



THE ALAMO SIERRAN

THE ALAMO GROUP OF THE SIERRA CLUB NEWSLETTER - VOL. 42 NO. 5 MAY 2008

A Word from the Chair by Loyd Cortez

I recently received an inquiry from a member asking where one could take depleted batteries and used antifreeze so that these items would not wind up in the landfill. I informed him of the city dropoff location on Culebra near Loop 410, but he did not find the location and hours of operation convenient. We are happy to report there is a website listing places where these items can be taken. All you need to do is input the type(s) of item(s) you want to dispose of and your zip code. We have added a new webpage in the Conservation menu called Recycling. Here is the link: <http://www.earth911.org/recycling>. Let's keep toxic materials out of our landfills.

Well, we held our first Singles Social, but unfortunately only three single guys showed up and no gals. Hopefully, we will be able to plan more of these singles get-togethers down the road. You singles out there, give me some tips on how, where, and when to set up singles events.

As you know, the Alamo Group has taken a position opposing construction of two new nuclear reactors. We are aware that this decision may be controversial. The ExCom respects differing opinions and will always welcome input. Our goal is to do what is best for our environment, our community, and our organization. I want to end with this message:

As a society, we use our rivers, lakes, and oceans to dump our garbage. We use the ground beneath our feet to bury our garbage. Now we want to use the ground to bury our nuclear waste. In the past, the only thing we would bury in the ground was our dead. Now the only thing we want to bury is our mistakes. We don't have to use our earth as a dumping ground. We don't have to rely on nuclear energy because we can use sustainable energy alternatives like wind and solar power. You must make a choice between paying now for sustainable energy alternatives or paying later for cleaning up nuclear contamination.

Peter Bradford in San Antonio Nuke Vote This Month

Former Nuclear Regulatory Commission member Peter Bradford was in San Antonio the week of April 7 for talks with city and utility leaders and the public. His visit was sponsored by the Sierra Club and other organizations. Bradford, who now works as an advisor on energy and regulatory issues, came to address cost issues associated with two new nuclear units CPS is considering adding to the South Texas Nuclear Project (STNP).

Continued on Page 2

Why Be Political?

Thank you for being a member of one of the largest membership-based organizations that endorses candidates in the San Antonio area. When the political committee sends invitations to candidates for interviews concerning potential endorsements, most candidates are willing to meet with us regardless of their party affiliation. The reason candidates are eager to visit with us is our numbers. The Alamo Group forms a political base that cannot be ignored.

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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 6:40, program at 7 P.M.

May 20, 2008: Photographic Journey through Southeast Asia

Fellow Sierran David Klar will take you on a photographic excursion through seven Southeast Asian countries. Highlights include a two-week Sierra Club international outing to backcountry Laos, climbing Mt. Fuji in Japan, the awe-inspiring ruins of Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Borneo's biodiversity, and the beauty and ethnic diversity of Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia. Come celebrate Southeast Asia as seen through the eyes of an independent traveler.

June 17, 2008: The Greening of San Antonio

What is San Antonio doing to become a greener city and what are some of the things that can still be done? A panel discussion will look into these questions.

The Possibilities Are Endless

The ways we can save energy are seemingly endless, as a recent article in the spring 2008 Earthjustice bulletin illustrates. In the article, "Transformers a Key in Warming Fight," author Kathleen Sutcliffe writes that electric transformers, those "ubiquitous gray boxes mounted on utility poles all over the country," are extremely inefficient in their job of reducing electric voltage. "Because every single watt of power travels though one or more of the nation's 40 million transformers, improving their efficiency means huge energy savings," writes Sutcliffe.

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Thank You

The Alamo Group wishes to thank all of those who helped in the planning for the Peter Bradford talk, "The Economic Risks of Building Nuclear Reactors," that took place at Trinity University on April 10. Special thanks go to Peggy Day, who worked tirelessly for many hours putting together the event and arranging other aspects of the Bradford week, and to Bill Livermore, who created the posters announcing the talk. They were clever and beautiful.

Thanks are also extended to Loyd Cortez, Ana Paredes (the Alamo Group's community organizer) and Loretta Van Coppennolle for their work at the Northwest Vista College Earth Day event April 10.

