Alamo Group of the Sierra Club Newsletter

# The Alamo Sierran June 2015, Vol 49 #5

## Word from the Chair

### *Thoughts On "SA Tomorrow"*

The City of San Antonio has launched a Comprehensive Planning process named "SA Tomorrow". There are three interrelated plans—a comprehensive plan, a sustainability plan, and a transportation plan. The comprehensive plan addresses land use, urban design and municipal policy. Sustainability speaks of "three pillars of sustainability—social, economic, and environmental." Transportation is "multi-modal", including pedestrians and bicycles. This process will go on at least until the end of this year, and for transportation at least, into spring 2016. This is a very important opportunity for all of San Antonio to have a voice in our future. Unfortunately, planning processes can result in lengthy documents that see little to no implementation. We at Sierra Club will try very hard to see that good plans are created, and just as importantly, that they are implemented. We urge all to check out the website and get involved: satomorrow.com.

I would like to offer some personal reflections on what I would hope to see for SA in 2040 (the time horizon for this process). THESE ARE NOT ALAMO GROUP OR LONE STAR CHAPTER POSITIONS, BUT PERSONAL THOUGHTS ONLY. They are intended to stimulate thought and discussion.

I would first question the demographic principles on which the process is founded, i.e. the predicted growth patterns. These may be accurate, but we can look around and see many examples where predicting the future is often badly wrong: oil prices taking a huge fall in the last year, the strong cost competitiveness of solar and wind power eliminating any argument for the South Texas Nuclear Plant expansions proposed (and fought) a few years ago, the marked reduction in per capita water use achieved in SA over the last two decades (and much more possible!). Economic drivers of continued rapid population growth and associated massive sprawl CAN CHANGE. Remember, the internet barely existed 25 years ago!

SA Tomorrow asks us to imagine, suggest a Big Idea, etc. So I will imagine a SA without freeways, yes you read right! I imagine no more sprawl outward, consuming no more rural land and habitat, all growth managed within current ETJ (SA + Extra Territorial Jurisdiction). I imagine mobility using no fossil fuels at all, with possible heavy duty (18 wheeler-like) updated diesel exceptions. I imagine mobility by a combination of shared electric vehicle fleets, linking with larger fixed systems into which these vehicles may hook together like so many cars on a train. On the more local level, the same vehicles would link to truly safe walking, bicycling, and other personalized ways to link "the last mile, or half, or quarter". Personal flying drones may also be an option to carry us around by 2040. All of this mobility would be powered by a fully sustainable distributed network of renewable energy, CPS serving as the caretaker of the system, with every appropriate home and building in the city mounted with solar panels to produce electricity, and with local wind, biofuel and other renewable technology developed similarly by then. Our housing will be energy efficient and take advantage of our natural conditions. I envision neighborhoods becoming more mixed, economically, ethnically and culturally, with more truly local food, entertainment and work opportunities. Commuting long distances to work will largely disappear. Our air will return to the healthy clarity we had before gas guzzler sprawl enveloped us.

I envision SAWS being our water caretaker instead of purveyor, supporting local water supplies for local wise, efficient use and reuse, rather than importing water from hundreds of miles away to supply to wasteful landed estates spread all over the Hill Country. I imagine education building informed citizens participating in democracy, not industrial cogs in a machine. I imagine quality health care available for all.

I imagine many will find these visions nightmarish, or overly idealistic, or both even. So far COSA has been much under the influence of developers and Council Chamber people who can only imagine more of our past. We must do better. I encourage all to imagine big, and get involved!

*By 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.

## Event Schedule

***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*. Here is a summary of the series.

**Save the date: group annual potluck**

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

**General meetings venue change**

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

***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

## Re-framing San Antonio's Water Future

*By Meredith McGuire, Co-Chair of the Conservation Committee*

What does San Antonio need to learn from the California water crisis? Dr. Char Miller offered some interesting insights to our own looming water crisis when he spoke (by video conference) during the Water Forum[1] at Trinity University on May 19. Dr. Miller, formerly Professor of History and director of the Urban Studies Program at Trinity, is now the W. M. Keck Professor of Environmental Analysis at Pomona College in Southern California. His extensive, acclaimed research and writing about San Antonio's water issues and decision-making make his experience with California's water crisis especially interesting.[2] He has given many talks in California about what California should learn from San Antonio's history of enhancing and protecting its water sources. This talk, however, emphasized what San Antonio must learn from California's mistakes leading to the current water crisis and from some of Los Angeles' recent exemplary practices for a better water future.

