Environmental Roulette: What You Don’t Know May Harm You!

By Sue Williams

The Tennessee Chapter’s Tenth Annual Environmental Justice Conference was held on Nov. 5 with the timely theme of “Environmental Roulette: What you don’t know may harm you!” Hosted by the regional environmental justice office in Memphis, the Tennessee Chapter, and the Chickasaw Group, the tenth anniversary gathering was celebrated in a spacious new conference venue with the largest attendance in years.

A plenary opening session included comments by two state legislators, Sen. Beverly Marrero and Rep. Barbara Cooper, both from Memphis. Sen. Marrero, an environmental champion, serves on the Senate’s environmental committee. Rep. Cooper has promoted community environmental awareness for many years because many of Memphis’ polluting industries are within her district that runs along the riverfront.

Workshop sessions offered information about nuclear waste, genetically engineered food, drinking water, air quality, toxic landfills, the benefits of landscaping with native plants and other topics.

A noon media conference focused on nuclear waste. Rep. Cohen attended this event. Tennessee receives 75% of the nation’s so-called low-level, but not low-risk, waste for processing. Tennessee is the only state that permits radioactive waste incineration; there are four incinerators in East Tennessee, and a proposed incinerator on President’s Island (2005) in Memphis was cancelled due to citizen pressure.

In Memphis, highly radioactive metals are processed on President’s Island and two of four Tennessee radioactive waste dumps are in Shelby County.

“A leak from the landfill could contaminate Memphis’ drinking water,” said Chickasaw Group Chair Keven Routon.

Don Safer, of Tennessee Environmental Council, added: “Tennessee allows radioactive waste processing and disposal practices that are unique in the U.S. and the world. This has made Tennessee the nation’s primary pathway for the processing and disposal of low-level radioactive waste materials, amounting to 75% or more of this dangerous waste stream annually.”

Panelists also included Chapter member Ann Harris, who is on the Sierra Club’s national nuclear task force. Sen. Marrero pledged to continue urging better protections during the next legislative session.

Special guest, National Sierra Club President Robin Mann, also noted the need to promote clean energy solutions. “There are so many communities across Tennessee that are ignored and suffering because of lax

environmental enforcement and questionable business practices that put profit before safe communities and meaningful environmental protection,” she said. “We must all keep pushing for relief for communities struggling with various types of environmental problems.”

Lunch included a retrospective video with scenes from the past 10 years of the environmental justice work within the region, serenaded by “environmental troubadour,” Marvin Butler, premiering his new song, “We Need Environmental Justice.”

This year, a three-person panel of activists served as the “keynote address” to spotlight communities that are struggling to achieve environmental justice. Speakers included Harrell Carter, NAACP President in Madison County, representing an African-American community in Denmark, where residents have been pleading with the Madison County commissioners to get zoning changed to prevent a private construction and debris landfill from destroying their quiet community.

Michael Melton, a Camden pastor and resident whose property borders an aluminum dross landfill that daily emits smothering noxious fumes such as ammonia and other toxic gases, spoke about the fight the Camden community has waged against the landfill owner and their numerous requests for relief to the Tennessee Department of Environment & Conservation.

The final panelist, Fayette County resident Gary Bullwinkel, spoke passionately about his five-year battle to keep an industrial “megasite” from overtaking the nearby historical community of Fredonia and 3,000 adjacent acres in bordering Haywood County.

The common thread in all of the EJ stories is the detrimental impact of injustice when it comes to dealing with rural, low-income, environmental justice communities, and the assumption that our government agencies will protect us from harm and negative consequences.

After the panel, the annual Dick Mochow Environmental Justice Awards were presented to four worthy activists from the Camden fight to protect their community from the devastating effects of an aluminum dross landfill. The leaders of the opposition to the landfill and recipients of the 2011 Dick Mochow Award are: Michael Melton, Travis Bubsey, Mark Totty, and Cindy Wheatley. The awards are named for the late Dick Mochow, a co-founder of the Memphis environmental justice office, who also served as a group, chapter and national leader promoting environmental justice and wetlands protection.
Tennes-Sierran
The bi-monthly newsletter of the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club.

