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Alamo Group of the Sierra Club Newsletter

The Alamo Sierran **October 2015, Vol 49 #8**

Word from the Chair

Close focus on water issues

Here are the key points about water the Alamo Group has been focusing upon. See the sections below for discussion.

- Storm water rates
- Vista Ridge (VR) pipeline
- SAWS rate structure
- SAWS rate increases
- The suppressed Water Policy Study.

New storm water rates

New rates were approved using a new (to SA) impervious cover methodology (which we support). This methodology should make entities with the most impervious cover pay the most for storm water runoff fees. Unfortunately, as adapted, large breaks are given to large entities, so that fees will increase most for small businesses and residents.

Vista Ridge Cost

VR is estimated to cost \$3.4 billion to build a 142 mile pipeline and bring 50,000 acre-feet of water per year from Bureson County into SAWS for distribution. We see this as part of a proposed State-wide pipeline system to move water around, similar to what is failing in California. Water efficiency and conservation are far cheaper solutions to our water needs. SAWS and the Chamber of Commerce are equally and adamantly opposed to ever having to apply greater than Stage 2 water restrictions, while we think higher restrictions are an essential part of good drought management.

Better land use management-- with reduced impervious cover, low impact development, use of rain gardens, swales and retention ponds—could “slow, spread and sink” (into our aquifer) our storm water, reducing flooding and enhancing recharge.

An aggressive rain water harvesting program, with rebates, leasing and proper rate incentives, could greatly add to our available water (collection of 1 inch over Bexar County could yield over 60,000 acre-feet, more than VR, for almost nothing). Proper landscaping ordinances that encourage drought tolerant plants, discourage impervious cover, and ban water wasting plants, could save much of the 50,000 acre-feet of water used for landscape irrigation every year.

VR is unsustainable, like the California system, will seriously damage river inflows in Central Texas, affecting our estuaries, and will lower Carrizo-Wilcox aquifers

rapidly (it is very slowly recharged, unlike our Edwards).

Demonstrable, cheaper, sustainable alternatives to VR exist and are being ignored for political and financial reasons (for the profit and gain of the few, at the cost of the many—about \$1000 per person).

Speak out against Vista Ridge!

Join other Sierrans on October 28th to speak out against Vista Ridge and the SAWS rate increase to pay for it.

The council meeting below will be preceded by a rally at 5 pm. Check for updates: sierraclub.org/texas/alamo#speak

Citizens to be Heard at the San Antonio City Council meeting:

6:00 pm, Wednesday October 28th, Council Chamber, Municipal Plaza Bldg., 114 W Commerce (entrance on Main Plaza, just to the right of San Fernando Cathedral).

To register to speak, sign up in advance on the "[Citizens to be Heard](#)" webpage (only between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm), or in person between 5 and 6 pm in the foyer of the Council Chamber. You may also want to review the "[Appearing Before Council](#)" page.

SAWS rate structure

The proposed rate structure has some very good features, such as eight residential tiers instead of four currently. However, the tiers are applied consecutively, so that high users pay high rates only on the last rate block than enter; the majority of their water is at the same low cost as low volume users.

This is unfair, given the out-sized impact of these customers on SAWS water supply. These users, together with the Chamber of Commerce and developer interests, are the ones insisting on VR, and on green grass lawns and sprinkler systems in all new developments. These are the users that should pay for VR. Instead, the proposed rate structure spreads the entire VR cost on to all SAWS customers, on the assumption that “growth is good”, and we all benefit. This is a false assumption, and the economic stagnation of the lower half of SA household incomes is clearly documented.

VR is a financial threat to the lower income half of our community that uses small amounts of water. Taking \$1000 from each of these persons to pay for VR is not trivial, as SAWS suggests through its rate structure proposal. At the same time, General Class (largely commercial) customers have no incentive to reduce water use. Their rates only increase if their use increases.

SAWS rate increases

Rate increases are needed to pay for VR. The rate structure, if approved as proposed, will distribute the full \$3.4B cost on all users. Rates are expected to increase every year for the next several years, by 20% or more. At the same time, storm water and waste water rates are increasing rapidly. Aggregate increases may total 50%.

Suppressed water policy study

City Council, at the request of Ron Nirenberg, approved and funded \$98,000 for a Water Policy Study (WPS), to examine all of our various rules and regulations that impact our water supply. That study was due the end of February 2015, and scheduled for release to the public (including stakeholders like Sierra Club) in July and August. It was to be utilized in the FY2016 Budget process to guide issues relating to water. Mayor Taylor has not allowed the study to be released, even to City Council, until extensive revisions are made at the behest of SAWS. We see this as an assault on democracy and public discourse. It appears to us the WPS must contain information and opinions unfavorable to SAWS and possibly to VR, and that by delaying the study's release the Mayor has enabled a number of critical votes (FY2016 Budget, and Storm Water Rates being two) to occur without the benefit of the paid for information in the WPS. We have filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to obtain information pertaining to WPS.

