



The Pelican Sierra Club Florida

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF SIERRA CLUB

INSIDE: Black Bear Victory/Solar Amendments/Big Sugar Summit

Summer 2016

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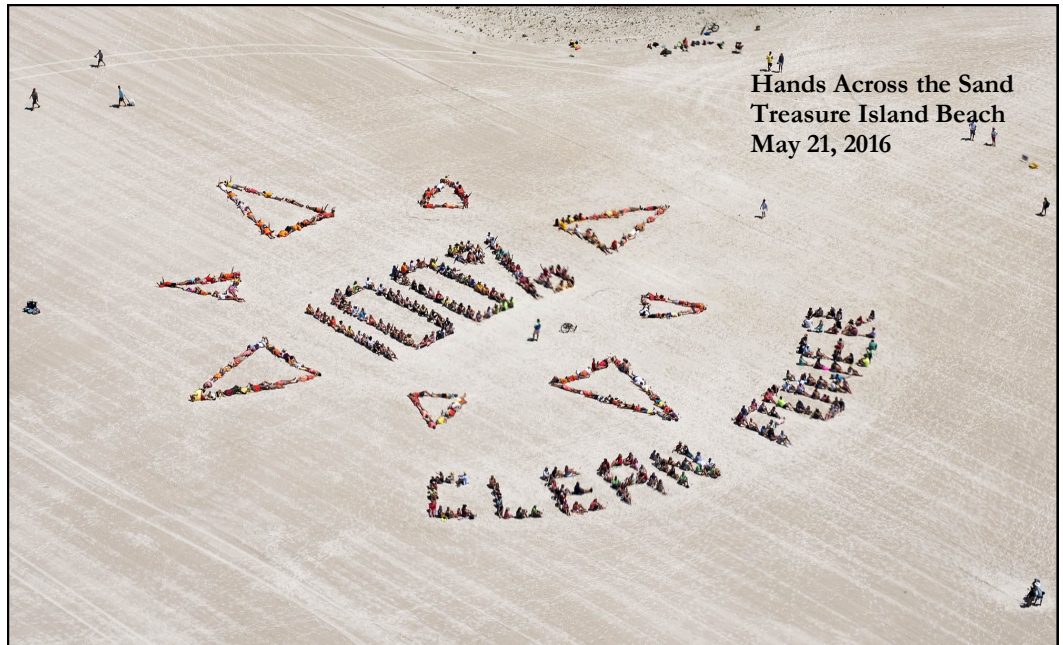


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SIERRA CLUB



Hands Across the Sand
Treasure Island Beach
May 21, 2016

Photo by Kathleen Finnerty

HUMAN SUN MAKES SIERRA HISTORY

A massive human sun powered by nearly 300 participants lit up the Treasure Island beach on May 21 at the largest Hands Across the Sand (HATS) event in the nation, according to national HATS executive director Dede Shelton.

At exactly noon, a helicopter overhead signaled some 300 people on the beach to pose with their bodies to create the image of a huge sun encircling “100%” to symbolize the move towards clean energy, with

words below the sun spelling “CLEAN POWER.”

The human aerial art formation, coordinated by the Suncoast Sierra group and national Sierra Club organizers, helped to bring attention to the St. Petersburg kickoff of the club’s “Ready for 100” campaign. The nationwide initiative is challenging 100 cities in the nation to step up and commit to 100% Clean Energy. Fifteen cities, including major cities like San Diego, have already made such commitments.

The Suncoast Group is working locally to ensure that the City of St Petersburg is a national leader in the transition to 100% clean energy. Speaking at the event press conference, which was widely covered by local media, were Pinellas County Commissioner Ken Welch, State Rep. Kathleen Peters, Mayor Robert Minning of Treasure Island, and Florida Chapter Director Frank Jackalone, among others. Other environmental groups supporting the HATS event were Environ-

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From the CHAIR

By Mark Walters



Meet the New Staff

The remaining Florida black bears that call the state home can rest a bit easier ... for now. On June 22, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) voted 4-3 to delay the hunting of black bears until 2017.