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*Email: address.changes@sierraclub.org
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SEND ARTICLES TO:
Email: bk1rivers@comcast.net
Snail Mail: Barbara Kelly, Communications Chair 3524 Pinellas Lane Chattanooga, TN 37412-1730
(423) 718-5009

We are still conducting a search for an editor for the Tennes-Sierran. Please contact Barbara if you are interested.

ARTICLE SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:
Submission DEADLINE is the 1st of the month preceding the new month’s issue.
1. Email and email attached files are preferred. Send to baker@uw.org either with embedded text messages, or attached files in PC-based formats. Attached files are preferred. Mac users should embed text in body of an email message only.
2. Photographs should be scanned in .jpg or .tif file format then either attached to email or mailed via US Postal Service (USPS) on a 3” diskette or CD Rom. Please include a stamped, self-addressed envelope if you would like your diskette or photo prints returned.
3. Hard-copy handwritten or typewritten articles may be accepted; however, pre-approval from the Editor is required.
4. Any materials submitted via USPS mail cannot be returned unless a stamped, self-addressed envelope is provided.

The opinions expressed in the Tennes-Sierran are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the Tennessee Chapter, or the Sierra Club.

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ritaharris@sierraclub.org

Please notify the Editor when changes are needed
Learn from Naturalists, Enjoy Good Company, Listen to Gifted Performer at Tennessee Chapter’s Winter Retreat January 20-22, 2012 at Cedars of Lebanon State Park

We will explore this beautiful state park, learn from naturalists and relax in the company of good friends, old and new. Plan for a relaxed weekend close to nature and feel free to participate, if you choose, in the chapter executive committee meeting. Prices are low, and there are bunk house accommodations. Please bring your own linens, towels, toiletries and other personal supplies.

Saturday evening will feature the music of Antoinette Olesen, an award-winning songwriter who has toured internationally and performed with numerous world-class artists. Her songs feature big choruses and picturesque melodies on the Sheryl Crow / Jack Johnson side of pop. She describes herself as “environmentally friendly, 0 pollution.” It will be a real treat to hear this gifted performer.

Your Support Needed to Defend Tennessee’s Environment

By Adelle Wood

The Sierra Club Defenders campaign, which funds our legislative and lobbying work, is in its 15th year! We have been delighted to see contributions of every size from towns large and small across the state, but we also need your support. When we get involved our legislators learn that it is we, their constituents, who care about the environment in every part of our state.

Some of the most important issues we worked on in the last legislative session included:

- A hard-fought battle supporting a bill to stop mountaintop removal (MTR) coal mining;
- A significant victory in helping stop an amendment that would have a major impact on water quality;
- Inclusion by the Governor in his budget, and legislative approval, of $16,514,700 for the State Lands Acquisition fund;
- A resolution passed urging TDEC, the oil and gas industry, and citizen groups to work together to develop appropriate state regulations for hydrological fracturing (fracking).

In addition, because of strong opposition by the Sierra Club and its allies, a bill that would have increased the allowed limit of toxic selenium in Tennessee’s waters did not even come up in the past session.

In the coming legislative session Sierra Club will support:

- Continued efforts to prohibit mountaintop mining;
- Protection of clean water from threats from any sources;
- Revisiting the fracking issue unless the state has adopted appropriate regulations;
- Efforts to regulate nuclear dumping in Tennessee;
- Continued dedicated funding for lands acquisition for parks, wetlands, woods, wildlife protection;
- Fighting budget cuts and “deregelation” proposals that threaten environmental protections;
- Prevention of weakening amendments to environmental protection laws; and
- All other efforts to protect our environment.

We win battles but must continue the war to protect our natural heritage. Please support this grassroots campaign. Complete the form below. Send it with your check made out to Sierra Club to Sierra Club Defenders, c/o Adelle Wood, 4641 Villa Green Drive, Nashville, TN 37215. These contributions are not tax-deductible.

We thank Defender contributors through November 28.