Peter Bradford - Continued

Bradford made several points that may not have been considered by either CPS or the city when entertaining the idea of new nuclear power sources, and he brought new information into the discussion. According to Bradford, the congressionally-mandated \$18.5 billion in loan guarantees many nuclear investors are relying on is probably enough for only two or three new plants, since each plant will now cost multiple billions of dollars. CPS' partner in the STNP, NRG Energy, began as first in line for loan guarantees, but because of an incomplete application submitted to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, it has been "bumped back." The application was indefinitely suspended pending completion, and other applicants have come forward. NRG, says Bradford, cannot go forward with this project without loan guarantees. Just now emerging from a 2003 bankruptcy, NRG has an extremely low B- bond rating.

CPS is claiming that it will need to request only one 5% rate increase every other year during the estimated ten years it will take to construct the new nuclear units. Bradford says that, according to reliable data, rate increases should be more like 4% to 4.5% every year, which would probably make CPS' record of affordable rates a thing of the past. Bradford concurred with a cost estimate earlier issued by nuclear expert Arjun Makhijani that showed the new nukes will cost up to if not beyond \$18 billion for construction, assuming no cost overruns due to delay. CPS is now publicly admitting to a cost of only \$8 billion, though it has apparently revealed a much higher amount to City Council representatives that the public is not being allowed, at this writing, to know.

Bradford made two very important points regarding nuclear waste disposal. First of all, Yucca Mountain, mired in controversy and possibly never opening as a national waste repository, has a capacity of 70,000 tons. That amount of waste has already been generated by the country's existing 104 reactors. The U.S. Department of Energy had a contract with nuclear operators to assume responsibility for waste disposal. It has not been able to honor that contract, and has had to pay fees (from taxpayer money) to operators for their onsite waste maintenance. The DOE will not be

entering into a similar contractual agreement this time around with operators, who will now have to assume their own responsibility for waste maintenance and costs. Those costs will most likely be passed on to ratepayers.

CPS has committed \$206 million to preliminary engineering and design work on the new units. NRG has apparently committed a similar sum. Bradford questioned the unusually large size of that commitment, especially given that the design of the new units is supposedly a standard one and the site is one that was originally chosen because of its suitability in housing four units. Bradford urged that CPS, instead of making an a priori decision to go nuclear with NRG, use an all-source procurement process (comparable to a call for competitive bids) on alternatives.

San Antonio's City Council will vote to approve or disapprove the 5% rate increase CPS has requested sometime in mid or late May. The Sierra Club and its coalition partners are urging that the portion of the rate increase (0.9%) for nuclear be disapproved or that it instead be earmarked for efficiency expenditures. The bulk of the rate increase is for cleanup of the Deeley coal plant and a much smaller amount is currently designated for efficiency.

Why be Political - Continued

Lately, we have been asking our membership to become more active in fighting the CPS rate increase for nuclear power and urging the city to study our energy policy recommendations. You have probably been asked to call your city council representatives and attend meetings on very short notice. Other organizations such as Public Citizen and the SEED Coalition look to us for support. Our membership numbers open doors and make positive change possible.

Recently, someone told me that he did not want to join the Sierra Club because we are politically active. Actually, it is the ability to influence political decisions promoting a healthy environment that gives purpose to Sierra Club membership. As the seventh largest city in the U.S., San Antonio offers a wide base of potential members with much to offer. If

potential members or current members do not want to receive calls or emails, there is a mechanism to opt out and that is fine. But it is numbers that give us the ability to be heard. I want to challenge each of you to recruit one new member before the election in November.

Those of you who do not have the ability right now to be active, we thank you for being a member. Those of you who give time and energy to our goals on a constant basis, we appreciate what you do. We can all be proud that we are members of the Alamo Group of the Sierra Club and that our group provides us with a means to protect our natural resources.

Russell Seal

Endless Possibilities - Continued

The technology for increasing efficiency of these transformers is currently available, and utility companies are asking that more efficient models be approved by the government. The change would save over \$11 billion and eliminate the need for twenty new power plants by 2038. The change would also reduce carbon dioxide emissions by up to 700 million tons by about 2030, an amount, says Sutcliffe, that exceeds what all the nation's passenger cars emit in one year.

The Department of Energy (DOE), however, chose not to adopt new efficiency standards that would have made the switch possible. The standards the DOE adopted in October 2007 fall far short of expectations of both environmentalists and utilities. The Sierra Club and other entities are now challenging the DOE to adopt higher standards in a lawsuit filed in December.

