



# THE ALAMO SIERRAN

THE ALAMO GROUP OF THE SIERRA CLUB NEWSLETTER - VOL. 41 No. 10 NOVEMBER 2007

## *A Word from the Chair* by Jerry Morrissey

Our fall programs have been well attended, providing insight about important conservation topics. The September movie, "Who Killed the Electric Car?" explored the reasoning and forces that led to the removal of GM's electric car from the marketplace. Our October program by John Ashworth on the Trinity Aquifer explained how geology controls the interaction between groundwater and surface water. He pointed out that water conservation is helping to meet water needs identified in regional water plans and that corn growing for ethanol production can cause excessive pumping of the Oglala Aquifer.

Our Conservation Committee has been developing a detailed policy statement on energy for providing input to CPS Energy and the City of San Antonio. We are advocating energy conservation and renewable energy options as alternatives to two new nuclear plants. Our members had an opportunity to advocate these options instead of nuclear power at the CPS board meeting on October 29th. Despite the CPS board's decision to approve an initial investment in nuclear, our committee will continue to press CPS Energy and the City of San Antonio to aggressively pursue energy conservation and renewable energy. Changing circumstances could lead to a change of heart by CPS; if not, we will work to see that this is the last non-renewable energy plant built. We invite you to participate directly by reducing your own energy consumption and by advocating energy savings in private conversations and at public forums.

## *We Want YOU on the ExCom*

In December, the Alamo Group will hold elections for three expired terms on the Executive Committee (ExCom). We are seeking members who can commit to attending monthly ExCom meetings and participate in running the club. You need not be an expert on environmental or organizational matters to serve. All we ask is the desire to make a difference and a willingness to learn as we address the issues affecting San Antonio and the region. If you are interested in being a candidate, please contact one of these members of the nominating committee: Marsha Meredith, 657-4097 (MarshaM@satx.r.com), Eloise Stoker, 828-0919, or Loretta Van Coppenolle, 492-4620.

## *Save the Date!* *Holiday Party & Silent Auction*

Mark your calendars for Tuesday, December 18 (the regular December meeting date) to attend the Alamo Group's Holiday Party and Silent Auction. The party is from 6:00-8:30 at Lion's Field, 2809 Broadway. This is the same great place we had it last year, with lots of room for us and our wonderful auction items. Since we're getting the space for free, we have to be out by 9 sharp, but that gives us plenty of time for food, conversation, and the opportunity to get some great bargains just in time for Christmas. It's "potluck" so you know the food will be really good. The silent auction is a Club fundraiser and a way to get some unique goods and services. Bring a dish to share, your appetite and your wallet!

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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.**

### **November 20 - Build San Antonio Green**

Stephen Colley, Co-Chair of the San Antonio Chapter of the American Institute of Architects Committee on the Environment, will give us a sneak peek at the Remodel/Renovation Program, the newest element of Build San Antonio Green. Although green building of houses and commercial structures centers on new construction, it is important to realize that the largest potential to reduce greenhouse gases and improve health is in existing buildings.

### **December 18 - Holiday Party and Silent Auction**

Potluck and fundraiser held at Lion's Field (see article in this issue).

### *Nuclear Plan(t)s Emerge in South Texas*

A New Jersey-based company, NRG Energy, the second largest electricity producer in Texas, has filed an application with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to construct two new nuclear power plants in South Texas. They would be the first nuke plants to be built in the nation since 1996 and the first permit application since 1978. The new reactors would be added to the existing South Texas Project located near Bay City, some 80 miles SW of Houston. NRG operates the 2,700-megawatt facility completed in 1988, which it owns jointly

### *The Bottom Line on Personal Solar Power*

Installing residential photo-voltaic (pv) solar power provides some energy independence while reducing one's energy-related carbon dioxide "footprint" and pollution load. Though worthy goals, there are many issues to consider. System type, size, orientation, installation, whether to use batteries, etc. are important questions, but the most critical is, "How much will it cost?"

According to The Power Store, an average net metering system (in which excess power can be sold back to the utility) on an average house will run around \$25,000.

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**Save the date - Continued**

Local businesses are donating items, but many will come from members like you. Search through your treasures and find some wonderful thing that needs a new home. Or, maybe you have a service that could be donated. We need to know what you're going to donate and receive the item(s) by Saturday, December 15. A list of items and donors will be posted on our website. If you want to donate an item or a service, contact Paula Stone at paula@PaulaStoneInteriors.com or 393-7351.

**Nukes Emerge Continued**

with Austin and San Antonio. The new reactors are estimated to cost \$5.2 billion when completed. Construction might begin as early as 2010, with the plants going on-line as early as 2014. Toshiba, a Japanese company, would be the contractor for the two advanced boiling-water reactors, of a design now being built in the land of the rising sun. The CPS Energy board voted unanimously to approve participation in the project at its meeting on October 29.

