



THE ALAMO SIERRAN

THE ALAMO GROUP OF THE SIERRA CLUB NEWSLETTER - VOL. 40 No. 3 MAR 2006

WORD from the Chair by Tom Dukes

Spring is springing, and it looks like it's going to be a dry one. Water conservation is always in style around here, but right now it appears to be extra important. Luckily, our region is in much better shape than we were during the last big dry spell of 1996. Still, if a multi-year drought similar to the mid-1950's strikes again, things could get a bit dicey.

Your Sierra Club has been instrumental in getting San Antonians to plan ahead and to use less water per capita than many ever thought possible, making our city a statewide leader in conservation efforts. And, contrary to our critics, economic disaster was not the consequence. More xeriscaping, efficiency increases in plumbing fixtures, and conscious decisions to avoid water waste have all made a positive difference.

Yes, there is more to do, and yes, there is always a harebrained water scheme hatching somewhere that we must guard against, but we, meaning you, are making an important difference.

Be proud of what you and your organization have done and are continuing to do for the benefit of our environment. Stay informed about the environmental issues that face us today, and do your part to improve them. With your efforts, the Alamo Group of the Sierra Club will continue to help drag our region, sometimes kicking and screaming, down the path to a sustainable future.

Write? Right!

Ansel Adams, famous photographer, ardent conservationist, and life-long member of the Sierra Club, once said that he made it a daily habit to contact a politician about an environmental issue he held dear. Why? Because he knew what all politicians know. The best path to reelection is to give voters what they want, and the best way to know what voters want is to pay attention to the mail, phone calls, and e-mail that people send.

Have you contacted your political leaders today? It's a safe bet that at least one lobbyist from a group or industry you disagree with has. The only way that we as citizens can counteract their influence is to actively and regularly contact our elected representatives and their bureaucratic helpers in the halls of power.

Politicians credit each contact they receive from a citizen with representing 7 to 10 voters back home, so your individual phone call or letter has far greater impact than you might imagine. Congressional staffers tell us they grant phone calls and individually written letters and postcards the most attention, since they take the most effort. E-mails are slightly less valuable, and mass produced form e-mails and petitions are the least effective.

We Sierrans want to make the world a better place. We paid our hard earned money to join this worthy organization, but it takes more than money to achieve our goals. It takes effort.

If you're already an active letter writer, thanks! Keep up the great work! If you're not, then why not? Most people who don't contact

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Help Us Make a Difference

The Alamo Group is committed to building a stronger and more interactive conservation effort. We will continue to use our e-mail network to alert members on items that need action, both locally and nationally. We would like to invite you to participate in developing some local conservation campaigns. Possible major themes could be relating local energy policies to global warming and addressing local transportation issues with regard to urban sprawl, air pollution and gas-guzzling vehicles. Other ideas, and enthusiasm for other campaigns, are welcome.

We would like to see a much greater level of interactive member participation. The development of a conservation campaign(s) envisions using Conservation Committee meetings, internet exchanges, phone conversations, the local newsletter and the mail to communicate. We can internally improve our own conservation ethic by such activities as promoting carpools among members to attend monthly meetings and outings, and commuting to work and shopping. We could exchange helpful information on water conservation and on energy efficiency for many different uses.

The process of building this effort has begun with eight members expressing their personal conservation interests on a form, which was available at the February General Meeting. We would like to hear about your willingness to participate and the issues on which you would like to work. Contact David Klar, local Conservation Chair at dklar63162@aol.com or 210-495-2148, or Jerry Morrissey at jlmorrissey@aol.com or 210-382-2614. If you prefer writing down your ideas, you can send us a letter at the Alamo Group of the Sierra Club, P.O. Box 6443, San Antonio, TX 78209.

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.

March 21, 2006: Renewable Energy

Today by Russell E. Smith, Executive Director, Texas Renewable Energy Industries Association. One focus of the presentation will be the

retrofitting of existing buildings with renewables.

April 18, 2006: Solar Cooking by Monica Salyer of Texas Solar Cookers

Word from Chair Continued

governmental decision-makers practice what I call the Three Deadly Excuses. (Drum roll, please).

Excuse 1. "I'm not very good with words." - Whether at City Hall or in D.C., your postcards and letters aren't picked over by red pen packing high school English teachers. They are quickly read and tallied by a staffperson who tells the boss what's on voters' minds. Remember, your letter represents the voting tendencies of 7 to 10 others. SO WRITE, RIGHT?