***A Watershed Commonwealth***

Char spoke of John Wesley Powell's concept of hydraulic districts, what Miller called "watershed commonwealth", as the best approach to community decision-making about water stewardship and protection in a region where our lives are bound together with of those who live upstream and downstream on our watershed's precious source of fresh water. Unfortunately, most political boundaries fragment the watersheds of our nation and state. They typically produce political decisions that result in gross misuse of precious resources, water contamination, and environmental degradation. In the face of today's water crises, however, communities and whole regions could make more effective decisions about water supply and quality, if they would work together on the level of a watershed and find common cause in its protection.[3]

Dr. Miller used the Edwards Aquifer as the best instance of how people take collective action to protect the watershed commonwealth for the well-being of the whole region that depends on the aquifer. He noted that time and time-again, San Antonio residents raised their voices in defense of their aquifer from political threats, such as the thrice-proposed Applewhite Reservoir, an expensive boondoggle promising vast surface water supplies from damming the Medina River. [Had it been built, it would have been bone dry the last 2-3 years, due to drought-reduced river flow.]

***Parallels***

The parallels between SAWS' current Vista Ridge project and Applewhite are obvious. As former Council member Maria Berriozabal pointed out last October, when Council approval was being rushed through deliberations: Vista Ridge is Applewhite IV – only far more expensive, far more wasteful, and far more dangerous for aquifer protection. The Acting Mayor (Ivy Taylor) and SAWS have promoted a top-down decision-making process about our water by refusing to hold sufficient open and informed public discussion of all the options for meeting San Antonio's water needs in the future. We need to re-frame San Antonio's water future, democratically re-asserting our ownership – together with all who share the watershed - of the moral responsibility for protecting our watershed commons for the common good.

Char Miller discussed some of Southern California's massive mistakes in the 19th and 20th centuries: building numerous pipelines to pump water over mountains from distant lakes and rivers, paving over natural aquifers' catchment areas, while channeling existing waterways into storm drains and dumping the water that fell as rain into the ocean as polluted wastewater. He also noted Los Angeles' recent award-winning "best practices," like removing impervious surfaces over the aquifer catchment areas, using bioswales to let stormwater percolate down into the aquifer, and restoring wetlands. Nevertheless, as an extremely dry region, Southern California may never be able to save enough water to support such a large population. Although our area has never been so dry (or so populous) as Southern California, might we share a similar fate?

### *Re-Framing to Cope with Mega-Droughts, Ongoing Regional Droughts, and Climate Change*

SAWS and Chamber of Commerce spokespersons have tried to frame San Antonio's need for water as a mere public relations problem. They tell us that San Antonio should not settle for "adequate" amounts of water, but should be known as a place of "abundant" water. They claim that we need the Vista Ridge deal so that San Antonio can avoid the "stigma" of being a dry climate. To deny the possibility – indeed probability – of serious, prolonged drought is to set our city up for a water crisis perhaps more disastrous than that facing Los Angeles right now. Such a drought would not be a "natural disaster," but rather – a humanly caused one.

To become more resilient in the face of extreme weather events that climate change will make more frequent and more severe, *we need to change how we think about droughts*. Before, during, and after rainy periods (like the ones we've been experiencing this Spring), we need to be carefully preparing for the dry months that could last for many years, even many decades. We also need to think of droughts as regional, not just local, phenomena. That means, if our region is experiencing drought stresses, but our locality is getting some rains and relief, San Antonio is still vulnerable.[4]

New data, such as a recent study by Cook et al., suggest the probability of a 35-year-long drought before the end of this century.[5] How can we withstand such a drought? The weather extremes triggered by climate change also include heavy downpours and flooding, heat waves that last weeks desiccating the soil and evaporating surface waters, record-high daily low temperatures that prevent night-time cooling, and so on. To prepare, cities must deal with all the contingencies in an integrated way to meet needs for clean water, energy, shelter, food, and security.