This choice was one of four options considered by the commission. The options included disallowing bear hunting in Florida going forward, the one they should have chosen and which the FWC still has a chance to make when it considers a 2017 bear hunt at a later date. The other options considered were: the FWC staff recommendation to modify the 2015 hunt to include data and input from stakeholders; and a replication of the 2015 hunt with updated kill numbers.

We are thankful for the leadership of commissioners Ronald M. Bergeron, Brian Yablonski, Bo Rivard, and Robert A. Spottswood who voted for the stay of execution. Aliese P. "Liesa" Priddy, Richard Hanas, and Charles W. Roberts III voted for a restaging of the 2015 hunt. Thanks also to the many supporters and concerned citizens who turned out to speak for bears at the FWC hearing, and to

There are many more humane methods to address bear-human conflict than the killing of these animals.

those who wrote and phoned in their disapproval to the FWC.

The hunting of black bears in Florida is supposedly prompted by an increase in human-bear conflicts. The state has admitted, however, that hunting does nothing to reduce that conflict. Wildlife advocates and the general public have overwhelmingly opposed the slaughtering of our black bears, a species that was listed as endangered only four years ago.

There are many more humane methods to address bear-human conflict than the killing of these animals. Simple common sense options such as securing garbage cans around homes in bear areas, electrified fencing, motion-sensing lighting and having a dog on the property will help to reduce incidence of humans and bears coming into contact.

The most critical aspect that needs to be addressed, however, is the relentless

(Continued on page 3)

Patrick Ferguson is the new organizer for the Stop Sugar Cane Burning Campaign. This campaign will help the residents in and around the Everglades Agricultural Area to put an end to the outdated and toxic practice of sugar cane burning which pollutes the air while padding the profits of Big Sugar. Patrick is an attorney with internship experience at the Broward County Public Defender's Office and the City of Ft. Lauderdale Attorney's office.



Merrilee Malwitz-Jipson is the new organizer working on the statewide campaign to prevent harmful algal blooms in Florida's coastal and inland waters, with a special focus on Florida's springs. Merrilee is a longtime North Florida envi-

ronmental activist, a founder of Our Santa Fe River, Inc., and was president of the former Save Our Suwannee organization.



Diana Umpierre joins Sierra as the organizer for the Everglades Restoration Campaign. She is a geologist, geographer and certified planner with experience in Everglades-related water issues. Diana served as Coordinator with the Everglades Coalition, and while at SFWMD, worked on regional water supply planning and sea level rise mapping for Southeast Florida. She is also Vice President of the International Dark-Sky Association.



The Pelican, Vol. 49 No.2

Marcia Biggs, Editor

The Pelican is published by Sierra Club Florida and mailed to Sierra Club Florida members. Annual membership dues include \$1 for the Pelican newsletter. Address all inquiries to Sierra Club Florida, 1990 Central Avenue, St. Petersburg, Florida 33712 or e-mail marcia.biggs@florida.sierraclub.org

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Last year's Big Sugar Summit pulled back the curtain on the state's powerful sugar industry. Hundreds learned about the impact on health and the environment from experts based in Florida, Brazil and Washington, D.C.

On August 20, we will be returning to the Embassy Suites in West Palm Beach to take a deeper dive into the Big Sugar world and get even closer to cutting Big Sugar down to size.

Topics will include:

- Everglades restoration
- Sugar cane burning
- Big Sugar money in politics
- Everglades Agricultural Area
- Lake Okeechobee discharges and impacts to estuaries

Last year's summit brought together a diverse group of participants from across the state who are deeply concerned about the plight of our health and environment. The disastrous impacts from recent discharges from Lake Okeechobee to our coastal estuaries are a clear sign that the status quo is destroying the Greater Everglades ecosystem and our economy. We can no longer sit on the sidelines and watch our quality of life and natural habitats be destroyed.



Registration Opening Soon

Big Sugar Summit 2 will provide an outstanding opportunity to learn the facts from expert speakers and panelists. Come prepared to learn, network and discuss solutions.

Keynote speakers, panels and a schedule of seminars will be announced shortly.

Last year's Sugar Summit was sold out, so don't wait when registration opens in July. Be sure to subscribe to www.sierraclubfloridanews.org to get the latest updates.

Contact Cris Costello at cris.costello@sierraclub.org or (941) 966-9508 for more information.

