

Newsletter

The Alamo Sierran e-Newsletter - May, 2013

* GENERAL MEETINGS *

Tuesday, May 21st: Challenges of Climate Change - Communicating, Organizing, Adapting

Too many of our fellow citizens are in denial on the most important issue facing life on Earth. How can we communicate effectively about it? How can we organize on a non-partisan basis to achieve government policies which will severely limit fossil fuel emissions? How can we help our communities to prepare for the inevitable extreme weather events? The presenter will be Attorney Darby Riley.

Tuesday, June 18th: The Battle for the Warbler

Uncontrolled habitat destruction throughout northern Bexar County is rapidly making Camp Bullis a lone island of refuge for endangered Golden-cheeked warblers. As a result, the areas usable for Bullis's training missions are continually shrinking. This has made Camp Bullis an influential voice for environmental protection. James V. Cannizzo will tell us how our local military commands are fighting for endangered species habitat, the Edwards Aquifer and Bexar County's forests.

This meeting has been approved for Advanced Training by the Alamo Area Master Naturalists.

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

A Word from the Alamo Group Chair

Even though we know sprawl exacts a high price, San Antonio still ranks among the top American cities for uncontrolled growth. Ranchland development continues unabated, girdling San Antonio, Dallas and Houston, as we rapidly morph into one unbelievably huge multi-mega conurbation. Sprawl imposes staggering costs on society, not only for the extensions of water, sewer and electrical services, as well as roads, but also greater fossil fuel consumption to support needlessly dispersed neighborhoods. Sprawl imposes much higher per capita costs than more compact, resource efficient neighborhoods. The social and economic costs will only go up as resources become scarcer and costlier to procure.

Many decision makers do not have enough foresight to understand the impacts that the booming economy brings. The Eagle Ford oil and gas boom and other forms of increasing resource extraction, has turned this region into a magnet for in-migration and has generated the powerful synergies that come from providing for the growing population and diversifying huge profits—much of which is being plowed into real estate development.

One company is Galo Properties that is developing Crescent Hills over the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone. Galo is modeled like other developers such as Forestar. Forestar helped Atlanta become America's most sprawling city and has been pouring profits from its synergistic portfolio of resource extraction (oil, gas, wood) and real estate projects into Texas' booming markets in Austin and San Antonio—including the PGA Village's Cibolo Canyon Resort Community development. Like many other business ventures, they search for profits and investment opportunities in diversified, often vertically integrated holdings, with the goal of maximizing profits from every acre of land.

Developers increase profits and gain political support to push through mega-projects on "underproductive" lands by dressing the same old sprawl up with sustainable flourishes and "greenwash." Many of these development transactions and allied resource extractions are taking place without adequate social, economic or environmental studies to determine their impacts, especially collective ones.

Short of the holistic planning and controls that our state and region lacks, one management tool available to us is utility service rules. Our local utility is publicly owned, so it offers us opportunities to curtail sprawl and foster more sustainable development by connections. It's too obvious that this is not happening, since the Galo project, Crescent Hills, sailed by the SAWS Board of Directors for water and sewer service extension approval.

Ideally, this project could become another threshold case. Surely Sierrans have not forgotten the bitterest environmental fight in San Antonio, the infamous PGA Village development (now renamed TPC San Antonio/Hyatt Hill Country Resort), but you may not realize that project is right next door to this Galo development. Many groups are aligning with the Sierra Club to continue the fight against building on the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone.

We aim to get SAWS to reconsider its decision to extend service and the City of San Antonio to renegotiate rules for new services over the aquifer recharge zone, sensitive habitat, and outlying rural areas in general. Will the Alamo Area remain in the thrall to the "growth is necessary and good" mantra? Or can we effectively deal with sprawl and persistent issues that push and pull populations to outstrip carrying capacity? We need every Who down in Whoville to speak up.

Please contact your [City Councilperson](#) and voice your opposition to SAWS approval for Crescent Hills services and ask for new rules.

If possible, please show up at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, May 22nd, to speak as a "Citizen to be Heard" before the City Council B Session. You must sign-up between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. on the day of the meeting. The [link to register online](#) becomes available at 8 a.m. that Wednesday at: <http://www.sanantonio.gov/yourcity/meetingappear.aspx>. The meeting takes place at 100 Military Plaza (Main Plaza, Council Building), San Antonio.

