A Victory For Energy Efficiency

The year 2013 began on a promising note for energy efficiency when the La. Public Service Commission (PSC) voted at its Jan. 10 meeting to “quick start” its newly adopted Energy Efficiency (“EE”) rules. But things were soon to change with the departure of Commissioner Jimmy Fields, an EE advocate. At its Feb. 27 meeting, the Commission refused to hear public comment and voted to vacate the Jan. 10, 2013 order.

In response, the Sierra Club, the Alliance for Affordable Energy (“AAE”), and LEAN filed a lawsuit, prompting Commissioner Erik Skrmetta to agree to re-hear the issue if the suit were put on hold. The matter was then placed on the June 26, 2013 agenda at which time the PSC voted to reinstate the January 2013 order (with Commissioners Clyde Holloway and Skrmetta opposing). That victory, however, was short-lived. Commissioner Scott Angelle moved that the implementation of the order be stayed until the PSC’s July 31 meeting. Not surprisingly, the motion passed.

In the weeks leading up to the July meeting, the Delta Chapter joined forces with the AAE, urging its members to ask Commissioner Angelle (a swing vote) to vote for the implementation of the EE rules. Although the matter was postponed until the PSC’s Aug. 21 meeting, there is no doubt that YOUR calls had a persuasive effect on Commissioner Angelle. He was the key supporting vote to implement the EE rules. Again, the Commission’s vote was not a complete victory. At the request of Commissioner Angelle, the Commission voted to make participation by utility companies optional rather than mandatory. However, in response to persuasion from the commissioner, the utility companies announced they would voluntarily participate in the EE program. There will be an initial, nominal (47 cents on a residential customer’s monthly bill) cost to consumers, but the transition to more efficient energy production will result in long-term savings to consumers and also will help to create a cleaner, healthier environment. The battle is not over yet. Please stay tuned as the fight to become more energy efficient continues.

Nancy Grush

Scenic Rivers

The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission has approved a notice of intent to amend the rules governing the Louisiana Natural and Scenic Rivers System and the deadline for public comments is November 29, 2013. The Recommendations to amend the existing rules were made by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and are strongly supported by the Delta Chapter of the Sierra Club, The Louisiana Wildlife Federation and many other groups, individuals and landowners.

In 1970, the Louisiana Legislature created the Louisiana Natural and Scenic Rivers System. The System was developed for the purpose of preserving, protecting, developing, reclaiming, and enhancing the wilderness qualities, scenic beauties, and ecological regimes of free-flowing streams around the state.

Today, there are approximately 3000 miles of waterways in the Louisiana Natural, Scenic and Historic River System. 

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One of our consistent projects over the last few years has been the development of a Delta Chapter Water Sentinals program that organizes water quality sampling on local streams. On occasion I get the opportunity to take the water quality message to the classroom.

A recent field trip to Catahoula Lake in St. Martin Parish gave us the opportunity to do some real world sampling and analysis with Mr. Roland Pautz’ senior science class at Teurlings High School in Lafayette. Early on a Wednesday morning we started out with 12 students, five boats, and a carload of sampling equipment in order to do a water quality profile of the lake.

The students had been studying the water quality parameters and had practiced sampling and analysis techniques in class. Going to the outdoors allowed them to apply classroom teaching to working in the natural environment. My role was to assist in the classroom practice analyses and to help supervise students on the day of the field sampling. Sampling from the boats included water and air temperature in deg C, turbidity with secchi disk, and dissolved oxygen (DO) at 4 meters depth.

Sampling from shore included surface PH, DO, salinity, dissolved solids, nitrate nitrogen and turbidity using a calibrated meter. Four teams of students turned in sampling results with very good consistency, demonstrating that the procedures were being performed correctly. The students performed admirably and we all had fun talking about the characteristics of natural surface water.

My thanks to Mr. Roland Pautz for the invitation for me to help out, and to Harold Schoeffler for providing the canoes and his instruction to the students on how to handle them. Working with students in this way is just plain fun but it also gives us the opportunity to establish the Sierra Club as providing a constructive addition to local environmental awareness.

Woody Martin
Forty whooping cranes were released in three cohorts (groups of similar aged birds) in 2010, 2011, and 2012 at White Lake Wildlife Management Area in Vermilion Parish. Twenty four remain alive with seven of these birds having wandered to the Dallas, Texas area. On December 11 of this year, eleven new young whooping cranes will be released at White Lake. This cohort will consist of eight males and three females. Previous releases have been skewed toward females and so this release will improve the male:female sex ratio.

