



**SIERRA
CLUB**
FOUNDED 1892

Alamo Group of the Sierra Club Newsletter

The Alamo Sierran May 2016, Vol 50 #4

Word From the Chair

National Club elections are now over. I hope everyone participated in selecting our Board of Directors. An experienced, effective and responsive Board is vital to the Sierra Club as the largest and oldest volunteer based environmental organization

in the country. The Club began as a hiking and mountaineering organization in the 1800s, but from the earliest days of its founding by John Muir was also active in the protection of Yosemite National Park. One early “water war”, the flooding of Hetch Hetchy Valley to feed water to San Francisco was an early loss that effected John Muir deeply. The Club’s mission has grown ever since to encompass the whole gamut of environmental issues, more broadly than any other environmental organization.

In the late 1950s, early 1960s the Club fought hydroelectric dams in Grand Canyon NP. It won that battle, fortunately for us, but in the process lost its tax exempt status as a non-political organization. As a result the Club split into two arms, essentially, with the non-profit non-political activities (“c3” in IRS terminology) in one part—Club outings, educational activities, membership functions etc. The political activities (“c4” in IRS terminology) are carefully separated for accounting purposes. Our Texas Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club, like National and most other Chapters, engages in both types of activities, but carefully separates them. This is critical on the funding as well as activity side, i.e. donations can be designated “c3” and tax deductible, or if undesignated or specified “c4” are not tax deductible and can be used for political activities. The Chapter especially needs c4 funds (always) and particularly during the state legislative session (coming January 2017) when our state office in Austin is very busy working the Capitol to try to promote our environmental concerns and protect against the regular assaults on those concerns by various industries and other groups.

Our local Alamo Group has to follow the same c3 and c4 rules. Of course we spend almost nothing, being all volunteers. Looking to next Spring’s City of San Antonio (COSA) elections, we hope to have c4 money to be able to participate more vocally in these campaigns. We do not feel the environment of our community is getting the kind of discussion from our leaders that it needs, and is certainly not getting the kind of leadership needed.

Anti-idling ordinance

Our metropolitan area has seen its air quality worsen dramatically over the years. The Alamo Area Council of Governments (AACOG) is the organization that has been

dealing with this issue. Much data have been collected; studies have been done. Public Service Announcements (PSAs) have been made. Essentially no actions of note have been taken to address this issue. We are now expecting “non attainment” designation from EPA for ozone. AACOG and COSA have now proposed a concrete action, i.e. to limit idling of large vehicles (over 14000 lbs) to no more than 5 minutes. The hope is to get the whole eight county region represented by AACOG to adopt the same rules.

We support these proposals as a small first step. The rules are weak, with important exceptions and limitations to their application. Hopefully they still will have a small positive effect on our air. Hopefully, they will also open the way to more discussion and stronger rules.

Our transportation system needs many changes to improve our air quality. Vehicle emission testing could be required by EPA. Traffic congestion is only getting worse and will not be cured by adding more and more lanes of highway, any more than it has cured problems in Dallas or Houston. We need smarter growth with better designed neighborhoods, where walking and biking are possible and safe. We need much better transit options so that people do not have to drive everywhere. We need much more carpooling and ride sharing through businesses etc. We need roads that prioritize transit and multi-person vehicles so they are not trapped in the sea of single person vehicle congestion.

A different kind of city, with different infrastructure, more friendly to people, healthier, safer is possible and being built in many places. All we lack is the will (and political power) to achieve it.

*By Terry Burns MD, Alamo Group
Executive Committee Chair*

Event Schedule

For updates on all events check the Alamo Group website, sierraclub.org/texas/alamo, under *Get Involved*.

Battery recycling! Bring your dead batteries to the EcoCentro and Lion’s Field meetings below and place in the box provided. Thanks to Gay Wright for coordinating this effort.

May 16 Tuesday

At EcoCentro, 6:30 pm, topic: Solar Energy

General monthly membership meeting. Venue details below.

Topic: *Solar Energy*. Russel Smith will share his knowledge of the solar industry. He was a founding member of the Texas Solar Energy Society and served as its Executive Director from 1978 to 1992. He was also co-founder of the Texas Renewable Energy Industries Association, where he was Executive Director from 1986 until early 2015. In 1994, he was recipient of the

American Solar Energy Society's first National Achievement Award-Chapter Level. He helped shape and pass several significant bills in support of renewable energy development at the state level, as a registered lobbyist, and has been involved in organizing hundreds of conferences, forums, public fairs, trade shows, and workshops. He is currently an Independent Renewables Agent and is a member of Alamo Group's Executive Committee.