Margaret "Peggy" Day

Opportunities to Get Involved

[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, phone 210-681-5889) or Barb McMillin (mcmillin5543@gmail.com). All help is welcome!

Lion's Field Events

[Monthly films and presentations for your edification and enjoyment](#)

Wednesday, May 22nd: Permaculture - Farms for the Future

More than 96 per cent of all the food grown in Britain is reliant on synthetic fertilizer. This BBC documentary film on Permaculture challenges all the normal approaches to farming. One of its central principles is that you work with the land, rather than against it.

Wednesday, June 26th: Plastic Planet

This film gives an up-close and personal view of the controversial and fascinating material called plastic. It has found its way into every facet of our daily lives.

Wednesday, July 24th: Adventure Travels

Alan Montemayor will tell us about his latest adventure: Hiking in Southern Patagonia and Iguazu Falls and Cruising Antarctica. His presentations are fantastic; don't miss this one.

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.](#)

Enabling Sprawl — SAWS & Crescent Hills

The San Antonio Water System (SAWS) Board voted on March 13 to approve water and sewer service to the proposed Crescent Hills development (CHD). The details of this plan and its impacts have many environmental groups up in arms. The Sierra Club, Texas Nature Conservancy, Bat Conservation International, National Wildlife Federation, Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance (GEAA), Texas Parks and Wildlife, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and others. Apparently even some members of SAWS' Board were caught unaware about the real impact of this project and would like the case reviewed.

Crescent Hills is in Comal County 20 miles from downtown San Antonio, on the banks of Cibolo Creek in the City's Extra Territorial Jurisdiction and over the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone. CHD's 2,778 acres are part of the old Dierk's Ranch and border two preserves purchased with taxpayer funds—the 967 acre Bracken Bat Preserve and the 1,244 acre Nature Conservancy managed endangered species habitat.—and one wrenched from the PGA Village developer across the Cibolo Creek. Galo Properties is surely also banking on these rare, permanent, natural buffers.

According to its promotional material, the developer, San Antonio-based Galo Properties, is "an aggressive real estate development company...maximizing land potential... one of the largest single-family lot developers in South Central Texas...The result is exceptional, eco-minded communities." Galo adds that Crescent Hills will be the first conservation development in Comal County and will embrace "The true character of the Hill Country region" and principles of sustainability, connectivity, and open spaces preservation. However, does their characterization of the project really make Mother Earth happy or is it greenspeak?

The CHD masterplan is a mixed use design that calls for 4,500, primarily single family residences, of 3,800 square-foot-average size, dispersed on quarter acre lots, bull-dozed onto 1,677 now-forested acres. The so-called preserved land is really just a fragmented patchwork of unbuildable sloped land. The connectivity is a convoluted maze of streets with no public transport, miles from many services and jobs. How is this eco-minded? Crescent Hills will be more unsustainable sprawl encroaching on ever scarcer, more sensitive remaining habitat.

Why should SAWS' ratepayers enable and subsidize Crescent Hills? Texas is in the grip of drought, predicted to get drier, and has over-allocated its water resources. SAWS will have to find an additional 800 acre feet of water annually to supply CHD. New water rights and infrastructure and power will be very expensive. Outlying infrastructure is several times more costly than for compact habitation. CHD does not comply with San Antonio's impervious cover restrictions or with the Comal County density code. The oversize sewer lines are to be buried in creek beds that serve as major

recharge features and with time will be at risk of contamination. Ratepayers will also have to pay for extra costs associated with stricter controls over the recharge area.

Other public infrastructure Galo is negotiating include four miles of road and utility easements through Alamo Cement property, a four lane extension of Evans Road eastward, and a major new bridge over Comal Creek that will connect IH-35 to Hwy 281.

In order for the development to go ahead it requires that both Comal County and the City of San Antonio approve it as a Public Improvement District (PID). In 2007, Senator Wentworth enabled a PID and Special Improvement District #1 for Comal County in his Senate Bill 2008. The CoSA must approve a Non Annexation Agreement and Super Public Improvement District.