How can we increase the water supply to meet people's needs? As we learned in grade school, the hydrological cycle – of evaporation and precipitation – means that no one can produce "new water." All the molecules of water on the earth today were here in some form thousands of years ago. Our water supply is limited; if we use it up faster than new precipitation falls, we may run out. Unlike many other scarce natural resources, however, much water is renewable by the hydrological cycle. But if human activity – like building over the aquifer recharge zones – destroys the capacity of the natural system of aquifer recharge, then much renewable water is lost. If human activity – such as one town continually overdrawing a fragile aquifer – destroys its potential for recharge, then all the communities of the whole watershed have lost a source of water. One of our highest priorities must be to hold onto as much of the precipitation that falls in our watershed as possible. That includes, not only capturing it in aquifers, cisterns, and lakes, but also holding it in the soil (e.g., with compost), wetlands, creekbeds, and riparian habitats.

### *Re-framing Our Water Supply Options: "Waste Not, Want Not"*

Juliet Christian-Smith and Peter Gleick, both of the Pacific Institute (pacinst.org), argue that the 19th and 20th century conventional approach to water supply was a "hard path."[6] It was focused almost exclusively on large-scale, extremely expensive infrastructure projects, like dams, reservoirs, and extensive networks of canals and pipelines. Economies of scale were prioritized, while economies of scope went unrecognized. Detrimental environmental impacts on rivers and riparian ecosystems, wetlands and estuaries, rarely counted in calculations of the real costs of water, according to this perspective. Huge projects required such enormous, long-term commitments of (usually government) resources that they were not adaptable to change or implementing new technologies. The systems were centralized, with decision-makers often remote from the lives of the people who used the water. The reigning assumptions seemed to be that increased productivity and increased population required proportionately increased amounts of water to be supplied. Decision-making itself tended to be rigid and isolated with separate decision-making agencies working in silos rather than together (e.g., separate decisions about water, energy, and storm water management, rather than integrated planning to accomplish all three inter-related goals at the same time).

Like most US cities, San Antonio took this conventional approach to water supply throughout most of its history, as a diagram of its water infrastructure and its history of construction costs would indicate. The most expensive examples of decision-making along "hard path" lines are the proposed Vista Ridge project and the desalination plant, now under construction, together with the extensive pipelines to bring in saline water from an aquifer in another county. Like Los Angeles' pipelines from Owens Lake and the Colorado River, and like Santa Barbara's desalination plant, these extremely expensive and inflexible water projects may not serve us well, precisely when we need the water the most. For example, what if – in year 15 of a 35-year mega-drought, both groundwater sources for that purchased water become so overdrawn that pumping is halted? What if fracking operations in the area cause contamination or depletion of wells that San Antonio thought would supply the city for more than 30 years? What if, having been sold the myth of "abundant water," a large proportion of San Antonio residents are completely unprepared to adapt to greatly reduced water from SAWS? What if, having spent so much money on Vista Ridge, SAWS has no funds to develop better alternatives quickly? Vista Ridge is San Antonio's "hard path" route to water crisis.

### *"Soft-path" approaches*

Let's devote our resources to more flexible, local and community-supported "soft path" approaches instead. The "soft path" for water supply focuses on *meeting water-related needs* – not just supplying water. If businesses could have their water-related needs met by using water-efficient equipment, then the existing water supply could stretch farther without detriment to

economic productivity. In a 2003 study of California water use, Gleick and colleagues analyzed water use and potential savings from water-efficient practices in households, landscaping and gardens, as well as commercial, institutional, and industrial sectors of the state's economy. They conclude that "… *it is much cheaper to conserve water and encourage efficiency than to build new water supplies* or even, in some cases expand existing ones."[7][emphasis added] With our region's higher rainfall, San Antonio would almost certainly experience even greater savings from comparable conservation and efficiency-enhancement measures. Although the city has already achieved a considerable reduction in water usage rate, compared with 30 years ago, systematic water-efficiency measures, such as those described by Gleick, in all sectors of the local economy could conserve as much water as Vista Ridge would supply.