From the Chair

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destruction of bear habitat. The state's push to develop vast tracks of land for subdivisions, roadways and malls (see Alachua County story on Page 4), means more of the habitat where bears and other wildlife live is being invaded and destroyed. So even if bears avoid human settlements for fear of being shot, humans continue to encroach into their areas, forcing conflict and killing bears.

More than 100 bears are killed by vehicles every year, and the numbers continue to climb as more of their habitat is destroyed. We must put a stop to this. We must educate Gov. Scott and our legislators that paving and building in Florida's heartland is akin to flushing our heritage down the sewer; that destroying bear habitat and then killing them because they have nowhere else to go is wrong.

What is being done to black bears is being done to the Florida panther, the

Florida manatee, gopher tortoise and many other species of wildlife with whom we humans share space in Florida. Unless we do something, they won't be with us for much longer. When election time comes around, it is our responsibility to speak with our votes to support candidates who cherish our natural places and wildlife and will work to conserve them for future generations.

Mark Walters is the chair of the Florida Sierra Club Executive Committee. He can be reached at mark.walters@sierraclub.org

Community activists show coalitions can

By Janet Stanko
Chair, Sierra Northeast Florida Group

No, this isn't another Civil War story, but rather the story of citizen activists in Alachua County fighting against the biggest landowner in the nation. And so far, against the odds, the people have won! Here is how the story unfolds.

Suwannee–St. Johns (SSJ) Sierra Club joined forces with other community activists and citizens to form an organization called “Stand By Our Plan” (SBOP) to support the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan against powerful private developer interests who wanted to convert 60,000 acres of undeveloped swampland in eastern Alachua County into a major multi-use development. This battle has gone on for over two years, and in March the Alachua County Commission rejected the proposed development.

Scott Camil and Sherry Steiner of SSJ Sierra have been front and center in this fight and were awarded the Manatee Award in 2015 from the Sierra Florida Chapter for their work on this issue. They recognized the need to form a group aligned with Sierra's goals on the project but outside the Sierra purview. “We recognized that this issue was larger than just a Sierra Club issue and wanted to make everyone stakeholders,” SBOP coordinator Scott Camil explained. “By forming SBOP we were open to everyone and were not hampered by concerns about being a 501c3 and the club regulations that censor what can be said and done.”

SBOP is a diverse collaboration including people from the affected areas in eastern Alachua County --



To listen to the six podcast episodes, go to:

<http://ssjsierra.org/conservation/plumpudding/>

PLUM PUDDING EPISODES

1. "You May Find Yourself" Off to Alachua County for a classic story of environmental justice.
2. "This Is Not My Beautiful House" Commissioner Mike Byerly talks about how and why the county's comprehensive plan is supposed to work.
3. "Into the Blue Again" Plum Creek counters with its own plan and a big public relations effort to sell it.
4. "Water Flowing Under" A look at the science behind the county's environmental regulations.
5. "How Do I Work This?" Plum Creek tries for an end run around county environmental laws by getting some of their land annexed to the City of Hawthorne.
6. "Where Does That Highway Go?" Environmental politics in Alachua County come down to the wire, as the County Commission prepares to vote on the proposed plan amendment.

liberals, conservatives and lots of folks in between -- who worked together to create this victory. Many of the people had never before gotten involved in public opposition of a comprehensive plan change proposal, or any other form of citizen activism.

The idea for the podcast originated as an engaging and interesting way to bring our message about growth management to a new audience by using a story format. A podcast is an audio show similar to a radio show, usually spread across a series of episodes, which can be downloaded from the Internet and listened to either on a computer or an Mp3 player.

“We wanted to sensitize the public about how sprawl development impacts their quality of life, costs them as taxpayers, and is not in the public interest,” said Janet Stanko, chair of the Northeast Florida Sierra Club group and coordinator of the project.

“Those who already care about responsible growth can learn how a dedicated, well-informed group of activists

fight and win vs. bad growth policies

have used the tools that are still available to us to fight bad growth in Florida. We also wanted to develop the concept of 'public interest'."

George Sibley, a videographer who has produced many public interest environmental documentaries, was chosen to lead the narration in an engaging format helping the key players to tell the story of their role in the Plum Creek story and what their community means to them. As he put it "this was an interesting chance to open up and tell an important environmental story in greater detail than would be possible in a film. I think it's not only a great story in itself, but a sort of inspirational toolkit for other people facing similar issues. These guys did just about everything right."

