

## Newsletter

The Alamo Sierran e-Newsletter - March, 2013

### \* GENERAL MEETINGS \*

#### **Tuesday, March 19th: New Carsharing System - Efficient, Flexible**

Bill Barker of the City of San Antonio's Office of Sustainability will give an overview of the new, downtown carsharing system operated by Hertz On Demand. The recent background, expected impacts and current status of this system will be presented. Bill will provide the sustainability argument for this transportation option and show how carsharing is compatible with the significant shift in demographics and technology now taking place. Attendees will be given specific information on how to enroll and use the carshare system.

#### **Tuesday, April 16th: Local Micro-Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles**

Gary Krysztopik, through his venture ZWheelz, LLC in San Antonio, is in the process of developing very simple Open Source Electric Vehicle (EV) kits that are easy to manufacture and easy to assemble. The first vehicle is a two-seat, highway-capable, battery-electric vehicle. This project is also about creating a network of local micro manufacturers of EV's, and a global open source design community.

#### **Tuesday, May 21st: Challenges of Climate Change**

Attorney Darby Riley will present a program on climate change. Mr. Riley is the founder of the [Texas Environmental Democrats](#), an environmental caucus of the Democratic Party.

**Times, location and speaker bios are on our Events page.**

## Lion's Field Events

Monthly films and presentations for your edification and enjoyment

#### **Wednesday, March 27th: All About Growing Fruit Trees**

David Rodriguez, Texas AgriLife Extension Horticulturist, will teach us the essentials of growing peach, pear, and citrus trees.

#### **Wednesday, April 24th: Genetic Roulette: The Gamble of Our Lives**

The film *Genetic Roulette: The Gamble of Our lives*, by Jeffery M Smith, author of best selling books on genetically engineered foods will be shown. Diane Baines, active in educating about the topic, will introduce the film and lead a discussion following the viewing.

#### **May: There will not be a Lion's Field program this month**

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 maps and additional information.**

## Opportunities to Get Involved

### **Help with Water Legislation Policy**

Save the date! Join [Environment Texas](#) for the San Antonio launch of our Save Texas Rivers campaign. Learn about current Texas water policy, the importance of conservation, and ways to ensure a sustainable water future. [RSVP HERE](#).

Where: Whole Foods Market Meeting Room, 255 E. Basse Rd. #130 San Antonio, TX 78209

When: Wednesday, March 13, 6:30-8:00 PM

This event is free and open to the public. Friends, family and co-workers are also welcome.

### **Get Certified in Native Landscaping**

The San Antonio Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas is offering two levels of Native Landscape Certifications. The Level 1 course is 8 hours long and is offered March 16, and April 13. Their Level 2 classes are 12 hours long and offered April 27-28 and May 11-12. To learn more about the classes, costs and to register online go to NPSOT.

### **Join in Climate Change Awareness**

Calling all persons concerned about climate change, one of our most pressing environmental issues. We have put together a PowerPoint presentation with the help of 350.org and others. If you would like to assist in raising local awareness by making or facilitating such presentations, and other actions, please contact Darby Riley

([darby15@swbell.net](mailto:darby15@swbell.net), phone 210-681-5889) or Barb McMillin ([mcmillin5543@gmail.com](mailto:mcmillin5543@gmail.com)). All help is welcome!

### Tablings and Volunteer Opportunities

If you would like to help with community outreach, the Alamo Sierra Club would love to have you volunteer with any of the upcoming events listed below. To sign-up please contact Gay Wright at [alamo.sierra@yahoo.com](mailto:alamo.sierra@yahoo.com) OR 210-362-1984.

- March 16: "Native SA" Native Plant Society Land Heritage Institute (10 A.M. – 2 P.M.)
- April 5: "Fresh Air Friday" Main Plaza (11:30 A.M. – 1 P.M.)
- April 6: "Siclovía" Broadway at Lion's Field (10 A.M. – 3 P.M.)
- April 18: "Earth Day" NW Vista College (9 A.M. – 1 P.M.)
- April 20: "VIVA Botanica & Plant Sale" San Antonio Botanical Garden (10 A.M. – 2 P.M.)
- April 22: "Earth Day" San Antonio College (10 A.M. – 2 P.M.)
- April 23: "EarthFest" UTSA 1604 (11 A.M. – 2 P.M.)
- April 27: "King William Parade" Roosevelt High School-King William (10 A.M. – 11 A.M.)
- May 3: "Walk & Roll to Work Rally" HemisFair (8:00 A.M. – 9 A.M.)