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The Tennessee-Sierran
Lake Visitor Center, 1160 Otter Creek Road, MIDDLE TENNESSEE GROUP (Nashville). Topic: Ghost Birds. Presenter: Lynn Bales, writer/photographer/artist Tennessee naturalist and natural historian with Ijams Nature Center in Knoxville, Tenn.

Ghost Birds is not just a book about the ivory-billed woodpecker, though that would be quite enough. It is the story of conservation's beginnings in a rapidly changing, war-torn world, a time when sound recordings, movies, and still photography were barely versatile enough to be used in the field and field observations were new and uncharted territory.

With his expert storytelling skills, Bales sets a vivid stage, giving not only sensory detail, but also the deeper context of history and prevailing mood of the time when James Tanner, a young biologist, faces an enormous challenge—learning everything there is to know about ivory-billed woodpeckers.

For more information, contact Mac Post at 615-311-5035.


March 13, 7:00 PM, Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church. Topic: Preview of Harvey Broom Group 2011 Outings Program. Presenter: Ron Shrieves, Harv Broom Bike Share Chattanooga Co-Coordinator.

The annual outings program provides a preview of the HBG's outings program for 2012 and a slideshow from past outings. Included in this year’s program are 2 backpack trips, 20 day hikes, 2 canoe/kayak day trips, and a bicycle trip. This year we will again offer the HBG “Take-a-Hike” program, a series of day hikes that will increase the skills and confidence of first-time hikers. These group日 hike is that they will provide a guided tour of all the major ecosystem types in the biologically diverse Great Smoky Mountains. Invite anyone who is interested in exploring the outdoors to come and find out more about HBG outings.

STRATEGY MEETINGS: Fourth Tuesdays of each month, 7:00 p.m., at the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church, 2931 Kingston Pike, Knoxville, TN. For additional information, contact Robin Hill, 865-966-9435, robin.hill8@gmail.com. All members and guests are invited to attend to get the news on what’s happening in our Harvey Broom Group.

MIDDLE TENNESSEE GROUP (Nashville)

PROGRAM: January 12, 7:00 p.m., at Radnor Lake Visitor Center, 1160 Otter Creek Road, Nashville. Topic: A View of Earth (From Space). Presenter: Rocky Alvey, Director of Vanderbillt’s Dyer Observatory.

“The Earth was small, light blue, and so touchingly unique, our home that it must be defended like a holy place.”

February Program: Last Monday, February 27, 7, pm, at GreenSpaces, 63 E. Main Street, Chattanooga. Topic: Riverwalk Expansion. Rick Wood, Trust for Public Lands, will talk to us about two of the Trust’s current projects—the expansion of the Riverwalk from Ross’ Landing to Lookout Mountain, and the newly completed South Chickamauga Creek Greenway. Come and hear the latest developments. Bring your friends—spread the word! The public is very welcome and healthy snacks are served.

Note: Our program meetings continue to be held at GreenSpaces, 63 E. Main Street, which is a non-descript storefront building with little-to-no signage—it is last on the left in the first block off Market Street. It is kitty-corner from the Fire Department across the street. Look for the Sierra Club banner!

CHICKASAW GROUP (Memphis)

(Stip up for our monthly email list on the calendar page http://tennessee.sierraclub.org/chickasaw)

STRATEGY MEETING: Monday, January 9, 6:30 p.m., Republic Coffee, 2924 Walnut Grove Road, Memphis, TN. (NOTE: New Location!!)

The Executive Committee meets on the second Monday of every month. This is a business meeting but members are welcome to attend. For more information or to place items on the agenda, contact the group chair Keven Routon at kroutine@me.com. Agenda items must be submitted at least three days before the meeting.

PROGRAM: January 19, MOVIE NIGHT, 5:30 p.m., Benjamin Hooks Library, 3030 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN.

It was a great year in 2011 for green-themed cinema. When we looked at the Academy Award lineup of films, we were thrilled to see a number of environmentally focused documentaries nominated for the 2011 OSCARS. Unfortunately, none of these excellent nominees won a gold statue, but we’re happy to see them nominated all the same, and hope this platform elevates the profile of these important issues. If you are interested in documentaries, join us for an environmental MOVIE NIGHT on January 19. We will select our film title after January 1. Watch for an announcement on our Website, Facebook, and in your local newspaper.

