



THE ALAMO SIERRAN

THE ALAMO GROUP OF THE SIERRA CLUB NEWSLETTER - VOL. 40 NO. 6 JUNE/JULY 2006

An Inconvenient Truth

Al Gore's documentary on global warming, *An Inconvenient Truth*, is coming to San Antonio this summer. It is currently scheduled to open at the Bijou in mid-June. This film delivers a call to action that we all need to hear. Take a friend. Discuss the movie with your colleagues. Many Sierra Club members plan to attend as a group, and you are invited. Join us at the Bijou for Sierra Club night at the movies. Contact Marsha Meredith at 675-4097 or marsha1205@sbcglobal.net for more information.

Word from the Chair

by Tom Dukes

I have seen the future, and it runs on rails.

Sharon and I spent a week in Portland, Oregon in early May, and what got me excited wasn't their signature beer, coffee, or cool, wet weather; it was the transit system.

We thoroughly explored Portland via light rail and bus, with far less stress and at much lower cost than car rental and parking. Cab fare? Forget about it! Best of all, on the rails and buses we were able to relax and attend to the funky, fabulous architecture, rather than the traffic swirling around us. One shopkeeper we spoke with told us she hasn't owned a car in three years, and doesn't miss it one bit.

An automated ticket kiosk at the airport dispensed our one week, all zone tickets for \$19. From there, light rail rapidly whisks travelers to the city center for convenient transfers to other rail, streetcar, or bus lines. Our hotel was less than two blocks from a rail stop, and we were never far from transit service as we visited Portland's vibrant neighborhoods, shopping districts, and lush green parks.

Portland's citizens have embraced its transit system with vigor. In fact, one day the newspaper headline asked why light rail was not yet in place for a newly developing area. Imagine that in San Antonio.

The Alamo city's decision makers need to stop dreaming about more and wider asphalt and start thinking about how to adjust to excessive sprawl and expensive gasoline. Light rail can traverse a large city faster than an automobile and move far more people than a bus. It is fuel efficient, safe, and convenient, and it is long overdue in San Antonio. Our future runs on rails. Let's hope we are smart enough to realize it.

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.

This is the JUNE/JULY Alamo Sierran, so save this issue for important information.

June 20, 2006: The Edwards Aquifer by George B. Ozuna, Hydrologist.

Don't miss this important presentation. Learn more about this valuable resource from a professional who has been studying it for almost thirty years. Ozuna is currently Chief of the U.S. Geological Survey San Antonio office.

July 18, 2006: Potluck and Volunteer Appreciation Meeting 6:30 PM

Come socialize at the potluck! This year our annual summer potluck will include recognition of those who have helped with various projects and events over the past year. Bring your favorite covered dish to share and your own plate, cup, and utensils. Iced tea will be provided. Let's have a little fun. Note the early start time.

August 15, 2006: Update on Texas Conservation Projects by the Nature Conservancy

Sierrans Speak on Behalf of Tree Ordinance

Over 30 environmental activists, including many Sierra Club members, attended the Citizens to be Heard session of the San Antonio City Council on May 18 with tree branches in hand. Many spoke out against weakening the tree preservation ordinance as requested by the development community. Others waved their branches in support of protecting San Antonio's tree canopy.

Mayor Hardberger announced that the Tree Ordinance amendments would not be the subject of a vote on June 8 as earlier indicated by City staff. The vote will be delayed until late June or in August after the summer recess of the Council.

Richard Alles, the Alamo Group's tree preservation contact person and organizer of the Citizens' Tree Coalition, did a PowerPoint presentation on the values of trees and the need for a stronger, not weaker, tree ordinance. He spoke of the American Forest study that recommended a 35% tree canopy for San Antonio. Mayor Hardberger asked Richard a number of questions about the most recently measured 27% tree canopy in San Antonio and about the use of ordinances in other cities to maintain or achieve tree canopy goals.

Jerry Morrissey was the last speaker to address Council on the tree issue. He advocated the setting of a goal of 35% tree canopy in San Antonio and Sierra Club support for the establishment of an Urban Forestry Program and a Citizens Advisory Committee on the urban forest.