Three of the birds are known to have been shot. Two were killed in Jeff Davis Parish in October 2011. The perpetrators were juveniles and so served only community service hours. The third whooping crane was killed in Bossier Parish in April of this year and a $15,000 reward is currently being offered for information leading to an arrest in this crime. No leads have been reported to date. Other birds have been killed by predators and other known causes but some have disappeared with no evidence of the cause of their fate. An ongoing public education program seeks to make the local population aware of the importance of this species. Whooping crane shootings have also occurred on occasion in other parts of the country.

Losses in an ambitious reintroduction effort like this are to be expected. As surviving birds mature, learn survival skills, and eventually breed, it is hoped that a truly self-sustaining population will begin to take root. The mandated three year federal review of the program is now being conducted.

Charles Pfeifer, New Orleans Group

The Acadiana Master Naturalists will be offering a program starting in early March, only the second Master Naturalist program offered in the state. The program will consist of a 2-hour introduction and 2-hour wrap-up at the Acadiana Park Nature Station in Lafayette and nine 6-hour workshops. Eight of the workshops will be held in locations within an hour of Lafayette, with the last workshop being an over-niter at Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge.

The workshops will begin by studying native soils and hydrology, then progressing into the study of plants and animals that occur locally. The program will be limited to 20 participants for a fee of $200 each. Applications will be available in January. For more information contact Stacey at Acadianamasternaturalist@gmail.com.
These rivers, streams and bayous are important to all people and future generations because they offer unique opportunities for individuals and communities to enjoy and become involved in the conservation and protection of two of Louisiana's greatest natural resources; its wilderness and its water ways.

In 1974 voters passed the new State Constitution which included Article 9, Section 1 which states that “The natural resources of the state, including air and water, and the healthful, scenic, historic, and esthetic quality of the environment shall be protected, conserved, and replenished insofar as possible and consistent with the health, safety, and welfare of the people.”

If these rivers are to be adequately protected, public involvement and support are crucial. Individuals and communities can help by using these rivers and their adjacent lands in responsible ways, not dumping trash in or near the waters or on the land, initiating river cleanup projects, and by reporting conditions or activities that threaten these rivers to the Louisiana Natural and Scenic Rivers Program at (318) 343-4045.

The most serious current threat to our scenic rivers is the driving of motor vehicles in protected stream beds. This destroys wildlife habitat and drives off less invasive uses of the stream such as fishing and boating. A key part of the proposed rule will specifically prohibit the driving of motor vehicles in designated scenic rivers.

You can see the complete notice of intent at www.wlf.louisiana.gov/action-items under the Oct 3, 2013 date. Public comment may be made by writing Keith Cascio, Scenic Rivers Coordinator, P.O. Box 98000, Baton Rouge, LA 70898-9000 or kcascio@wlf.la.gov. For up to date information about the threat to our scenic rivers you can go to the Delta Chapter website at www.laSierraClub.org.

Willie Fontenot,
Conservation Chair
Sierra Club Supports Lawsuit

The Sierra Club Delta Chapter Executive Committee has voted unanimously to support in principle the lawsuit filed by the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-East (SLFPA-E) against 97 oil and gas companies. The lawsuit seeks to enforce federal and state permits requiring the companies to repair damage from their operations in Louisiana’s coastal wetlands. Aerial photos show that oil companies have cut thousands of miles of canals and drilling sites in Louisiana’s fragile coastal wetlands. The effect of this has been to cause erosion and to allow salt water intrusion into the fragile coastal marsh. Estimates of the direct damage are that around 10,000 miles of pipeline and access canals have been cut and have not been restored. This causes coastal wetlands to disintegrate, removing the protection against storm surge and coastal wave action that they provide.

Louisiana legislation which reorganized and consolidated levee boards after Katrina provided that boards would be composed of experts in relevant fields and would be independent of political pressure. Almost as soon as this lawsuit was filed the Governor’s office launched strong criticism of the lawsuit and since then has worked to remove two members of the SLFPA-E board. Special legislative hearings have also provided for intense criticism of the lawsuit by our oil industry dominated legislature. So much for independence from political pressure. Public Service Commissioner Foster Campbell has been an independent voice in support of the lawsuit and with the Governor to be a leader who stands up for the people of Louisiana, not just for the oil companies. John Barry, recently a board member and key figure initiating the lawsuit has called repeatedly for the Governor to stand up for the citizens of Louisiana who have lost such a valuable resource in the coastal wetlands. He has also said clearly that no one blames the oil companies for all of the wetland losses but that they should be held responsible for their fair share.

Whatever happens with the lawsuit it has already had some hugely beneficial effects. That is to bring attention to the role of oil industry operations in causing coastal wetland loss, and to highlight the complicity of oil industry influenced politicians and regulatory agencies in allowing the wetland damage to happen. We know that opposition to the lawsuit from the oil industry and Louisiana state government (are they the same?) is formidable. We anticipate that this will be a developing story so stay tuned.