February Program: February 26, 5:30 p.m., Benjamin Hooks Library, 3030 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN. Program contents TBA.

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Sierra Club Chickasaw Group is now on Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/ChickasawGroup

This is a forum for public discussion, so please feel free to post comments, raise issues, and express environmental concerns. Updates and details about upcoming events are posted here.

WATAUGA GROUP (Northeastern TN)

PROGRAM MEETINGS: Every second Tuesday at 7 pm. Please contact Gloria Griffith at gla4797@earthlink.net or 423-727-4797 for more information.
Welcome to the Tennessee Chapter’s master list of outings in our Chapter. Members, and the public, are always very welcome at any of these events. Listed by the sponsoring Group, you are welcome at attend as many across the state as you wish! We believe that what you come to love, you will stand up to protect.

All participants in Sierra Club outings are required to sign a standard liability waiver. If you would like to read a copy of the waiver before you participate, please refer to: http://www.sierraclub.org/outings/chapter/forms/SignInWaiver PDF, or call 415-977-5630 for a printed version. Transportation to the outing, including carpooling, ride-sharing or anything similar, is strictly a private arrangement among the participants. Participants assume the risks associated with this travel.

CHEROKEE GROUP (Chattanooga)

Jan. 14 or 15 (Sat. or Sun.) Tenn. Sandhill Crane Festival, Birchwood.
We'll be visiting the festival, which celebrates the thousands of Sandhill cranes (and some Whoopers) that migrate through or spend the winter at the confluence of the Hiwassee and Tennessee Rivers near Birchwood. There will be speakers, films and children's activities centered on the cranes and on the rich Native American history of the area.
A special guest this year is John James Audubon, as depicted by Brian Fox Ellis, an engaging and entertaining storyteller.
We'll meet at Birchwood Elem. School, and go by free shuttle bus over to the TN Wildlife Resources Hiwassee Refuge. While the festival is spread over two days, we'll pick one day for our outing closer to the date when we know the schedule of activities better. Contact Sheryl Campbell, 423-693-4729 or campfamily63@gmail.com for details and to register.

Feb. TBA (Sun.) Raccoon Mountain trip to view Bald Eagles. Check our local E-News or our Cherokee Sierra Facebook page for details, which will be announced closer to time.

No outings were planned for January-February as of press time. Contact Matt Farr, outings chair, at 901-517-8879 for a list of outings or go to the Group's Facebook page, http://www.facebook.com/Chickasaw.Group/.

We are still conducting a search for an editor for the Tennes-Sierran. Please contact Barbara Kelly at bk1rivers@comcast.net (423-718-5009) if you are interested.

Ten Essentials for Hiking
Sierra Club outings offer a variety of wilderness and near-wilderness experiences. It is important to realize that while all trips are guided by a leader, it is ultimately the responsibility of the individual to operate in a safe manner. To this end, the following is a list of essential items which should be considered, according to the particular type of outing. These are:
1. Adequate map
2. First aid kit
3. Compass
4. Rain gear
5. Extra clothing (it is a good idea to always have a wool hat)
6. Matches
7. Knife
8. Flashlight
9. Extra food, water
10. The fourth essential: You decide what is the most important thing to bring!
Fifth Annual Sustainability Summit Shows Progress Achieved

By Don Safer

The 2011 Tennessee Sustainable Economy Summit held in Nashville at Lipscomb University on October 28-29 provided hopeful evidence of our society’s move toward true sustainability. It also provided helpful guidance for those who recognize the importance of making these moves as quickly as possible. A compelling case was made for crafting a viable future for generations to come. Tangible steps were identified and endorsed.

The summit was a collaboration of several groups that have hosted separate conferences in the past: the Tennessee Environmental Council, Tennessee Conservation Voters, Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, Tennessee Alliance for Progress, Tennessee Higher Education Sustainability Association, and Living Well Events. Substantial financial and volunteer support was provided by the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club. Many Sierra Club members were participants and presenters.