Book Review

The Tecate Journals: Seventy Days on the Rio Grande by Keith Bowden (The Mountaineers Books, 2007). 291 pp. \$16.95

Is there still adventure to be had in overpopulated, overdeveloped Texas? This book answers the question, in spades. Keith Bowden, a

journalism professor and experienced river runner, decided to travel the Rio Grande along the entire 1260 miles of the international boundary in one journey during the winter of 2004-2005. The book might be thought of as four sequential trips, each one defined by the presence or absence of a companion. Due to concerns (later confirmed) about navigability, he began by riding a mountain bike with a friend along the Rio between El Paso and Presidio, much of the way on the Mexican side of the river. At Presidio, he switched to a canoe and soloed the Big Bend as far as La Linda. At La Linda, he met another friend and ran the Lower Canyons, then crossed Amistad Lake. Below that huge insult to the river, he again traveled (mostly) alone along the Brush Country reach of the river to a final takeout at Boca Chica on the Gulf of Mexico. Along the way, he encounters mostly friendly and helpful Mexicans, and mostly sympathetic Border Patrol and Customs agents. As he progresses downstream, the wilderness of the Lower Canyons gives way to dams, towns and farms, and the impacts of pollution, water diversion, urbanization and smuggling become ever more apparent. Bowden's excellent knowledge of Spanish adds an extra dimension that would be lacking in a book by a monolingual individual. There are few false notes in his account, though he often seems to confuse the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, National Park Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, worries about being shot by a Border Patrol agent after calmly chatting with armed "coyotes," and fears copperheads that do not occur in that part of South Texas. The sense of adventure was undoubtedly enhanced by his minimal use of maps, and perhaps his extensive use of beer. ¿Otra cerveza? ¡Si, Tecate!

Fred Willis

Government Canyon Day Hike: April 5, 2008

Once again, great weather and even better company made for an enjoyable nine-miler. With unexpected but greatly appreciated help from

Patti, we were able to identify a number of wildflowers along the way. Early on we were greeted by patches of Pink Evening (Showy) Primrose. The stately and proud Evening Star Rain Lily dotted a number of sunny slopes all along the way. Bluet, Vervain (Verbena), and Pointed Phlox splashed added color. Let's not forget the many daisies and asters such as Fleabane. Blanket Flower and Bluebonnets rounded out nature's offerings. Olfactory sensations were provided by innumerable Mountain Laurel shrubs. Thanks to everyone, including Patti's mom and daughter, Catherine, Rosalind and daughter Gabi, and co-leader Peter Allen.

Scott Wolfe



SUN, MAY 25: MISSION TRAIL BIKE RIDE.

This bike ride is along paved trails and roads that are along the San Antonio River and that lead from mission to mission in the SE part of San Antonio. We will stop to take quick walks through some of the missions along the way. Distance may be up to 18 miles round-trip, depending on participants. Pace will be "no riders left behind." Minimum age is 12. Helmets are required. Be ready to ride by 8:30 AM in the grass parking lot southeast of the paved parking lot in front of Mission Concepcion on Mission Road. Difficulty: Moderate. Fees: Donations accepted. Leader: Lee Dodge, LSG999@earthlink.net, or 647-0216.

SAT, JUNE 28: SAN MARCOS RIVER CANOE/KAYAK TRIP.

We will take a 4 to 7-mile paddle down the beautiful San Marcos River, its banks lined with Elephant Ears and other interesting plants. Bring your own canoe or kayak, or make reservations to rent one from TG Canoe Livery at (512) 353-3946. Leader: Lee Dodge, LSG999@earthlink.net, or 647-0216.