Excuse 2. "I don't know enough about this issue." - Phone contacts and letters seldom provide new information to an official. They do, however, help representatives gauge voter sentiment on the topic. That's why it's so crucial to write something, anything. SO WRITE, RIGHT?

Excuse 3. "I don't have the time." - A postcard takes 5 minutes to write and address. Just one sentence (Please support/oppose _____ because.) is enough to make your point. SO WRITE, RIGHT?

OK, now. No excuses. Don't change the channel. Grab your phone or pick up a pen, select an issue worth caring about (there's no shortage of those, now, is there?) and let your leaders know how you feel. The planet you save may be your own!

WRITE? RIGHT!
Tom Dukes

Save The Neches River Wildlife Refuge

Dallas dam or wildlife preserve? You decide.

Plans by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to establish a 25,000 acre Neches River National Wildlife Refuge are being jeopardized by calls for yet another unnecessary Texas reservoir.

The proposed refuge would protect some of our state's rapidly dwindling hardwood forest, provide critical habitat for numerous species, and offer hunting, fishing, hiking, canoeing, bird watching, and other recreational activities.

But water developers at the Upper Neches Municipal Water Authority are seeking to derail the refuge in order to build a 32,000-acre reservoir known as Fastrill, which would supply water for the city of Dallas. However, data from the official Region C Water Planning Group shows that existing reservoirs are sufficient to meet the region's projected increases in demand through 2060. And even after 2060, Fastrill would most likely serve only as a reserve water supply.

As Texas' most powerful senator, Kay Bailey Hutchison is a key player in the debate over whether to save the Neches River forests. Please take a moment to call her Washington, D.C. office at (202) 224-5922, and ask her to support creation of the Neches River National Wildlife Refuge.

Here's a sample message you can leave:

"Hello, my name is _____ and I live in _____. I want to urge Senator Hutchison to support creation of the Neches River National Wildlife Refuge."

Good News for the Great Bear Rainforest

On February 7, British Columbia announced that nearly 5 million acres of the Great Bear Rainforest — an area roughly the size of New Jersey — would be kept off-limits to logging. The region supports one of the highest concentrations of grizzly bears in North America, as well as habitat for the rare "spirit bear", coastal wolves, mountain goats, and a unique species of goshawk. Last fall the Sierra Club asked activists to write B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell, urging protection of the Great Bear. According to the New York Times, "A deluge of postcards and demonstrations by groups like the Sierra Club and Greenpeace at shareholders meetings and retail outlets pressed American, Japanese and European hardware chains to shun products from the area." So to those of you who wrote, spoke out, sat in, boycotted, or demonstrated, we say, "Thank you!"

Save A Tree

As you may recall, we were looking

into the feasibility of providing the newsletter online through our website. At the same time we were also working on a project to email the newsletter to our members who decide they want to receive an email newsletter rather than the paper copy. We want to make these changes in order to save some operational costs and volunteer hours in getting the newsletter out to our members.

Well, we are now happy to announce that we are accomplishing these goals. Members can now view the newsletter on the website in a pdf format. We can also email the newsletter as an attachment in a pdf format; however, because page 4 of the newsletter currently takes so long to download as an email attachment, it is omitted from the email. Page 4 is available on our website where this pdf document is kept.

If you would like to participate in receiving the newsletter as an email attachment instead of a paper copy by US Mail, then please send an email to Loyd Cortez at loydcortez@earthlink.net. In the email, please provide him with your name, membership number, if you have it, (8-digit number found on the upper left corner of the address label above your name on your paper newsletter), and the street mailing address so he can notify National Sierra Club to stop printing your newsletter label and, of course, the email address to which you want the newsletter sent.

Please remember: If you choose the email option, we will automatically send your newsletter in email format. For this reason, it is vital that you inform us of any email address changes.

Loyd Cortez
loydcortez@earthlink.net

You're invited to a Party!

Every month a handful of volunteers meet at the home of Jim and Ruthie Stewart to label over 2,000 newsletters. If you would like to join the fun, contact Jim Stewart [goldstewart@earthlink.net or 210-692-0727].

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.