The panelists and speakers included activists, academics, businesspeople, and government officials. Featured speakers included permaculture/eco-village expert Albert Bates; author Amanda Little; Vanderbilt Professor David Hess; TDEC Deputy Commissioner Shari Meghreblian; Dan Beyer of Mars Petcare; Ray Coss of Nissan North America; Rosa Gonzales of Green for All from Oakland, California; and many other leaders and experts in the business and environmental communities. Almost all were local Tennesseans who are leading the way.

The summit offered three breakout tracks: Green Jobs and Industry, Sustainable TN Policy and Practice, and Greening Education. Music from Barry Sulkin, Susan Shan, and “Mr. Organic” Marvin Butler provided a break for busy participants.

The policy priority actions identified for 2012 were: 1) Pass the TN Scenic Vistas Bill to ban mountaintop removal mining; 2) Support growth of clean energy markets, energy conservation and green jobs; 3) Prevent the building of new nuclear power plants and transportation of nuclear waste to TN landfills; 4) Pass a resolution requiring TVA to have a renewable portfolio standard; and 5) Restructure the Air Control Board to improve representation of health and quality of life concerns.

The practice priority actions for individuals and organizations were: 1) Conduct a home energy audit, then join the local Climate Action Team and/or become an advocate with the TN Climate Protection Campaign; 2) Recycle, compost and reduce waste; 3) Improve and increase food security through local and sustainable production; 4) Support and use state and local parks, greenways and blueways; and 5) Join and support TVA’s Green Power Switch program.

The conference adopted a goal of zero waste and was able to almost reach that goal through effective pre-event planning, reusing, recycling and composting.

The summit brought 200 Tennesseans together to network, share successes, identify challenges, and help move our world toward a more sustainable future. We discussed our challenging environmental, political and economic realities. We looked straight into the heart of our current global problems and found inspiration and hope in working together to find appropriate, long lasting solutions.

One of the most important actions individuals can take coming out of the summit is to sign the Sustainable Tennessee Agenda. The agenda will be presented to the Tennessee Legislature and media at a press conference on January 25 from 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. Sierra Club members are strongly encouraged to attend. Our goal is to have 200 signatures on the agenda to show legislators a strong and broad support base. Please sign the agenda today at www.sustainabletn.org.
Attention Teachers, Parents, Grandparents, Retirees: Volunteer to Teach Children about Our Environment

By Joy Mayfield

I don’t suppose I’m the only one worried about the future. I don’t imagine I stand alone in my feelings of grave disappointment in the leaders of our nation. I’m quite certain we all share feelings of helplessness as our country seems sucked into an ever escalating downward spiral into some abyss that has no name and an unknown terminus.

Recently I decided I could no longer be consumed by these negative feelings and had to do something, so I decided to call a neighbor who teaches third grade. When I asked her if I could talk to her students about birds, she jumped at the offer. I surmised that as a member of both the Audubon Society and the Sierra Club for years, I had amassed enough knowledge to surely pass along to third graders.

My neighbor affirmed what I already knew: That our public schools are grossly under-funded and have no money available for field trips or guest speakers anymore. Teachers bear a heavy load. We as Sierra Club members can help! I’ve given five presentations in the month of November on “bird watching” to third graders at Stratton Elementary School. I have a captive audience every single time. I teach them bird calls, bird identification, show them nests I’ve collected over the years and bring them “bird food” to try. What they enjoy the most is writing with turkey feathers and ink. At the end of the class I give them a “test” to see how many birds they have learned. The winner gets a prize (a quill of their own or a pair of children’s binoculars).

One of the third grade teachers informed me that learning about birds, recycling, and trees—the particular subjects I feel qualified enough to teach—are all subjects that are part of the elementary school curriculum, so these classroom visits make me an adjunct, not an interruption, to their regular studies.

Unfortunately my full-time job precludes visiting more classrooms. Therefore, I am making this plea for anyone reading this article to contact their neighborhood public school and volunteer. I can tell you the need and desire for our volunteer help is palpable. The teachers welcome the reprieve from teaching. The children love a new face. We, as Sierra Club members, have a responsibility to the next generation if we want them to preserve and protect our planet and carry on in our stead.