NRG Chairman David Crane claims that the reactors would produce "a vast amount of electricity cleanly, safely and reliably" for 2.4 million homes, while avoiding the carbon dioxide emissions of fossil fuel power plants. However, Sierra Club Chapter Director Ken Kramer cautioned that the mining of uranium and construction activities would produce significant CO2 emissions, and questions claims by the industry that nuclear plants are a good way of addressing global warming.

Texas already gets about 14 percent of its electricity from nuclear sources, but this amount would increase if utilities get the permits they are seeking. Texas Utilities wants to expand its 2,300-watt Comanche Peak facility near Glen Rose by adding two more units. Exelon Corporation announced in June that it has selected two potential nuclear plant sites, one of them near Bay City.

*Fred Wills*

**Bottom Line Continued**

Storage batteries, to provide electricity during the night and on dark days, will cost more depending on how much additional capacity is desired. Still, unlike a new vehicle, the solar panels will offset their cost in energy savings each month for about 20 years! So, what keeps those who would buy a car from buying a pv system? Perhaps it is confusion over rebates, coupled with the

inconvenience and angst of finding financing.

If you are undaunted, here are some resources (note: no Sierra Club endorsement is implied and, in all cases, fine print and specific requirements apply):

\* CPSEnergy - Offers a \$3.00/watt rebate, capped at 50% of cost or \$10,000 per year. [www.cpsenergy.com](http://www.cpsenergy.com)

\* Also available: a Federal Solar Tax Credit, calculated at 30% of the invoice with a cap of \$2,000. [http://energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=products.pr\\_tax\\_credits](http://energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=products.pr_tax_credits)

\* Citizenre - Long term leased equipment with uniform payments. Not yet available. No rebates apply. <http://renu.citizenre.com>

\* HUD 203k Loans - Up to 20% (replacement cost) over maximum insurable mortgage for solar equipment installation. Up to 9 months loan payments can be rolled into mortgage.

<http://www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/sfh/203k/203kabou.cfm>

\* FHA Energy Efficient Mortgage - up to 100% for eligible "cost effective" energy improvements to the greater of 5% of the property's value (not to exceed \$8,000), or \$4,000. <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/energyenviron/energy/apply/index.cfm>

*Randy Carroll-Bradd*

**How's Your Legislator Doing?**

The Texas League of Conservation Voters released its 2007 Legislative Scorecard in early October. The scorecard rates the conservation voting records of Texas state representatives. State senators were not rated as there were not enough record votes in the Senate for meaningful scoring. Representatives were rated on the basis of votes on 27 environmental bills that came before the Legislature before its adjournment. San Antonio area legislators were graded as follows:

Joaquin Castro (D)	92%	(A+)
Frank J. Corte Jr. (R)	36%	(D)
Joe Farias (D)	96%	(A+)
Edmund Kuempel (R)	30%	(F)
David M. Leibowitz (D)	96%	(A+)
Nathan Macias (R)	38%	(D)
Trey Martinez Fischer (D)	92%	(A+)
Ruth McClendon (D)	80%	(A)
Jose Menendez (D)	77%	(B)
Robert Puente (D)	68%	(B)
Joe Straus III (R)	30%	(F)
Michael Villarreal (D)	86%	(A)

The Scorecard noted that there were many "missed opportunities to fix dirty power plant permitting, address climate change, and secure a cleaner, more sustainable energy future for Texas.... Many key conservation votes fell along partisan lines with Republicans [34%] significantly underperforming Democrats [86%]. Numerous polls show that this partisan divide is close to non-existent among the voting public concerning core conservation issues." The League's website is [www.tlcv.org](http://www.tlcv.org).

*Loretta Van Copenolle*

**Alamo Group Political Committee**

The political committee will hold an organizational meeting on November 29, 2007, at 7:00 PM at 202 East Park Avenue, San Antonio, Texas 78212. We will be drafting a questionnaire for U.S. House of Representatives congressional races. The committee will also plan the calendar for the upcoming year. Any Sierra Club member with an interest in the political process is invited to attend.

*Karen Seal*

**Getting on Board**

The federal government is receiving lots of requests for new starts on railway systems. San Antonio needs to jump on board the rail renaissance; otherwise, we will be the only large city in Texas to be without rail.

Austin will have commuter rail up and running by the fall of 2008 and there are plans for a streetcar line. There is also the future possibility of commuter rail between Austin and San Antonio, so our city would need rail connections to move incoming people to destinations. Houston just voted this October to go with five new light rail lines, adding to their existing line. The new lines will be ready by 2012 and one will run by several universities.