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### A Word from the Alamo Group Chair

The Texas legislature is in session and is making decisions on numerous issues that Sierrans care deeply about. Below are most of the environmental bills. Though many of them are small, piecemeal steps, Sierrans support most of them and are working with legislators to improve them. If you want to know more about the authors, sponsors, or details of the bills and their progress, it is available by clicking on the [bill number](#) that connects you to Texas Legislature Online. These and more bills are listed by Chapter Conservation Director Cyrus Reed at [Texas.sierraclub.org](http://Texas.sierraclub.org)

#### Justice:

- [HJR 94](#) urges Congress to call for a convention to propose amendments to the United States Constitution to address concerns raised by the decision of the United States Supreme Court in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission and related cases and events. As you may know, the National Sierra Club has called to amend this Supreme Court decision, so our cause can be advanced with House Joint Resolution (HJR) 94.
- [HB 1496](#) prevents certain limits on development of oil and gas wells permitted by the Railroad Commission. Sierrans oppose this bill to protect the rights of local communities to adopt health and safety standards appropriate to the needs of their citizens.
- [SB 957](#) (HB 2082) changes to procedures in TCEQ contested permitting case hearings on important waste, air and water permits. We oppose this bill in order to protect citizen rights in contested cases.

#### Air:

- [HB 788](#) (SB 536) regulates greenhouse gas emissions by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

**Water:** Currently 89% of Texas is in drought, according to Texas water expert Ken Kramer, so water legislation is a high priority for top officials.

- [HB 4](#) provides implementation funding for a revised Texas Water Plan, which in this draft stipulates that 20% must go toward conservation, education, and wastewater reuse. Many of us would like to see a higher percentage of the funds go toward conservation. You can help with the effort, led by [Environment Texas](#), to boost this number closer to 50% for conservation. Also see SB4.
- [HB 993](#) requires public notice by Parks and Wildlife Department of Consumption advisories for mercury contamination.
- [HB 11](#) (HB 227, SB 224) appropriates money from the Economic Stabilization Fund ("Rainy Day Fund") to finance certain water-related projects in water plans.
- [HB 857](#) requires water audits of large public water utilities.
- [SB 272](#) requires water well recordkeeping and reporting from oil and gas and agriculture.
- [SB 302](#) amends management, operation, rulemaking authority and oversight of groundwater conservation districts.
- [SB 668](#) calls for annual reports and recommendations by the Water Conservation Advisory Council.
- [SB 873](#) requires a permit for drilling and operation of water wells used to supply water for hydraulic fracturing.

**Energy:** There are numerous bills that affect energy. Sierrans support all of them except [HB2026](#), which alters the renewable energy code in ways that would kill the state's renewable energy plans.

- [HB 303](#) calls for at least 35% of the state's generating capacity be from renewable energy and 2% of total generated capacity be from solar by January 2020.

**HB 723** , among other aspects, this bill calls for new renewable energy standards and a renewable energy technology credit trading program. It has a target of at least 1,500 more megawatts of capacity from a renewable energy technology other wind energy by 2022. The bill also aims to raise the state's renewable energy production to 10,000 MW by 2025.

- **HB 546** calls for renewable energy reinvestment zones and the abatement of ad valorem taxes on property of a renewable energy company located in such a zone.
- **SB 304** calls for requiring solar panels to be offered in subdivisions of more than 50 homes.
- **SB 305** calls for an exemption from the sales tax for certain solar energy devices.
- **SB 385** (HB 1094) calls for authorizing assessments in certain districts through property taxes that provides for a secure repayment means so that private sector lenders can extend credit for water and energy efficiency improvements at reasonable rates. This supports [Property Assessed Clean Energy \(PACE\)](#) programs, where businesses and homeowners could receive funding for solar and other energy projects.
- **HB 378** (SB 78) requires major state agencies to adopt a climate adaptation plan.
- **HB 550** (SB 326) creates a Systems Benefit Fund trust fund that allocates at least 11 percent for weatherization.
- **HB 775** (SB 735) calls for allocation of 20 percent of System Benefit Funds for support of certain programs for low-income electric customers.
- **HB 1144** requires that the Multiple Listing Service list efficiency and other green building aspects.
- **HB 1854** appropriates \$250 million from the Economic Stabilization Fund to be used for upgrading materials and fixtures in state buildings to maximize energy and water conservation.
- **HB 1182** (SB 700) requires state agencies and institutes of higher education create an energy and water management plan and report their annual savings to SECO.
- **SB 533** encourages the use of performance contracts to save water and energy in universities and state agencies.
- **HB 2194** requires PUC and ERCOT to pass rules to make sure demand response and loads can participate in energy and ancillary markets.
- **HB 2195** creates a franchise tax credit for building new single-family homes or duplexes that meet certain energy efficiency and water conservation standards.
- **HB 2196** allows homeowners with solar to choose retail electric companies that offer money for surplus electricity.

