

Newsletter

The Alamo Sierran e-Newsletter — January, 2015

* General Meetings *

Tuesday, January 20th: No January Meeting

There will be no General Meeting in January. Instead, Sierrans are encouraged to attend the Lone Star Commuter Rail EIS Scoping meeting to learn about and provide comments on future two-way commuter rail service between San Antonio and Austin. See article below for more information.

Tuesday, February 17th: Learn about Commuter Rail between San Antonio & Austin

Joe Black, Rail Manager of the [Lone Star Rail District](#), will provide an update on progress of the LSTAR Commuter Rail between SA and Austin. It will utilize the Union Pacific track and make stops in San Marcos and New Braunfels. Progress is being made in Austin to move the project forward. San Antonio needs to become aware of this new future commuter service from San Antonio to Austin.

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

A Word from the Alamo Group Chair

Happy New Year Sierrans. My wish this year is that every Sierran will resolve to become more engaged in campaigns and our administration.

Climate Change will continue to be our top conservation issue in the coming year. Have you seen the climate data that is pouring in from research labs? Have you looked at the record-breaking weather data from around the world published by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)? Have you heard of 350.org's "Do the Math" campaign and understand its implications for life on Earth as we know it? If you have, then you know there is no time to lose. We need decision makers to understand the consequences of the Keystone Pipeline and development of tar sands oil and the importance of internalizing the environmental costs in the energy market. Like the Whos down in Whoville (from the lovely Dr. Seuss tale, *Horton Hears a Who*), humanity needs every last voice.

We hope to continue to prioritize developing alternative water plans and opposing the Vista Ridge pipeline project, primarily because it is unsustainable. It is estimated that pumping 50,000 acre feet of water for 30 years will mine this aquifer from 250 to 850 feet, when estimated recharge only adds back 5 to 12.5 feet. As well, decision makers have not concerned themselves with the added Green House Gases when Texas is already the largest GHG emitter in the nation (double that of the 2nd largest emitter, California, which has a much bigger economy). The federal government has set desired GHG cutbacks for each state, and Texas is asked to cut current levels by 40%, much more than any other state. Do that math.

We have work to do to get the ban on coal tar sealants and single use shopping bags, as well as help resolve parks funding, haze from power plants, transit solutions, comprehensive plan update, air quality issues from cement plants and fracking, stormwater management, net zero solid waste, as well as a backlog of other concerns. San Antonio's Sustainability Office is preparing a sustainability plan, and we need to be sure it is a strong one with resources to carry it out. The comprehensive plan update is also in limbo. It will influence development for decades. If we are not there in force, the chambers of commerce will see to it our plans are eviscerated.

The Club is a vital player, and the work is very rewarding. Though we may not get the credit, our efforts have made a big difference, and we are needed more than ever. I know this because I have served to the fullest for ten years—four helping with organizing a chapter in Puerto Rico and six here—one as Executive Committee vice chair and five as chair and serve on all committees. Like other leaders in our group, we all eventually need a break. So it is vitally important that you give serious thought to reorganizing your life and try to step forward and do what you can to help the Alamo Sierra Club. Renewed blood and energy of those who care is constantly required to preserve and protect our environment.

by Margaret Day, Executive Committee Chair

EPA Proposes Haze Protections: Let's Make Our Voices Heard in January

Our national parks and wildlife refuges are American treasures that have long provided memories and adventures for many locals and visitors in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. But thick smog from haze pollution is clouding our state's remarkable vistas and dramatically reducing visibility. Hikers who enjoy trekking to the top of mountains can forget taking scenic photos – that is, unless they want a heavy gray filter added.

What we can do, however, is tell the Environmental Protection Agency we don't want haze to cloud the horizon. In mid-January, the EPA is holding hearings in Austin and Oklahoma City for this purpose, where many plan to testify --

property owners near Big Bend, tourism and national park employees, health professionals, faith leaders, parents and more.

There's a lot more at stake in reducing haze pollution. For years, the state of Texas has been releasing alarming amounts of haze pollution into the air, with more than 365,500 tons of sulfur dioxide emitted in 2013 alone, according to federal Environment Protection Agency data. This is a serious public health threat.

Coal plants in Texas emit more pollution than coal plants in any other state, but our pollution blows over state lines into Oklahoma and Arkansas, affecting their wilderness areas and obstructing views. Even though the Clean Air Act requires states to address haze pollution, in 2009, the Texas Commission of Environmental Quality submitted a do-nothing plan that wouldn't have cleared the skies over Big Bend for another 140 years.

The good news is that the EPA has recently rejected TCEQ's plan and, instead, proposed to cut Texas' coal-burning pollution by more than 228,000 tons – almost two-thirds of the total amount of sulfur dioxide emitted by all the state's power plants. This requirement will safeguard the health of all people in the region while protecting the natural visibility in our beloved parks and refuges. We need a strong turnout to testify in support of the EPA's new regional haze rule in Austin on January 13 – also to provide formal comments on the rule through February: We want clean and clear air!

