



SIERRA
CLUB

FOUNDED 1892

Alamo Group of the Sierra Club Newsletter

The Alamo Sierran

March 2016, Vol 50 #2

Word From the Chair

MARCH 5 ALAMO SIERRA CLUB MEETUP! Please come out to Government Canyon to meet with other local Sierra Club members and environmental activists, and learn more about the Sierra Club and the activities of the San Antonio based Alamo Group.

All Sierra Club members and environmental minded people interested in the Club are invited to attend. This event will provide an opportunity to meet other like minded citizens, share ideas about how to make the Club more effective, and enjoy the outdoors.

Where

We will meet at the Group Picnic Pavilion at the Government Canyon State Natural Area, 12861 Galm Rd, San Antonio, TX 78254, From the intersection of Loop 1604 and Culebra Road (also known as FM 471 - back road to Castroville), travel west 3.5 miles to Galm Road. Turn north (right) on Galm and travel 1.6 miles; gate with signs on the left, pavilion at end of road next to Visitor Center. We will offer, starting at 8:15 am, voluntary car pooling locations at EcoCentro, 1802 N Main Ave, San Antonio, TX 78212; and also at Crossroads Mall at Target parking area, 4522 Fredericksburg Rd, San Antonio, TX 78201, near IH410/IH10 NW interchange. Park entrance fee is \$6 per person over 13 years. HOWEVER, tell entrance park personnel you are with Sierra Club and fee should only be ONE DOLLAR.

Agenda

- 9:30 am: welcome
- Sierra Club 101—Brief History of SC, and explanation of its structure.
- How SC is funded, deductible (c3) and non-deductible (c4) and political (PAC, TurnTexasGreen.org).
- Comments from GUEST SPEAKER, REGGIE JAMES, LONE STAR CHAPTER SIERRA CLUB EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR.
- Alamo Group—History, structure, activities
- Executive Committee
- Outings Committee
- Youth Outings Committee
- Political Committee
- Conservation Committee
- Breakout sessions for further discussion related to How to do BETTER?
- Concluding remarks
- Picnic lunch, BYO
- Afternoon hikes
- Car pooling back starting at noon

Hope to see lots of interested people and beautiful weather!

-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.

March 1-3 Tuesday-Thursday

SA Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan Neighborhood Workshops

There are four sessions; you can sign up for any and all. Here is [the website](#) with details and session information and the registration form. Also see the article on page 2.

March 5 Saturday

Note: two events this date

Alamo Group Meetup

All Sierra Club members are encouraged to come out to the Group Pavilion at Government Canyon State Natural Area, 9:30 am to noon (later if you are going for a hike). See the *Word From the Chair* article to the left for details.

Texas Night Sky Festival

The International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) Texas, the City of Dripping Springs, and the Hays County Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists will host the [Texas Night Sky Festival](#), a free celebration of the Texas Night Sky!

3 pm-10 pm at the Dripping Springs Ranch Park and Event Center, 1042 Event Center Drive.

The [schedule of activities](#) includes examples of good lighting and light pollution, looking at the Sun with a solar telescope, and Lakota stories of the night sky. There will be food trucks. At 6 pm Paul Bogard, author of *The End Of Night*, will speak. At 7 pm you can meet the astronomers, and then the Star Party begins, which runs till 10 pm. You will be able to view the dark sky with good telescopes assisted by knowledgeable astronomers.

March 15 Tuesday

General membership meeting (3rd Tuesdays)

Topic: *Climate Change, Water-related Weather Extremes, and San Antonio's Drought-Preparedness and Drought Management*

6:30 pm at [EcoCentro](#), San Antonio College, 1802 N. Main, at the northeast corner with Locust St. Free and open to the public. [Here's our web page](#) with map showing EcoCentro.

[State Climatologist John Nielsen-Gammon](#) will present science updates on Climate Change, with specific attention to Texas climate issues, especially drought, flooding, and the current El Niño. (For weekly updates on drought, weather, and climate change, check [this website of the Office of the State Climatologist](#).)

After Dr. Nielson-Gammon's talk, we'll have a brief presentation by Mike Mecke and Meredith McGuire on what San Antonio needs to do to increase our community's drought preparedness and drought management, especially in light of climate change. See Mike Mecke's background below. Dr. McGuire, Co-Chair of the Alamo Group's Conservation Committee, will present his prerecorded or written message, and add her own information and brief commentary on specific drought-preparedness challenges in San Antonio. General discussion will follow.