**Oil and Gas Fracking:** So far there appears too little legislative effort to rein in the most damaging aspects of the fracking boom.

- **HB 379** calls for a small fee on oil and gas drilling waste for burial in a commercial injection well, to encourage wastewater recycling and help fund oil and gas regulation and cleanup.
- **HB 380** calls for new gas pipeline safety measures under certain conditions.
- **HB 55** allows for "high cost" gas eligibility for tax reductions or exemptions.

#### **Parks & Wildlife:**

- **HJR 40** calls for a public vote on a constitutional amendment directing that the net tax revenue from the sporting goods tax go to its intended beneficiaries—the Parks and Wildlife Department and Texas Historical Commission. Recently they have been starved for funding, as most of the funds have been diverted into the state's general revenue. Also see SB 175 and SB 933, HB 105 and 162, and SJR 17.

**Trees:** San Antonio's tree ordinance is again under attack by this bill, which we hope does not pass.

- **HB 1377** calls for an act in the Natural Resources Code that, among other things, prohibits municipalities from regulating tree removal from private property in Extraterritorial Jurisdictions and limits any state mandated mitigation to less than that in San Antonio's code. This bill would gut our tree ordinance protections for the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone.

*Editor's note: see "[Bill Poses Threat to San Antonio's Trees](#)" below for more on this bill.*

#### **Native Flora:**

- **HB 1116** creates a Texas Native Seed Competitive Grant to promote the study, propagation, and sale of native seed.
- **HB1135** creates a Texas Native Seed Committee to use native seed in public land restoration projects.

**Xeriscaping:** Two bills have been introduced regarding home or property owner associations' (HOAs or POAs) restrictions on resource conservation landscape features.

- **HB449** (SB 198) prohibits restrictions on xeriscaping by POAs & certain political subdivisions.
- **HB727** prohibits restrictive covenants regulating not just drought-resistant landscaping (xeriscaping), but irrigation systems, water catchments systems, and organic waste composting.

**Waste:** Four bills chip away at wasteful practices.

- **HB648** prohibits the land disposal of computer equipment and certain television equipment.
- **HB1346** regulates collection and recycling of computer and television equipment by certain retailers.
- **HB1473** (SB645) provides for a "Bottle Bill" with incentives to recycle beverage containers to improve water quality and reduce pollution.
- **HB169** prohibits the disposal of certain used equipment at a municipal solid waste facility.

We need you to ACT now. Legislators pay attention to those who speak to them. Don't let them hear only from industry lobbyists. Join me, other Sierrans and our partners in the Alliance for a Clean Texas Lobby Day at the Capitol in Austin on March 20. To sign up now, go to <http://www.acttexas.org/lobby-day-2013-in-austin/>. As Smitty from Public Citizen urges, "If there's only one day you can make it to Austin this year, make it March 20." If you can't go to Austin, please contact the committee chairs and your state representatives by phone, mail or email. Give thanks where it is due. Let officials know your position on these bills.

*Margaret "Peggy" Day*

### 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.

### Conservation Committee Report

The Conservation Committee had its last meeting on February 7, 2013. **The next meeting is scheduled for March 14, 2013 at the Candlelight Coffeehouse on N. St. Mary's at 6:00 p.m.** Thereafter, the meetings will continue to be on the first Thursday of every month at Candlelight Coffeehouse at 6:00 p.m.