Not only water interests are concerned and taking a lead in opposing this project, like the GEAA, but many wildlife groups too. Bat Conservation International, Texas Nature Conservancy, the National Wildlife Federation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, among other groups, are very concerned about the risks to wildlife habitat as well. Both the Department of Defense and Bexar County (\$4.8 million) contributed funds to purchase the adjacent Nature Conservancy lands. Their interests—protection of habitat for the golden-cheeked warbler and dozens of other species, aquifer recharge, and Camp Bullis activities—will be negatively affected. Taking a lead on the issue is Bat Conservation International, which owns the Bracken Cave Preserve and foresees compelling conflicts and costs from Crescent Hills (described in an article here).

Margaret Day, ExCom Chair

Bat Conservation International Expresses Concerns About Crescent Hills

Bat Conservation International (BCI) manages the 967 acre Bracken Cave Preserve. In a March 8, 2013, letter appealing the decision by SAWS, BCI Executive Director Andy Walker highlights the importance of the preserve and raises many concerns over the Crescent Hills development on its border.

The preserve is unique. It is home to the world's largest bat colony, estimated at 20 million Mexican Free Tail bats, said to have probably been in the cave for thousands of years. This colony's foraging provides a singular economic service by consuming 100 tons of insects a night. A 2012 *Science* article found bats contribute an annual average of \$23 billion to US agriculture. This wildlife refuge is important for education and research for a "species of greatest conservation need," as determined by the Texas Parks and Wildlife in its Texas Conservation Action Plan.

Walker finds the density and design incompatible with the preserve's unique ecological significance. This close proximity of high human and bat populations presents disease and accident risks to both that will drive up BCI's management costs. The bats nightly emergence sends them directly over the Galo Property, where they may become a nuisance. Bats also carry rabies and a fungal disease. Their guano, up to 80 feet deep in parts of the cave, is highly flammable in large quantities, which could lead to fires that might burn for years. Poisonous ammonia gas also accumulates. The Galo properties drain toward the preserve and, non-compliant with impervious cover and other standards, would increase stormwater flooding and risk from herbicide, pesticide, and bacterial runoff into the water features of Bracken Cave. Since Galo property is downwind, concern arises about eventual restrictions to the controlled burns necessary to maintain the savannah ecology and higher aquifer recharge, which forms an important component of their conservation easement agreement with the Edwards Aquifer Authority and SAWS.

The Texas Sierra Club is engaged in this issue. Director Scheleen Walker informs us that "BCI is meeting with USFWS, and trying to set up some meetings with appropriate legislators and local officials. They hired a former San Antonio City Council member as a lobbyist/legal adviser and are assessing their legal options, as well." Let's help to assure that reason prevails.

Margaret Day, ExCom Chair

Sign Up for Action Alerts

The Sierra Club is all about citizen action on critical issues. Quick citizen input often spells the difference between victory and defeat for important measures at the local and state levels. Sign up now to receive our local e-mail Conservation Action Alerts and let your voice be heard. **Call (674-9489) or email Loyd Cortez** and we'll add your name to our growing list of environmental activists.

Conservation Committee Report

The Conservation Committee met on the first Thursday of May over drinks and dinner. The main topic of conversation was the report on the status of Texas and local parks funding and funding bills in the 83rd Legislature. Other topics on the Conservation Committee agenda were Energy, Transportation, Recycling and the City Council races and how those might impact the environmental improvements that the current council has put in place.

Find more information on these topics on these links submitted by committee members:

- Electric bikes: <http://www.resilience.org/stories/2013-04-25/will-electric-bicycles-get-americans-to-start-pedaling>
- Texas Parks update: <http://www.texasinterfaithcenter.org/article/keep-texas-parks-open-2013-tour>

- Fracking: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/08/us/as-fracking-in-texas-increases-so-do-water-supply-fears.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0
- Alternative/Sustainable Energy: <http://www.reporternews.com/news/2013/mar/01/texas-wind-energy-sets-record-grid-expansion-in/>

Your input in creating the direction of the Conservation Committee is welcome. Please join us at our first Thursday meetings held at the Candlelight Coffee House on N. St. Mary's St. The next meeting is June 6, from 6 - 7 p.m..
Karen Seal, Chair - Conservation Committee

The Alamo Sierran NEWSLETTER needs a new editor. For inquiries please contact Editor *pro tem* Margaret Day, peggyday@hotmail.com, (210) 829-5632.