-Mike Mecke worked for the *Texas Water Resources Institute as Water Resources Specialist covering Texas west of Kerrville; and prior to that for SAWS as Water Resources Planner and Agricultural Conservation Program Coordinator. He is a member of many conservation associations and has served on the boards of several including the Native Plant Society of Texas. He grew up in San Antonio and now lives in Kerrville.*

Lion's Field dates changed

The Lion's Field programs (March 24th below) are now 4th Thursdays. Previously these were 4th Wednesdays.

March 24 Thursday

Lion's Field program: the Film *Merchants of Doubt* will be viewed.

Inspired by book *Merchants of Doubt*, Naomi Oreskes and Eric M. Conway, the film presents "scientific authorities" who spread maximum confusion about such things as toxic chemicals to climate change. Satirically comedic but illuminating nevertheless.

These programs are 4th Thursdays, 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.

News and Contributions

Volunteers needed at info tables

Please help get the word out about Sierra Club! Man our educational tables at these upcoming fun events. Contact Tabling Chair Gay Wright, alamo.sierra@yahoo.com or 343-0222.

Earthwise Living Day:

March 5, Saturday, Leon Valley, 9 am to 2 pm.

SAWS Spring Bloom:

March 12, Saturday, SAWS Headquarters, 9 am to 1 pm.

Fresh Air Friday:

April 1, Friday, Main Plaza, 11:30 am to 1:00 pm.

Stop a new fracking initiative on Texas public lands

From sierra.force.com

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is scheduled to lease mineral rights underneath Lewisville Lake, Somerville Lake, Choke Canyon, Sam Houston National Forest, Sabine National Forest, and Davy Crockett National Forests for fracking. Their plan is to hold a public auction on April 20 -- in Santa Fe, New Mexico -- to lease public lands at reduced fees for oil and gas fracking. Not only would this sale mar the beautiful natural areas we Texans have cherished for years, it could put many cities' water supplies at risk.

What's more confounding is that neither the BLM, National Forest Service, nor the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have made any meaningful effort to reach out to the Texas people about this. The only public notice for this proposed sale was on a BLM website... in New Mexico.

[Send the BLM a message today and tell them to withdraw the proposed oil and gas leases, and hold public meetings in Texas to get input from us.](#)

When it comes to protecting our wild places and drinking water, we need bold action that keeps dirty fuels in the ground where they belong.

Fracking in these areas is a bad idea because some are already facing air quality compliance issues, are heavily populated, and experience frequent earthquakes. Others are cherished wild places that Texans care deeply about protecting and preserving.

[Please urge the BLM to do the right thing and stop the sale of these lands for oil and gas development.](#)

Dark skies: a conservation initiative

By Kevin Hartley

The Sierra Club views light pollution as an important conservation issue. One of the Sierra Club's national board of directors, Jim Dougherty, is president of the board of the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA).



A Sierra Club member, Roy Ellzey, has been appointed as the Dark Skies conservation contact for the Alamo Group (the list of our conservation contacts is included in the box at bottom of the last page). Roy is a board member at [UBarU](#), the dark sky park west of Kerrville certified by the IDA in January (see the article in the February issue of this newsletter).

For more information on the IDA see [darksky.org](#). You can read about their mission and their [FAQ page](#).

San Antonio Comprehensive Plan and Workshops March 1-3

By Barbara McMillin

When we think about the next 25 years, we would like to know that the new [San Antonio Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan](#) will address key issues, such as the need to do what we can across the city for climate change, to improve the air quality so walking and cycling are healthy endeavors, in addition to providing exercise. To maintain appropriate air quality levels to prevent non-attainment. We would like a plan that identifies high activity areas where jobs, housing, and transit, could converge and where the close proximity would provide good savings all around, not to mention being able to walk to work. High use areas such as the medical center, or Brooks City Base, have been identified as areas where thinking things through with good planning results in efficiencies. Hopefully, as we take action to carefully plan in these efficiencies, we also increase our opportunities at the same time to access jobs across the city, colleges and universities, medical and military, downtown, and cultural amenities in the future. We save money years from now by making good plans now.

