



### Word from the Alamo Group Chair

The Texas Legislature is now over, and we can all breathe a big sigh of relief that it was only bad, and not catastrophic, as feared for a while. For details on our concerns I refer you to the Sierra Club Lone Star Chapter [Texas Legislature web page](#), there is a [summary pdf](#), and a

[webinar done June 29](#).

Thanks to Lyle Larson's HB 158, Texas Parks and Wildlife should now get the tax funding they have been denied for years. HB 1736 will hopefully have a net positive effect on energy efficiency. Several water related bills passed that will need close monitoring to achieve net positive benefits. HB1579 passed to finally protect Gulf sharks from "finning" which is lethal, wasteful and devastating these species.

Lyle Larson's "Gridzilla" state water pipeline proposal did not pass, thankfully. SB709, HB40, and HB1794 are bad bills that passed.

Bad constitutional amendment proposals will be put to Texas voters this November:

- SJR22 (prop. 6) would guarantee a person's right to hunt and fish, which sounds okay, but has a lot of potential problems. It would protect "traditional means", completely undefined, and calls hunting and fishing the best ways to control wildlife populations. It makes no provisions for endangered species, landowner protection, modern scientific habitat and wildlife management etc.
- SJR5 (prop. 7) would require portions of general and motor vehicle related sales tax revenues to be used for State Highway fund "to construct, maintain, or acquire rights-of-way for roads". No funds would be available for use on any toll road construction, as well as pedestrian, rail, bicycle and other non-automotive travel. This is an assault on modern mobility planning, and will prevent positive smart growth transportation solutions to our problems.

The Lone Star Chapter has a new Executive Director Reggie James, who brings much nonprofit leadership experience to us, and is now permanent, after serving as interim Director for six months.

Alamo Group is heavily involved in local air, energy, water, transportation, and SA tomorrow planning issues. Endangered species are left largely unprotected by the Habitat Conservation Plan adopted this spring for our EA region, but we were unable to mount a sufficient campaign to prevent this unfortunately.

We need your help if you wish to prevent further Houstonization of San Antonio! Get involved on whatever issue, or outdoor activity that appeals to you!

-Terry Burns, Executive Committee Co-Chair

### Alamo Group Events

For updates on all events check the Alamo Group website, [sierraclub.org/texas/alamo](http://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.

#### 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.

No Lion's Field programs in November and December due to the holidays.

#### Event Schedule

##### September 15 Wednesday

At EcoCentro, *Cost Saving Water Management: Recharge Groundwater* with Bryan Hummel.

Bryan captures water. For plants, wildlife, riparian areas, groundwater tables, and the bottom line. The plan slows, spreads, and sinks runoff into the landscape. From installing grant-funded rain gardens at elementary schools to miles of contour bioswales, he shows others how to recharge groundwater.

##### September 23 Wednesday

At Lion's Field: *Visiting Glacier National Park and Other Places Along the Way* with Kevin Hartley.

Photos, maps and discussion from Kevin's trip this summer. Mostly about Glacier, plus bits from Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, Shoshone National Forest, and the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail.

##### October 20 Tuesday

At EcoCentro: *A financial review of SAWS' 2012 water management plan* by Bill Bunch, Director of Save Our Springs (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 (see [ecosystemeconomics.com](http://ecosystemeconomics.com)). It looks closely at the Vista Ridge pipeline deal as a water investment strategy.

##### October 28 Wednesday

At Lion's Field: viewing of the DVD *Baraka*.

Originally shot in 25 countries on six continents, *Baraka* brought together a series of stunningly photographed scenes to capture what director Ron Fricke

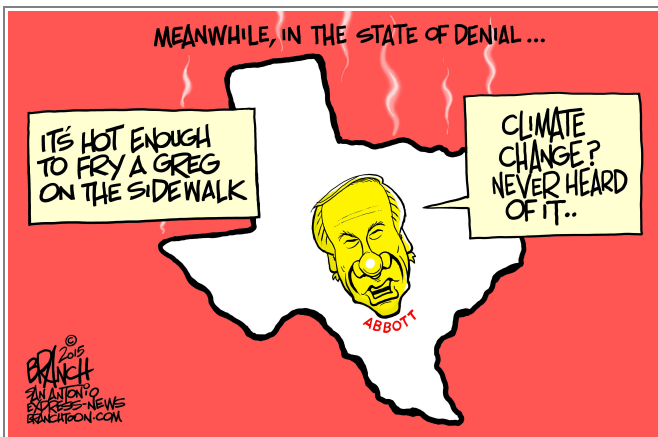
calls "a guided mediation on humanity." For more information on the movie see [wikipedia.org/wiki/Baraka](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Baraka) or [barakasamsara.com](http://barakasamsara.com).

## News and Contributions

### Alamo Group submits commentary on Region L draft water plan

The Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) is in the process of shepherding all the state's regional groups through their 2011 - 2016 Regional Water Planning Cycle, water plan updates, that the TWDB will compile into the state water plan to address users' needs. It serves as a guide to state water policy and includes legislative recommendations.

