



THE ALAMO SIERRAN

THE ALAMO GROUP OF THE SIERRA CLUB NEWSLETTER - VOL. 42 No. 9 OCT 2008

Voting Records and the Environment

More on Endorsements and the Election

As was announced in our September newsletter, the Sierra Club has endorsed Barack Obama for the U.S. presidency. Sierrans may be interested to know a little about the environmental voting background of John McCain, Obama's opponent, which made McCain unacceptable for endorsement.

McCain, according to League of Conservation Voters (LCV) tabulations, has a lifetime environmental voting record of only 24 percent. In 2002, McCain voted against measures that would have mandated

This newsletter will be the last before the November election. It's time to Get Out the Vote and shake any complacency. The Fall issue of the Lone Star Sierran addresses our endorsed statewide candidates. It does not include endorsements by the Alamo Group Political Committee. We are responsible for endorsing local candidates (and initiating endorsements for U.S. congressional candidates in our area that are approved by the National Political Committee).

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A Word from the Chair by Loyd Cortez

We had another good turnout of 15 people for our September Social at Candlelight Coffee Cafe. There were a bunch of single ladies in the group, so you single guys lost out on a chance to meet them. I am happy to see that many more members are turning off their TV sets and instead getting out of the house to enjoy the company of their fellow members.

Today I want to give you a progress report on two of our ongoing internal campaigns—the Electronic Newsletter List and the Email Alert List. I am very pleased to report that we have had a steady increase in new subscribers to both lists. Specifically, 283 members have signed up for the Electronic Newsletter and 228 for Email Alerts. My goal is to get at least 500 members on both the newsletter and alert lists.

I can't resist saying that we have a wonderful group of loyal member volunteers who give about two hours of their time each month to help get the newsletter ready for mailing. *Muchas gracias* for all your hard work and dedication to helping get the newsletter out the door and into all those mailboxes.

Celebrate 40 Years of Greening San Antonio

Join us Sunday, October 19th to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Alamo Group of the Sierra Club. From noon until 4:00 we will party in the beautiful Koehler Pavilion in Brackenridge Park. For more information: Paula Stone 393-7351 or paula@PaulaStoneInteriors.com

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.

October 21, 2008: New San Antonio Parks

Come hear about our new parks, including Voelcker and the linear park program, from Crystal Strong and Brandon Ross of the San Antonio Parks & Recreation Department.

November 18, 2008: Organic Matters

Bruce Deuley, radio personality and organic gardening expert, will discuss organic victory gardens and what to plant in San Antonio area winter gardens. Bring your questions.

Toll Roads and the Environment

When concerned citizens protested the conversion of Texas freeways already built and paid for into toll roads, the Texas Legislature passed a law making it a requirement to leave as many non-toll lanes as existed before the conversion. This mandates that the footprint for these tollways be much larger than necessary simply to toll a road, putting our aquifer, many species, and the environment needlessly at risk.

The U.S. Hwy 281, Loop 1604, and Bandera Road toll projects all threaten the Edwards Aquifer and endangered species, yet the Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT) attempted to fast-track federal environmental approval for these projects by doing only cursory environmental studies called Environmental Assessments (EA) instead

of full Environment Impact Statements (EIS). TXDOT has failed to do a sufficient study of noise, air quality, water quality, endangered species, or the indirect and cumulative effects of the toll roads on the surrounding environment. Instead they found there would be "no significant impact" by doubling the footprint of existing Highway 281.

After exhausting every other means of stopping the tolling of Hwy 281 for three years, Texas TURF (Texans Uniting for Reform and Freedom), along with co-plaintiff Aquifer Guardians in Urban Areas (AGUA), filed a lawsuit in February to stop the toll road in order to advance the quickest, most affordable and least invasive solution, the gas-tax-funded original plan that's been available since 2003 (see www.281OverpassesNow.com for extensive information). On the day the lawsuit was filed, the two parties announced that there is NO opposition to installing the promised and funded

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Voting Records - Continued

a 20 percent renewable energy goal by 2020. In 2005, McCain again voted against a renewable energy goal, this time a goal of only 10 percent. In 2003, 2005 and 2006, McCain voted in favor of drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

In 2007, McCain had a 0 percent score from the LCV because he missed every environmental vote that year. Now a presidential contender, McCain found no time to vote the 15 times environmental matters came before the Senate. By contrast, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, whose campaigns were concurrently much busier, found time to be present for most of these environmental votes. Obama's score for 2007 was 67 percent (lifetime: 86 percent) and Clinton's 2007 score was 73 percent (lifetime: 87 percent).

In addition, McCain has spoken out on his intention to add 45 new nuclear plants in the U.S., despite the known drawbacks to nuclear, including unresolved waste disposal issues, mounting costs and lack of necessity.

