

EJ Times

The Sierra Club Environmental Justice Newsletter Vol. II Issue 1, Jan.-Mar. 2001

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Toxic Tours: Challenging Polluters' Business Sense(s)

A king sees an ox on its way to sacrifice. He is moved to pity for it and orders that a sheep be used in its place. He confesses he did so because he could see the ox, but not the sheep.

--translated summary of a story by Meng-Tseu

Since the U.S. environmental movement began, various rhetorical strategies have been chosen to attempt to explain the worth of a place—particularly when such places have appeared threatened by human activities. In addition to writings, speeches, paintings, photographs, and protests, tours have provided a compelling medium of persuasion for environmentalists. The primary logic behind advocacy tours is reminiscent of Meng-Tseu's story of the ox and the sheep: if a person exposes her/his senses to a place (or any other potential "sacrifice"), that person will better appreciate its value and, thus, will feel more connected to its fate. What makes the environmental justice movement different from the story, in part, is that toxic tours highlight people who are being sacrificed and the movement, instead of offering another sacrifice, argues no community should have to bear such a burden.

Although employing tours as an environmental advocacy strategy

began as a means to protect more traditional environmental areas such as wetlands and forests, the scope of tour topics has expanded as the environmental movement itself has broadened its reach. With the rise of grassroots environmental activism against toxic pollution since the late 1970s, two often overlapping branches of the environmental movement have emerged: the anti-toxic movement, generally considered to have begun in Love Canal, NY, and the environmental justice movement, which was born in Warren County, NC.

Collectively, activists from these movements have claimed that certain people, particularly those who are poor and/or are people of color, disproportionately carry the burden of waste produced in the United States. Given the specific constraints posed by toxic pollution and its producers, grassroots communities from these relatively newer environmental branches increasingly have developed a strategy called "toxic tours."

(Tours, cont'd. on p.3)



... to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment...

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The Environmental Justice Committee and its liaisons comprise the Editorial Board of the EJ Times. As this newsletter is intended to provide a forum for a wide range of contributors, including non-members of Sierra Club, views expressed in these articles may not represent Sierra Club policy or opinion.

Issue Editor's Welcome

As members of the Sierra Club, perhaps one of the most important things we learn by working together is not just more about what we care about, but how we can do something about them. Most of us trade organizing tactics like cooks trade recipes. We always want more ideas, and each time we find a new one, we quickly adapt it to our own tastes. As a national organization that has existed for generations and has learned from many generations before, sometimes, it's hard to keep track of where we first heard of an idea. And, like cooks, we often don't take the time to write down our best tips. This issue of *EJ Times* is an attempt to record some of our more current creations.

Toxic tours, as many of you know, are a powerful and increasingly common strategy of activists organizing in response to chemical contamination. Having participated in toxic tours myself, I know that a newsletter cannot do justice to such moving experiences. Instead, I hope that focusing upon toxic tours in this issue will help provide a useful window to those who have not yet been on a tour and an interesting mirror to those that already have organized these journeys.

It's hard to believe that *EJ Times* has existed for a year now. As always, if there is another campaign, story, person, or group you'd like us to note in the future—or if you'd like to offer feedback on what we've done so far—please, let us know.

- Phaedra C. Pezzullo

P.S. Some of the contact information listed in this newsletter only lists an email or internet address. If you do not have access to a computer, please contact any one of us on the EJ Committee and we will provide you with other contact information.



Congratulations to residents of Warren County, NC! They have received federal funds to help begin detoxification of the PCB landfill that has burdened their community since 1982. We hope the State of North Carolina continues to support these efforts and we will continue to watch as their story develops. Dollie Burwell, Chair of the Warren County Citizens' Advisory Board, is announcing the good news in the picture above. Photograph by Phaedra Pezzullo.

(Tours, cont'd. from p.1)

Toxic Politics

Communities that organize toxic tours face constraints specific to their struggles. Michel R. Reich's (1991) book, *Toxic Politics*, highlights toxic contamination and struggles for redress in response to three disasters (PBB contamination in cattle in Michigan, USA; dioxin contamination from a factory in Seveso, Italy; and PCB contamination of cooking oil in western Japan). From his research, Reich offers a concise and important overview as to some of the challenges and possibilities facing communities that have been contaminated by toxics. First, he notes: "Humankind has knowingly and unknowingly used toxic substances for centuries. What has changed recently is that many more chemicals with known toxic properties are being used without proper testing and control, and that many of these substances are much more toxic than others used in the past" (p. 3). "Paradoxically," Reich continues, "crisis in society creates a window on normality, one that offers a view of underlying political patterns not usually visible" (p. 11). These patterns and the cost of them are precisely what communities across the nation are attempting to highlight on their tours. Due to the nature of toxic contamination, Reich argues that any attempt to challenge toxic pollution faces constraints such as invisibility of the toxic agent, nonspecificity of toxic symptoms, geographical distribution of victims/survivors, and difficulties of identification. It is these sorts of complexities that move communities to find more creative strategies such as toxic tours in order to provide persuasive public input.