JULY 20-27: BACKPACKING IN THE GILA WILDERNESS

The 560,000-acre Gila Wilderness in southwestern New Mexico is our oldest wilderness area. We'll hike through 27 miles of it on the Redstone-Baldy Loop near the Arizona border. There, we'll experience riparian to alpine environments while passing

through the land of the ancient Mogollon people. We'll hike four days and spend one day camping to relax in the wilderness, fish and day-hike. After hiking out, we'll stay at the Palace Hotel in Silver City to clean up and visit this historic mining town. This is a strenuous trip for experienced backpackers. Fee: \$275 (includes transportation and one night at the Palace Hotel; food not included). Leader: Steve Funderburg 317-4186 or sfunderburg@rkci.com

Sierra Socials

**MAY 23, LA FOGATA,
2427 VANCE JACKSON, 6-8 PM**

Join us on the patio for good Mexican food and a cold margarita. The weather will be warm but still pleasant in late spring. Contact Loyd Cortez 674-9489 or loydcortez@earthlink.net so we can get a head count. The restaurant can be reached at 340-1337 or www.Lafogata.com

**JUN 13, BLUE STAR BREWING COMPANY,
1414 S. ALAMO, 6-8 PM**

Good choice of micro-brew beers to wash down your food. Contact Loyd Cortez 674-9489 or loydcortez@earthlink.net so we can get a head count. The restaurant can be reached at 212-5506 or www.bluestarbrewing.com

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MEETING DATES AND CONTACT INFO

General Meeting:	3rd Tuesday 7 p.m.	Jerry Morrissey	497-5470
Executive Committee Meeting:	3rd Friday, 7 p.m.	Loyd Cortez	674-9489
Newsletter Submissions:		Fred Wills	fredwills@att.net
Political Committee Meeting:	2nd Thursday, 7 p.m.	Russel Seal	289-9008
Newsletter Mail Party:	2nd Tuesday, 7 p.m.	Jim Stewart	692-0727
Outings Committee Meeting:	1st Wednesday every 2 months, 7 p.m.	Lee Dodge	647-0216
Conservation Committee Meeting:	1st Thursday, 7 p.m.	L. Van Coppenolle	492-4620

ALAMO GROUP OF THE SIERRA CLUB

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OFFICERS & MEMBERS

Loyd Cortez	Chair Person	674-9489
Ellen Clegg	Secretary	488-7787
Jerry Morrissey		497-5470
Sandy Redmond		872-5390
Jane Ward		829-5575
Hector Gonzalez		226-6069
Paula Stone		393-7351
Fred Wills		673-9566
Scott Wolfe		724-2707
Sharon Dukes (non voting) Treasurer		828-3721

ADMINISTRATIVE CONTACTS

Programs	Eloise Stoker	828-0919
Fundraising	Paula Stone	393-7351
Membership	Sandy Redmond	872-5390
Publicity	Linda Higby.....(585)	330-1890
Mailings	Jim Stewart	692-0727
Newsletter	Fred Wills	673-9566
Website	Richard Alles	494-2088

COMMITTEE CONTACTS

Outings Chair	Lee Dodge	647-0216
Political Committee	Russell Seal	289-9008
Outreach & Education ..	Carolyn Wells	271-0640

CONSERVATION CONTACTS

Conservation Chair	L. Van Coppenolle	492-4620
Assistant Chair	R. Carroll-Bradd	216-6125
Endangered Species	Fred Wills	673-9566
Fluoridation	L. Van Coppenolle	492-4620
Organic Gardening	Dave Klar	495-2148
Recycling	Patricia Martinez	454-5920
Tree Conservation	Richard Alles	494-2088
Volunteer Coordinator ..	Jerry Morrissey	497.5470
Water Issues	Jerry Morrissey	497-5470

U.S. CONGRESSPERSONS

Charlie Gonzalez (210) 472-6195
Lamar Smith (210) 821-5024
Henry Cuellar (210) 271-2851
Ciro Rodriguez (210) 922-1874

CITY COUNCIL

Mayor: Phil Hardberger; 207-7060;	mayor@sanantonio.gov
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Dist. 3: Jennifer V. Ramos; 207-7064;	district3@sanantonio.gov
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Dist. 5: Lourdes Galvan; 207-7043;	district5@sanantonio.gov
Dist. 6: Delicia Herrera; 207-7065;	district6@sanantonio.gov
Dist. 7: Justin Rodriguez; 207-7044;	district7@sanantonio.gov
Dist. 8: Diane G. Cibrian; 207-7086;	district8@sanantonio.gov
Dist. 9: Louis E. Rowe; 207-7325;	district9@sanantonio.gov
Dist. 10: John G. Clamp; 207-7276;	district10@sanantonio.gov

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STUDENT	<input type="checkbox"/> \$24	<input type="checkbox"/> \$32
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