



SIERRA
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Alamo Group of the Sierra Club Newsletter

The Alamo Sierran

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Word From the Chair

SAWS

Our city owned water utility took another step May 18 in its drive to burden rate payers with a \$3 billion bill for an unneeded water pipeline from Central Texas. Despite gutting the previous WTPA contract, and inserting

over 400 pages of amendments, they insist this dog is still the same dog, and COSA's (City of San Antonio) previous vote in support of the original WTPA gives automatic approval to this contract. We continue to point out the following:

1. Vista Ridge is unnecessary if SAWS would recognize the benefits of rain water capture (reducing flood problems in the process), further conservation, etc.
2. Vista Ridge is clearly intended to support Chamber of Commerce marketing of San Antonio as a place of cheap abundant water, and to support those high end executives and others who insist on lush green landscapes in the face of a semi-arid environment that will continue to become drier over the next decades. All San Antonio will pay to support these wealth few and their developer friends, on the theory that "growth benefits all", which is nonsense.
3. SAWS has been totally untrustworthy throughout this process, repeatedly issuing promises and reassurances that later prove half or more untrue, and are often completely contradicted by their own future statements. Most recent of many examples are the following: SAWS is bragging that Garney Construction has cut the water leases needed for the project in half, because "Vista Ridge Abengoa did not do their due diligence", the opposite of earlier assurances that Abengoa Spain and its corporate Texas shell company Vista Ridge Abengoa were the perfect partners because of their vast experience in this field.
4. SAWS also celebrates the locking in of low interests rates "saving" us more than \$500 million, as if buying something you don't need when it's on "sale" is a bargain not to be missed.
5. COSA must do its own financial analysis of this contract and vote on it again. It is ridiculous at this point to trust SAWS on this, especially since there are known good and cheaper alternatives to Vista Ridge.
6. COSA should retake control of SAWS and throw out the current Chamber Board with people who actually represent the community.

Texas Water Scorecard

The group Texas Living Waters, of which our Lone Star

Chapter is an essential member, has released a [scorecard](#) rating hundreds of water utilities around the state on how well they manage their water supplies. It has lots of good information that will be helpful to those utilities that want to improve their performance in water conservation etc. SAWS was rated 12th among the hundred or so major water utilities in Texas. Not so bad, but nothing like the "National Leader" they portray themselves as. They could do much much more.

Region L Water Plan

The Texas water planning process is divided into regions, and we are in Region L. The "Pre Planning" process is occurring now, here's the [web page](#). This is for the 5th planning cycle, 2017-2021. Their next meeting will be at SAWS Headquarters August 4th 9:30 am. This is another important venue that impacts our water future. The current materials use 125 gallons per capita per day (GPCD) as their assumed average for our region in 2021. San Antonio achieved 121 GPCD in 2014.

The SAWS 2015 Management Plan has never been released, probably because it uses something like 125 GPCD. This is important because if they made a serious conservation effort we could easily achieve half that, which would completely negate their argument for needing Vista Ridge.

Air Quality

Our region is in non-compliance with new ozone rules, and is expected to be officially designated as in "non-attainment" (EPA language) this October. Our Alamo Area Council of Governments (AACOG) representing this region has tracked our trends of increasing air pollution for several years. They are now initiating actions—some of which have already been in place in Austin for years—to help reduce our ozone causing emissions. A first step now being taken by San Antonio and the region is to institute a uniform anti-idling ordinance for large vehicles in excess of 14,000 lbs. A significant portion of our ozone relates to vehicle emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx). Idling is a significant source; however, idling in traffic congestion and in passenger vehicles is not addressed, and we all see long lines of parents idling while waiting for children. Children are among the most sensitive to the harmful health effects of ozone, and San Antonio has some of the highest pediatric asthma rates in the country.

Many other steps will be needed, but Alamo Group has expressed our support for this small first step. We have also expressed our opposition to continued efforts by AACOG, TCEQ and the Governor to obstruct the ozone rules. They are in denial and need to move forward for the benefit of our health, as AACOG is beginning to do.

Thanks much to the almost 200 members who sent e-mails about the anti-idling ordinance, in response to our action alert. This is why we need e-mail addresses of members. We will not abuse your trust!