If you have never listened to a podcast that tells a story, this is a good time to start. Each episode is about 25 minutes long, so you can listen over a series of days. It can be found at <http://ssjsierra.org/conservation/plumpudding/> or <http://priceofsprawl.com/blog/podcast/> where you can make comments.

On March 1, the County Commission voted on Plum Creek's plan. The vote was 3-2 to deny the development. This was an enormous victory for the citizens of Alachua County and our environment. Rarely do citizens win a victory over a multi-billion dollar corporation. Plum Creek was recently bought out by Weyerhaeuser. We will remain vigilant.

The good guys have won for now, but the saga will continue as the developer will pull more out of their bag of tricks. Currently Plum Creek is running their own candidates for county commission in an effort to replace the com-

Factors in the Plum Creek Challenge

The Plum Creek comp plan challenge was selected for the podcast because it had three strong attributes:

1. The developer had already illustrated the tactics that are common to all highly funded, determined development interests. Sometimes citizens, new to challenging development, feel like their situation is unique, but that is not usually the case. Developers use similar tactics over and over by emulating successful tactics used by other developers.

2. A dedicated group of well-informed citizen activists use some best practices. In this case SBOP is a diverse group who learned the laws and regulations relating to growth in Alachua County. Some of them had participated in formulating the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan

"The Alachua County Comprehensive plan is as close as you can get to a political consensus and compromise in our community. The product of many years of citizen advisory committee deliberations, workshops, public hearings, and legal challenges, then formally adopted and continually revised by an elected county commission, it provides a carefully considered blueprint for future growth in the unincorporated areas of our county. It balances the public interest with the rights of property owners by directing growth to appropriate areas and protecting public health, neighborhoods, farms, wetlands, and significant natural areas." (SBOP website)

3. Two members of the Alachua County Commission, Mike Byerly and Ken Cornell, were also SSJ members and very protective when it comes to matters concerning the environment.

missioners who voted against their plan. Will the citizens prevail? Time will tell.



Citizens made a point of expressing their thoughts at many board and policy meetings.

Around the State ...

On Earth Day, state and federal officials kicked off work to remove part of the **Tamiami Trail** that has dammed water going into the Everglades National Park for nearly nine decades and build a second, long-awaited span. At 2.6 miles, the \$144 million bridge will be more than twice the length of the first bridge completed in 2013. Another three miles of bridging are also planned. Everglades Senior Representative **Jon Ullman** and Miami group Conservation Chair **Stephen Mahoney** were in attendance at the ceremony representing the Sierra Club. The new bridge is part of the largest conservation effort ever undertaken by the National Park Service and will help to return water flows to more historic levels, Interior Secretary Jewell said at the event.



Northeast Sierra members stood in solidarity with other community members during Hands Across the Sand May 21 on Jacksonville Beach.

Rallies Say 'No' to Bear Hunt



Thousands gathered in cities across the state on June 18 to protest a proposed black bear hunt. Local activists including Sierra members gathered outside the FWC building in St. Petersburg, left, and in Jacksonville Beach, right.

Looking for something to do next weekend?

Sierra Club offers programs and outings such as monthly meetings, hikes and walks, and bicycle and paddling trips to encourage both members and non-members to explore Florida's nature and wildlife. Search for outings across the state from the home page of our website, sierraclub.org/florida Also, many groups post events and activities on Facebook and Meetup.com. Be sure to search for your group on these social media sites to keep updated on local happenings.

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You can help save a tree and reduce paper waste by opting out of this print newsletter and receiving it via e-mail instead. Send an e-mail to marcia.biggs@florida.sierraclub.org with NEWSLETTER EXCLUDE in the topic line. Include your name and mailing address.

Solar Amendments: What You Need to Know Before Voting

Two amendments addressing solar energy will be put before voters in upcoming state elections. Florida Sierra Chapter is recommending the following votes:

VOTE YES IN AUGUST

Florida voters will have the opportunity to vote to remove a major economic barrier to solar power development in Florida – taxes. You'll have the opportunity to exempt renewable energy devices, including solar, from the tangible personal property tax. This onerous tax increases the cost of many solar installations in the Sunshine State. Additionally, that same amendment also exempts the assessed value of solar systems on commercial property. Currently, the solar system increases the assessed value of the property leading to higher taxes.