What are toxic tours?

Generally, toxic tours are non-commercial visits organized and facilitated by people who reside in areas that are polluted by toxics, places that sociologist and environmental justice activist Robert D. Bullard has named "human sacrifice zones." Residents of these areas guide outsiders, or "tourists," through where they live, work, and play in order to raise awareness of their suffering and to gain support in their efforts to achieve redress. Like other environmental advocacy tours, therefore, toxic tours provide an occasion for community members to invite people (who they believe either directly or indirectly have the power to alter their environment) to better appreciate the value and, thus, the fate of their environment.

Toxic tours, of course, are organized by a variety of groups for an assortment of reasons. Oftentimes, local communities will organize a toxic tour as an opportunity to share their experiences and to educate the "tourists" whom they have invited. Many of the more visible environmental justice grassroots groups (e.g., Jesus People Against Pollution from Columbia, MS; Concerned Citizens of Chester County from Chester, PA; and Communities for a Better Environment from Oakland, CA) have provided tours for a broad range of audiences such as mainstream environmental groups, academics, political representatives, government officials, and media reporters. Typically, these grassroots groups choose one or two "guides" to walk from block to block, pointing out where local polluting industries are located in relation to the residents and provid-

ing information regarding the apparent effects these polluters have on the surrounding land and people. Frequently, the tours schedule stops at different homes so that the visitors may witness the stories of various residents' ailments and struggles.

Building Partnerships

In addition to locally organized toxic tours, sometimes, individual communities and national organizations collaborate in order to pool resources and energy together to present a tour. These groups are not just limited to environmental groups. In an article entitled, "Redefining the bond between religion and ecology," Johnson (1998) reports of a toxic tour that was based in Louisiana's "Cancer Alley." *[Editor's note: another toxic tour organized by Sierra Club activists from this region is highlighted elsewhere in this issue of EJ Times.]* The tour she focuses upon was a single day event organized by the National Council of Churches of Christ for religious leaders. Its purpose was not only to raise awareness regarding affected communities, but also to frame environmental justice as a religious mission. After the tour, "one of the ministers mention[ed] the haunting sight of children playing in the shadow of the Shell complex, and around the table [were] murmurs of shock, outrage, sorrow. Bishop P. A. Brooks of Detroit...[shook] his head. 'What this is about,' he says, 'is children. It is about the earth. It is about life.' Children. The earth. Life. More than any other commonality," Johnson writes, "it is these three elements that bind the work of the religious and environmental communities" (p. 7). Dialogues

(Tours, cont'd. on p.5)

Toxic Tours and the Sierra Club

by Robbie Cox
President, Sierra Club

“What’s this about ‘toxic tours?’” a Sierra Club member asked me at a Board meeting several years ago. It seemed a far cry from our history of backpack trips in the high Sierras. I realized that a practice Club activists had become involved with over the last decade was finally getting some notice in new circles.

I had become convinced myself of the power of toxic tours in 1993 when I stood with Charlotte Keyes, a young African-American activist, near an abandoned chemical plant in southern Mississippi. “The evidence is in my body,” she explained patiently to a reporter who doubted the effects of the explosion of the Reichold Chemical plant on the nearby community. It was Charlotte’s plea also to officials from the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry to conduct a health study of residents who had been exposed to the toxic fumes and also drinking water that they feared had been contaminated by the hasty burial of chemical drums on the plant site. Sierra Club activists with the Gulf Coast Regional Conservation Committee had just finished visiting residents in the community when the reporter questioned Charlotte. He (and the Club activists) had been moved by the stories of the families we had visited, but he had questions about the plant. That, I thought, was the whole point of the tour. For the first

time, someone was asking, “What happened here?”