Venue: 3rd Tuesdays at [EcoCentro](#), San Antonio College, 1802 N. Main, at the northeast corner with Locust St. Free and open to the public. [Here's our webpage](#) with map showing EcoCentro.

May 26 Thursday

At *Lion's Field*, 6:30 pm, topic: *Exploring Cuba*

Monthly program; venue details below.

Please join world travelers Alan Montemayor and Cheryl Hamilton as they present a slide show describing their recent trip to Cuba, including the history, caves, landscapes, ecology, environment, culture, economy and the rapid changes that are occurring in Cuba and relations between the US and Cuba.

Venue: 4th Thursdays at the Lion's Field Adult Center, 2809 Broadway at Mulberry. Free and open to the public. Service by bus routes 9, 10 and 14.

News and Contributions

No taxpayer-funded SWIFT low-interest loans to SAWS for Vista Ridge or related projects!

By *Meredith McGuire*, Co-Chair of the Alamo Group Conservation Committee

The Alamo Group and the Lonestar Chapter of the Sierra Club were among several groups that, on April 11, strongly urged the Texas Water Development Board to refuse SAWS' and Central Texas Regional Water Supply Corporation's preliminary loan applications for State SWIFT funding. Two loans were requested, one for building the Vista Ridge Pipeline (\$885 million) and another for integrating the Vista Ridge pipeline into the entire SAWS' system (\$127 million).

Why are these seemingly arcane Texas loan applications such a big deal?

- Because both applications make **false assertions**, the most egregious of which claims that Vista Ridge promotes conservation; Ken Kramer, former director of the Lone Star (Texas) Chapter of the Sierra Club, wrote that the claim by SAWS, in both applications, that the project “. . . addresses conservation and water loss is simply bogus. . . . *Reducing water demand from the Edwards Aquifer is a pretext for the Vista Ridge project, not the reason for it*” [emphasis added].
- Because the Vista Ridge deal is structured as a “**public-private partnership**” (SAWS + Abengoa, Pape-Dawson, Harden, BlueWater) in which the private partners stand to make huge profits (double-digit returns on

investment), but private companies are not eligible for SWIFT funding;

- Because Central Texas Regional Water Supply Corporation is actually just a **shell corporation**, created and controlled by for-profit Abengoa for the purposes of declaring eminent domain over the properties needed for access and building the 142-mile-long pipeline;
- Because SAWS' for-profit “partners” claim they are “public” when seeking state money for this loan, but they are adamant they are “private” when they want to evade FOIA requests for important information that the public should be able to know (e.g., whether Harden's hydrology report on the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer fully supports SAWS' claim that the aquifer's water is “drought-proof” and can be withdrawn at the rate of 50,000 AF/Y without harm to other permitted users or the aquifer's recharge capacity).
- And because the entire scheme for the Vista Ridge deal was designed to saddle SAWS rate-payers with the costs, while **preventing San Antonio residents from voting** on the \$3.4 billion deal.

Texas is on the verge of imitating the California (water pipeline-grid) model for providing water to cities where growth of demand for water far exceeds local supplies. As the situation of Los Angeles in the recent drought shows clearly, that model is simply not sustainable! It is especially disastrous in the face of climate change which is leading to longer and hotter drought periods. SAWS' (San Antonio Water System) Vista Ridge Project is the largest and potentially the most damaging of the pipeline projects being developed in Texas.

Texas *must* learn from the drought experiences of Australia. A recent report about how Australian communities coped with their more-than-10-years-long, serious drought says: “The Australian experience shows that investment in water conservation options provided the cheapest, quickest and most effective contribution to managing demand during the drought,”¹

Also, the report shows that Melbourne, a city with over 4 million residents, was successful in weathering that drought, in large part due to “. . . community involvement which rallied support to lower household water demand to a target level of 140 litres (37 US gallons) per person per day” [emphasis added]. San Antonio, too, could achieve that level of usage or even lower. The report also commended local projects of rainwater harvesting and storm-water capture and reuse, as being more flexible and manageable than expensive investments in large-scale projects sometimes became stranded assets.