Tell the City Council

[Click here to tell City Council to oppose SAWS' proposed rate structure and the Vista Ridge pipeline.](#)

By Terry Burns, Executive Committee Co-chair

Alamo Group Events

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

EcoCentro programs

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

Lion's Field programs

Fourth Wednesday each month, 6:30 pm, at the Lion's Field Adult Center, 2809 Broadway at Mulberry. Free and open to the public. Service by bus routes 9, 10 and 14.

Event Schedule

October 20 Tuesday

At EcoCentro: *A Close Look at the Vista Ridge Water Pipeline Plan*, facilitated by Alamo Group ExCom co-chair Peggy Day.

This will include a financial review of SAWS' 2012 water management plan by Bill Bunch, Director of [Save Our Springs Alliance](#) (SOS). He will give us a summary of a review of SAWS' 2012 plan by outside national expert Bruce Aylward and his firm, [Ecosystem Economics](#). It

looks closely at the Vista Ridge pipeline deal as a water investment strategy.

November 17 Tuesday

At EcoCentro: *Questions about the Vista Ridge Water Pipeline Plan*, led by Jim Smyle.

It is a good idea to ask questions from all angles when it comes to expensive projects. Was enough information presented to the City Council? Can the company Abengoa Vista Ridge LLC truly provide water to cover bonds issued, or will risks of water allocation lead to conflicts in future? Can they be resolved with predictability? How will calculating water savings from conservation or adding more brackish water desalination add to our knowledge? Be educated about the questions and the answers. Weigh the options.

Lion's Field October 28 Wednesday canceled

...Due to the important meeting related to Vista Ridge, see page 1. Please check for updates and news about that event:

sierraclub.org/texas/alamo#speak

News and Contributions

In addition to water concerns: two topics being followed by the Alamo Group ExCom

By Terry Burns, Executive Committee Co-chair

Air Quality

Air quality is another important current issue we are not ignoring. Russell Seal is involved with AACOG and I attend their meetings with some regularity. Our air quality has deteriorated significantly over the last several years, and is now comparable to Houston's, and substantially worse than Austin's.

We will lose "attainment" status with EPA and the Clean Air Act, even under current ozone standards (75 ppb). Ozone limits will drop in October, but it is uncertain whether to 70, 65, or even 60 ppb (the last well supported by health data, and achievable in some countries already). Despite the business community opinion pieces in the San Antonio Express-News, the current standard is NOT healthy, and was not supported by the data even in 2008, when the Bush Administration chose 75 ppb, for political not scientific reasons.

Now the business community says 75 is working, even though they opposed that standard at the time, only accepting it as less expensive than the data driven 65-70 ppb proposals. Unlike Austin, which has taken a number of local actions that have prevented air quality deterioration, San Antonio and AACOG have watched without anything but modest voluntary actions as our air deteriorates, blaming our problems on transport of

pollutants from elsewhere.

Although transport is a significant part of our problem, they have done little about our own contributions. They are finally looking at taking substantive local actions to limit point source emissions from cement and power plants (we hope CPS will close the Deely coal plant early), reduce traffic congestion and sprawl, encourage public transit, and limit idling. We have a long way to go to clean up our air. We support the proposed ozone rules, and hope they will be no higher than 65 ppb.

Proposed EPA methane rules

New methane rules are also proposed by EPA, to reduce emissions of this potent greenhouse gas at oil and gas pumping and processing locations. These rules will substantially reduce loss of methane at these locations and improve worker safety, while helping to reduce smog and climate change.

It is estimated that 8 ppb ozone in our area is attributable to Eagle Ford fracking activities. Reducing methane releases from Eagle Ford will help our air quality.

Unfortunately, the proposed rules apply only to new infrastructure, and so will not impact the extensive infrastructure already existing in Eagle Ford. If these rules had been proposed several years ago much of Eagle Ford would already be covered, and our air would be better.

A geographical digression about where water goes or not

By Kevin Hartley

This summer I did a very nice trip to Montana and Wyoming with objectives including Glacier National Park. Not having kept up with the news, upon arriving at the latter I saw the Going to the Sun Road across the park was closed due to a big fire and the campgrounds were full.