Electric streetcars or light rail operate on fixed lines (steel tracks) and this permanency encourages development in the urban core. Think about light rail cars gliding down Broadway and you can imagine attractive mixed-use infill and building renovation/reuse occurring along the route. That means residences, shops and other businesses, including lively sidewalk restaurants with native plant landscaping. People walking between them would create a sense of community.

Many arteries could benefit from light  
*Continued on Page 3*

rail and transit-oriented development (TOD) near the stations. The TODs could comply with new energy-efficient green building codes as well. This increased density would help re-direct growth and save on vehicle miles traveled to distant suburbs, thereby reducing emissions.

Health benefits also accrue. An efficient transportation system links rail or streetcars, buses, and bike and walking paths, including linear parkways at Salado and Leon creeks. Joining the rail renaissance will reduce the incidence of obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and cardiovascular problems. Just losing a few pounds by walking or biking can move a person from pre-diabetic to normal. Our air will be cleaner and that will reduce respiratory illnesses.

The rail renaissance will result in dollar savings to San Antonio and its citizens. A population in better shape means medical dollars saved. Transportation is the second highest cost for citizens after housing, so savings on automobile maintenance or ownership means more money for other things. Reducing the amount of city resources that are consumed by transportation (and sprawl) allows resources to be reinvested in other things like education and after-school programs.

For more information on light rail, go to <http://www.lightrailnow.org/>. Information on TODs, go to [www.reconnectingamerica.org/public/books](http://www.reconnectingamerica.org/public/books).

Barbara McMillin



## Become an Outings Leader

There will be an outings leader training session on Saturday, December 1. You too can lead hikes, bike trips, and canoe trips for the Alamo Group of the Sierra Club. Training will start at 9:30 AM and end shortly after lunch. Contact Lee Dodge for meeting location at LSG999@earthlink.net or 647-0216.

### NOV 16-18, FRI-SUN: LOST MAPLES CAR CAMPING, BACKPACKING, AND HIKE

Fall is the perfect time of year to enjoy the outdoors in Texas, and Lost Maples with its beautiful trees and trails is certainly one of the best places for camping and hiking. Lee Dodge will lead a small group of backpackers to one of the primitive campsites while the rest of us set up camp in the campground. On Saturday we'll take a 6 to 7 mile hike and have a potluck dinner that evening. Space is limited. Difficulty: MODERATE to DIFFICULT.

Suggested donation: \$4 per adult. Participants pay their own entrance fee and share the cost for campsites. Car-pooling is encouraged. Leaders: Marsha Meredith [MarshaM@satx.rr.com or 675-4097] and Lee Dodge [LSG999@earthlink.net or 647-0216].

### DEC 2, SUN: MISSION TRAIL BIKE RIDE

This is a bike ride on paved trails and roads that go between the historic missions of San Antonio. Total trip length will range from 18 to 27 miles, depending on participants. No child (or adult) left behind. Meet at Mission Concepcion in the grass parking lot SE of the paved parked lot at 9:00 AM. Must bring and wear helmet. Difficulty: MODERATE. Suggested donation: \$2. Contact leader Lee Dodge at LSG999@earthlink.net or 647-0216.

### DEC 31-JAN 1, MON-TUES: FROZEN CHOSEN

Come enjoy New Year's Eve at Enchanted Rock. Be prepared for chilly conditions. Potluck dinner and trash bag salad Monday evening. Climb the rock Tuesday morning. Difficulty: EASY to MODERATE. Suggested donation: \$4 per adult. Participants pay own state park entrance fee and share cost for campsites. Car-pooling is encouraged. Leaders: Marsha Meredith [MarshaM@satx.rr.com or 675-4097] and Ellen Clegg [eclegg@els.edu or 488-7787]

## Sierra Socials

NOV 16, CHRIS MADRID'S, 1900 BLANCO, 735-3552, 6-8 PM

Come enjoy wonderful burgers (Best of 2007), salads, cold beer, and wine. Locally owned restaurant is a great place to chat and cheer.

DEC 5, GREEN VEGETARIAN CUISINE AND COFFEE, 1017 N FLORES, 320-5865, 6-8 PM

Come and enjoy delicious, fresh food at the only vegetarian restaurant in San Antonio (Best New Restaurant of 2007). B.Y.O.B.

## 2007 Renewable Energy Roundup: Part 1

History will prove the significance of events like the 8th annual Texas Energy Roundup that took place, like its predecessors, in Fredericksburg at the end of September. History may also note the absence of area city and state political leaders at the event.