Not only will all the energy you expend teaching children return to you manifold, but you will also feel you are doing something positive for our future. Let Congress continue to bicker, dither, and fail to act responsibly. Congress, in fact, should meet with third graders. They could use a refresher course in “getting along well with others.” Contact me if you need help getting started (joymayfield@comcast.net or 615-851-1192).

Get Ready for Spring Retreat at Sterchi Lodge

The Tennessee Chapter 2012 Spring Retreat and Executive Committee Meeting will be held at Sterchi Lodge on April 27-29. In the Highlnds, spring will just be starting to flush out leaves and wildflower blooms. Prices are low with bunk house accommodations for 42 people, including breakfasts and Saturday Night Dinner. Attendees need to bring their own linens or sleeping bag, towels plus Saturday & Sunday lunches and beverages.

Hosted by Watauga Group Sierra Club. Please confirm your reservation and omnivore or vegetarian preference with Gloria Griffith at Gla4797@embarqmail.com or 1-423-727-4797. Early Registration Price until April 20: $40 Regular Registration Fee: $50 Single-day-only price with no lodging: Sat-$20; Sun-$10 (Children up to 15 attend free.) SPECIAL: ½ price for first-time attendees!

A limited number of partial scholarships are available by request to the Chapter Treasurer, Michael Varnell, at rmvarnell@bellsouth.net

Silent Auction
Plan to participate in the Defenders Silent Auction by bringing items to donate plus bidding early and often. The Silent Auction benefits our chapter's lobbying and legislative program.

Sterchi Lodge is located on a mountaintop along the Tennessee-North Carolina state line about 80 miles from Knoxville. It borders both the Pisgah National Forest and the Cherokee National Forest. Hiking is available on the Appalachian trail, which is located ½ mile from the lodge on Max Patch Mountain. 360 panoramic video from top of Max Patch may be viewed here http://youtu.be/q3Fx9fKPdVQ

Directions FROM KNOXVILLE:
Sycamore, sassafras, pear and hickory trees for carbon sequestration, food and shelter for wildlife, and a shady spot for students to gather.

In January we will finish what we started with Phase II, planting sycamore, sassafras, pear and hickory trees for carbon sequestration, and persimmon trees.

Volunteers Needed for Phase II Tree Planting

By Joy Mayfield

Twenty-three volunteers from the Sierra Club, Sound Forest and White’s Creek High School came out Sat., Nov. 19 to help plant trees on school grounds. We planted tulip poplar, oak, sycamore, plum and persimmon trees.

In January we will finish what we started with Phase II, planting sycamore, sassafras, pear and hickory trees for carbon sequestration, and persimmon trees.

If you share an interest in restoring the tree canopy Nashville has lost from tornados and construction or are interested in cooling our city, cleaning the air, cutting storm water costs and saving energy, please consider helping us plant trees in January. It’s great aerobic exercise, good fellowship and sometimes there’s even free coffee and donuts (Thanks to Starbucks and Suzanne Petrey). Contact me at joymayfield@comcast.net or 615-851-1192 if you would like to help us.

photo Credit: Betsy Garber

Volunteers Needed for Phase II Tree Planting

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Sierra Club Impacts UN Climate Conference in Durban, South Africa

By Steven Sondheim, Conference Attendee

In late November 2011, the national Sierra Club sent a delegation to Durban, South Africa to influence the yearly United Nation climate negotiations. Our specific mission this year was to stem the tide of dirty and dangerous energy, including nuclear, and to support the rise of renewable energy to power our future.

We connected with partners fighting dangerous coal development around the globe, promoted renewable energy solutions, worked on climate finance, addressed gender issues, and built the international youth movement. Some members of the delegation even got a head start, arriving in Durban early for the Conference of Youth http://youthclimate.org/coy7 and Dirty Energy Week. http://sierraclub.org/international

Here is a sampling of Sierra Club activities that happened in Durban:

• Partnered with Greenpeace International on “Coal, the Dirty Truth,” discussing the true costs of coal, revealing that it is not cheap, it does not relieve energy poverty and it is time to invest in the renewable energy that can safely power our future.

