneficence we would be unable to function.

Thank You! Holiday Party Auction Donations

The following people and local businesses contributed items for the auction at the holiday party, which was December 10th. The auction was a great success and is an important annual fundraiser.

- Adelante Boutique
- Alamo Heights Kennel & Salon
- Anne Pearson
- Austin Forrest
- Benjamin Kurata
- Big Grass Bamboo
- Blue Star Brewery
- Chipotle
- Clyde Dexler
- Crumpets
- Dos Carolinas
- Eloise Stoker
- Flemings
- Green Restaurant
- Grimaldi's Pizzeria
- Half Price Books
- HearthStone Bakery
- Jason's Deli
- John Hertz Architect
- K Charles Salons
- La Madeleine
- Loretta Van Coppenolle
- Mark Robinson
- Michelle Petty
- Milberger's Nursery
- Paesanos
- Page Barteau Catering
- Panera
- Peggy Day
- Rainbow Gardens Nursery

- Red @ SA Art Institute
 - Renaissance Fine Jewelry
 - Sea Island
 - Shades of Green Nursery
 - Sprouts
 - Sushi Zushi
 - The Beautiful Bowl
 - The Bluegrass Express
 - The Wash Tub
 - The Worm Mescal & Tequila Bar
 - Trader Joe's
 - Twin Liquors
 - Wendell Fuqua
 - Whole Earth Provision Co.
 - Whole Foods Market
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Outings: Beautiful Central Texas Weather Beckons

Visit the [Alamo Sierra Club Outings page](#) on Meetup for detailed information about **all** of our upcoming Sierra Club Outings.