Another key "soft path" approach involves reserving the higher-quality potable water for uses that require it, while utilizing "fit-for-purpose" water for other uses. SAWS' excellent "fit-for-purpose" water project involves recycling sewage (for use as compost, methane energy, and recycled water redistributed through SAWS' "purple pipes" for landscape irrigation, fountains, and the Riverwalk water itself), but that recycled water is hardly enough. San Antonio misses many valuable opportunities to capture rainwater and stormwater run-off, which would be excellent sources of "fit-for-purpose" water for, not only irrigation, but also many commercial, municipal, and industrial uses.

SAWS seems to be avoiding some of the most valuable and cost-saving aspects of the "soft path." Christian-Smith and Gleick point out that "the soft path recognizes that investments in *decentralized solutions* can be just as cost-effective as investments in large, centralized options."[8] Decentralized solutions, such as capturing and storing rainwater near the eventual points of use (e.g., industrial cooling processes), are not only water-efficient but also energy-efficient. Many "soft path" measures involve decentralized investment, too. For example, rather than SAWS or City of San Antonio (CoSA) supplying all money for investment in water supply, the businesses or neighborhoods that would benefit from using captured rain- or storm-water could collectively invest in a mini-grid of "fit-for-purpose" water. SAWS may be avoiding such measures out of fear of lost revenue, but that is short-sighted, because every gallon of aquifer water saved by a household or business investing in its own water supply is a valuable piece of San Antonio's water security.

The "soft path" approach requires *thinking about water in an integrated way*. But SAWS, CPS, and CoSA are not structured to encourage that kind of thinking. Given San Antonio's long history of struggling with flooding and storm water runoff, the city could realize far greater volume of stormwater capture than Southern California and – if its agencies could collaborate – simultaneously make good use of mandated stormwater fees as incentives to make good use of water that is currently nothing but destructive and polluting.[9] Thinking about water in an integrated way means taking water-efficiency into account in energy production and taking energy-efficiency into account in providing water; it also includes reducing emissions of greenhouse gasses involved supplying energy and water.[10]

Unlike most US cities, San Antonio has already taken some exemplary "soft path" measures. In addition to the recycled sewage water, San Antonio employs an aquifer storage and recovery facility to retain excess aquifer water in wet months to be able to use it in dry months. Especially important is the voter-supported (yet again this year!) use of sales tax funds to acquire conservation easements to protect land over the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone. The 2014 documentary, Water Blues/ Green Solutions,[11] highlights these laudable achievements.

When a preview of the San Antonio segment of the documentary was shown at a U.T.S.A. water forum in early 2014, SAWS CEO Robert Puente used the celebratory occasion to announce that SAWS had decided not to pursue the route of water purchase and inter-basin pipeline transfer, because it was not needed and not cost-effective. The audience applauded enthusiastically. But the Chamber of Commerce and some other political powers prevailed to reverse that decision, and within a month, the SAWS Board had approved the decision to engage in contract negotiations for the Vista Ridge deal

The documentary had emphasized the extent to which San Antonio's residents cared about their water, working together to protect and conserve it. Viewing the documentary again recently, I thought about the ideal of a "watershed commons" and how important the people of San Antonio and the whole watershed are in accomplishing our collective water future. What happened to their voice in the decision-making process? This is clearly a case of a small group of powerful people choosing the wrong path, to the benefit of only a few and to the detriment of many -- not only current residents, but also generations to come.

Let us reclaim and defend our watershed commons. Let us take the "soft path" to prepare our community for a sustainable water future.

***Endnotes***

[1] Co-sponsored by the Trinity University Environmental Studies Program and Biology Department, together with the Alamo Group of the Sierra Club, the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance, and the Headwaters Coalition.