Most of those who spoke and exhibited at the Roundup were pioneers, or that is what they will be called at some future, perhaps more enlightened time. They are the geeks and nerds who are fashioning a new energy model for a country that prefers brinkmanship to prudent forethought. Their messages involve green building, organic food growing, and replacement of fossil fuels with alternatives like biodiesel for cars and geothermal for buildings. Nearly 60 of these pioneers spoke during a crowded three-day

weekend whose schedule precluded hearing all the speakers. And then there were the exhibits and the films and the demonstrations.

Two speakers of note were Austin architect Peter L. Pfeiffer and former Washington civil servant Rick Piltz. Pfeiffer began building green in the 1980s. A founder of Barley and Pfeiffer Architects, Pfeiffer built the "greenest home in America" in 2003 and in the same year was named National Green Advocate of the Year. In 2004, he was cited as one of the ten most influential residential architects of the past decade. For Pfeiffer, the first tenet of green building is sustainability: the building has got to last. Building green also means reducing consumption and improving health. The orientation of a house is more important than having an array of solar collectors on the roof. His overriding message is that the building envelope must be well sealed and well insulated, with conservation primary and renewable energy use secondary. The Barley and Pfeiffer website is [www.barleypfeiffer.com](http://www.barleypfeiffer.com). - continued next month

Loretta Van Coppenolle

## Sierra Club Calendars Are in.

Support your local Sierra Club group by purchasing your 2008 calendars from us. These gorgeous calendars make great gifts. Contact Loyd Cortez at 674-9489, or just bring your money to the next General Meeting.

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# MEETING DATES AND CONTACT INFO

General Meeting: ..... 3rd Tuesday 7 p.m. .... Jerry Morrissey ..... 497-5470  
 Executive Committee: ..... 4th Monday, 7 p.m. .... Tom Dukes ..... 828-3721  
 Newsletter Submissions deadline ..... 3rd Thursday (Thursday before ExCom) . Fred Wills ..... user261695@aol.com  
 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 Monday, 7 p.m. .... Paula Stone ..... 393-7351

### ALAMO GROUP OF THE SIERRA CLUB

#### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OFFICERS & MEMBERS

Jerry Morrissey ..... Chair Person ..... 497-5470  
 Loyd Cortez ..... Vice Chair ..... 674-9489  
 Carolyn Wells ..... Secretary ..... 271-0640  
 Tom Dukes ..... 828-3721  
 Hector Gonzalez ..... 226-6069  
 Eloise Stoker ..... 828-0919  
 Paula Stone ..... 393-7351  
 Fred Wills ..... 673-9566  
 Sharon Dukes (non voting) Treasurer ..... 828-3721

#### ADMINISTRATIVE CONTACTS

Programs ..... Eloise Stoker ..... 828-0919  
 Membership ..... Loyd Cortez ..... 674-9489  
 Publicity ..... George Windrow ..... 408-1988  
 Mailings ..... Jim Stewart ..... 692-0727  
 Newsletter ..... Fred Wills ..... 673-9566  
 Website ..... Tom Dukes ..... 828-3721

#### COMMITTEE CONTACTS

Outings Chair ..... Lee Dodge ..... 647-0216  
 Political Committee ..... Beck Steiner ..... 342-6694  
 Outreach & Education .. Carolyn Wells ..... 271-0640

#### CONSERVATION CONTACTS

Conservation Chair ..... Paula Stone ..... 393-7351  
 Co-Chair ..... Dave Klar ..... 495-2148  
 Endangered Species ..... Fred Wills ..... 673-9566  
 Fluoridation ..... L. Van Coppenolle ..... 492-4620  
 Genetically Modified Organisms Michele Petty 490-4133  
 Organic Gardening ..... Dave Klar ..... 495-2148  
 Recycling ..... Patricia Martinez .....  
 Tree Conservation ..... Richard Alles ..... 494-2088  
 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  
 Dist. 1: Mary Alice P. Cisneros; 207-7279; district1@sanantonio.gov  
 Dist. 2: Sheila McNeil; 207-7278; district2@sanantonio.gov  
 Dist. 3: Roland Gutierrez; 207-7064; district3@sanantonio.gov  
 Dist. 4: Phillip A. Cortez; 207-7281; district4@sanantonio.gov  
 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: Kevin Wolff; 207-7325; district9@sanantonio.gov  
 Dist. 10: John G. Clamp; 207-7276; district10@sanantonio.gov

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*Alamo Group website address*  
[www.alamosierraclub.org](http://www.alamosierraclub.org)

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Alamo Group of the Sierra Club  
 P.O. Box 6443  
 San Antonio, Texas 78209

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## Membership

**Yes**, I want to help safeguard our nation's precious natural heritage. My check is enclosed.

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