CELEBRATING SUCCESSES! – By Sue Caruso, Ina Oost Topper & Darryl Rutz

In light of the current political atmosphere surrounding environmental issues, it is important to stop and consider the successes, big or small, that we have achieved this year.

First of all, the Broward Sierra Club sponsored an Earth Day event that, despite torrential downpours much of the day, brought out almost 400 people to the Anne Kolb Nature Center. This event was in conjunction with an art poster contest open to all students in the Broward School system, with the theme “Solutions to Pollution.” We received dozens of entries, showing that our students understand the connections of their actions to pollution on our planet. Especially encouraging was the number of families who brought their children to enjoy and be educated about the environment.

Secondly, some state bills that went as we hoped:

SB 90 is an outcome of Amendment 4 that passed last August. It will provide a solar tax exemption for commercial properties, and blocked a property tax on residences that improved their property value by adding solar panels to their homes. This, combined with the two solar co-ops with hundreds of members here in Broward County, shows that solar energy is on its way in Broward!

SB 10 is a bill to create a reservoir to hold and cleanse the overflow from Lake Okeechobee whenever necessary. This will lessen the amount of nutrient-rich water flowing through the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie Rivers from the lake. That polluted water is the cause of algae blooms that killed fish and other creatures in record numbers recently. More good news...the funding for this project was also approved! This is a good sign after our legislators failed to purchase the Big Sugar lands two years ago.

SB1238 was a bad bill that failed to make it to a senate-wide vote. It would have allowed FPL to invest in fracked natural gas and charge ratepayers for the cost plus get a guaranteed profit on the investment, even if no gas was produced. This failed, in large part, due to the many calls of outraged citizens. Sometimes, our legislators do listen!

Other successes include:

The dozens of awards presented at the P3 Ecochallenge, which acknowledges environmental accomplishments by students, teachers and staff at our local schools. Broward Sierra Club was one of the sponsors for this program. Good things are happening in our schools!

The local Climate March in Fort Lauderdale was well-attended and garnered media attention.

The number of mayors, governors and businesses that have committed to staying with the Paris Accord.

I hope that by now you have heard the good news about the Florida Black Bears. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) voted 4-3 not to have a black bear hunt in 2017 and 2018. This decision was made by the seven member Commission in front of a packed house of about 200 attendees of which about 85 spoke to the FWC in favor and against the hunt. The Sierra Club was represented by Whitey Merkle and Darryl Rutz, both members of the Sierra Black Bear Committee. The FWC staff estimated there was an increase in the bear population reaching the 4000 mark. After deliberation by the Commission, they failed to support a pro-hunt motion made by Commissioner Liesa Priddy. Commissioner Burgeon as usual did not support the hunt. In summarizing, the Commission stated the science was there for a hunt, but citizens of Florida were not ready. They referred to the black bear as being iconic. So all of you that made noise by calling, emailing and contacting officials get the credit for this great wildlife victory. The Sierra Club and other wildlife organizations worked very hard to get the facts out. Many thanks to the members of the Black Bear Committee made up of Whitey Merkle, Laura Hensley, Marian Ryan, Drew Martin, Rocky Milburn and Judy Kuchta. Even though the Committee will be in hibernation, we need to be vigilant of the activities of our Florida Wildlife. Now that the FWC has stated that the numbers of our manatees and Florida panthers have increased we need to make sure they have a safe habitat. We love our wildlife and want to see that they become an integral part of our landscape.

Continued on next page
Xeriscaping.

The city of Delray Beach recently adopted a policy allowing its residents to xeriscape their property, no longer being obligated to retain a mandatory lawn in their front yard.

The Greek word ‘Xeris’ means ‘dry’, and most xeriscaping literature pertains extensively to the desert climate areas of the South Western United States. In fact, many local ordinances prohibit any lawn needing frequent watering, but instead favor or even MANDATE a front yard consisting of gravel, river rock, or pulverized lava chunks. Then, one may decorate with cactus, agave or whatever the budget may allow. Result? A hardy native plant in a large size box doesn’t need any care either.)

With ever greater frequency we have here in South Florida plant & tree giveaways throughout the year on those environmental days like Earth Day, Water Matters, or even local neighborhood events. This is the time to get some free landscaping additions. With that option you’re not only enhancing the “green look” of your residence, it will be a most economical venture, both in acquisitions as well as future watering expenses.

Let’s hope that MORE xeriscape friendly ordinances are put in place soon. You may do your part with a proposal at your next city commission hearing.

Meanwhile, at least ONE South Florida municipality is leading the way!

Kudos to Delray Beach!

Lastly, the number of volunteers and people attending our general meetings and local events. There are so many of you out there who care about what is going on in Washington and at the state level. We look forward to your continued support to keep these successes coming!

See www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIMrYHAbqmQ for more Sierra Club success stories.

It is a good time to stop, and not only reflect on these successes, but commit to reducing our own carbon foot prints. Small actions taken by all of us can make a big difference!