[2] Char Miller's books include – On the Edge: Water, Immigration, and Politics in the Southwest. Trinity University Press, 2013; and Deep in the Heart of San Antonio: Land and Life in South Texas. Trinity University Press, 2004.

[3] Those who missed this talk – or just want to learn more about the concept of "Watershed Commonwealths" and how it applies to San Antonio – may view Char Miller's 2014 talk on that topic through a link on his website: ea.pomona.edu/faculty/char-miller/

[4] Viewing Texas, the Southwest, and the Central Plains areas on the animated GIS maps of recent years'

drought progression gives a sense of how region-wide many droughts are: droughtmonitor.unl.edu/MapsAndData/Animations.aspx

[5] B.I. Cook, "Unprecedented 21st century drought risk in the American Southwest and Central Plains," e1400082. Science Advances, Feb. 12, 2015. Note that, although the regions this study examined do not include south Texas, our part of south Texas is geographically close enough to have similar probability of mega-drought.

[6] Christian-Smith, Juliet, and Peter Gleick, "Introduction: The Soft Path for Water," pp. xv-xxi in A Twenty-First Century US Water Policy. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. See also, various pages on the Pacific Institute website: pacinst.org/issues/sustainable-water-management-local-to-global/soft-path-for-water/

[7] Gleick, Peter H., et al., 2003. Waste Not, Want Not: The Potential for Urban Water Conservation in Californi. Oakland, CA: Pacific Institute for Studies in Development, Environment, and Security. San Antonio businesses could benefit from reading some of the cost effective water-saving measures this analysis considered, estimating potential savings, for example, in schools, hotels, office buildings, hospitals, golf courses, industrial laundries, petroleum refining, high tech industries and dairy processing.

[8] Christian-Smith and Gleick, 2012: xix

[9] Garrison, Noah et al., June, 2014, Issue Brief: Stormwater Capture Potential In Urban and Suburban California. Pacific Institute and the NRDC. accessible online at: pacinst.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2014/06/ca-water-stormwater.pdf

[10] The principles of this integrated approach, as described by Cooley and Donnelly, apply equally to California and Texas, but Texas has a much higher proportion of coal-burning power plants, so the production of greenhouse gas emissions is a more serious problem. Cooley, Heather, and Kristina Donnelly, 2013. Report: Water-Energy Synergies: Coordinating Efficiency Programs in California. The Pacific Institute. pacinst.org/publication/water-energy-synergies/

[11] Produced by Penn State Public Media and shown on PBS, beginning in February, 2014. Several segments can be viewed online. Most of the San Antonio segment is accessible at: waterblues.org/themes/san-antonio/san-antonio-segment.

## Comments on "Free Trade"

*By Terry Burns, Executive Committee Co-Chair*

Sierra Club is working with other groups to oppose the "Trans Pacific Partnership" trade deal (there is a similar "Transatlantic Partnership" also in negotiation, waiting in the wings). These deals are negotiated behind closed doors, by the U.S. Government, with extensive Corporate but ZERO PUBLIC input, and they are being pushed for "Fast Track" Congressional rubber stamp approval. These deals, like the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA) and others since, the promise is always more jobs, keeping America more competitive. History shows these deals always result in further erosion of American worker rights and loss of jobs to cheap labor countries. A recent story highlights another bad effect of this so-called "free trade" movement, i.e. the inability of our own government to set its own rules and standards by which we live. This loss of our sovereignty is happening in many ways. The Global Trade Organization (GTO) of which we are a member has ruled we cannot have nation of origin labels on our foods. Canada and Mexico thought this labeling hurt their sales. Well, yes, I ALWAYS seek U.S. food whenever possible. Shrimp from some countries is full of pollutants, fruit and vegetables are covered with pesticides banned here, etc. At the most basic, I refrain from buying food shipped using petroleum from the other side of the world. Even if that food is safe, and even if less expensive, it seems crazy that we should buy grapes or apples from Chile instead of the U.S. A sustainable SA is based on local products wherever reasonably possible, especially basics like water, energy, and a substantial amount of our food.