At the meeting on February 7, the committee focused on the State Park funding issue. The group determined that it needed to gather information on how the funding cuts are harming our park service. Some parks such as Lake Texana have been given to the counties in which they exist for the counties to maintain. Unfortunately, Lake Texana did not reopen until recently because the county could not afford to maintain it. Now, it is under the auspices of the Lavaca-Navidad River Authority and is opened under a new name, Texana Park and Campground. Other parks have either remained closed or have been stripped of their funding to the point of no longer being functional.

The response of the Conservation Committee is to hold a press conference and get the word out about the situation in the state parks. One of the main topics of conversation at the next meeting will be the logistics of holding a press conference. Everyone is welcome to join the conversation either by attending the March 14th meeting or by going on the [Sierra Club Alamo Group Facebook page](#) and adding comments. The state parks issue will be the main post of this committee while the Legislature is in session.

Another topic to be addressed at the next meeting is an invitation from our new executive director, Scheleen Walker. She would like the opportunity to come down to San Antonio and meet with the club members in an informal environment. She is very interested in meeting us, and would like this opportunity to be a fundraiser since the club is on a very tight budget. It is something to consider and we will discuss this possibility at the March 14 meeting.

Finally, the committee wants to develop groups that will study and address the issues of transportation, recycling, inner city renewal and energy.

Members and interested individuals are encouraged to participate in this committee. For questions or comments concerning conservation in the San Antonio area, please contact Karen Seal at 210-226-8101.

*Karen Seal, Chair*

*Conservation Committee*

### ICO Needs Your Unused Camping Gear

Do you have unused tents, sleeping bags and other camping or backpacking gear still in good condition that's taking up space in your closet? Inner City Outings would love to take them off your hands! Please contact Anne Pearson, ICO chair, 210-408-6321. or [ico.sanantonio@yahoo.com](mailto:ico.sanantonio@yahoo.com).

### Outings: Hikes that Lead Us Into Spring

Our Alamo Group outings participants will enjoy great weather for hikes in Scenic Canyon Natural Area, Government Canyon SNA, Hardberger Park and other beautiful places. Visit our Outings page for complete details or go to the [Alamo Sierra Club Outings page](#) on Meetup.



### Bill Poses Threat to San Antonio's Trees

A bill to allow clearcutting of trees by developers has been filed in the Texas House. **HB 1377** would allow developers to destroy every tree on a site regardless of size, age or historical significance.

Sierrans are strongly urged to oppose this bill by contacting:

- Democratic members of the [House Committee on Urban Affairs](#): [Rep. Harold V. Dutton Jr., Rep. Carol Alvarado, Rep. Rafael Anchia, and Rep. Justin Rodriguez]
- [Speaker of the House Joe Straus](#),
- and [their own State Rep.](#)

It has not yet been scheduled for a hearing, so watch [this page](#) to see when one is scheduled. I also encourage you to attend the hearing and speak or submit a card in opposition to the bill.

Developers testified to San Antonio's "abuses of regulatory authority" during invited testimony last September. This testimony was subsequently used to draft a bill that:

- allows developers to clearcut every tree on sites inside the city limits;
- prohibits cities from enforcing tree preservation rules in their extra-territorial jurisdictions (ETJs), the vast areas where most new development occurs;
- slashes the fees developers are charged when they destroy more mature and heritage trees than prescribed, ensuring that many developers will opt to pay the fee and clearcut trees. (Under SA's ordinance, developers can destroy 65-80% of the mature trees before they incur fees or requirements to plant replacement trees.);
- redefines "tree" so that only large specimens count as "trees" for purposes of measuring tree destruction.



I want to emphasize that the bill's clearcutting provisions apply to every square foot of Texas, including sites inside city limits, in ETJs and everywhere else. Over time, HB 1377 would lead to:

- excessive, unnecessary tree removal, clearcutting and hilltop removal,
- increased stormwater runoff and flooding of topographically lower parts of the city,
- increased ozone levels potentially putting San Antonio in violation of clear air standards,
- increased contamination in stormwater runoff recharging the Edwards Aquifer, our drinking water source, and
- potential enormous job losses resulting from closure of Camp Bullis and relocation of its mission and associated personnel at Ft. Sam Houston.

An excellent op-ed on the bill, [S.A. tree ordinance under attack](#), was published by Representative Roland Gutierrez (D-San Antonio). I encourage you to read it as it illuminates the politics behind this bill.