Woody Martin
Did you know that there is a good chance that centuries-old cypress exist within an hour’s drive of where you live? In the Shreveport area, Bayous Bodcau and Dorcheat and Lake Wallace will transport you to hundreds of old growth cypress. Near Lafayette, they’re at Lake Dauterive; near Monroe and Bastrop, they are waiting for discovery in Bayous Bartholomew and Chemin-A- Haute; in New Orleans in the Pearl River Basin; from Baton Rouge, they’re upriver at Cat Island, and northwest of Alexandria, the Saline Bayou National Wild and Scenic River harbors an accessible grove of superb old growth cypress.

The Louisiana Purchase Cypress Legacy (LPCL) campaign has landmarked many of these majestic old trees, and, since much of the remaining old growth cypress is on private property, has brought overdue attention to the land owners who are proud stewards of these grand trees. LPCL plaques on scores of these trees proclaim them “alive in 1803”; indeed, many of these trees were already several centuries old at the time of the Louisiana Purchase.

Our blog at lapurchasecypresslegacy.blogspot.com (June 2012 blog entry) will link you to a registry of the oldest known cypress in many parishes); other parishes are still awaiting listings. Please contact Harvey Stern at hstern@bellsouth.net with suggestions for new registry listings, especially for those parishes whose venerable cypress denizens have yet to be recognized and honored.

Harvey Stern, Coordinator, Louisiana Purchase Cypress Legacy and Delta Chapter Excom.
So you think you know birds. You've been out in the swamp with your binoculars, Audubon field guidebook, a new bird-identification app on your Smartphone, and your essential list. You've identified and written in your log book that you've seen and identified an aquatic bird you know to be the Common moorhen. That's the name in the Audubon guidebook. You also have logged several other birds you've identified on the morning's excursion. You look forward to reporting your sightings in the new electronic bird system developed by Cornell University's Institute of Ornithology.

The Cornell system is connected by a series of electronic kiosks throughout the country. With brilliant graphics and photographs, the system allows birders to identify birds, report their sightings, and map them as to time and place. Several kiosks are installed locally, but the one at the Barataria Preserve of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve is the only one functioning and accessible to the public. Once an entry is made into the system, the information is transmitted to a network of avian mavens (“birdbrains”) who massage and analyze the data for “correctness.” Dummies beware! Your ignorance and ornithological faux pas will be caught, challenged, changed, corrected. You will be fortunate not to be condemned to a re-education camp to disabuse you of your errors.

Lo and behold! The ekiosk's data base has no entry for the Common moorhen, a regular inhabitant of Louisiana's marshes. A check into the Audubon guidebook discloses, however, an alternate name for the bird, Common gallinule. That name shows up in the kiosk, but there is no reference to the moorhen. Here is the footprint of the Bird Police, the gurus, sachems, and honchos hunched over their computers in some dark caverns of academia. They have decreed that the Common moorhen in a non-person, that it is now the Common gallinule, even though its scientific name, Gallinula chloropus, is unchanged. The name change is a decree of an influential precinct of the Bird Police, the American Ornithologists' Union or AOU. (It sounds like either a vowel exercise or a very big IOU.)

Once upon a time, scientists decided that, to solve the confusion created by the multiple common names of species in several languages, a Latin name would be assigned to promote scientific communication across language and regional barriers. But the AOU likes English, apparently preferring to relegate the language of the Romans to Caesar salads. They guffaw at Louisianians calling the Lesser scaup a “Dos Gris” or the Coot a “Poule d'eau.”

The AOU is not the only precinct of the Bird Police. More aggressive are those who patrol the kiosks' entry data. Woe to those whose data entry is suspected of error! The kiosk asks for the birder's email address. Once the birder enters a sighting, eagle-eyed [sic] e-storm troopers will be looking for errors. Apparently they have programmed the system with an algorithm that recognizes “wrong” entries and sends a red light to the enforcers.

Then an email shows up at the birder's terminal from a bird-watcher watcher ensconced in some place like Hoboken, Walla Walla, or Ouagadougou, chastising the incompetent for improper identification.

“You could not have seen a red-headed woodpecker in that location. What you observed was undoubtedly a red-bellied woodpecker, which has a red head too.” Thus sprach the Bird Police. The birder's data entry is immediately removed electronically, eliminating all challenges to avian correctness. That the birder has actually seen a red-headed woodpecker in an environment beyond its usual range is not up for review. The birder is wrong, the Bird Police are correct.

