

Newsletter

The Alamo Sierran e-Newsletter - June, 2014

* General Meetings *

Tuesday, June 17th: UTSA's Texas Sustainable Energy Research Institute

Dr. Les Shephard, Director, Texas Sustainable Energy Research Institute, at UTSA, will discuss the Institute and its many areas of focus, some of which are EE and Conservation, Wind Energy, Renewable Energy Technology Storage, and Solar Energy. To learn more about the Institute and Dr. Shephard, go [here](#).

Tuesday, July 15th: Pot Luck Poetry Party!

At the Witte Museum, Memorial Room, dinner at 6 pm, program 6:30-8:30 pm. Please bring a tasty dish for the potluck dinner. This is our 3rd annual summer eco-poetry event. We are very happy to welcome back contributors:

- San Antonio's inaugural poet laureate Carmon Tafolla
- Bryce Milligan, eco-balladeer and Wings Press publisher
- Carol Reposa, editor of the arts-literary journal *Voices de la Luna*
- Jim LaVilla Havelin, San Antonio National Poetry Month organizer and Gemini Ink and Bihl Haus Arts poetry teacher
- Lahab Assef Al-Jundi, poet author of *No Faith At All*
- Moby Warren, our emcee and Alamo Chapter poetess

Rose Catacalos, Texas Poet Laureate, has been invited and we hope she will join us also. These are top San Antonio poets that have previously read and really love this event. They are enthusiastic about returning. Their work often expresses deep connections to and concerns for the natural world. Participants will be led by Moby to contribute to a collective poetry-writing experience by crafting a line on a poetry banner.

Tuesday, August 19th: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland plus Svalbard Archipelago (Norway)

Alan Montemayor and Cheryl Hamilton, will provide wonderful exploration of Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland, and the Svalbard Archipelago, including the Northernmost Point, just 540 nautical miles from the North Pole, land of the polar bear, beluga, walrus and reindeer. This expedition will be on Spitsbergen Explorer.

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

A Word from the Alamo Group Chair

Climate change is now the highest priority conservation issue of the Sierra Club, so it is always in the back of my mind. This focus leads me to set my sights on any news or resources that can be of use in this uphill battle. On my recent trip home to New Mexico, I happened to learn of an interesting old New Mexican family's climate change advocates, the Nordhaus brothers, Robert Jr. (Bob) and William (Bill), in a [May 11 article in the Santa Fe New Mexican](#).

Their father Robert Sr., the grandson of a wealthy Santa Fe immigrant merchant and whose family later owned a 50,000 acre sheep ranch, was a lawyer specializing in energy and Native American law and who built the ski resort and partnered to build the tramway at Sandia Mountain. Both brothers grew up riding, fishing, skiing, and exploring the land. Their close contact and observation of the landscape made them more aware of the fragile ecosystem. Like their father, the brothers became Yale alumni. This background shaped them, and, from different approaches, led to important breakthroughs for climate advocacy, according to the *New York Times* author, Coral Davenport.

Bill Nordhaus is a distinguished academic economist at Yale who has written more than 20 books. Many are influential books on climate change. *Reflections on the Economics of Climate Change* came out in 1993. Another, a co-authored book, is *Warming the World: Economic Models of Global Warming* (2000). *Managing the Global Commons: The Economics of Climate Change* (1994) won the 2006 Award for "Publication of Enduring Quality" from the Association of Environmental and Resource Economics. His most recent book from 2013 is *The Climate Casino: Risk, Uncertainty, and Economics for a Warming World*. Bill is known as a key theorist on the economics of climate change and is credited with the idea of a carbon tax and its development, as well as for the first model for an economic sustainability measurement, presented in *Is Growth Obsolete?*, his co-authored 1972 book. He later created DICE and RICE, assessment models that integrate economics, energy and climate change. DICE calculated the cost of economic damage from carbon pollution to be \$20-30 per ton—the target figure commonly used for carbon taxation, and for the 36 billion tons released per year globally that is a lot of damage. Bill has usually stayed out of the political fray, but has recently stepped up to publically address the deficient claims of the small band of scientists, supported by conservative

foundations, who argue there is no demonstrable rise in global temperature and that a small rise in temperature would be more beneficial than harmful (See [“Why the Global Warming Skeptics Are Wrong”](#)) and who have blocked carbon tax legislation.