Fewer taxes means greater economic return for customers, which will help unlock the market for distributed solar power in the Sunshine State.

VOTE NO IN NOVEMBER

This is a utility-bankrolled deception campaign. It enshrines current Florida energy policy into the Constitution. It is deceptively vague, and if it passes, future interpretation could work against solar. Case in point: the last sentence in the amendment summary ensures non-solar customers not "subsidize" solar customers. Clean energy advocates do not want a presumption in the Constitution that such a so-called "subsidy" exists. It will lead to attacks on net metering by the big power companies in the future. That's why it deserves to be defeated.

Human Sun

(Continued from page 1)

ment Florida, Oceana, Suncoast Surfrider Foundation, Chart 411, Greenpeace, Once Upon an Ocean, St. Pete Sustainability Council and Florida Food & Water Watch.

Since the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010, Pinellas County has hosted some of the largest gatherings for this global event to raise awareness about the dangers of dirty fossil fuels and offshore drilling, and the need to transition to clean energy sources. On the heels of the recent Shell oil spill in the Gulf, this year's event also follows Congress' recent consideration of a bill to lift the moratorium on offshore drilling from Florida's Gulf Coast.

Coordinating and promoting the event, which was spearheaded by Suncoast chair Lisa Hinton, was a major undertaking of emails, conference calls, and

To see videos from this event, check out:

Time-lapse video of sun formation at <https://vimeo.com/167575675>

Live Fox 13 Facebook video featuring interview with Sierra Club's Frank Jackalone:

www.facebook.com/Cynthia.Smoot.FOX13/videos/1067974059914797/

meetings over two months. First, an original art logo to be approximately the size of a football field had to be designed by internationally renowned aerial artist John Quigley in California. He flew in several days in advance to meet with a team of on-ground organizers who were to outline the logo in small flags early on the event morning and direct participants.

Advance publicity was paramount as the logo ideally needed



Having fun on the ground./ Photo by Marcia Biggs

300 people to complete. Social media postings and press releases started three weeks out. Quigley did a radio interview and appeared on a morning TV talk show in Tampa Bay. A helicopter, along with video and photography assistance, was secured. A press conference with public officials in the hour prior to the sun formation was organized. It all went off without a hitch! The

media exposure was phenomenal – a large photo in the Sunday Tampa Bay Times, several TV news segments and a live Facebook video on Fox 13 garnered more than 30,000 views. The event was the first in the country for the Ready for 100 campaign, other Sierra Club groups will be utilizing information and training gathered to hold their own Summer of 100 events.

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The price we pay for polluted water is too high

By Drew Martin, Conservation Chair,
Loxahatchee Group

Not only have we seen an increase in blue green algae, but we have seen dramatic fish kills in the Indian River Lagoon. These deaths relate to polluted runoff from the land.

One of the best solutions to reduce this pollution is to purchase and protect wetlands. We also need to preserve our *existing* parks and open space. In Palm Beach County, we are once again seeing a proposal to ruin one of our oldest county parks with a commercial baseball stadium. This will indirectly result in more polluted water as open space is replaced with concrete.

In St. Lucie County, a bridge is proposed to be built through Savannas



Preserve State Park which could introduce pollution into the park. In the center of the state we divert water to the coasts because the River of Grass is blocked and Lake Okeechobee no longer flows freely to the Everglades.

This polluted water is a serious health problem for the public. We need to change how we are making land use decisions to prevent this pollu-

tion. We need to stop large developments that increase polluted runoff into our waterways. Each new development increases the pollution load and risk to the public's health.

We need to open a path for water to flow south to the Everglades instead of out to the coasts. This means cleaning water that flows south. Nature did this originally through sawgrass prairies south of Lake Okeechobee. In order to do this we must free up Amendment 1 monies now being used for administrative tasks and use it to purchase land south of Lake Okeechobee.

In order to have a vibrant economy we must clean up our environment or we will become known as the state of poor health rather than the Sunshine State.