Alamo Sierra Club members mostly belong to the Region L Group, composed of 21 counties. A draft plan was released in May for stakeholder commentary. Go online to see [the plans and learn more about our water planning](#). The Alamo Group submitted comments on the plans, which can be seen online in our [Vista Ridge Clearinghouse](#). The San Antonio River Authority is overseeing compilation of the comments. These will be considered in two scheduled meetings of the Region L Planning Group. The first will be held at SAWS headquarters on September 3, 2015; 9:30 am and the last one in November. Final Regional Plans must be submitted to the TWDB by December 1.



Reprinted courtesy of John Branch and the San Antonio Express-News

### City Council must reject SAWS' proposed rate structure NOW

By Meredith McGuire, Conservation Committee Co-chair

Why this is urgent: Since Council was rushed into approving the Vista Ridge deal ten months ago - its approval of this new rate structure would prevent Council members from protecting their constituents against extremely unfair rate increases every year for the next five years. After the Vista Ridge deal goes through "Financial Closure" (sometime between April, 2016 and April, 2017), City Council cannot refuse even one of those

onerous rate increases, because it would jeopardize the City's municipal bond rating.

The time for a long, critical look at the proposed rate structure is NOW. If SAWS can't pay for Vista Ridge without further burdening current residents, then SAWS cannot afford the Vista Ridge deal.

Regardless of whether the Vista Ridge pipeline happens, the rate-structure is extremely unfair to current residents and should be changed significantly, as follows:

SAWS is trying to acquire this extremely expensive water to "over-size" the system to meet the demands of future population and commercial/industrial growth. Those who benefit from such growth should have to pay all the costs of it.

See: [Sierra Club: San Antonio Doesn't Need Vista Ridge Pipeline](#), The Rivard Report, July 1<sup>st</sup> 2015.

### SAWS' proposed rate structure is unjust

The proposed rate structure forces current residents to subsidize the water supply to be used by future residents. Before Vista Ridge, developers had to pay part (but not a fair share) of "impact fees" for new subdivisions; however, Vista Ridge water cannot be charged to developers who will profit from future growth.

SAWS' proposed rate structure puts unfair burdens on residents - especially a regressive fixed charge - while other classes of customers (like businesses and industries) have no such increase in fixed charges. Businesses and industries pay far too little for water. The City uses the promise of cheap utilities to attract businesses like Niagara water bottling company that would pay less than \$0.29 per hundred gallons - a price lower than residents pay at the third tier (of eight).

See: [Our Water Future is Not for Sale](#), The Rivard Report June 8<sup>th</sup> 2015.

There are no set tiers to encourage greater water-efficiency for businesses, but as long as one uses no more than the amount used the year before, the rate is kept at the very low "base" cost. Indeed, the proposed rate structure actually reduces the cost of that base rate for businesses that may be using millions of gallons a year. San Antonio's water for General Class is priced too low, while its costs to many residents is too high.

See "[SAWS' Proposed Rate Structure, Unfair to Residents](#)," Express-News, June 20, 2015.

Because the charges to residents for each unit of water are not based on per person usage, households with 3 or more members would have difficulty staying under the 2992 gallons/month ceiling and, thus, would incur the full regressive fixed charge each month. The rate structure must take household size into account to set a fair block ceiling for each residential rate tier.

SAWS' claims of a "Lifeline Rate" are misleading. A true Lifeline Rate would provide affordable water to a low-income family, regardless of ability to pay. SAWS offers no such Lifeline!

SAWS' "Affordability Discounts" now help less than one-fourth of households eligible, and the size of the discount is already far too small to prevent future rate increases from further impoverishing residents. There

need to be “affordability discounts” for renters, too; otherwise utility rate hikes will result in evictions and homelessness.

### **And in the meantime**

City Council should give strong direction to SAWS, forbidding promotion of San Antonio as “WaterCitySA,” a place of “abundant water.” Branding our city that way will attract all the wrong kinds of new businesses and suburban residents.

City Council should admonish SAWS for trying to represent a biased “survey” as evidence for the Water Management Plan of public approval of Vista Ridge’s promise of “abundant water” for future businesses and residents.

### **Regarding a SAWS survey**

Here are some excerpts from an article (not yet published) by an Alamo Group Ex-Com member, Lili Gonzalez:

“This survey is pure PR! Millennials are the most educated generation; I’m offended by this survey, designed to get the answers it wants. SAWS must think our generation is easily duped!

Take Question #1: ‘When it comes to securing San Antonio’s water future, what are the three most important things to you?’ One of the five possible answers mentions conservation and two refer to ‘abundant water’ - to ‘attract new businesses’ and for ‘future generations.’ Guess how SAWS wants you to respond. ...

Question #1 also pits ‘abundant’ water supplies against ‘reasonable rates for economically disadvantaged customers.’ That’s a false choice. A fair rate structure would reward conservation and protect working- and middle-class families from rate hikes they cannot afford. ...