Endorsements - Continued

We have endorsed Chip Haass for County Commissioner Pct 3. This young man, a history teacher, ably served four years on City Council before being "term-limited out." He is currently completing his legal degree at St. Mary's University School of Law. Haass is for smart growth, and he advocates that the State Legislature give counties zoning authority. The commissioners' court has a very important role in community-wide issues such as public transportation, including providing leadership on the light rail system initiative. We see Mr. Haass as an up-and-coming leader who will likely seek higher office in the future.

The Sierra Club endorses Benjamin F. Youngblood for the District 4 position on the Edwards Aquifer Authority which includes much of NW Bexar County. He is a long-time community activist who has supported environmentally sound development and has served on a number of SAWS advisory committees. He supports strong water quality provisions and sound management for the Edwards Aquifer.

Ciro Rodriguez won our endorsement for U.S. Congressional District 23. His district stretches from the south and northwest sides of San

Antonio across Trans-Pecos Texas to El Paso (including the Sierra Club's Big Bend Group). He has been an advocate for making the Christmas Mountains part of Big Bend National Park, supports less intrusive border protection, and wants a sound energy policy.

Early voting starts October 20. This year we hope you can do more than vote. Each member of the Sierra Club is encouraged to set a goal of finding 10 people who would not normally vote and get them to the polls. Ask your family and friends to go to the polls or vote early. Help your elderly or disabled acquaintances vote early. Offer to share a ride with someone who could not otherwise get to the polls.

Toll Roads - Continued

overpasses and minimal expansion of 281 from either group. Yet TXDOT and the tolling authority, the Regional Mobility Authority (RMA), have refused to implement this plan or even attempt to negotiate with concerned citizens.

However, in what amounts to a total victory for the grassroots, TXDOT had to ask the court for a 60-day delay in the 281 lawsuit to buy time to persuade the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) not to yank its environmental clearance for the 281 toll project. That effort failed and FHWA has pulled the clearance. A new environmental assessment will take a year or more and may lead to the need for an EIS for the project.

Through the discovery process of the TURF/AGUA lawsuit, it's been revealed that TXDOT kept key documents not only from the public and TURF attorneys, but also from the federal government. TXDOT purposely withheld a key study (by a geologist they hired) that stated the potential long-term effects of the toll road on the Edwards Aquifer could be "severe." Such a study didn't conclude as TXDOT wanted, so they intentionally hid the report and failed to submit it to the FHWA which would have used that crucial information in their decision on whether or not to give federal approval for the project.

There is also an email that shows TXDOT tried to "fix" the environmental work for 281 to pre-determine a "Finding of No Significant Impact" (FONSI) BEFORE the study even began. TXDOT

then hired a company, HNTB, to do the so-called "independent" environmental study even though HNTB has a major conflict of interest, namely that the RMA also hired HNTB to do the preliminary engineering for all their toll projects! So HNTB had a vested interest in a FONSI.

TXDOT and the RMA blame citizens for the delay instead of their own incompetence and deception. They seem to think they can wiggle out of their corruption without consequences simply by supplementing the record. They were forced to come clean through a lawsuit brought by concerned citizens, not by being forthcoming from the beginning.

Please join the fight at www.TexasTURF.org For in-depth information on 281: www.281OverpassesNow.com

Terri Hall, founder, Texas TURF, San Antonio Toll Party and 281 Overpasses Now

Sierra Socials

(Contact Loyd Cortez 674-9489 or loydcortez@earthlink.net if planning to attend.)

OCT 17, La Fogata, 2427 Vance Jackson, 6-8 PM (Singles Only!)

In case you missed the last one, here is another chance to meet and mingle with other singles. Join us on the patio for good Mexican food and a margarita. The weather should be ideal (it's OCTOBER!!). The restaurant can be reached at 340-1337 or www.Lafogata.com.

NOV 14, Casbeers, 1150 South Alamo (lower restaurant), 6-8 PM

If you are familiar with Casbeers on Blanco, then come see their new upscale location at a remodeled church! They are known for their great burgers, so come join us for a beer and a round sandwich. The club/restaurant can be reached at 271-7791.

DEC 12, Candlelight Coffee House, 3011 N. St Mary's, 6-8 PM

We had such a good response last time at this place that we decided to hold another social event here. Hopefully the weather will be pleasant enough to sit outside. The good food and quiet atmosphere make CCH a great place to get together.