Older brother Bob is a distinguished lawyer specializing in federal electric, natural gas, and environmental regulation. Bob contributed to the 1970 Clean Air Act, and part of this work was a prescient provision, Section III(d), the category for unknown “pollutant of the future” that in 2009 became the legal basis for regulating carbon dioxide. Bob served as the first General Counsel of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and later as General Counsel of the Department of Energy under President Clinton. His position as a political insider has enabled him to translate Bill’s work into legal and regulatory policy.

“Both brothers believe cutting carbon pollution is crucial to protecting the environment and the economy from climate change. They also agree on the best way to do it: A Bill-style carbon tax, they say, would be far more effective than a Bob-style regulation,” Davenport notes.

Thinking about the Nordhaus brothers’ story and their contributions to our climate change fight was both uplifting and nostalgic. I identify with Bob and Bill in their evident love for the land, the sky, the water and the wildlife that develops from a close and observant contact with the beautiful Land of Enchantment that I was also privileged to enjoy growing up. Each of us contributes what we are able and can take heart knowing that there are many others who share this biophilia and help to preserve the natural world and ourselves in the process.

by Margaret Day, Executive Committee Chair

Lion's Field Events

Monthly films and presentations for your edification and enjoyment

Wednesday, June 25th: *The End of the Line – The World Without Fish*

Scientists predict that if we continue fishing as we are now, we will see the end of most seafood by 2048. Oceans without fish. Imagine your meals without seafood. Imagine the global consequences. This is the future if we do not stop, think and act. The End of the Line chronicles how demand for cod off the coast of Newfoundland in the early 1990s led to the decimation of the most abundant cod population in the world, how hi-tech fishing vessels leave no escape routes for fish populations and how farmed fish as a solution is a myth.

The film lays the responsibility squarely on consumers who innocently buy endangered fish, politicians who ignore the advice and pleas of scientists, fishermen who break quotas and fish illegally, and the global fishing industry that is slow to react to an impending disaster.

The above commentary is from topdocumentaryfilms.com.

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.](#)

Water Conservation, Smart Growth, and San Antonio’s Water Security

On **May 29**, the City Council will vote on a SAWS impact fee increase for developers of new housing. Please [contact your Council representative](#) ASAP to support the Alamo Group’s position about water conservation and protection of the aquifer.

Here is the statement we will submit to the City Council:

* * *

The Alamo Group of the Sierra Club fully supports SAWS’ proposed impact fee increase to the maximum allowed by the State of Texas. When developers create new housing with new water hookups, supply pipes, pumping stations, and sewage lines and treatment, they are assessed impact fees that are supposed to compensate the public utility for the costs added for each new residence. City Council will decide on May 29 whether to assess fees increased to the maximum allowable under State regulations. The main reason for setting those fees much higher is that acquiring “new” sources of water, such as the desalination plant to process brackish water and make it potable, is dramatically more expensive than supplying water from the Edwards Aquifer. Because recent and future construction of new housing – especially that on the suburban periphery of the City – is the foremost cause of increased demand, it is appropriate that developers (and ultimately the buyers of those houses) pay for the costs of acquiring “new” water.

We urge the Council to affirm the principle that those who benefit from development should bear the full per-unit cost of that growth. The SAWS staff report showed clearly that current ratepayers who live in existing housing have already been forced to subsidize new development for years, because the impact fees for new construction have been kept so low. We agree with the position of COPS/Metro Alliance that the City must end this injustice.

San Antonio must be proactive about our future water security. City Council’s recently established “Edwards Aquifer Water Supply Initiative” is a good step toward developing a comprehensive plan, but SAWS and City Council shouldn’t wait for that plan to make top priority of aquifer protection measures and water conservation.

1. Suburban sprawl, which causes considerable environmental degradation, should be actively discouraged – never subsidized. All development over the Edwards Aquifer Recharge, Transition, and Contributing Zones must pay for its ongoing impact on the quality and quantity of water supply. We support the position of the

GEAA regarding both future growth in those areas and the costs of protecting the aquifer from negative effects of existing development.

2. How should the City prepare for future water needs, in the face of probable population growth, fierce regional competition for existing groundwater supplies, and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events? We need to be prepared for severe droughts, punctuated by flooding, and other effects of climate change that we are already experiencing. The resilience of the City in the face of such future problems will depend greatly on how well the City prepares - right now!