• Joined a climate justice rally to call on delegates to work for equitable solutions, as their communities are already feeling the devastating effects of climate change.

• Met with Leave It In The Ground (LINGO) coalition to unify the struggle against the growth of the fossil economy.

• Presented the health impacts of deadly coal pollution at the Climate Health Summit www.climateandhealthcare.org


• Hosted a Move Beyond Coal workshop WWW.BEYONDCOAL.ORG WWW.SIERRACLUB.ORG/COAL/NARRATIVES with GroundWork South Africa.

• Discussed environmental/labor alliances at Blue-Green’s panel at the World of Work.

• Staged visibility events to highlight the dangers of coal and the need for action, including a funeral for coal and a heads-in-the-sands photo op.

• Held the first ever Sierra Club booth http://action.sierraclub.org/cop17 inside the conference to discuss who we are and what we do to give the Sierra Club an international presence. And much, much more! Stay tuned to http://sierraclub.typepad.com/compass and to delegation blog http://sierraclub.typepad.com/compass/cop17-climate-conference to get the latest info.

The Sierra Club wasn’t just burying coal, we also were working to build a clean energy future and deliver power to the 1.3 billion people without access to electricity. Former executive director and chairman of the Sierra Club, Carl Pope, co-chaired an energy access discussion with Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland and United Nations high commissioner for human rights. They countered the idea that coal is necessary to provide energy access to everyone.

There are two fallacies that people too often believe: that to provide electricity to the rural poor we must build out the grid and that renewable electricity and solar are too expensive. Universal access to the grid is simply economically impossible, which even the International Energy Agency and the government of India now admit. Meanwhile, people without energy access spend up to $8 per kilowatt hour on kerosene, far more than the price of distributed, localized renewable energy.

The Student Sierra Coalition (SSC) joined the youth briefing with US delegates Todd Stern and Jonathan Pershing who told them, “You have to stay engaged. Your voice has to not be just in one place.” The SSC presented him with a Beyond Coal t-shirt for his daughter who is about their age. Later, the SSC organized a meeting for US youth delegates to network and discuss shared strategy.

Steve Herz, Sierra’s finance specialist, played a critical role in drafting a letter signed by 16 groups to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The letter challenges the U.S. negotiating position on legal mandates (agreeing to legally binding limits on carbon), the green climate fund (money for countries that can’t afford climate actions) and long-term finance for mechanisms both to mitigate climate change and to help adapt to the devastating effects that some will suffer.

There was buzz around the “Unclear on the Concept: How Can the World Bank Group Lead on Climate Finance without an Energy Strategy?” report released by nine environmental groups, including the Sierra Club. We learned that both the World Bank and many leading banks are financing big coal, big oil, and big nuclear in the name of climate change. In addition we attended a World Coal Association session on “Coal in a Carbon Constrained World” where we learned to our surprise that some international companies are considering a transition beyond coal.

The Sierra Club held two funerals for coal to demonstrate that coal is no longer cheap or reliable anywhere in the world. In the U.S. we have turned away from coal, in large part because the Sierra Club and our allies have stopped virtually all of the coal-fired power plants proposed by the Bush Administration. We came to Durban to ally with other civil society groups around the world in our campaign to confront the dominance of the coal, oil and nuclear industries.

Our first funeral was at the Speakers Corner, the public space designated for protest. We showed our solidarity with activists from around the world who gathered to protest World Bank financing for fossil fuels and nuclear plants. Our black coffin for coal with its four pallbearers was followed by a grieving widow, who looked suspiciously like our six-foot-plus national Sierra Club board member Jim Dougherty. Bringing up the rear was the clean energy technology procession in the fifteen- by- nine foot section the Secretariat allotted us inside the conference. There, in full view of the media, we reminded negotiators of the devastating effect coal has on both the climate and on human health.

Stay tuned for additional analysis of the results of the conference in the next issue of the Tennes-Sierran and the Chapter website http://tennessee.sierraclub.org/