ICO Passes Its First Anniversary

After little more than one year, the Alamo Group Inner City Outings has twelve specially trained outings leaders that have provided ten fun and educational outdoor experiences for kids in collaboration with the San Antonio Boys and Girls Clubs, Boysville, and Inner City Development.

In the works are summer tubing and paddling adventures for each group, a bicycle trip, a fall camping trip to Seminole Canyon, and help with Alamo Group plans to provide outdoor and environmental education enrichment the 2013 East Side Neighborhood Promise summer camp program.

ICO can always use your donations of camping and backpacking gear in good condition. For information or donations please contact Anne Pearson, ICO chair, 210-408-6321, or ico.sanantonio@yahoo.com.

Outings: Hikes in the Central Texas Summertime

Our Alamo Group outings participants can look forward to an outstanding roster of hikes in Bamberger Ranch, Friedrich Park, 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.



Your Charitable Funds at Work

Members Libby Day, Gay Wright and Margaret Day are working out plans to invest Sierra Club Foundation donations in three environmental education efforts we hope to get approved for funding by our ExCom soon. Gay is overseeing sponsorship of several children in the Ft. Sam Area to participate in the Children's Vegetable Garden Program at the Botanical Garden next spring. Libby is leading a project to provide outdoor adventures and environmental education enrichment in the 2013 East Side Neighborhood Promise summer camps. Margaret is in contact with local colleges and universities promoting the establishment of campus green fund programs and offering more training workshops.

We could use more funds (tax deductible!) and especially need help from volunteers with special skills or knowledge that can contribute to our summer camp offerings with captivating trips, talks, demonstrations or workshops for the kids—from pre-school to high school. Many urban children today, especially those in impoverished, inner city areas, suffer Nature Deficit Disorder. Help spark a love of nature with specially designed experiences in nature.

If you are interested in helping out in any way, please contact Margaret Day, peggyday@hotmail.com or (210)829-5632.

Let's Party!

meet and greet your Sierra Club friends at these Fourth Friday socials

- **May 24th, 6-8 PM -- La Fogata.** Join us on the patio for good Mexican food and a margarita. 2427 Vance Jackson Road, San Antonio, TX 78229, (210) 340-1337
- **June 28th, 6-8 PM--Candlelight Coffeehouse.** One of our favorite places, it features good food and a nice quiet atmosphere. 3011 North Saint Mary's Street, San Antonio, TX 78212, (210) 738-0099
- **July 26th, 6-8 PM--Timbo's.** Ice cold beer and hot burgers. 1639 Broadway at Pearl Parkway, San Antonio, TX 78215, 210-223-1028, <http://www.timbosburgers.com/index.html>



Visit our Social Events page for maps, times and more information about these gatherings. If you're not busy on these days, then get out of the house and join us for a meal and a chance to "meet and greet" some of your fellow members.

If you would like to be reminded about our upcoming Socials, email [Loyd Cortez](mailto:Loyd.Cortez). Then one week before the next Social, you will receive an email notice reminder.

Exciting Ways to Get Around

In March and April, the Sierra Club had two good programs on the transportation sector. On March 19, Bill Barker of the Office of Sustainability, discussed sustainability and a new system called Carsharing. We learned that bus systems don't result in reduction of sprawl as compared to other forms of mass transportation, such as light rail transit, in addition to learning how the Carsharing program works. The power point from the meeting can be viewed [here](#).

That program, and the April 16 program on the Open Source EV Kit and Local Manufacturing of EVs by Gary Krysztopik of ZWheelz, were both captivating. In the EV program, we were brought up to speed on the status of electric vehicles in general, even bikes and electric skateboards, and solar-panel-powered vehicles. We learned about the kit cars popping up in different parts of the country, the funding of them, the trends in the emerging industry, where the interested parties are building on each other's ideas to move the industry forward, how prices of batteries are trending down at the same time as efficiency is trending up, and how the emerging industry compared to the transition of new airplane construction with its composite, lightweight structure. (Note that Boeing and its recent problems were because the components of plane construction were outsourced in many directions. This made making the various parts work smoothly later become an issue. If Boeing had done the whole construction, the problems would have been minimal and normal.)