Whether we win or lose on this issue, Sierrans can be proud of their efforts to preserve San Antonio's tree canopy. For those of you who were there to speak or provide support, our heartfelt thanks. For those who weren't, please consider joining us the next time to advocate an Urban Forestry Program. Our strength is in our numbers, and what we do improves our city's future.

Jerry Morrissey

What's Your Footprint?

Want a real eye opener? Find out what your ecological footprint is. Go to <http://www.myfootprint.org> and take a short online quiz. The results will show you how many earths would be necessary if everyone in the world lived the same lifestyle as you do. Then ponder this information; it is definitely something to think about.

The Road to Nowhere

To toll or not to toll? For us, there's no question. As the old saying goes, just say no. Yet our city's leaders, backed by companies who profit from highway construction and the pavement loving Texas Department of Transportation, (TxDOT), tell us that without toll roads we are doomed forever to a world of gridlock and traffic frustration.

We looked at how San Antonio stacks up against other cities when it comes to highways, and the results weren't pretty. We already have more highway miles per capita than all but four major cities in the U.S.: Kansas City, Fort Worth, Dallas, and St. Louis.

Has all that asphalt helped? Not really. Between 1990 and 2000, adding more per person highway miles actually increased local commute times 11%. San Antonio residents now average 29 vehicle miles per person per day, 19% above the big city average. This annually hits our city's residents and businesses with almost \$1 billion in extra transportation costs at the typical value of 45 cents per mile driven.

All that driving raises our per capita traffic fatality rate to 28% above the national average, worsens our ozone pollution and greenhouse emissions, and makes us one of the top ten cities hardest hit by recent gasoline price increases, according to Forbes magazine.

San Antonio is already the only city in Texas with a sales tax devoted exclusively to TxDOT projects, and the highway lobby is requesting an additional \$100 million a year over and above everything we already spend.

Elsewhere in this newsletter you can read how Portland has created a visionary mass transit system that

serves its citizens well. Cities receive federal funding to help with transportation projects, and Portland wisely devotes 57% of its funds to mass transit. San Antonio, however, dedicates 0% to mass transit. We treat mass transit as an afterthought. Almost everything goes to pay for roads. Without a specific amount dedicated to transit, our city will never build a better solution.

What can you do? Call Mayor Hardberger and your city councilperson and say that you want no part of toll roads. Tell them that it's time for San Antonio to embrace light rail and enhanced mass transit. You'll find their phone numbers on the back of this newsletter or at <http://www.sanantonio.gov/council/>. Thank you for taking action.

Tom Dukes

Devil's River SNA - Solar Cooking, Pictographs, and Swimming

Ellen Clegg, Maggie McDonald, Fred Wills, and Marsha Meredith met Saturday morning and drove out to Devil's River State Natural Area about 65 miles north of Del Rio. All but the last 18 miles was a breeze. Once we got off the paved road and onto the graded gravel it was a bit rougher and dustier. When we finally got to the campsite, George Windrow was already there sitting in the shade of his awning. Since the campsites are primitive and none of the vegetation provides significant shade, awnings are a good idea in the West Texas heat. We got set up and then went in search of the ranger to find out the time for the tour to the pictograph site on Sunday. At the campsite Ellen got out the solar oven that we saw at the April meeting. Her plan was to cook some baked beans with lots of good stuff to spice them up. She did a great job of setting it up and preparing the beans. We waited and waited, but after a couple of hours the beans had just begun to get warm. Fortunately, Ellen was wise to use canned beans on her first effort at solar cooking, so we did eat some very tasty beans. In the future, we'll remember to start cooking when the sun is directly overhead. It was a good first try.

Sunday morning we broke camp and met up with the two rangers who drove us over even bumpier roads to the site of some very fine pictographs in a shelter cave in one of the many canyons of the SNA. There may not be as many drawings as there are in Seminole Canyon, but they're just as beautiful. After viewing the pictographs we had a quick lunch and then walked down to the river (1.2 miles) where we had a good swim. The water was clear and cold, perfect for swimming and a welcome relief from the afternoon heat.

It was late when we got back to San Antonio, but we all had a good time.

Marsha Meredith

Act Today. SA Water Quality Ordinance At Risk.