Triple Divide Peak

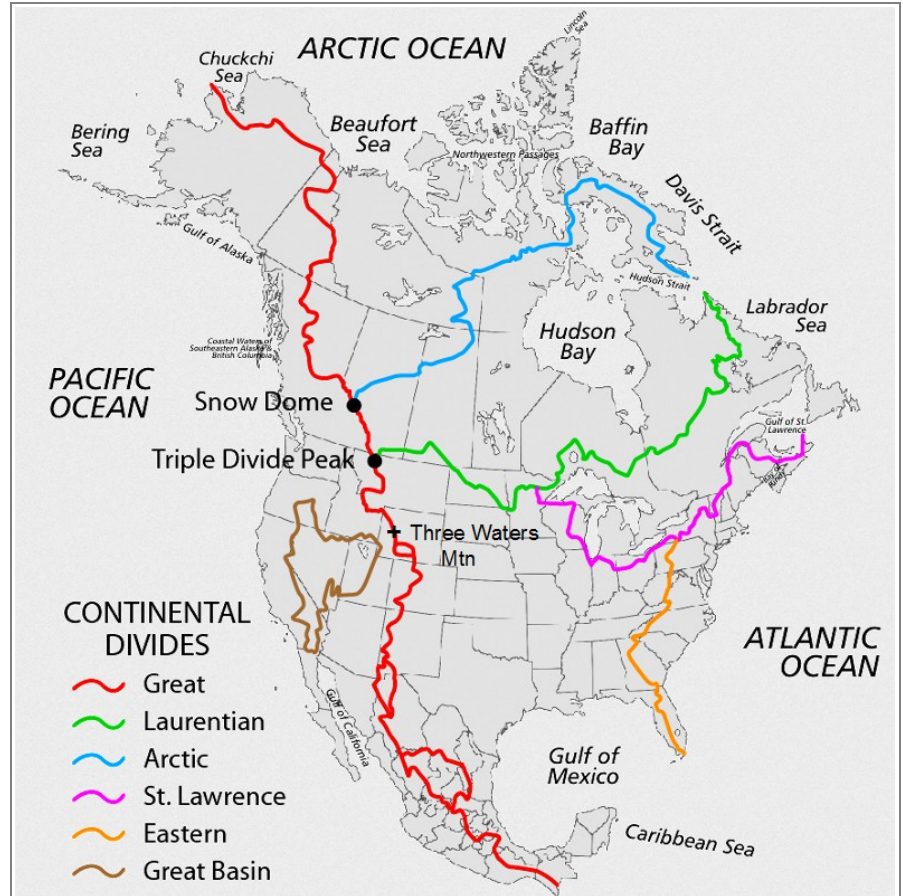
Escaping to the east side of the park, I did a hike toward Triple Divide Peak (adjacent pic), which on the park map is at the junction of the Continental and Laurentian Divides. I had learned this is the only place on Earth where waters divide to three oceans; the Pacific, Atlantic and Arctic. The trail to Triple

Divide Pass (just east of the peak, on the Laurentian Divide) was closed due to the fire; this is a challenging day hike, and to the peak itself a reasonable two-day.

I have always had a trill hiking on bits of the "Continental Divide". Upon research I learned there are various continental divides on each continent, of which the one in North America so usually named is also called the Great Divide.



Triple Divide Pk is the distant one far right. Looking NW across the Great and Laurentian Divides. Not spectacular this overcast day but memorable nonetheless. Photo Kevin Hartley



Continental divides of North America. From Wikipedia.

Waters NE of Triple Divide Peak flow to Hudson Bay, which is part of the Arctic Ocean. But it seems most of that water actually goes to the Atlantic, as Baffin Island is in the way. So there is an argument for the triple divide being instead at Snow Dome in Canada. Once again we see the Earth does not care beans about the efforts of *H. sapiens* to categorize and make sense of nature.

Further

...There is Three Waters Mountain in the Wind River Range, Wyoming, from where waters divide to the Columbia, Colorado and Mississippi. And the Great Basin Divide, within which along with three areas on the Grand Divide, waters don't go anywhere. See the map.

From Sierra magazine

Just a sample of the articles and news in the current issue of Sierra, which Sierra Club members get by mail. Anyone can read it on-line.

[Das Cheater: Volkswagen admits to evading emissions tests.](#) This week the German automaker Volkswagen admitted to outfitting millions of cars worldwide with devices designed to cheat on emissions tests. These cars emit dramatically more smog-causing pollution than allowed by clean air standards. [Here's a NY Times article.](#)

[Two months of environmental news, one page.](#) A raft of stories not widely covered in the press.

[Monumental Places](#), with a slideshow. Here's a sample of places the Sierra Club is urging the president to protect, as well as a look at our newest addition.

Food for thought

The worst thing that will *probably* happen - in fact is already well underway - is not energy depletion, economic collapse, conventional war, or the expansion of totalitarian governments. As terrible as these catastrophes would be for us, they can be repaired in a few generations. The one process now going on that will take millions of years to correct is loss of genetic and species diversity by the destruction of natural habitats. This is the folly our descendants are least likely to forgive us.

-Edward O. Wilson, from *Biophilia* (1984)

About this newsletter

Due to the high costs for this paper newsletter, beginning 2016 it will be available only by e-mail and on the website. The e-newsletters have been produced eight times annually anyway, and the paper editions only four times a year.

So if you wish to continue to receive this newsletter we must have your preferred e-mail address. Please update your info if necessary by e-mail to Loyd Cortez at lcc227@earthlink.net. Provide your name, address, and membership id if possible.



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.

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