“Toxic tours are just an extension of David Brower’s advice,” I said to my friend at the Board meeting. “Show people the places we care about. Then they’ll fight to protect them.” Brower did that with Echo Park, and the Grand Canyon, and a host of other threatened wild places. *This Is the American Earth* showcased our fragile wild places, and it played a major role in building public support for preservation of public lands.

Why couldn’t this principle work elsewhere?

“Endangered” and “fragile” places are also the places where people live, work, and where their children play. For many of us, the Sierra Club’s involvement with toxic tours is simply a natural evolution of our mission to “protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment.”

But, first, we need to know about these places.

A growing number of Sierra Club entities have begun to integrate toxic tours in many of their meetings around the country. Earlier this winter, staff from the Appalachian field office helped to arrange a tour of neighborhoods in Savannah, Georgia, during a retreat for Chapter and field staff. The Club’s national Board of Directors toured “Cancer Alley” while meeting in New Orleans in 1999. And in February of this year, Directors will

visit struggling Colonias in Matamoros, Mexico, and listen to those living near some 50 hydrofluoric acid plants discuss the dangers of living adjacent to some of the most dangerous chemicals produced.

But, such “tours” are only the beginning. With these visits also comes an ethical responsibility. Our challenge is to “see,” to listen and understand, and to respond on a human level, and to act.

Increasingly, local activists in Chapters (often with the help from the national Club) have been working with communities traditionally neglected by mainstream (white) environmental groups: rural communities near factory hog farms, urban neighborhoods threatened by highway construction or hazardous facilities, and communities whose drinking water is contaminated by toxic discharges or arsenic from mine runoff. Starting in Mississippi in 1993 (and since then, throughout the U.S.), Club activists have begun to forge partnerships with communities fighting exposure to dangerous substances and resistance from public officials.

Toxic tours, then, shouldn’t sound so strange for an organization that began with high trips in the Sierras. The love of place - including the places where we live - connects us in a wider web of caring and commitment. As John Muir said, “When we try to pick out anything, we find it is hitched to everything else in the universe.”

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(Tours, cont'd. from p.3)

such as this illustrate how toxic tours may provide powerful opportunities for strengthening coalitions between local communities and national non-profit social movement organizations.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that in addition to the use of toxic tours of and by nonprofit organizations, toxic tours increasingly are becoming incorporated in environmental justice gatherings facilitated by the government. Just one example of many occurred at the Environmental Justice Enforcement and Compliance Assurance Roundtable sponsored by the Enforcement Subcommittee of the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in San Antonio, Texas, October 17 through 19, 1996. A three-hour bus tour was organized by local community organizations on the first day for approximately 95 people. Within that time, participants met with representatives of over a half dozen grassroots environmental groups at locations ranging from a local church to a local Superfund site. According to the EPA Report, the goals of the tour were:

(1) to provide representatives of the EPA's Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance, EPA

Region 6, and the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC), among others, a glimpse of the concerns and conditions of citizens living near environmental justice sites; (2) to educate government representatives and provide examples of environmental racism in such communities which stem from a failure to enforce environmental regulations; (3) to allow community grassroots organizations the opportunity to share strategies for responding to environmental injustice; and (4) to strengthen the environmental justice movement. (p. 3)

From giving voice to local communities to educating outsiders to fostering the environmental justice movement more broadly, these purposes illustrate the many ways in which toxic tours offer a critical strategy for public participation.

Many argue the disproportionate pattern of toxic pollution has been justified because the waste was placed "out of sight" from those in power. Our goal must be to bring these toxic sites back into the spotlight so that no one can claim they do not see—and, therefore, feel or hear or smell—what is going on. The communities that have been affected the most by this pollution have been attempting to

do just that. And toxic tours are an important part of this struggle.

References/For further reading:

Bullard, R. D. (1993). *Confronting environmental racism: Voices from the grassroots*. Boston: South End Press.