Let’s have a real conversation about our water future, not some push-poll to get backing for SAWS’ proposed Water Management Plan. If the City Council approves that plan, it will be too late for citizens to say NO. Don’t let SAWS frame that discussion. ...

The Alamo Sierra Club has opposed this deal since its beginning. Piped-in water will not make our future more secure and is likely to result in overdrawing aquifers. ...

Please tell SAWS and your City Council representative that you don’t consider the push-poll to be a valid expression of public opinion.”

The San Antonio City Council should also reject SAWS’ Water Management Plan (due out in late September). Please check subsequent issues of this newsletter for updates.

### **Info table volunteers needed**

Volunteers are needed for tabling events. We go to many “green” events and distribute information about the Sierra Club and provide petitions about environmental concerns to be signed by the events’ participants. For more info or to sign up contact Gay

Wright, 210-362-1984, [alamo.sierra@yahoo.com](mailto:alamo.sierra@yahoo.com).

Volunteers are needed for the following events:

### **Wednesday, September 9**

*UTSA Volunteer Opportunities*, 10:00-1:00, where groups can describe their activities and recruit volunteers. At the UTSA Loop 1604 campus (parking pass can be provided).

### **Saturday, October 24**

*Solar Fest*, 11:00-6:00 at Concepcion Park, 600 E. Theo St. Sponsor: Build SA Green.

### **Alamo Group ExCom Seeks Candidates**

Each January we elect members to serve three-year terms on the Executive Committee (ExCom). The Committee conducts Alamo Group business. Would you or someone you know like to serve on the ExCom? Please submit a recommendation or your nomination with a 100 word statement of why you would like to serve. Deadline is Oct. 15. Contact Margaret Day, 210-271-0640 or [peggyday@hotmail.com](mailto:peggyday@hotmail.com).

### **Holiday Fundraiser Party - Call for Volunteers**

Our traditional holiday party is our only fundraiser. We are in a critical campaign to educate the community about plans for a sustainable water future, and it needs funds, so our auction must be a success. For six years now Margaret Day has chaired the event and is stepping down. It is time for others to step up and take this on. Please contact Loyd Cortez, [lcc227@earthlink.net](mailto:lcc227@earthlink.net), 210-674-9489.

### **A Few Good Books**

*By the Editor*

A fellow Alamo Group outings leader mentioned that a favorite author was Sue Hubbell, in particular *A Country Year - Living the Questions* and *Broadsides From the Other Orders - A Book of Bugs*. So I bought a bunch of Hubbell’s books, used.

*Broadsides* is well done and very interesting, chapters on bunch of the orders of insects and spiders. No, spiders are not insects, they are arachnids, along with scorpions; I’ve had to review for myself.

From the chapter on silverfish (these like anything containing starch or glue, particularly book bindings):

“...But if a bug could be allowed a point of view, silverfish would regard humans tenderly, as something of a treat. For them we are a

young, trial species that has come into the world in benign climatic times, a species with the ability to alter its environment modestly, thus allowing our kind to



*A silverfish, from [nathistoc.bio.uci.edu](http://nathistoc.bio.uci.edu)*

increase to ridiculous numbers for the express purpose of creating habitat and food for a few species of their kind. Good but probably not dependable providers. Will very likely disappear in the next mass extinction. Better not get accustomed to them.”

### Print Newsletters Going Away

This is the last year the Alamo Group will send out print newsletters to all members without a known e-mail address. Postal costs for this service have become prohibitive and reduce our funds available for real Club lobby and outings work. Please provide us with an e-mail address so we can send monthly e-mail newsletters to you. We DO NOT share these addresses. If you do not have an e-mail address or computer, we urge you to visit a friend or your local library to find our newsletters and other news on our website which is: [sierraclub.org/texas/alamo](http://sierraclub.org/texas/alamo).

IF YOU SEND US A WRITTEN REQUEST that you continue to receive a paper newsletter, we will attempt to accommodate, assuming the numbers requesting this are small. Thank you for your understanding.

### Sierra Club Membership

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

### Thanks!

...To SA Offset Printing, Inc. 4115 Gardendale, San Antonio, 692-9166 for our nominal printing costs.

### Food for thought

If all of humanity were to disappear, the remainder of life would spring back and flourish ... If all the ants somehow disappeared, the effect would be exactly the opposite, and catastrophic.

-Bert Hölldobler and Edward O. Wilson, *Journey to the Ants*, quoted in *Seasons of the Desert - A Naturalist's Notebook*, by Susan J. Tweit

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## Alamo Group of the Sierra Club

Website: [alamosierraclub.org](http://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](http://sierraclub.org).

The Alamo Sierran (publication # 018-475) is published quarterly by the Alamo Group of the Sierra Club, 615 Willow, San Antonio, TX 78202. Periodical postage paid at San Antonio, Texas.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sierra Club Member Services, Sierra Club, PO Box 42104, Palm Coast, FL 32142; or e-mail address.changes@sierraclub.org.

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