We need you to call, email and/or write the mayor and your councilperson and say "I support aquifer

protection and 15% impervious cover." Proposed changes to the Water Quality Ordinance do not go far enough in addressing impervious cover limits. Scientific data show water quality is compromised over the recharge zone if more than 15% of the total developable land is covered by nonporous structures like roads, roofs, sidewalks, and driveways.

If we want to make the Water Quality Ordinance stronger, not weaker, then we must act as soon as possible. Public meetings are being held this month with a final vote by the city council to follow soon after. The Alamo Group has a sample letter you can use and contact information for the mayor and council at our web site: www.sierraclub.org/chapters/tx/alamo. You can also find the email addresses and phone numbers of the mayor and council on the back page of this newsletter. Detailed information about this issue can be found at www.aquiferguardians.org.

Every phone call, email and letter counts. But you must act now. Please make a positive difference for San Antonio's future generations and a sustainable environment. Act today.

David Klar
Conservation Chair

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.

JUN 25, SUN: MISSION TRAIL BIKE RIDE (~18 miles).

Contact leader for meeting time (morning) and place. Difficulty: MODERATE. Cost: \$2 for members, \$3 for non-members. Leader: Jim Stewart, goldstewart@earthlink.net, or at 692-0727.

JUL 8, SAT: OUTINGS LEADER TRAINING.

Now is your chance to get certified to lead Sierra Club outings. Meet at 9:30 AM at Lee Dodge's house (7315 Whithers Lane) for a 4-hour workshop to learn how to be an outings leader. Lunch will be provided. Cost: FREE. For directions, contact Lee at lsg999@earthlink.net or at 647-0216 or 275-3355 (cell).

JUL 12, WED: EISENHOWER PARK WALK.

Join us for a mid-week after work hike at Eisenhower Park on the north side of San Antonio. We'll meet at the picnic tables near the playground at 6:30. Bring water and a snack, and wear boots or sturdy walking shoes. Difficulty: MODERATE. Cost: Donations. Leader: Marsha Meredith [675-4097 or marshal205@sbcglobal.net].

JUL 15, SAT: STAR PARTY AND OPTIONAL POT LUCK.

Take a look at Jupiter and its moons, spy the Summer Milky Way from a dark sky location, see the Lagoon Nebula, the Trifid, and various other wonders of the sky. Location is the Leakey Star Gazer near Leakey, Texas, about 2+ hours west of San

Antonio. Leader: Lee Dodge, lsg999@earthlink.net or at 647-0216 or 275-3355 (cell).

JUL 29, SAT: COMAL RIVER TUBING TRIP.

Take a break from the summer heat with a tube trip down the Comal River. Enjoy the cool crystal clear water fresh from Comal Springs while floating through New Braunfels. Difficulty: EASY; Cost: \$2 members, \$3 non-members. Leader: Bill Rogers [830-885-2523, or rogers@uthscsa.edu].

AUG 13, SUN: MISSION TRAIL BIKE RIDE (~18 miles).

Contact leader for meeting time (morning) and place. Difficulty: MODERATE. Cost: \$2 for members, \$3 for non-members. Leader: Jim Stewart, goldstewart@earthlink.net, or at 692-0727.

AUG 27, SUN: BIKE RIDE (~18 miles).

Contact leader for meeting time (morning) and place. Difficulty: MODERATE. Cost: Donations accepted. Leader: Lee Dodge, lsg999@earthlink.net, or at 647-0216.

SEP 22-23, FRI-SAT: ADOPT-A-BEACH CLEANUP.

What can be more fun than joining with other Sierrans in this international event? We'll camp at Padre Island National Seashore south of Corpus Christi Friday night. Saturday morning we'll spend 3 hours (9-noon) picking up and cataloging trash from a particular section of the beach. After that we'll swim, eat watermelon and share snacks. Those who want to camp a second night can do so. Difficulty: EASY; Cost: FREE. Contact Marsha Meredith for more information [675-4097; marshal205@sbcglobal.net].

GCSNA

GCSNA Saturday Hikes
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!

These hikes are limited to the first 10 people who show up. Participants meet at 8:30 a.m. at the visitor center by the rainwater harvesting tower. Bring plenty of water, snacks, sunscreen or hat and wear good, protective hiking shoes or boots. 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.

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