We have to realize that, globally, there is no such thing as “new” water. The hydrological cycle of evaporation and precipitation redistributes water, but if humans pollute wells with toxic chemicals or overdraw them so much that they “go dry,” there is no technological remedy, no “replacement” water source. SAWS staff reported that the projected costs of access to groundwater from other parts of the state are many times greater than the price per unit of water from our current sources. And those other areas are likely to need all their water precisely when cities need to acquire more. Such inter-basin transfers are an extremely expensive and unreliable approach to water security. We need much more transparency from SAWS about any plans afoot for such expensive “investments” of our ratepayers’ money.

Do we really need that expensive additional water? Not if we conserve water and protect the purity of our water supply. Although San Antonio has already achieved impressive water conservation to date, there is much more we could do, especially with help from SAWS and the City. Studies, both local and statewide, have shown that most people would prefer to conserve water and cut down on wasteful practices like irrigating lush lawns, rather than pay dramatically higher costs for water. A substantial plurality believe that conservation measures should be mandatory government restrictions, rather than voluntary measures.¹

San Antonio should not postpone conservation practices until we are already in severe drought. We need to start preparing now, so that all citizens and businesses have a chance to adjust their water use practices. We should be able to manage our normal water use to be less than 50 gallons per person per day and, in case of drought, no more than 35 gallons pp/day (according to OECD data, average usage in European countries ranges between 25 and 50 gallons pp/day).

We believe that the best interests of the people of San Antonio would be best served by a combination of carefully controlled smart growth, together with water planning based on conservation of existing sources and on protection of the purity of the aquifer. Without compromising our quality of life in this relatively arid part of the country, we can develop a program of water management that promotes timely response to drought and other extreme weather events, while building resilience for all neighborhoods.

¹ James W. Stoutenborough and Arnold Vedlitz, 2013, “Public attitudes toward water management and drought in Texas,” *Texas Water Journal* 4(2): 47-61.

In addition to the above immediate action, we hope to communicate with SAWS staff, the City Office of Sustainability, and City Council about measures that we should consider to help residents and businesses make the transition as quickly and smoothly as possible.

Here are some ideas that Conservation Committee has discussed, and we would welcome your suggestions and feedback. Please send them to Conservation Committee Co-Chairs, [Meredith McGuire](#) and [Terry Burns](#). Let us know if you would be interested in volunteering to work on this issue this summer and early fall. Thanks!

Some suggestions for how San Antonio could prepare for future water needs:

- a. Foster a *Culture of Conservation*, with incentives that encourage each household not to waste water. Grandpa knew how much water he had in the cistern, so he didn’t need an agency to tell him he had to conserve; if he used too much water in June and July, he might run out by September. San Antonio could foster the same self-regulation by using the system of steeply tiered rates to remind people “Waste Not, Want Not.” For example, drought restrictions could trigger lowering the usage levels for tiers 3 and 4, but frugal households could carry over unused units of lower-tier water toward the next two months’ allowance.
- b. Set up infrastructure in all neighborhoods that facilitates adaptations, such as rainwater catchment, graywater reuse, and A/C condensate capture - all useful water sources in case of drought.
- c. Create a much more effective drought response plan, requiring mandatory reductions in water use much earlier in a drought. In place of the ineffectual watering schedules for advanced stages of drought, consider both greatly increased price per unit for tiers 3 and 4, plus hefty fines for residences that exceed monthly usage of more than, for instance, 70 gallons pp/day during a drought.
- d. Provide incentives to help people convert their landscaping to low-water-requirement native plants, and require all new construction to have xeriscape outdoor plantings.
- e. Consider requiring metering (or some proxy for it) for multiple unit apartment houses, in order to reward water-efficient households; require the management to have full transparency about the water bill and its apportionment, in apartment buildings where the tenants are required to pay for water as well as rent.
- f. Consider creating tiered rates for all *non-residential* water uses, as well. For example, there should be strong incentives for hotels and restaurants to reduce their water consumption, especially during a drought.
- g. All prospective homebuyers should be supplied with both a water- and energy- usage audit for the house, and mortgages calculated to include predicted utility rates, as well as payments on principle and interest.