The Vista Ridge pipeline has a high probability of becoming just such a stranded asset even before the pipeline itself is fully paid for. San Antonio must stop SAWS' outrageously expensive folly now, while we can still get out of a very bad deal without penalty.

1. According to Professor Stuart White, director of the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) at the University of Technology Sydney. [See: [pacinst.org](#).]

We Do NOT Consent!

By Meredith McGuire, Co-Chair of the Alamo Group Conservation Committee

The Department of Energy, frustrated by the difficulty of getting sites for a permanent repository for high-level radioactive waste (mainly extremely dangerous used fuel rods from nuclear reactors), is trying an end-run against state-wide objections: *They are asking for the consent of only the community where the waste would be stored.* People who live in the communities through which that waste would be transported, by truck or train, are not considered to be "stakeholders." West Texas and New Mexico are most likely locations. The map shows the locations of sending nuclear reactors and the highways most likely to be used for transport:

In 2014, when then-Governor Perry promoted the idea of the privately owned Waste Controlled Specialists (which already was permitted for low-level radioactive waste storage), the San Antonio Express News wrote a strong editorial against the proposal: nukefreetexas.org.

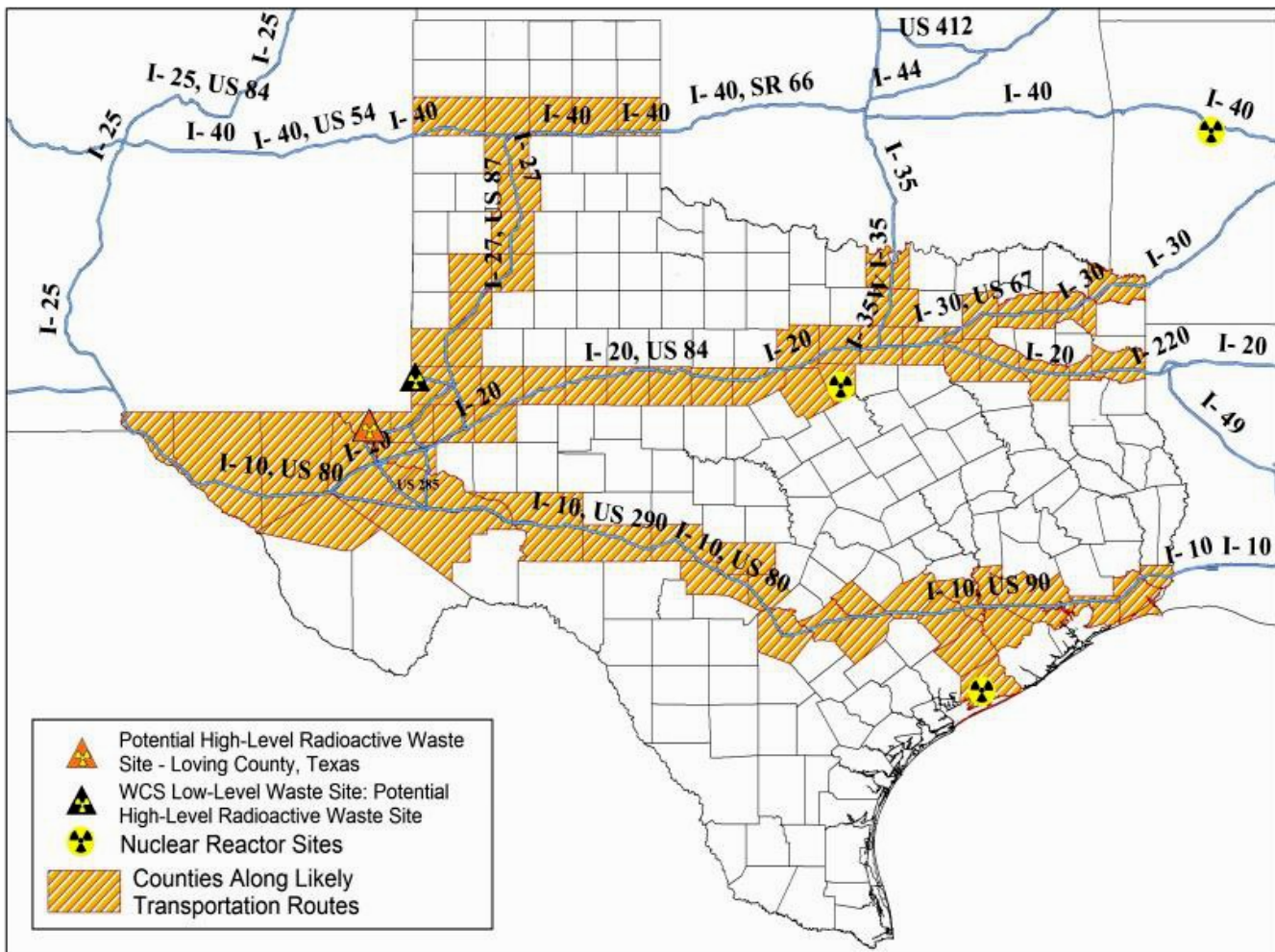
Unfortunately, as the editorial suggested, the fact that WCS was owned by a powerful donor to Perry and other Republican officials became a significant factor - even when the donor died and the storage facility was for