SA Tomorrow

San Antonio has released the draft documents

- [SA Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan](#)
- [SA Tomorrow Sustainability Plan](#)
- [SA Tomorrow Transportation Plan](#)

As part of its year long community engagement process to develop plans for our future until 2040. We are very pleased with the emphasis in these plans on sustainability, multimodal transportation, low impact development (LID), natural resource protection, including parks, endangered species, air and water, etc. It is critical for the COSA to hear loud and strong support for these plans from the environmental, social justice and other progressive communities.

If the Plans are approved, funded and with long term support they will make a huge difference and potentially turn the tide against our ongoing 40 year and more unregulated sprawl all over everywhere. These plans were to go to City Council for approval in June. This would allow them to be available to inform the budget process in July and August.

However, Mr. Krier (city councilman, district 9), after expressing concerns about cost and negative impacts on Chamber of Commerce and Developer interests, succeeded in delaying the vote until August, so the plans will NOT be available for the budget process. We can be sure these groups will be highly organized to water down many positive aspects of these plans. If COSA hears from enough of us we may be able to blunt some of the negative assaults from the “keep the party going as long as possible” interests.

National Parks

This year is the 100th year anniversary of our National Park system. This was a new idea in the world, promoted especially by Sierra Club's own founder John Muir. It is an idea we should all take great pride in. At this time there are many efforts in Congress by Republican lawmakers to privatize or sell off various public lands around the country, as well as to allow extractive industry activity within national parks. The National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service (includes wildlife refuges), Bureau of Land Management (these are Dept. of Interior) and US Forest Service (Dept. of Agriculture) are all chronically underfunded.

If you have visited any of these recently you may have seen this, or maybe you were blocked at the gates a couple years ago, like many foreign tourists, when the entire system was shut down when our own Ted Cruz led the way to shut down the government at a cost (yes cost NOT savings) of many millions of dollars per day. I forget the point of the shut down, but remember all the travel chaos it caused for the millions who visit our parks each year. The Alamo Group would like to do something to celebrate this important 100th year Anniversary, and call attention to the support and funding our Parks need. We are looking for good ideas as to how to do that. Please let us know your thoughts!

By *Terry Burns MD, Alamo Group*
Executive Committee Chair

Event Schedule

For updates on all events check the Alamo Group website, sierraclub.org/texas/alamo, under *Get Involved*.

Battery recycling! Bring your dead batteries to the EcoCentro and Lion's Field meetings below and place in the box provided. Thanks to Gay Wright for coordinating this effort.

June 21 Tuesday

At EcoCentro, 6:30 pm, topic: the SA Tomorrow Multimodal Transportation Plan

General monthly membership meeting. Venue details below.

The city's Transportation & Capital Improvements department will discuss the Multimodal Transportation plan that has been studied for the last 14 months. Extensive research and many meetings, including consulting with VIA, and across other agencies of city government, have gone in to the plan. Come learn about various concepts, such as different types of efficiencies, connectivity, how a transportation plan could remove traffic from congested corridors, and how it could move residents from one end of town to another quickly and reliably and with less stress.

Venue: 3rd Tuesdays at [EcoCentro](#), San Antonio College, 1802 N. Main, at the northeast corner with Locust St. Free and open to the public. [Here's our webpage](#) with map showing EcoCentro.

June 23 Thursday

At Lion's Field, 6:30 pm, topic: Urbanized showing

Monthly program; venue details below.

Urbanized is a feature-length documentary about the design of cities and features some of the world's foremost architects, planners, policymakers, builders, and thinkers. Over half the world's population lives in an urban area, and 75% may live in a city by 2050. Some cities are experiencing explosive growth, others are shrinking. Discusses challenges facing cities and presents a diverse range of urban design projects around the world.

Venue: 4th Thursdays 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.

News and Contributions

Mayor and City Council briefed on the SA Tomorrow Plan 2040

By *Barbara McMillin*

May 18th Mayor Taylor and City Council were briefed on the SA Tomorrow Plan's three prongs, consisting of the Comprehensive Plan, the Multimodal Transportation Plan, and the Sustainability Plan, at the "B" Session. For the documents see the links above in the *Word From the Chair* article under *SA Tomorrow*.