While the rule is good, Sierra Club experts are still evaluating it. There are several improvements that could be made – such as adding language that would encourage phasing out the use of coal and ramping up production of clean energy, such as solar and wind. Phasing out the coal plants will help with more than just regional haze; it will lower the levels of ozone smog in our cities and reducing climate disrupting carbon pollution. For example, the 14 coal boilers covered by the regional haze rule emit 35% of the ozone-causing NOx pollution from all the 121 power plants in Texas. In addition, the 14 coal boilers covered by the regional haze proposal emit 26% of the carbon emissions from all the power plants in Texas. Just replacing these 14 coal boilers with clean energy would get Texas 2/3 of the way to meeting the EPA's target for carbon emissions from Texas of 39%.

EPA haze protection hearings: here's how you can help

The Alamo Group of the Sierra Club is urging its members and supporters to weigh in on this important issue. Here's how to make your voice heard:

RSVP to attend the Austin EPA hearing January 13th

We are asking folks to join us at the EPA Public Hearing in Austin on Tuesday January 13th. The coal and energy industries will have their lobbyists and other representatives at the EPA hearing to fight the regulations, so we need to make sure that the people fighting for the health of people and the natural environment are even better represented. If San Antonio volunteers to attend will RSVP soon, the Lonestar Sierra Club organizers will arrange free refreshment and transportation by van or bus (or at least, carpools) from San Antonio (and New Braunfels) to a brief rally/media event before the hearing and then home after the EPA hearing. [RSVP here](#).

Write a formal comment, due no later than February 17th

Whether or not you can make it to the hearing, a format written comment will also have an impact (make sure you file it on time, referencing Docket # EPA-R06-OAR-2014-0754). Online activists can lodge a comment by going to the [Club's website](#).

Also, for yet more impact, consider personalizing your comment with a photo and/or personal story about you + regional outdoor recreation + air quality issues that affect you, your family and friends, and the health of the natural environment that's threatened by coal-fired power plants. For example, you could upload a PDF that tells the story of camping 20 years ago at Big Bend and watching a meteor shower in the clear sky, or you could upload a Word file with a "then" and "now" photo embedded to show how much more haze there is in some regional place that has more haze. Here's where to submit your own comment: Federal e-rulemaking portal: [regulations.gov](#). Follow the online instructions for submitting comments.

For additional information

See the Sierra Club Lonestar Chapter's [web page about this topic](#).

by Meredith McGuire, Co-Chair of the Conservation Committee. This article is derived from a release by [Sarah Sharif](#), Lead Organizer on Regional Haze, Sierra Club.

Lion's Field Events

Monthly films and presentations for your edification and enjoyment

Wednesday, January 28th: *Water – Vista Ridge Update*

Peggy Day, Alamo Group Chair, along with Conservation Committee Co-Chairs Meredith McGuire and Terry Burns, will tackle the recently approved [Vista Ridge Pipeline](#) including discussions of:

- Abengoa & Blue Water (Vista Ridge consortium) issues; the originating aquifer issues and its groundwater districts; more pipeline questions, its San Antonio connections, and sustainability issues other than water
- SAWS rates' update and how Vista Ridge would be paid for; can San Antonio afford Vista Ridge water without over-burdening the majority of residents with its costs; more information and questions about SAWS rate-restructuring (that, if approved by the City Council in mid-2015, will go into effect in 2016, regardless of whether the Vista Ridge project goes forward)
- why future development propelled by Vista Ridge water would be so bad for the Edwards Aquifer, why that future development would be completely unsustainable for San Antonio, and why it fails to prepare the City for

resilience in the face of rapidly increasing Climate Change

- "best practices" and other innovations employed by other cities to expand and protect their water supply more sustainably (and more affordably) than SAWS' Vista Ridge and/or continuing current San Antonio practices (such as using aquifer water for irrigation and industrial/business uses that don't require potable water).

Wednesday, February 25th: *Images of the West*

Gary and Michelle Krysztopik have been traveling in the West and will present images of creative sustainable ideas that they spotted plus new design concepts. They also have interesting images of changes to landscape, including extreme weather events. Come welcome Gary and Michelle as they fill us in on what they saw.

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.

Alamo Group Conservation Efforts

Alamo Group Conservation Committee meetings

Note change in meeting date: monthly Conservation Committee meetings will be on second Tuesdays, 6:00-7:30 pm, at the Eco-Centro on North Main Street near the SACC campus. **Thanks** to all the Conservation Committee volunteers who made our Alamo Group's efforts to affect local, regional, and state policies so effective in 2014.

Call for volunteers

If your New Year's resolution includes getting more active in the Sierra Club, consider volunteering your time and talents to support the Alamo Group's Conservation efforts here in the San Antonio region. We have ongoing campaigns for improving regional Air Quality, as well as conservation of Water and Energy. There are also frequent specific local efforts, such as protecting our nearby parks and wilderness areas, protecting regional endangered species, and fighting environmental health threats in and nearby our community. Please contact co-chairs **Meredith McGuire** and **Terry Burns**.

by Meredith McGuire, Co-Chair of the Conservation Committee

LSTAR Rail District EIS Scoping Meeting

Sierrans are encouraged to attend the Lone Star Commuter Rail EIS Scoping meeting to learn about and provide comments on future two-way commuter rail service from San Antonio/Austin.