The EV kit cars will emerge eventually into full blown vehicles with safety features like roll bars and more. In terms of micro manufacturing, it is possible to create forms on small model or exact size computer drafting equipment so parts can be cut out by individuals in distant places, with small model size drafting equipment costing \$1000, and exact size costing \$20,000. It means with this equipment, anyone can manufacture EV kit cars now while the industry is still growing. Many photos were shown of works in progress. There were all kinds of shapes and sizes and styles of 3 wheeled motorcycles (initially) that will progress into 3 or 4 wheeled vehicles. It was most interesting to hear about the whole area and its potential and progress.

See www.zwheelz.com for a glimpse of the future. Perhaps as Gary said, we will be ordering vehicles online.
Barbara McMillin, Transportation Contact

A Balanced Approach to Keeping Our Air Pure and Water Clean

The automatic spending cuts – sequestration – that are now going into effect cut too much and cut indiscriminately. These cuts will affect many and also hurt our environmental protection efforts. In a letter to congressional leaders, then EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson questioned the agency's ability to do its job thoroughly: “[Sequestration] will force us to make cuts we believe will directly undercut our congressionally-mandated mission of ensuring Americans have clean air, clean water, and clean land.” The EPA faces a \$472 million budget cut this year.

Sequestration and Environmental Law Enforcement. In addition to EPA employees being furloughed, environmental law enforcement will be impacted. For example, multiple air-monitoring sites that collect data on air pollution could be forced to shut down. The water we drink and the air we breathe will face unnecessary threats due to potentially 1,000 fewer inspections across the country this year. Reduced funding will impact our state's ability to meet drinking water public health standards, and threaten to eliminate more than 100 water quality protection and restoration projects across the country. The EPA has said that these reductions “would impact states' ability to reduce the nitrogen and phosphorus pollution that contaminate drinking water supplies, cause toxic algae blooms, and deprive waters of oxygen that fish need to survive.” The protections that normally keep us safe from harmful smog, soot, mercury, and other hazardous pollutants cannot be fully enforced when the EPA no longer has a reasonable budget.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time that EPA's budget has been threatened in recent years. Between 2010 and 2012, the Republican controlled Congress slashed EPA's budget by 18 percent—impairing the agency's efforts to clean-up its act. One report says that during this same time, the volume of contaminants removed from U.S. waters fell by half. During the same period, the amount of hazardous waste removed from the environment decreased by 7.4 billion pounds.

Finding a Balanced Solution. While addressing our national debt and long-term fiscal challenges is important, it can be accomplished without sacrificing provisions that protect our health and unique natural resources we all enjoy. When inspection schedules are cut, when standards are not enforced, polluters win. The answer is a federal budget that balances cuts with raising revenue from those, like multinational corporations, who are not bearing their fair share of the burden. I think we should be looking at a responsible combination of cuts to agriculture subsidies, and more revenue by cutting tax subsidies for Big Oil, and asking those at the top to share a greater responsibility in reducing the deficit. Let's get a little revenue from the giant oil companies, by closing some of their tax loopholes. Let's recognize that corporations as a whole didn't add a dime of new revenue back on New Year's Day “fiscal cliff” deal. In fact, some corporations received some major tax cuts.

I remain hopeful that we can still find an equitable path forward—one that makes spending cuts, closes tax loopholes, ensures the most privileged few among us are paying a reasonable share so that we can meet the obligations to our families' health and our Nation's wealth.

Lloyd Doggett, U.S. Congressman

U.S. Congressman Lloyd Doggett has worked for clean energy and environmental protection in Texas, nationally, and globally. For this work, he has received numerous honors, including the Sierra Club's John Muir Award and the Texas League of Conservation Voters inaugural Environmental Champion Award.

A Path to Citizenship

The Sierra Club Board of Directors has unanimously adopted a position in favor of a legal path to citizenship for America's undocumented immigrants, according to a brief received from Allison Chin and Michael Brune.

By establishing a just path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants living in America today, we can empower those in our society who are most vulnerable to toxic pollution to fully participate in our democracy, fight back against polluters and demand public health protections and clean energy solutions.

We will continue to support women's rights and empowerment, access to family planning, human rights and environmental protection in people's countries of origin. We also continue our opposition to the construction of the border wall.

This potential for environmental and human rights synergy comes at a moment when leaders across the political spectrum and the environmental movement are recognizing a need for a common sense approach to fix America's broken immigration system. A blog post on this will be live tomorrow morning at [this link](#).

Maggie Kao, D.C. office, 202 675 2384