



THE ALAMO SIERRAN

THE ALAMO GROUP OF THE SIERRA CLUB NEWSLETTER - VOL. 40 No. 1 JAN 2006

Word from the Chair

By Michele Petty

I am stepping down as Chair. It has been an honor to serve the Sierra Club. I have been blessed with a wonderful Executive Committee. They have been committed, hard working and fun to be around. Unfortunately, I find myself stretched a bit too thin and am no longer able to make the time and energy commitment to the Sierra Club. My heart and spirit are with you and I will continue to contribute as I can.

I wanted to share with you something unusual that happened as I was driving home on 281 North. It was around 5:30 pm and traffic had come to a virtual standstill. I was about half a mile from Encino Rio. There was a bulldozer working in the Right of Way pushing down trees to make room for the 281 expansion and toll roads. I saw the dozer tear the limb off a very large cedar tree. The dozer kept going on pushing the broken limbs into a huge woodpile and going after other trees. I stared at the proud cedar, still standing tall despite its gaping wounds. I blessed the tree, and I prayed for the spirit of the tree and the tree divas. Using my understanding of the healing art of Reiki, I began to summon and send Reiki energy to the tree through my right hand. My hand began to tingle and I felt a strong drawing sensation from the center of my palm. I asked the Healing Masters to magnify the energy I was sending and to bless the tree. I prayed that Mother Mary would give the tree a hug because I could not. I then felt a strong urge to blow the tree a kiss, and I did. To my surprise the center of the tree where I had aimed the kiss jerked back as though hit by a baseball home run.

The outer limbs were still. My logical left brain proclaimed it an interesting coincidence. The traffic moved on and then stopped in sight of a magnificent heritage oak tree that was tragically in the path of the unrelenting dozer. I blessed this tree as well and thought it deserved a kiss too. So I blew it a kiss aimed at the heart of the canopy and to my complete shock it jerked back as had the cedar. The outer branches did not stir or wave. My mystical right brain declared it was no coincidence. I drove the rest of the way home with tears rolling down my face.

May the New Year bring a sense of enlightenment to our elected and appointed officials to preserve and protect our beloved Earth. May you and yours enjoy many happy outings in nature and may we prevail politically in our efforts to elect and inspire our government to act in the Highest Interest of All. So Be It.

Holiday Party and 2005 Awards

Warm thanks to Bob and JoAnne Comeaux for their warm hospitality the evening of our holiday party. Guests were treated to tours of their sustainably restored home as well as to fine music by the Front Porch Dulcimer Band and an abundance of food and drink courtesy of members and friends.

The Alamo Group Awards for 2005 were presented during the party. The Conservation Award went to Annalisa Peace for her work with AGUA and GEAA to protect the Edwards Aquifer and the Texas Hill County. The Special Service Award was given to Jim and Ruthie Stewart for their organizing and hosting of the monthly newsletter mailing party. John Tedesco of the San Antonio Express-News received the Environmental Reporting Award for his excellent four-part series "Losing ground." Lynell Burkett, received the Environmental Editorial Award for her many editorials and columns supportive of the natural environment and its protection. For

his work in support of various environmental issues in particular his support of alternative energy sources, County Commissioner Tommy Adkisson received the Club's Environmental Political Leader Award.

A Big Thank-You

Every month dedicated volunteers meet at the home of Jim and Ruthie Stewart to close and label over 2,000 newsletters. Sometimes it takes an hour, other times longer, depending on how many people show up. This month we want to thank Sky and Dan Rosenberg, Stephanie Buckholdt, Kim Smith, Melody Krumdieck, Loyd Cortez, Dave Klar, Marilyn Wade, Hector Gonzalez, Fred Wills, Jim and Ruthie Stewart, and Marsha Meredith for helping out with the December mailing. It took a little longer because of the envelope that was included, but we followed the "work" with a good bit of socializing. If you want to join the fun at the February mailing, contact Jim Stewart [goldstewart@earthlink.net or 210-692-0727].

January 17, 2006: Beyond the Borders Mexico Project

Presented by Oliver Bernstein, the U.S. - Mexico Border Representative for the Sierra Club. Brenstein travels from San Diego to Brownsville on both sides of the border through the Sierra Club's Beyond the Borders Mexico Project, which helps grassroots groups improve the quality of life in the border region.

February 21, 2006: Film - The End of Suburbia Oil Depletion and the Collapse of the American Dream

Directed by Gregory Greene.

General Meeting: 7:00 P.M., 3rd Tuesday each month at the Witte Museum located at 3801 Broadway just south of Hildebrand Ave. Socializing begins at 6:45, program at 7 P.M.

Samuel Alito & The Environment

In late October, President Bush missed a historic opportunity to build consensus by nominating a new Supreme Court justice who would continue to uphold the rights and protections afforded to all Americans. Instead, he nominated Judge Samuel Alito, Jr., a champion of the extreme right wing and a nominee who may represent great danger to Americans' ability to protect our clean air, clean water, and special places.