Tuesday, January 20th

5 pm to 8 pm

Carver Cultural Center, 226 N. Hackberry

Website

Note this service will have domed cars, and a separate bike storage car for cyclists who would like to ride the trails in either city. This meeting is a good place to ask consultants questions and learn details.

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 Auction Donors

With gratitude, we are delighted to acknowledge these businesses and individuals whose generous donations made the silent auction at our 2014 Holiday Fundraising Party so successful.

- 5 Guys Burgers
- Kurt Youngblood Framing and Art
- Arcade Midtown Kitchen
- La Madeleine
- Azuca'
- Loretta Van Coppenolle
- Betty Dabney
- Liberty Bar
- Blue Star Brewery
- Los Nahuatlitos
- Boudro's Restaurant
- Mark Robinson
- Capital Genealogy
- Michelle Petty
- Canyon Cafe
- Paesanos
- Chipotle
- Panera

- Chris Madrid's
- Dorcol Distillery
- Dos Carolinas
- Eloise Stoker
- Flemings
- Grimaldi's Pizzeria
- Halcyon / Stella
- Half Price Books
- HearthStone Bakery
- Jason's Deli
- Jim's Restaurants
- Jim Spickard
- John Hertz
- K Charles Salons
- Kathleen Trenchard
- Peggy Day
- Rainbow Gardens Nursery
- Red @ SA Art Institute
- REI
- Sea Island
- Sherwin Williams Broadway
- Soluna / El Mirasol
- Sprouts
- The Carriage House
- The Cove
- Trader Joe's
- Tribeca
- Vegeria
- Whole Earth Provision
- Whole Foods Market

Sierra Club on-line resources

There is a wealth of information available on-line at SierraClub.org in addition to news and events. In particular podcasts, e-mail newsletters, video productions, and blogs. Have a cruise through! A summary is included below.

Sierra Club Radio

Sierra Club Radio is a half-hour audio program (a podcast). Recent programs of note:

December 6:

Biomimicry, Yerdle and Green Gifts. I was particularly interested in the interview with the president of the Biomimicry Institute. Their work is about understanding how organisms do efficiently the tasks we struggle to do with inefficient engineering solutions. For example, many animals excrete excess salt from their bloodstreams as a matter of course. But desalination of seawater for potable use requires expensive equipment and a lot of energy. The interview discusses how the desalination mechanism used by animals can be engineered for our use. The animals are the "patent holders" of these green technologies we can leverage. Visit biomimicry.net for more information.

November 29:

The Art of Fermentation. This session was an interview with Sandor Katz, author of *Wild Fermentation*. About how much of what we eat is a result of some fermentation process. The micro-organisms in our food and within our bodies connect us with our environment and are important for our health. Also check out [Katz's website](#) which has many articles and questions/answers about making your own sauerkraut, yogurt, kombucha, and other fermented foods.

November 15:

Kat Taylor of One Pacific Coast Bank, and Kate Galbraith Co-Author of The Great Texas Wind Rush. About how Texas became a world leader in the production of energy from wind.

How to deal with these podcasts

I put 100+ podcasts including **Sierra Club Radio** on an iPod and listen to them in my Prius. Or use your smart phone. Other of my podcast favorites include **Science Friday, Living On Earth, Nature, Fresh Air and TED Radio Hour**. There is a good directory of podcasts at npr.org. You can subscribe to podcasts with iTunes or one of the other podcast applications; [here is a review](#) of several.

Sierra Club e-mail newsletters

There are ten newsletters available to anyone at this [link](#). For example: **The Green Life: Your Daily Green Life Tip, The Insider** and the **Daily Ray of Hope**.

Sierra Club video productions

Emmy Award-winning Sierra Club Productions (SCP) develops and produces video projects that reflect the Sierra Club's belief that every person is connected to, inspired by, and responsible for the natural world. SCP also partners with filmmakers to create engagement campaigns around nationally distributed TV and film projects.

Visit our [YouTube Channel](#) to view more of our short videos. Of note are **Best Internship: 2013 Highlights, The Cost of Coal, 150 Coal Plants Retired** and **2012 Successes**.

Food for Thought

It is natural human impulse to think of evolution as a long chain of improvements, of a never-ending advance towards largeness and complexity; in a word, towards us.

We flatter ourselves. Most of the real diversity in evolution has been small-scale. We large things are just flukes, an interesting side branch.
- Bill Bryson, from *A Short History of Nearly Everything*

Sierra Club blogs

The Club has a dozen blogs (on-line discussions) on topics ranging from wildlife to green lifestyles, activism to current events. See sierraclub.org/blogs. Of particular note, but have a look at the full selection at the link above:

- Sierra Club Executive Director [Michael Brune's blog](#).
- [Compass](#), "Pointing the way to a clean energy future".
- [Explore](#), "Stories of personal encounters with the natural world".
- [Green Alpha's Next Economy](#): "The emerging green economy, green investing, and the roles of climate science, policy, and trends".
- [Lay of the Land](#): "All things lands and wildlife".

by Kevin Hartley, Newsletter Editor

Outings: The Call of the Wild

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