The plans are visionary, reduce emissions, have guiding principles, and the plan strategies can be monitored in the future on an online dashboard where the public will be able to track progress of plan elements. Plan goals will have targets, actions, tools, and time frames. The SA Tomorrow Plan is for the next 25 years and will be updated frequently. View the [B Session powerpoint](#) at the Rivard Report.

Presenting the Comprehensive Plan were Brittany White, Interim Director of Planning and Community Development, who is carrying on for John Dugan, former Director, who provided the initial direction for the plan; Terry Bellamy, Assistant Director of Transportation and Capital Improvements, who discussed the Multimodal Transportation Plan; and Doug Melnick, Chief Sustainability Officer, who spoke about the Sustainability Plan. After the presentation, the council members asked questions about aspects of the plan. Absent were Alan Warrick, District 2, and Ron Nirenberg, District 8, both on council business.

Looking forward to transportation options

By Barbara McMillin

The front page of *San Antonio Express-News*, on May 19th, had a great article on the fastest growing cities in US. Turns out that Texas has four of them, with New Braunfels the second fastest growing! The other three are Georgetown, Frisco, and Pearland. San Marcos had previously led the list for three years. The article also mentions the high traffic volumes in Austin and that IH-35 in Austin is gridlocked a lot. When Atlanta had 100 miles of sprawl, the business leaders went to Atlanta and said they did not want their employees driving 100 miles to and from work, so please put in light rail. That is how MARTA (Metropolitan Atlanta Transit Authority) was born. The San Antonio/Austin region is in need of options to get around in each city and between the two cities. Austin has one commuter rail to Leander, and we are waiting for resolution of regional rail from San Antonio to Austin.

In the *San Antonio Express-News* May 22nd there was an [article](#) entitled "Texas Can Help Solve Nation's Transportation Ills" which is promising in that the goal is for university research and academia to help solve local, regional, and national transportation problems. And it turns out that researchers and government agencies are already working together more. There is promise in this approach. Perhaps, just perhaps, when we think about capacity, it will have a broader definition beyond road capacity, which means adding more lanes to a gridlocked road, that may soon be gridlocked again. It might mean *moving people not just cars*, as the San Antonio Tomorrow Plan 2040 suggests. Read about the San Antonio Plan 2040 [here](#), which includes the Multimodal Transportation Plan.

Learn about Transportation Options

To get up to speed on research on transportation and transportation-related issues, go to [Victoria Transport Policy Institute](#). Click on TDM Encyclopedia and

Documents. There is even a Search function. This is an exciting, easy to read research organization that supplies transportation information.

Also visit the [American Public Transportation Association](#), and read reports there in the Resource Library.

Are you a Sierra Club member?

Do we have your e-mail address?

Sierra Club membership: please [join or renew!](#)

And, the Alamo Group would be very happy to have your e-mail address, so you can get this newsletter and other important regional news. Please e-mail Loyd Cortez, loydcortez@earthlink.net. Provide your name, and your address also would be helpful.

A little hike in the Grand Canyon

By Kevin Hartley

Further to the mention of the National Park System's 100th anniversary in Terry Burns' *Word from the Chair* article above! [Grand Canyon](#) was the 15th national park, established in 1919. In celebration here are a few photos!

Hiking rim to rim in Grand Canyon is the most well known backpacking adventure there. But another route is arguably more challenging and spectacular. Note: hiking within the canyon requires a permit for overnights, and proper preparation and planning even for dayhikes. People die here each year.

The Tonto Trail

The Tonto Trail runs along the Tonto Plateau which is about 2/3 of the way from the South Rim to the Colorado River. The plateau is the flat section both sides of the river above the inner gorge in my 1st photo below. This plateau is comprised of the Bright Angel shale, which is much more easily eroded than the rocks above and below, which in many places makes for idyllic hiking. A couple bits of the trail are faintly visible around Monument Creek in the photo if you zoom in.

Colin Fletcher followed the Tonto Trail on a fraction of his journey entirely through the national park below the South Rim in 1963, the first person to do this in one trip. This epic trek was covered in his book *The Man Who Walked Through Time*.