## Farewell, Hill Country

*By Tom Denyer*

The relationships between city and countryside provide a trope for many world histories. The city, or core, or metropole begins life as a waif, dependent on the bounty of the countryside, the periphery. The city has yet to become a thing in itself; it is merely an excuse to gather, a place where the trails happen to converge, perhaps with some open space and good water.

Yet in time the city learns to leverage its position into something more commanding. The process takes time and generations, but eventually the merchants, priests and politicians seem to offer something unattainable in the periphery. They seem to have discovered the secret of dominating "Nature, red in tooth and claw." They offer a walled enclave, with time for leisure and other civilized pursuits, a place where the race goes to the pretty and clever as well as the swift.

Once the city gains its commanding position, relationships with the countryside shift into reverse. The farms and ranches and villages need better roads to the city, not only to sell their production for whatever worth urban markets designate with cash and paper, but also to bring home the manufactures which, ironically, are no longer made by hand. The terms of trade have shifted. The country people can still bring their production to the city, but their trip home brings lighter pockets.

The give and take accelerates until we reach a point which is about where we are now in the relationships between the I-35 and I-10 corridors and the Hill Country. The urban core has taken the wood and limestone and caliche for roads and buildings; the grass, for food and fiber; the children, for labor; the culture, for amusement. Now it comes for the land, air and water: the space itself, formerly occupied by the Hill Country and now by the views of one another's mcmansions on the hills.

For those repelled by this last act, is despair the only option? Justice William O. Douglas visited the state -- the Big Thicket, the West Texas mountains, the Hill Country -- in the early 1960s. He hoped that the dedicated vision of conservationists could salvage "the shining bits of wilderness that are left in Texas." Yet he added a melancholy caveat, "the modern Ahabs are more strongly entrenched in Texas than anywhere else." The man who had rehabbed his polio with trail running in Yakima heard, over six years spent visiting Texas, "every outdoor value I know appraised largely in terms of dollars." Hence his final appraisal, "Farewell, Texas."

The naturalist, Bedichek, saw something like that over a decade earlier, as he scrambled over the Texas littoral, Karankaway country. He doubted that places like the Aransas Refuge could satisfy the hopes of their proponents. Maybe "a refuge as large in extent and as varied in natural environment as the whole state of Texas" might allow Nature "to do her worst or her best therein." Like his colleagues, Webb and Dobie, he knew his people. Scanning the rigs floating like Portuguese Men o' War in the Gulf, he recognized "the lengths to which rugged individualism will carry men when the predatory impulse is given free rein, where stakes are high, and the emulative instinct toned up to the peak of its ferocious capabilities."

John Graves, as he floated the Brazos between Possum Kingdom and Lake Whitney, pushed the narrative back a century. The Comanche, the People, had swept down from the Plains, displaced Kiowa, Apache and other peoples who had arrived before them, and delayed the manifest destiny of white men for a generation. Then they, too, collapsed under the pressure of war, disease, buffalo slaughter and real estate developers. The new frontiersmen of Graves and Bedichek's time "were the cutting edge of a people whetted sharp to go places, to even things out and move on, to take over and to use and discard." In their wake, some wild islands might survive "but the big, sloppy, teeming spraddle will go. It always has."

The newcomers found resident allies who embraced their destiny, but their greatest ally resided back in the city. When Steinbeck portrays dozers crushing the Joad's house "like a bug," he does not condemn machine or operator, but "the monster" that built the tractor and sent it out and "had somehow got into the driver's hands, into his brain and muscle, had goggled and muzzled him – goggled his mind, muzzled his speech, goggled his perception, muzzled his protest."

Worse, by now several generations have accepted Graves' "always has." When William Least Heat-Moon sailed his River Horse north on the Missouri just south of Omaha and the mouth of the Platte, he saw the first riverside billboard since the Atlantic. "The bullboard boys and others who see landscape only as a means to grab a fast buck have so degraded the view and so numbed us to the blight that we, especially the young, often silently accept the unsightly as a requisite for our economic lives."