MAR 17-1, FRI-SUN: ENCHANTED ROCK STATE NATURAL AREA CAR CAMPING TRIP

Sign up to camp (waiting list), or join us for a Saturday hike around the Rock. We'll share a potluck dinner Saturday night. 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 marshal205@sbcglobal.net.

APR 1, SAT: GOVERNMENT CANYON SPRING HIKE

Come out for a 2 to 5 mile hike on the Front Country Trails. Bring your wildflower books and we'll identify what we find. Group size limited to 10 hikers. Difficulty: MODERATE. Cost: Entrance fee into the natural area; donation to our local club's conservation efforts will be accepted. Leader: Marsha Meredith, 675-4097 or marshal205@sbcglobal.net

MAY 6-7, SAT-SUN: DEVILS RIVER STATE NATURAL AREA CAR CAMPING

Experience the dark skies and bright stars of West Texas at this unique State Natural Area. We'll leave early Saturday morning for this one night camping trip. We'll hike to the river and have a potluck dinner Saturday night. The sites are primitive, but you can bring the kitchen sink in your car. Leader: Marsha Meredith, 675-4097 or marshal205@sbcglobal.net; and Fred Wills, 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 [marshal205@sbcglobal.net].

HIKES AT GOVERNMENT CANYON

Three recurring monthly hikes are offered. Naturally Fit Hikes: Enjoy the outdoors while getting fit with beginner-to-intermediate, 2-4 hour hikes on the first and last Saturday of every month.

Hike the Canyon: Unfamiliar with the trails at Government Canyon or just want to go hiking there with other people? Join the Friends of Government Canyon Volunteers on the second Saturday of every month for a guided, 5-7-mile hike on one of the many trails at the state natural area.

Explore the Canyon: Interested in the flora, fauna, natural and cultural history of Government Canyon? Willing to court a little mystery? "Explore the Canyon" interpretive walks on the third Saturday of every month may be for you!

Group size for these hikes is limited to the first 10 people. Participants meet at 8:30 a.m. at the visitor center by the rainwater harvesting tower. Bring water, snacks, sunscreen or hat and wear good, protective hiking shoes. Age limits vary for these hikes so please check. Entry fees apply; donations to the Friends of Government Canyon are gratefully accepted. These hikes are subject to cancellation; call to confirm (210) 688-9055. For more information you may also visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/govcan/ and click on the Calendar of Events link.

APRIL 1, 2006: OUR ENDANGERED BIRDS

Want to learn about central Texas endangered songbirds: the Golden-cheeked Warbler and the Black-capped Vireo? Come to Government Canyon State Natural Area for an all-day outing on April 1, 2006 at 9:00 AM to hear Wendy Connally, Rare Species and Restoration Ecologist, describe the habits and habitats of these birds. Participation is limited to adults and supervised children over 12 who can enjoy a 2-hour hike through rugged terrain. Please bring a brown bag lunch, plenty of water, and binoculars if you have them; be sure to wear sturdy shoes, sunscreen and hat. For this event there will be a suggested minimum donation of \$10.00 per person benefiting the Friends of Government Canyon to support future outreach and hikes. This special program is limited to just 12 participants. Reservations are required and may be made no earlier than 10 days prior to the event, beginning at 7:30 A.M. March 22nd. To make your reservation, or to get more information, email educmte@hotmail.com or call (210) 688-9055.

Sierra Club Chronicles

Sierra Club Chronicles is a monthly TV series capturing seven David vs. Goliath stories: the dramatic efforts of committed individuals across the country working to protect the health of their environment and communities. The series is hosted by Daryl Hannah.

The seven episode Sierra Club Chronicles series is broadcast the second Thursday of each month at 8:30 PM Eastern and Pacific January through July 2006 on Link TV (DIRECTV channel 375 and Dish Network channel 9410). These 30-minute programs air after the original series The ACLU Freedom Files.

Go to <http://www.sierraclub.org/tv/> for more information.

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:

Basura Bash, March 25, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m., San Antonio River; contact Hector Gonzalez at 226-6069 or hjgonzalez@aol.com

Earth Day, April 22, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., Woodlawn Lake; contact Loyd Cortez at 674-9489 or loyd_cortez@earthlink.net

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

THUNDER HEART BISON



Natural Healthy and Delicious
Low-fat, Grass-fed Texas Bison
The Red Meat That's Healthy to Eat
Available at Select San Antonio Stores
For more information call 210-930-0841
www.thunderheartbison.com