Social Events

meet and greet your Sierra Club friends

Friday, June 27th, 6-8 PM: *Candlelight Coffee House*

One of our favorite places, it features good food and a nice quiet atmosphere.
3011 N. St. Mary's St.

Friday, July 23rd, 6-8 PM: *Chris Madrid's*

A good place to have a tasty burger, salads, cold beer, and wine. 1900 Blanco Rd.

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](#). Then one week before the next Social, you will receive an email notice.

Visit our [Social Events](#) page for maps, times and more information about these gatherings.



Sierrans Show King William Parade Watchers Past and Present

Visit our [Photos](#) page for a slide show of our 2014 King William Parade appearance.



Kim and Ashley Hernandez carry the Sierra Club banner in the 2014 King William Parade

Our theme this year was *Traditions Old and New* illustrating various types of carryout bags used throughout the years. Sierra Club marchers enacted old and renewed carryout bag traditions as part of our 2014 *It's in the Bag!* [campaign](#) to support a citywide carryout bag ordinance.

Design for Deconstruction (DfD)

What is deconstruction?

Deconstruction is a simple concept. It supposes the reuse of building materials that traditionally are thrown into a landfill when remodeling or demolition takes place. Some see this principally as a waste-management issue. However, the real benefit of deconstruction is more than diverting materials from the waste stream, it is in reducing the extraction of new raw materials from our ecosystems, most of which is done in an unsustainable manner. In contrast to the linear mode of extraction, fabrication, installation, and discarding in the landfill, DfD is a closed circle of use and

reuse. This is distinct from recycling, as recycling of used building materials often results in "down-cycling" where the value of materials is degraded. Here materials retain their inherent value and embodied energy.

Buildings are large artifacts, made up of complex, interwoven assemblies of materials that in and of themselves do not have high value. Separating these materials out is often difficult and laborious. Many are difficult to reuse or recycle. Buildings are not valuable because of their materials, but for their utility. In reality the greatest cost of building is the labor it takes to put together. Materials themselves only represent about one third of the total construction cost.

What is DfD?

The ease and speed of demounting a building and separating its materials is what DfD is all about. How can design professionals put buildings together so that taking them apart is easier? How are materials first fastened together and then later unfastened? Are materials bound together in such ways that rendering them asunder is next to impossible? Is there a mix of hazardous or toxic materials intertwined with ones of great value? Is there a use of mastics, glues, or caulking? Are composite materials present?

A building that takes into account DfD has the following characteristics:

- It is not complex
- It is structurally simple and clear
- It has a limited palette of materials
- Materials are non-toxic and worth recovering
- There are few components – they are large
- There are few fasteners - they are strong
- Connections are simple and accessible
- Mechanical fasteners are used in lieu of sealants and adhesives
- Systems are separate from structure
- Components and assemblies are accessible for demounting

Why is DfD important?