For lovers of the Hill Country, other than despair what is to be done? The islands of open space, the tree museums, remain options. Opportunities for public natural areas and wildlife management districts, private conservation easements and nonprofit refuges will emerge from time to time, worthy projects all.

Or, the fantasy of political resistance might yet transport us to an alternative universe, in which the growth gospel cultists scatter before a coalition of tree huggers, ecotourists, boutique farmer-ranchers and monkey wrenchers.

The more likely outcome and perhaps best hope may be Nature, the spraddle, herself. Sometime in the past two decades the Hill Country's water resources fell behind human population growth. They will not catch up. Developers do not construct affordable housing, so the people who actually work have no place to live. As the newcomers relocate their baggage of congestion, pollution, crime and all the other versions of unsightly babbittry, their followers may second guess themselves. And leave it up to Nature to do her best or worst therein.

*-Tom Denyer is a long-time Sierra Club member, avid participant in Alamo Group outings, and a hard-working volunteer at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept. Kronkosky State Natural Area (not open to the public yet). Here you can learn more about this place. -Ed.*

### For further reading

William O. Douglas, *Farewell to Texas*

Roy Bedichek, *Karankaway Country* and *Adventures With a Texas Naturalist*

John Graves, *Goodbye to a River* and *Hard Scrabble*

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*

William Least Heat-Moon, *River Horse - Across America by Boat*

William A. Owens, *Three Friends: Roy Bedichek, J. Frank Dobie, Walter Prescott Webb*

Dobie, Webb and Bedichek: *texasmonthly.com/story/pen-pals*

Roy Bedichek: *humanitiestexas.org*

John Graves: *npr.org*

## 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.

## From SierraClub.org

Our national website has rafts of interesting groups of news and discussions. Have you had a look recently?

Here's a link to the news section. There's an article A Victory in the Decades-Long Fight for Environmental Justice in the Gulf and Beyond, highlighted by a story from Corpus Christi.

At the top of the News web page there is a list of Blogs,

*Cross Mtn from the East Rim trail, Chisos Mtns, Big Bend National Park. Photo by the Editor.*

including Sierra Club Radio.

There is a web page for Sierra magazine, which Sierra Club members receive by mail. There is a link to the contents of the current issue but much more written additionally by the magazine staff and contributors.

At the top of the homepage note the link Near You. At the bottom of the resulting page there is a link Texas: Lone Star Chapter, which is our state's chapter website. On that home page if you go to the Regional Groups list you can see Alamo, which is our group's website, along with the others in Texas.

### 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.

### Food for thought

Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature - the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter.

-Rachel Carson, from *Silent Spring*

## 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. Our national website: sierraclub.org.

### Executive Committee Officers and Members

*Phone area codes are 210 unless noted*

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*Fluoride Issues*: L. Van Coppenolle 492-4620
*Organic Gardening*: Dave Klar 485-6880
*Recycling*: Margaret Day 829-5632
*Tree Conservation*: Richard Alles 494-2088
*Transportation*: Barbara McMillin 734-4170
*Water Issues*: George Rice 737-6180
*Climate Change*: Mobi Warren 496-4942
*Drought*: Alyssa Burgin 381-4021
*Endangered Species*: Mobi Warren 496-4942

### US Congresspersons

Rep. Lamar Smith 821-5024
Rep. Joaquin Castro 684-6896
Rep. Henry Cuellar 271-2551
Rep. Will Hurd 202-225-4511
Rep. Lloyd Doggett 866-916-5921

### Mayor

Ivy Taylor 207-7060

### City Council

*E-mail to district[n]@sanantonio.gov*

Dist 1: Roberto Treviño
Dist 2: Alan Warrick
Dist 3: Rebecca J. Viagran
Dist 4: Rey Saldana
Dist 5: Shirley Gonzales
Dist 6: Ray Lopez
Dist 7: Cris Medina
Dist 8: Ron Nirenberg
Dist 9: Joe Krier
Dist 10: Mike Gallagher