sale. Now WCS about to start ISFSI (Independent Spent Fuel Storage Installation) licensing - for storage at their "low-level" radioactive waste site in Andrews County, Texas. Interestingly, not one of the 8 DOE hearings on the "consent" issue will be held in or near Texas or New Mexico. See: energy.gov/ne/consent-based-siting.

What could go wrong? Lots! See: nonuclearwasteaqui.org

Because several Texas County Democratic Conventions have approved a resolution, entitled "Protect Our Lives, Land and Water from High-Level Radioactive Waste Risks," (stating that they do not "support or consent to transportation of high-level radioactive waste on our highways or railways" and do not "consent to having consolidated storage or disposal of high-level radioactive waste in Texas or New Mexico"), we hope there will be non-DOE hearing in San Antonio before the state Convention. The Alamo group of Sierra Club is already collecting signatures on a petition affirming that "We do not Consent!" Contact Meredith McGuire or Terry Burns for a PDF copy of the petition form.

Since 2014, new concerns about such a repository and all nuclear power plants have been raised in a *New York Times* article April 4, 2016, Could There Be a Terrorist



Potential Texas radioactive waste sites and transport routes. Courtesy of Public Citizen, Texas office.

[Fukushima?](#)

“The attacks in Brussels last month were a stark reminder of the terrorists’ resolve, and of our continued vulnerabilities, including in an area of paramount concern: nuclear security.”

Three new national monuments!

By Kevin Hartley

President Obama on February 11th extended protection on 1.8 million acres of largely BLM, NPS and USFS lands, of the Mojave Desert in southern California. Here's a good [LA Times article](#) and an article with photos at [NPR.org](#). This resulted from years of hard work particularly by Senator Diane Feinstein, further to the 1994 California Desert Protection act which elevated Death Valley and Joshua Tree national monuments to national park status and created Mojave National Preserve.

Death Valley National Park is the largest protected area in the continental US and Mojave National Preserve is the third largest at 1.6 million acres (Yellowstone National Park is second).

Joshua Tree National Park bridges the Mojave and Sonoran Deserts. Driving through is quite an experience; from 1700' at I-10 to the south you climb to over 4000' near the campgrounds in the center of the park, passing from the Sonoran into the Mojave.

The new monuments

The three new monuments are Mojave Trails, Sand to Snow, and Castle Mountains. Here is an [overview map](#), and a Wilderness Society [web page](#) with BLM and NPS maps.

The 1st map is a good overview, but a detailed BLM map at the latter page shows that Mojave Trails fills in around previously existing federal wilderness areas west, south and east of Mojave National Preserve, northeast of Joshua Tree National Park, and includes the historic Route 66 highway alignment. Another BLM map shows Sand to Snow lies west of Joshua Tree and includes the previously existing San Geronio Wilderness. And an NPS map shows that Castle Mountains lies NE of Mojave National Preserve. Just 30 mi northwest of Mojave (off the map) is Death Valley National Park. Lots of great pics on the Wilderness Society page! I must go back for more hikes!

I drove past and through some of these areas early this year but was focused on the more well-known spots. Below are a few of my pictures taken late Jan/early Feb.