Of great concern are Judge Alito's Constitutional opinions in several cases — opinions that threaten both the ability of Congress to pass laws to protect the environment, and the ability of citizens to enforce those laws.

In *U.S. v. Rybar*, Judge Alito dissented from a decision upholding Congress' power under the Commerce Clause to regulate possession of machine guns. His reasoning is extremely troubling given that, if confirmed, Judge Alito would be ruling on two cases now pending before the Supreme Court on whether this same Constitutional provision — the Commerce Clause — gives Congress the authority to protect any of America's streams and wetlands. This same philosophy could also eventually jeopardize the environmental laws that protect clean air, clean water, wildlife, and more.

Judge Alito has also held that Congress does not have the authority to require states to provide the same benefits to their employees under the Family and Medical Leave Act that are enjoyed by all other Americans (*Chittister v. Department of Community and Economic Development*). This narrow view of Congressional power is alarming because much of the protection afforded by the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, etc. rests in the power to require states to protect the air and water of their citizens.

Judge Alito has also ruled (in *Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) v. Magnesium Elektron*) that the

Constitution bars citizens from enforcing the Clean Water Act even against a company that admitted it had been violating the law for years. The Magnesium Elektron decision threatened to put a stop to most Clean Water Act enforcement. Fortunately, the Supreme Court effectively reversed this decision three years later in another case.

In the first such move since the Bork nomination of 1987, on December 20 the Sierra Club joined with other national environmental groups to urge Senators to oppose the confirmation of Samuel Alito to the U.S. Supreme Court. Americans deserve mainstream, independent Justices, with unassailable integrity, who will protect individual rights and freedoms. Unfortunately, Judge Alito's opinions and other statements, combined with a disturbing lack of candor since being nominated, show that Judge Alito cannot be trusted to protect those rights and freedoms. Senators from both political parties must take this responsibility seriously and not be a rubber stamp for the President's choice.

For more information on Judge Alito's record on a variety of issues, visit:

People for the American Way [www.pfaw.org]

The Alliance for Justice [www.supremecourtwatch.org]

Earthjustice [www.earthjustice.org]

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2005 CALENDAR SALES

Last Chance/Reduced Rate

Loyd Cortez still has four wall calendars left at a reduced rate. Support the Alamo Sierra Club by buying your calendars from us a very good price (below retail). Loyd will have them at the January meeting, or you can contact him at 674-9489 or loydcortez@earthlink.net.

25-Year Member Acknowledgement

On behalf of the Executive Committee, we want to extend a joyous acknowledgement of the following members on their 25-year membership with the Sierra Club:

Michael Maleske, San Antonio
Judith L. Martin, Bulverde

Member Donated Bed

To help us raise funds, a member (Dan) has donated an 1992 Model E-1 Adjusta-Magic-electric adjustable bed and mattress that measures approximately. 54 x 78 (Full Size) and weighs approximately. 250 lbs. The only know problem is with the remote control having some loose wires. Due to its size it will take a couple of strong men to roll it out of their garage and lift it on a truck or big van. If Dan is home, he will help with the bed. We are hoping for a contribution of \$50.00 OBO. For more info contact Dan or Sky at 735-3820.

Volunteer Opportunities

Spring is just around the corner, and so are our annual tabling events. These are important events, which allow us to engage the general public in conversation about our environment and introduce them to the Sierra Club. Consider volunteering at our Sierra Club table at the following events:

EARTHWISE LIVING DAY,

February 25, 9a.m. — 3 p.m., Leon Valley,
Contact Marsha Meredith at 675-4097 or
marshal205@sbcglobal.net

BASURA BASH,

late March, San Antonio River, contact
Hector Gonzalez at 226-6069 or hjgonzalez@aol.com

VIVA, BOTANICA,

early April, Botanical Gardens

EARTH DAY,

April 22, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., Woodlawn Lake

KING WILLIAM FAIR,

April 29, 9:30 a.m. - 6 p.m.

HIKE & BIKE FEST, early May, Maverick Park

SOLAR FEST, June, Maverick park

Bexar Audubon's January Meeting

Find out how San Antonio became the sprawling metropolis it is today at Bexar Audubon Society's next meeting on Thursday, Jan. 12, at 6:30 p.m. In a talk called "Best Laid Plans: How San Antonio Grew," Trinity University history professor and director of urban studies Char Miller will explain the historical relationship between city policies and development in San Antonio, from the 18th century to today. How and why did the Spanish establish a walking, face-to-face community? How and why did the railroad, then the auto, turn a pedestrian-friendly community into a place where walking is dangerous? Why do we flood when it rains?

In a program bonus, City Arborist Debbie Reid will briefly explain three proposed Tree Preservation Ordinance amendments.

The meeting is free to the public and starts at 6:30 p.m., at Cowles Life Sciences Bldg., Rm. 336, Trinity University. (Cowles is uphill from Laurie Auditorium near the library but may be hard to find for first-timers. See <http://www.bexaraudubon.org/calendar.html> for a description and map, or call Patty at 824-1235 for directions.)