OUTINGS

SAT-SUN, OCT 18-19: PEDERNALES FALLS BEGINNER BACKPACK

Have you ever wanted to try backpacking and never had the time or opportunity? Then this trip is for you. No prior experience is necessary for this trip, only a willingness to camp out overnight in a tent. We will be backpacking at Pedernales Falls State Park during the cooler weather of fall, going about 4 miles to the primitive camping area overlooking the river. This will give you ample time to adjust to your equipment and get a good taste of how much fun backpacking can be. Experienced backpackers will assist you and share their many years of backpacking experiences around the campfire. The trip will start early Saturday morning and end early Sunday afternoon. A mandatory meeting will be held on Wednesday evening, October 8, to go over equipment and supplies needed, as well as the trip plans. Individuals provide their own food. Difficulty: EASY. Suggested donation: \$6/member and \$8/non-member plus park entrance and camping fees. Signup deadline is October 6. Leaders are Bill Rogers (rogers@uthscsa.edu) and Terry Platt (taplatt@earthlink.net).

SAT, OCT 25: GOVERNMENT CANYON SNA HALF-DAY HIKE

Join us for a long (10+ miles) but slow (4.5 hrs) hike into the lower half of the protected habitat area. Arrive at GCSNA (12861 Galm Rd) at 8am (\$6 GCSNA entrance fee); bring water and snack. The hike will start promptly at 8:30 AM, leaving from headquarters. Difficulty: MODERATE (speed) to DIFFICULT (length). Cost: donations accepted. Contact Leader Stan Drezek (493-0939) to sign up, or for questions. Assistant Leader: Chris Anderson, anchorpt11@yahoo.com.

SAT, NOV 1: TOUR OF CANYON LAKE GORGE

Visit Canyon Lake Gorge with the Sierra Club and the Canyon Lake Gorge Preservation Society. The leisurely hike is approximately 1.5 miles one way downhill. It is moderately difficult due to often slippery rocks and stepping up and down. Guides provide informative sessions on flora, geology, and ecology. Cost \$10 per person, cash or check only. Pre-registration and confirmation are required (maximum of 22 hikers). Hiking boots or suitable footwear (NOT sandals),

water, and completion of waiver form also required. Meet at 8:30 AM at the restrooms near the top of the dam. Lunch can be pre-arranged at a nearby restaurant. Contact leader Christine Anderson for sign-up and waiver form (838-1952 or anchorpt11@yahoo.com). Please send or leave your contact information. More information: www.canyongorge.org or www.canyonlakeguide.com/helpful_info/gorge.htm

FRI-SUN, NOV 14-16: ENCHANTED ROCK SNA CAR CAMPING AND HIKE

Camp at Enchanted Rock State Natural Area and enjoy a fall weekend of hiking and communing with nature in the Texas Hill Country. The moon will be near full, so there should be lots of light to help as you set up camp and cook. There will be a potluck dinner on Saturday night. Bring your own breakfast, lunch, and Friday dinner. Difficulty: MODERATE. Cost: park entrance fee, plus a share of camping fees. Donations accepted. Space is limited. Contact Leader Marsha Meredith (MarshaM@satx.rr.com or 675-4097) for info or to reserve your place on the trip. Assistant Leader: Ellen Clegg, eclegg@els.edu

SAT, NOV 22: LOST MAPLES STATE NATURAL AREA DAY HIKE

This is a great time of year to hike one of the nicest parks in central Texas. We'll meet around 8:15 AM and LEAVE promptly at 8:30 AM from the parking lot just outside of the loop at Hwy. 1604 and Bandera Road on the right side leaving San Antonio. Alternatively, meet us at the park ranger station at 10:05 AM. We'll hike about 4 miles, with an option to extend to about 7 miles. Difficulty: MODERATE. Cost: donations to Sierra Club accepted, plus park fees. Leader: Jerry Morrisey, 382-2614 or jlmorrisey@aol.com. Assistant Leader: Lee Dodge, LSG999@earthlink.net or 210-647-0216

2009 Sierra Club Calendars

The calendars are here. You can pick up one or several at our monthly Witte Museum meeting. The price for either calendar will be \$15. Plan now to fill 2009 with beautiful photos of our natural heritage, while contributing to the preservation of our environment. These lovely calendars make great gifts, too. If you can't pick one up at the general meeting, contact loydcortez@earthlink.net or 674-9489 to make other arrangements

THE ALAMO SIERRAN is available FASTER by e-mail * save time and resources * Subscribe electronically Contact Loyd Cortez at loydcortez@earthlink.net

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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	283-5045
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

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Fundraising	Paula Stone	393-7351
Membership	Sandy Redmond	872-5390
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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

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

CITY COUNCIL

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Dist. 3: Jennifer V. Ramos; 207-7064;	district3@sanantonio.gov
Dist. 4: Phillip A. Cortez; 207-7281;	district4@sanantonio.gov
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Dist. 6: Delicia Herrera; 207-7065;	district6@sanantonio.gov
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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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Alamo Group of the Sierra Club
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