With these new national monuments much of the Mojave Desert is protected; this is particularly important as the fragile environment is severely threatened by global climate change and development. The Mojave is the smallest of the deserts in the continental US; the others being the Chihuahuan, Sonoran and Great Basin. Here's an overview [article on these deserts](#) with map.



Joshua Tree National Park: looking WNW from Pinto Peak, 4000'. The hills center and right are in effect fingers of the Mojave Desert to the north interlaced with the lower elevation Sonoran Desert to the south. The park road climbing north from the Sonoran into the Mojave is visible left. San Geronio Mountain, in the new Sand to Snow monument, is visible on the horizon 60 miles away. At 11,500' this is the highest peak in southern California.



Joshua Tree National Park: sunrise at Jumbo Rocks campground after a blizzard.

The joshua tree yucca

An indicator species in the Mojave Desert is the [joshua tree](#) (*Yucca brevifolia*), a tall branching yucca. By 2100

there may be none alive in Joshua Tree National Park due to global warming. A [petition](#) was submitted to the Fish and Wildlife Service to list the joshua tree as threatened.



Mojave National Preserve: cinder cones and joshua trees in the NW area of the preserve a few days after a blizzard. The joshua tree center is about 20' tall. Old mining roads are visible on the cones. Off Kelbaker Rd, about 2900'.



Mojave National Preserve: the “forest” of joshua trees on Cima Dome, from the Teutonia Peak Trail. At 5200' this is a hospitable environment for the joshua tree.

Here's an [LA Times article](#) about this listing petition, Sept 30 2015.



SIERRA CLUB

Alamo Group of the Sierra Club

Website: alamosierraclub.org

The Alamo Group is one of 13 regional groups within the Lone Star (Texas) chapter of the Sierra Club. Our national website: sierraclub.org.

Executive Committee Officers and Members

Chair: Terry Burns tbscpbcs@satx.rr.com

Vice-chair and Treasurer:

Dave Wells dwells1315@yahoo.com

Secretary: Gay Wright

alamo.sierra@yahoo.com

Stephen Colley stephen@stephencolley.com

Lili Gonzales lg_3red@hotmail.com

Alan Montemayor

alan.montemayor@sbcglobal.net

Darby Riley darby15@swbell.net

Russel Smith russesmith@gmail.com

Enrique Valdivia enrique@lawyer.com

Administrative Contacts

Programs: Barbara McMillin

mcmillin5543@gmail.com

Publicity: Lili Gonzales (above)

Website: Richard Alles

blancoriver-hero@yahoo.com

Newsletter editor

Kevin Hartley khartley@windstream.net

Outings Contacts

Outings Chair: Jerry Morrisey

jlmorrisey@aol.com

Inner City Outings (ICO):

Anne Pearson anne.pearson@att.net

Conservation Contacts

Conservation Co-chairs:

Meredith McGuire mmcguire@trinity.edu,

Wendell Fuqua

wendell@woodcutsbywendell.com

Green Buildings: Steven Colley (above)

Education: Peggy Day

peggyday@hotmail.com

Fluoride Issues: L. Van Coppenolle

livewithnature@msn.com

Organic Gardening: Dave Klar

dklar63162@aol.com

Zero waste: Peggy Day

peggyday@hotmail.com

Tree Conservation: Richard Alles (above)

Transportation: Barbara McMillin (above)

Water Issues: George Rice

jorje44@yahoo.com

Climate Change: Darby Riley (above)

Sierra Club Membership

Are you a member? Please [join or renew!](#)

Drought: Alyssa Burgin

aburgin4peace@gmail.com

Dark Skies: Roy Ellzey rellzey@satx.rr.com

US Congresspersons

Rep. Lamar Smith 821-5024

Rep. Joaquin Castro 684-6896

Rep. Henry Cuellar 271-2551

Rep. Will Hurd 202-225-4511

Rep. Lloyd Doggett 866-916-5921

Mayor

Ivy Taylor 207-7060

City Council

E-mail to [district\[n\]@sanantonio.gov](mailto:district[n]@sanantonio.gov)

Dist 1: Roberto Treviño

Dist 2: Alan Warrick

Dist 3: Rebecca J. Viagran

Dist 4: Rey Saldana

Dist 5: Shirley Gonzales

Dist 6: Ray Lopez

Dist 7: Cris Medina

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