Parking is available at Laurie Auditorium and lots near Cowles.

For more on local conservation groups and events, visit <http://www.bexaraudubon.org> and <http://www.sa-naturecenter.org>.

John Muir Is Coming to Texas!

Remember - on January 28th and 29th John Muir (aka actor Lee Stetson) is coming to Austin to do a one-man show. This show is performed all summer at Yosemite National Park, and other places around the country. Wild Basin Preserve is hosting the two shows at 7pm on Saturday, January 28th and at 2pm on Sunday, January 29th. Tickets are available by contacting Julia Balinsky, 512-926-7312 or johnmuir@balinsky.com.

OUTINGS

NOTE: No dogs, radios, recreational drugs, or unescorted children are allowed on Sierra Club outings. Public consumption of alcohol is prohibited during scheduled activities. Outings are usually suitable for the whole family; check with the leaders about details and to verify dates. All fees will go fully to offset trip and administrative costs and to support the conservation efforts of the Alamo Group.

JAN 29, SUN: GOVERNMENT CANYON SNA HIKE

Join other Sierra Club members for a 5 to 6 mile hike over the rough terrain of Government Canyon State Natural Area. This is a great time of year to hike this rugged and scenic natural area, right in our own backyard. We'll stop for a snack on the trail. The hike will be MODERATE to DIFFICULT. COST: donations to our local club will be accepted. Contact Marsha Meredith at 675-4097 or marsha1205@sbcglobal.net.

FEB. 12, SUN: MISSION TRAIL BIKE RIDE

Enjoy a bike ride mostly along the Mission Trail that follows the San Antonio River and that does not have automobile traffic. This will be about an 18-mile bike ride from Mission Conception to Mission Espada and back. Show up at Mission Conception by 9:00 AM and be ready to ride by 9:15 AM. Helmets are required. The ride is relatively flat and is rated as MODERATE difficulty. COST: \$2.00 for members and \$3.00 for non-members. Leader: Lee Dodge, lsg999@earthlink.net or 210-647-0216.

FEB 17-20, FRI-MON: BIG BEND RANCH BACKPACK

The best time to hike the desert is during cool weather. Car camp the first night then spend 3 days and 2 nights on the trail in the beautiful desert scenery of the largest Texas state park. This is an unusual Big Bend trip in that there will be water available each night on the trail. This is a strenuous trip for experienced backpackers. Limited to 10 participants. Cost \$12 members/\$15 non members. Leaders: Bill Rogers (830) 885-2523, rogers@uthscsa.edu, and Terry Platt (210) 695-9570, taplatt@earthlink.net.

FEB. 25, SAT: TOM SLICK PARK HIKE

Join us for a visit to this relatively new park, a piece of countryside within Loop 410. Features include a hidden lake, trickling stream through a forested corridor, and open grasslands. Off the main loop trail, some minor routes wind through thorn

woodlands. Meet @ 9:00 AM near the east entrance of Westlakes Mall, located in the NW corner of the intersection of Loop 410 and Marbach Road. Contact Fred Wills (210) 673-9566 or (210) 296-6013 (cell) for more information.

MAR. 17-19, FRI-SUN: ENCHANTED ROCK STATE NATURAL AREA CAR CAMPING TRIP

Sign up to camp, or join us for a Saturday hike around and/or up the Rock. Space is limited for camping. Difficulty: EASY to MODERATE. Cost: \$2 per day for members, \$3 for non-members plus Entrance and Camping fees. Leader: Marsha Meredith, 675-4097 or marsha1205@sbcglobal.net.

APR 1, SAT: GOVERNMENT CANYON SNA SPRING HIKE

Come out for a 2 to 4 mile hike on the Front Country Trails at Government Canyon. Leader: Marsha Meredith at 675-4097 or marsha1205@sbcglobal.net

MAY 5-7, FRI-SUN: DEVILS RIVER STATE NATURAL AREA CAR CAMPING

This is not your average state park. Drive-up car camping is primitive but the night skies are well worth it. We'll hike and perhaps take a dip in Devil's River. Leaders: Marsha Meredith, 675-4097 or marsha1205@sbcglobal.net and Fred Wills, 673-9566, user261695@aol.com.

GCSNA

Government Canyon

Workdays at Government Canyon State Natural Area are the second Saturday of the month. Call 688-9603 to sign up for a work crew. For more information contact Marsha Meredith [marsha1205@sbcglobal.net].

JANUARY 7, 2006 - WINTER BIRDS OF THE GRASSLANDS & CANYONS

Join Master Naturalists Steve Hawkins and Bob Kurtz in exploring the wintering bird life of two different habitat types at Government Canyon SNA. Open to all who can handle four hours of hiking and birding on rough terrain. Group size is limited. 8:30 a.m.-noon; suggested minimum donation of \$10 per person includes entry permit and benefits the Friends of Government Canyon; reservations required and may be made beginning at 7:30 a.m. December 28. Please include your name, e-mail address and telephone number for each reservation. E-mail educmte@hotmail.com or call (210) 688-9055.