A central section of the Tonto Trail is reached by the popular Bright Angel Trail to the east, from Grand Canyon Village, and the unmaintained Hermit Trail to the west. This is usually at least a 3-day, 22 mi trip, with great side options including hikes down the the river. You lose/gain about 3500' on each end from/to the South Rim. Hermit has far less traffic than Bright Angel and the Tonto even less.

My 2nd photo is from the Tonto Trail, about half way between Bright Angel and Hermit Creek Trails. More of the trail distance is hiking up and around the side canyons (such as Monument, the 1st photo) than along the river as in this photo.



The view in Grand Canyon National Park from Pima Point on Hermit Rd looking north, along the South Rim. Some of the Colorado River inner gorge is visible from the upper right (northeast) to the lower left (west). The Monument Creek side canyon is lower center. Oct 2014.



On the Tonto Trail between Horn and Salt Creek side canyons, looking west. Monument Creek is in the side canyon this side of the separated low butte upper center (Cope Butte). My two trip companions are visible center left, along with a bit of the trail, if you zoom in. Apr 2012.



Monument Creek in the Colorado River inner gorge granite and schist, 8" wide at this point, with flow rate about typical. Apr 2012.

Water!

The only drinkable water on the 14 mi section of the Tonto between Hermit and Bright Angel trails is Monument Creek, my 3rd photo below. This creek is very reliable but obviously limited. Rocks moved by the creek during floods have sculpted an amazing section of little slots such as the one in the photo, through the ancient inner gorge rocks, which are 1.7 billion years old, among the oldest exposed rocks on Earth. Here's an [NPS article](#) on the geology. This photo was taken in a section of the creek visible bottom center of the 1st photo.

The Great Unconformity

Noted on the 1st photo is [The Great Unconformity](#), the striking demarcation throughout the central part of the Grand Canyon between the Cambrian age Tapeats sandstone (underlying the Bright Angel shale) and the pre-Cambrian inner gorge rocks, with the latter being the eroded flat remainder of an ancient mountain range that was higher than the Himalayas. 1.2 billion years worth of rocks is missing exactly here.

Rapids!

The [rapids of the Colorado in the Grand Canyon](#) were formed by enormous floods carrying boulders down the side canyons. One of many is Granite Rapids, at river mile 93.9 downstream from Lee's Ferry, at the mouth of Monument Creek. See the note on the 1st photo and the 4th photo below. A description for river travelers says "one of the more difficult rapids with a strong push of hydraulics to the wall on river right".

Some of the rapids are accessible from the Tonto Trail. In addition to Granite Rapids, there is a great hike down Hermit Creek to Hermit Rapids, and likewise Boucher Rapids down Boucher Creek (in Topaz Canyon, the next major side canyon west of Hermit Creek).

Park usage levels and getting around

Grand Canyon is extremely busy during Summer. Visiting Spring and Fall is a good idea; then hiking below the South Rim is more hospitable. Winter is great for hiking but there can be blizzards and freezing rain.

The park has an excellent [shuttle system](#) which takes you to the viewpoints along the South Rim. There are good view of bits of the trails mentioned above and a few of the campsites, far below, you would use if you hiked the Tonto Trail. For example, the view from Pima Point, the 1st photo. A hiking companion did this before hiking the Tonto, and then went back and looked again after the trip; she said then it all made a lot more sense.

For more info

If you want more info about the trails have a look at the national park's [backcountry info page](#).

The North Rim is an entirely different adventure, but is closed between Oct 15 and May 15 due to the higher elevation. Here's the park's [North Rim info page](#).

There was another article on Grand Canyon in the [April edition of this newsletter](#), about development plans in the area and the historic trans-canyon water pipeline. Included were a couple more photos and a reading list.



Granite Rapids, from the bottom of Monument Creek, looking east. The creek mouth is on the right. Apr 2016.

Food for thought

I believe we have a profound fundamental need for areas of the earth where we stand without our mechanisms that make us immediate masters over our environment.

-Howard Zahniser



SIERRA CLUB

Alamo Group of the Sierra Club

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