To learn more in depth about the vision for the city for the next 25 years, read about the goals and policies of the key issues in the [plan](#). Note that there are nine areas of interest--such as natural resources, transportation and connectivity, and more-- where the goals will be monitored and measurements taken every five years to stay on course, or to address changes. Second, note that at the beginning of March, there are public workshops to attend to view some of the visions. For instance, VIA is researching appropriate corridors that have promise for future transit, as some corridors have more congestion, more jobs and more ridership than other corridors. At upcoming **workshops**, you can view maps, ask questions, and provide input.

This new comprehensive plan that updates former Mayor Julian Castro's SA2020 plan is timely, as the climate change conference just ended, and it is still fresh on our minds. We want our city to be a well-planned city that works for everyone and that saves dollars in the future.

Comment on the proposed Texas water grid

Reprinted from [Ranch and Rural Living](#) magazine
June 2015

By Mike Mecke

This is a little True or False quiz. Often, in my distant past as an agricultural and biology teacher, I considered T-F tests too easy. But, this one is not easy and has far-reaching effects. My reply to Rep. Larson and the State Water Grid proposal is explained here briefly:

The piece is well written by San Antonio Rep. Lyle Larson on April 28th and knowing of him, I am led to believe Lyle is sincere in his humanitarian view of why a state plan or grid for sharing water across the state sounds logical. The idea seems good on paper and at a quick glance. Just as did earlier plans from the 60's to bring water from the Mississippi River to Lubbock or Great Lakes water to the Southeast. This type of grandiose plan "to save Texas" often sound great and easy to do, especially on TV news bites or in a newspaper headline. But the devil is in the details for sure.

For some reason, spending hundreds of millions on a pipeline or a new reservoir is often easier to sell to we voters than cheaper, safer, common sense options? Perhaps we are too busy or lazy to put out the effort which may be required for we taxpayers to carry out a home or community project? Or do we no longer care enough to learn the facts and vote? I hope not. I don't think Texans and Americans are that noncaring down deep.

Unless Rep. Larson is "speaking with a forked tongue", and I do not feel he is, there is some logic to sharing our water. And to some extent we already do and should using carefully thought out plans *when no or few other options are left*. There are some pipelines and reservoirs on rivers which share water now. Some drier areas are maxed out now or will be soon. More growth could cause the entire domino stack to fall and maybe others as well.

I also believe that if Rep. Larson is sincere in his message, then he is likely in a minority among the legislators, etc. who are pushing for the statewide water sharing plan. Most, in my opinion, are mostly looking at more water for urban areas to grow and expand - at the expense of our Texas resources, our Texas agriculture, our Texas bays and estuaries and the future of our Texas rural communities. Sadly, I think most of our leaders and some water folks either do not know or understand the full consequences of pulling groundwater or river water from one aquifer or river basin to another region - or they just honestly do not care. I hope it is the former.

Do our legislators and power brokers really realize that water IS NOT a commodity like oil, coal or grain? In order to have a sustainable Texas - both the economy and the supporting environment, we must realize that water is in a special category. If we overbuild or overuse our water resources or pollute them too badly, there are NO substitutes.

Research this matter and think about it - have we maxed out our water conservation efforts in every city, in every town, for every water-using industry and on every irrigated farm? Has every alternate option been considered, planned and put to use? Those options might be: rainwater harvesting, efficient ag and urban irrigation, groundwater desalination, wastewater recycling, stormwater harvesting, switching to new financially rewarding low water-use crops, Xeriscape landscaping or Gulf water desalination. Not hardly. Not even close. Have all cities, towns and counties moved to a better method of growth planning such as Low Impact Development or Smart Growth? We should not be considering any state water sharing plan such as this until

all other logical efforts at solving water issues to reach sustainability have been fulfilled.

Have you heard this? *Majority rules and the votes and dollars are in the cities!* "Water flows uphill to the money!" Are these sad truths going to rule Texas waters and leave our descendants with another California or worse? Does a statewide run plan for "sharing" our water resources begin to look and sound like a Federal plan for "sharing the wealth"? Do you feel Austin leadership and state agencies have the knowledge, judgement and wisdom to decide who across Texas gets their water and grows or who does not? Do they know which far-off springs, creeks or rivers can be dried up and which bays or estuaries will become too salty to be sustainable? This is the heart of the issue.

Can we educate the legislature and local authorities in time, before this is legislation, passed and signed by the governor? Will the wisdom of King Solomon win out or will our state's water future go down the pathway of greedy kings?

This is very crucial to the future of Texas; truly **"Water is Life"**.

-Please read about Mike Mecke's background at the bottom of the announcement for March 15 in the Schedule section above.