*Richard M. Alles, P.E., Tree and Forest Contact*

## Keystone XL Pipeline Update

The Texas Drought Program is working to keep concerned citizens updated on the progress of the Keystone XL Pipeline. Recently the U.S. State Department issued a favorable Environmental Impact Statement on the Keystone XL Pipeline, stating that its construction and the processing of oil would have no measurable impact on the environment. To find out more and stay up-to-date, please visit the [Texas Drought Program](#) and join their mailing list.

## Let's Party!

*meet and greet your Sierra Club friends*

This month's Social Event is at **Cheddar's Casual Café**, 7403 Northwest Loop 410. Contact Loyd Cortez, (210) 674-9489, if planning to attend.

**Friday, March 22nd**  
6 to 8 p.m.

On Friday, April 26th, we'll get together for another social at **La Tuna**, 100 Probandt Street, 6-8 p.m. Join us outside and enjoy San Antonio's beautiful spring weather under the trees.

Visit our Social Events page for maps, times and information about these and other gatherings we have planned. If your 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 reminder.



## VIA Has Three New All-Electric Buses

I decided to catch the Primo 100 to VIA's new all-electric bus celebration held at the Robert Thompson Transit Center on February 26. I knew the Primo passed in front of the center and stopped at the Ellis Alley Transit Center, so I had a pleasant stroll alongside the Sunset Station. I spotted the VIA signs, and then rode the elevator down to the opening. I got a bird's eye view of the speakers, the folding chairs, and the people. I love openings because I like to be on the cutting edge.

VIA's three new electric buses are definitely cutting edge. San Antonio is right out front as one of only two cities in the country to have these silent, emission free, battery-operated, all-electric buses made by Proterra. David Bennett, the head of Proterra, said the VIA team raised the bar for the Proterra team and that they liked working with VIA. He stressed the environmentally friendly nature and the cost effectiveness of the new buses. The buses charged in 10 minutes, he said. And before we knew it, a bus pulled up, the photos were taken, and the process was described whereby the battery is recharged. The bus is steered by the driver, as a wireless operation moves the bus forward on a track to the recharge device.

The buses can get 30 miles on a charge and are to circulate in the downtown, and will return to the Robert Thompson Transit Center to be recharged. See the [website for Proterra](#) for more details.

With the new, quiet, compressed natural gas VIA Primo 100, the streetcars coming on line in the near future that will run on steel tracks and be powered by electricity, the hybrid-electric buses already running in the core, and the new, battery-operated electric buses, the downtown will have much-improved air quality and noise reduction. That means better quality of life for residents, visitors, and workers downtown. Not to mention the health benefits of breathing cleaner air. These changes are important, as downtown would have become more congested with buses, if these actions by VIA had not been taken.

Students from the San Antonio School of Inquiry and Creativity and others boarded the new ARC bus for the inaugural ride. More questions were asked of Mr. Bennett, who pointed out how quiet a ride it was on the interior--a conversation could be carried on easily. Proterra made the buses as light as possible, which is also energy efficient. The company has a number of projects that are active or are being evaluated, one being a fuel cell project in Austin.

There is a symmetry that exists between environmentalism and urbanism. Sustainable transportation in an urban or suburban area encourages responsible mixed-use development, and this facilitates subsequent beneficial community and economic development. Once this is accomplished, there is much less incentive to pave over and sprawl into watersheds, aquifers, the hill country, and farmland. For a glimpse at VIA's comprehensive plan, go to <http://www.viainfo.net/Planning/PlanningMain.aspx>. Click on initiatives.

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We made our way back to the Robert Thompson Transit Center for more photographs. There are more questions informally. I find out that a diesel bus costs \$55,000 per year for fuel, and the electric bus equivalent cost for electricity is \$8,000 to \$9,000 per year. The bus gets 21-23 MPGe, and has a capacity for 64 riders. This means 87,000 lbs. of carbon savings annually per bus versus compressed natural gas.

I retrace my steps to the Ellis Alley Transit Center. And this time I admire Copper Canyon Daisy plants in full foliage and an interesting vine growing along the wall at the Sunset Station. A VIA Primo is already there for a break, so I check out the new facility, which is very attractive and full of information for making connections. I made it home in 30 minutes from this stop. I am going to love the walks, the connections on these new exciting and fun-to-ride travel modes, and arriving stress-free and fast in the future.

*Barbara McMillin, Transportation Contact*



Students from San Antonio School for Inquiry and Creativity at the opening celebration of VIA's all electric bus