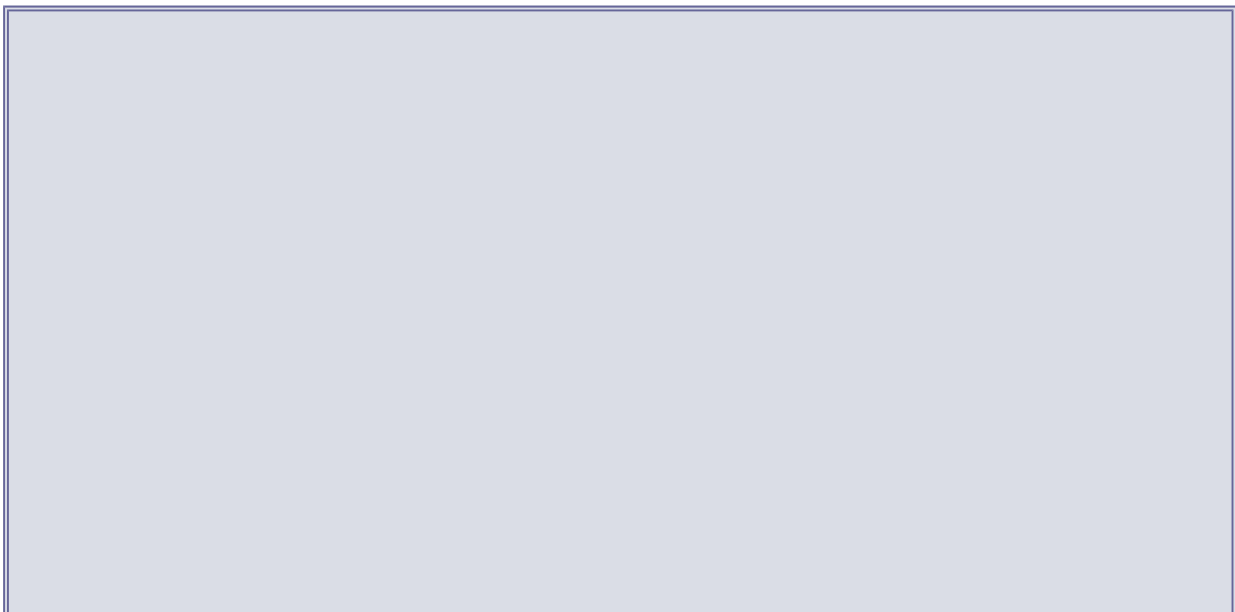
- The average DfD project salvages 60 - 90% of the materials from any given structure.
- The deconstruction of an average-sized home will provide 6,000 board feet of lumber, which is the equivalent of saving 33 mature trees.
- The average home contains 892 million BTUs of embodied energy, an amount of energy equal to 7,826 gallons of gasoline, or enough to drive an SUV 5.5 times around the Earth.
- For every three square feet of salvaged materials, one square foot of new construction can be built, saving all the materials that go into new construction.
- Every year, the amount of construction debris placed in landfills could form a wall 30 feet high and 30 feet thick that would encompass the entire continental United States. That is EVERY year.
- The microorganisms that decompose this debris will release about 5 million tons of carbon equivalent in the form of methane gas. This is equivalent to the yearly emissions of 3,736,000 passenger cars.

What can we do in San Antonio?

San Antonio has adopted a zero waste goal as policy and DfD is an essential tool to reach this goal. Sierrans should contact their elected leaders and request they assess how to incentivize and regulate to promote DfD. Construction businesses and professionals and their associations should also organize to promote DfD.

by John B. Hertz, Architect – Green Building Contact

Alamo Group Gives Scholarships to Childrens Garden





Lamar Elementary students who received Alamo Sierra Club scholarships to the Children's Garden at the SA Botanical Garden

The Alamo Group gave scholarships to the Children's Garden at the SA Botanical Garden. Here is what some of the children had to say about the garden:

- I Love it. We do a lot of planting. The thing I like is a cucumber. I like the Sunday house because we learned a lot about plants.
Abigail, second grade
- I like that we do a lot of work. I enjoyed watching the Gladiolus grow. We tried the honey and cucumbers too.
Aaron, Kinder
- The thing I love the most is the bee section. My favorite is the brocolie plant it is so big. The insects that we find are cool.
Kira, 2 grade
- I like learning how to plant things and taking the bad stuff off the plant, like insects and eggs.
Juan Viera, fifth grade

by Gay Wright, Executive Committee Member & Tablings Chair

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.

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.



National Rivers Month Film Festival

To celebrate National Rivers Month this coming June, San Antonio River Authority (SARA) will be hosting a film festival in collaboration with the Wild & Scenic National Film Festival Tour.

Thursday, June 19th

5 to 10 p.m.

Santikos Bijou Theater in Wonderland Mall

[Website](#)

For more info call Yviand at SARA (210) 302-3244.

SAWS has new coupon programs for patios and gardens to conserve water

I learned about these new SAWS' programs yesterday at Festival of Flowers. There is a new website that describes the new coupon programs for gardens to replace turf, and for patios that require pervious covers such as flagstone or pavers. Flagstone is better to use; it is more pervious. If you cap a portion of irrigation system in your yard, you may get a coupon for \$200 for a patio that would remove turf. Learn more at website below.

There are also handy lists of drought tolerant plants listed by categories with descriptions: shrubs, perennials, and more. Perennials include Rock Rose Pavonia, Zexmenia, sages of all types, Indigo Spires. Check out each category.

Mark Peterson has organized this information on the [SAWS Conservation webpage](#). Click on the various options and view the plant lists.

Mark's preference for edging a garden space is to use rock rather than metal edging. He also mentioned that trees hate water in the first three or four feet from the trunk. Will invite him for a presentation.

by Barbara McMillin, Transportation Contact