The lesson to be learned from the Cornell ebird kiosk is to enjoy your bird-watching, write your observations down, take pictures if you can, share your observations with friends and colleagues, but don't tell the Bird Police. On the other hand, make a bizarre entry into the data base, like a blue-footed booby or a stormy petrel, and see what response you get.

Earl Higgins
Notes from the Field

Here are some photos from the Bayou Bienvenue bulrush wetland planting Saturday the 26th. This is a continuing project that the Sierra Club Environmental Justice program has been working with since 2005.

These are the groups that helped make this event successful:

1. Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana
2. Lower 9th Center for Sustainable Engagement & Development
3. Common Ground wetlands team
4. Gulf Restoration Network
5. Global Green Holy Cross Project
6. Groundworks and members of their Green Team from MLK Jr School
7. Sierra Club
8. over 20 volunteers some coming from as far away as California

Over all a great day with wonderful weather and great volunteers. For more information about Bayou Bienvenue and opportunities to volunteer, contact Darryl Malek-Wiley.
The **Acadian Group** meets the second and third Wednesday of the month. Our meeting starts promptly at 6:30pm. All members, friends of the Sierra Club, and the general public are welcomed to attend, listen, and participate.

Location: First Methodist Church - Lafayette, Louisiana, corner of Lee/Main/Johnston downtown, 700 Lee St. The Meeting Hall is upstairs, enter through rear doors facing parking lot. Check out the Acadian group web page at http://acadiansierra.blogspot.com/ for meetings and fun outings.

The **Baton Rouge** Group meets on third Thursdays of the month. The location is in the Backpacker, the store is located at 7656 Jefferson Hwy in Baton Rouge. The meeting is held every other month. On alternate months, there’s usually an outing. Call Nancy Grush at (225) 938-9353 for more info. All are welcome. We often do Biking, Hiking and Paddling outings.

The **New Orleans** Group meets monthly at the Audubon Zoo. **Next Meeting is December 8, 2013**

Meetings are at Dominion Auditorium near the main Zoo entrance, 6500 Magazine St. Drive to the front entrance to the Zoo, just off Magazine St. To the right of the Zoo’s main public entrance, go through gate and bear right to the Dominion Auditorium. There will be signs for directions. Doors open at 6:30 pm and the program starts at 7:00 pm. Admission is free and all are welcome.

To get the latest details, call 1-504-836-3062.

The **Honey Island** Group (Northshore of Lake Pontchatrain) is on hiatus right now.

The **Kisatchie** Group works on water and air quality issues in northern Louisiana. Contact Jeff Wellborn at jwellborn@seaber.com to get involved.

If you would like to get emails about chapter events and updates here in Louisiana and you are not currently getting them please send your email address to the chapter chair at hrmartin2sc@gmail.com
Trail Blazers Still Needed

This is an appeal to all hikers and paddlers to give us a little help on our new outdoor guide. The sale of these guides will provide revenue for the Delta Chapter and Groups. The few people that have volunteered to help with this guide have done a wonderful job of getting trail information but we need much more help if we hope to complete the guide.

So please, when you are on an outing collect some data, take some photos and send them to devin.martin.sc@gmail.com or naturestacey@gmail.com, along with any questions you might have. Cut this out and put it in your back pack, or access the form on your phone http://lasierraclub.org/delta-country-trail-guide

Hike – Paddle

Region:
Trail name:
Level of difficulty:
Type of ecosystem:
Length of trail:
Normal duration of trip:
Cover, vegetation:
Typical wildlife sightings:
Camping Nearby?:
Getting there (directions to trailhead/put-in):
Suggested route with landmarks:
Parking:
Interesting notes:
Map if possible:
GPS coordinates if possible:
Route for shuttling cars-if needed:
Resources:
Contact information for conditions:
Donations to Sierra Club Delta Chapter

You can cut out and enclose this form with your year end contribution to Sierra Club Delta Chapter. Please do not send cash. These are only suggested amounts. Any contribution that you can make is appreciated.

__ $25 Sustaining member   Name:______________________________________________________________

__ $50 Environmental Hero  Address:________________________________________________________________________

__ $100 Champion of the Environment City, State, Zip:_____________________________________________________

__ $500 Cypress Steward     Email Address:____________________________________________________________________

__ Other                     Phone:_____________________________________________________________________________

Contributions to Sierra Club Delta Chapter are considered not tax deductible because they support our effective citizen lobby efforts. If you would prefer to make a tax deductible contribution for this year you can send a check up to ten days before the end of the year, made out to The Sierra Club Foundation. Please indicate on the memo section of the check that the donation is intended for the Delta Chapter Fund. Either way we thank you for your support.

Your return envelope helps us to save printing costs. This address should be printed on all return envelopes:
Sierra Club Delta Chapter, PO Box 52503 ,Lafayette, LA 70505