Heard of this national monument?

By Kevin Hartley

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument is southwest of Tucson Arizona, on the border with Mexico, flanked by the Tohono O'odham reservation to the east and the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge to the west.

Just over a day's drive from San Antonio, this part of the Sonoran Desert is the only habitat in the US for the organ pipe and senita cacti species.

I did not know about [Organ Pipe](#) until a few years ago when browsing maps looking at the green spots, "ah what's this?" I visited in 2013 but half the place had been closed since 2006 due

to border security concerns. Now it has been entirely reopened, so I went back in November 2015.

One hike I did was into the Bates Mountains, from the northwest corner of the park (my 1st picture). Starting at the Bates Well historic site the route climbs south up to a pass opening out onto a broad valley circled by peaks. I was tracked down by Border Patrol, who said "Oh you're a hiker! We saw your foot sign. Don't see many of you here." I've read this was a seasonal migration route of various prehistoric peoples including the Hohokam; here's an [informative NPS survey](#).

If you want to visit

There are some trails and unmarked routes; the



The Bates Mountains from the north. A route goes through the pass center, then to the right, climbing gradually to a high valley for a 10 mi round trip hike. Organ Pipe, November 2015.



A big selection of vegetation at Organ Pipe, March 2013. Saguaro, organ pipe, and two species of cholla cacti are visible along with ocotillo, palo verde trees and creosote bush. From Ajo Mountains Drive.

spectacular Ajo Mountain Drive, a 21 mi maintained loop (see my 2nd picture); Puerto Blanco Drive, a 31 mi high-clearance loop; and various unmaintained 4wd roads. Check with the park about road conditions. Travelers are cautioned about potentially encountering illegal activities.

There is one large campground (with solar showers!) but no reservations, best to arrive in the morning. Ajo to the north is the nearest town.

On the way it is easy to visit Saguaro National Park and Chiricahua National Monument. There are also the [sky islands of southeastern Arizona](#) included in Coronado National Forest, for example the Huachuca (my 3rd picture), Santa Rita and Pinaleno mountain ranges.



South side of the Huachuca Mountains from Coronado Peak, on a windy day after a blizzard. Montezuma Pass, where an expedition led by Francisco Coronado crossed in 1540, is just to the right. On the way back from Organ Pipe November 2015.

Sierra Club Membership

Are you a member? Please [join or renew!](#)



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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

Chair: Terry Burns tbscpbbsc@satx.rr.com

Vice-chair and Treasurer:

Dave Wells dwells1315@yahoo.com

Secretary: Gay Wright

alamo.sierra@yahoo.com

Stephen Colley stephen@stephencolley.com

Lili Gonzales lg_3red@hotmail.com

Alan Montemayor

alan.montemayor@sbcglobal.net

Darby Riley darby15@swbell.net

Russel Smith russesmith@gmail.com

Enrique Valdivia enrique@lawyer.com

Administrative Contacts

Programs: Barbara McMillin

mcmillin5543@gmail.com

Publicity: Lili Gonzales (above)

Website: Richard Alles

blancoriver-hero@yahoo.com

Newsletter editor

Kevin Hartley khartley@windstream.net

Outings Contacts

Outings Chair: Jerry Morrisey

jlmorrisey@aol.com

Inner City Outings (ICO):

Anne Pearson anne.pearson@att.net

Conservation Contacts

Conservation Co-chairs:

Meredith McGuire mmcguire@trinity.edu,

Wendell Fuqua

wendell@woodcutsbywendell.com

Green Buildings: Steven Colley (above)

Education: Peggy Day

peggyday@hotmail.com

Fluoride Issues: L. Van Coppenolle

livewithnature@msn.com

Organic Gardening: Dave Klar

dklar63162@aol.com

Zero waste: Peggy Day

peggyday@hotmail.com

Tree Conservation: Richard Alles (above)

Transportation: Barbara McMillin (above)

Water Issues: George Rice

jorje44@yahoo.com

Climate Change: Darby Riley (above)

Food for thought

If industrial man continues to multiply his numbers and expand his operations he will succeed in his apparent intention, to seal himself off from the natural and isolate himself within a synthetic prison of his own making.

-Edward Abbey, from *Desert Solitaire*

Drought: Alyssa Burgin

aburgin4peace@gmail.com

Dark Skies: Roy Ellzey rellzey@satx.rr.com

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](mailto: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

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