Environmental Protection Agency. (website). Report of the environmental justice enforcement and compliance assurance roundtable, Oct. 17-19, 1996. San Antonio, TX: National Environmental Justice Advisory Council. Download date: Dec. 4, 2000. <<http://es.epa.gov/oeca/main/ej/nejac/pdf/1096.pdf>>

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Johnson, T. (1998). The second creation story: Redefining the bond between religion and ecology. Sierra Club website. Download date: Dec. 7, 2000. <<http://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/1999811/second.html>>

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TOXIC TOUR VIDEO: "Toxic Partners" is a documentary

by filmmaker/activist Neal Livingston about activists from two places (Fort Valley, Georgia, USA & Sydney, Cape Island, Nova Scotia, Canada) who visit each other's communities to learn more about each others' problems and struggles for recognition. Narrated by David Suzuki, "Toxic Partners" shares their stories of sickness and death that ensue from living near toxic waste sites. The film is a powerful document of how governments often care little for the health and well being of their citizens and of how communities have begun to find ways to fight back. If you are interested in more information on the film or how to borrow a copy, contact Kirstin Replogle at 217.344.3809, or by email at <kirstin.replogle@sierraclub.org>

Environmental Justice Grassroots Organizing Program has Expansion Plans to Two New Sites in 2001

The Environmental Justice Committee and the Sierra Club National Environmental Justice Grassroots Organizing Program are pleased to announce the addition of two new sites to the Program for 2001.

Central Appalachia:

The Southern Appalachian Highlands Ecoregion Task Force (SAHE) will be working in partnership with rural, predominantly white low income communities throughout the central Appalachian coal region, which encompasses West Virginia and portions of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

Southwestern U.S.:

The Plateau Group and the Arizona Chapter will be partnering with Native Americans throughout the Southwest on campaigns that focus on water quality issues facing their communities.

These two projects, because they are predominantly rural in their character, complement the more urban-focused efforts of our other grassroots organizing projects, and in addition, add to the diversity and differing cultures and communities with whom we seek to partner in developing a comprehensive program linking Sierra Club entities with communities facing environmental injustices.

We are all very excited about the opportunity to build strong alliances with all of the communities included within the scope of these proposals.

Celebrate with us!

Regards,
Kirstin Repogle, Chair, National EJ Committee
Jim Price, Director, National EJ Grassroots Organizing Program

**A TOUR BY ANY OTHER NAME:
“Tour de Sprawl” ...
...& “Tour de Stench”**

“Tour de Sprawl” was a public education tool initiated by the Minnesota North Star Chapter and has spread across the Midwest since 1996. By organizing those concerned with unplanned development to bike through areas most affected by sprawl, these groups have managed to raise a significant amount of press and attention.

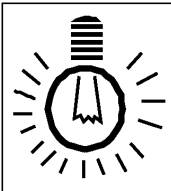
For a draft press release on Michigan’s Tour de Sprawl or an outline of what to consider when planning a tour of your own, go to:
<<http://www.sierraclub.org.sprawl/resources/challenge/tourdesprawl.asp>>

In order to highlight the environmental and public health damages associated with Factory Farms, the first ever Sierra Club “Tour de Stench” was sponsored by the Cumberland (Kentucky) Chapter of the Sierra Club and Hopkins County Group Kentuckians for the Commonwealth.

For more information on goals, “how to,” pictures, etc., on this tour, go to: <<http://www.sierraclub.org/cafos/states/kentucky/tour.asp>>

For more information on how to conduct a tour highlighting the effects of CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations) in your area, contact: <ed.hopkins@sierraclub.org>

IDEAS: NEED MONEY FOR YOUR OWN TOXIC TOUR?



* As part of the Environmental Justice Small Grants Program, the Environmental Protection Agency also has provided communities with funds to organize and to facilitate toxic tours. See, for example, Grant number: EQ-993450-01, the Anacostia Watershed Society's request for funds for “[a]n environmental justice tour of D.C. for 32 members of the Coalition of Environment and Jewish Life,” at <<http://es.epa.gov/oeca/oej/success.pdf>>. Contact information for the EPA also is available through most phone directories.

* The Sierra Club also provides small grants through the EPEC/EJ Discretionary Fund. Please contact Kirstin Repogle (contact information on p.2) for a description of the goals and criteria for this fund, as well as an application. Last year (2000), the Atlantic Chapter received a small grant to fund expenses associated with an Open Space Tour of the New York City Waterfront Communities.

Mapping What's Happening on the Ground: Three Toxic Tour Surveys

[Editor's Note: The following three surveys were filled out by people who have organized and facilitated toxic tours. Their answers were so telling, they have been published here without edit. For more information on their tours or questions you might have in creating your own, feel free to contact tour leaders or the EJ Committee.]

TOUR NAME: Cancer Alley Toxic Tour or River Road Reality Tour

GROUP WHO RUNS THE TOUR:
Green Haven Travel

CONTACT INFORMATION:
Darryl Malek-Wiley
618 Adams St.
New Orleans, LA 70118-3929
504-865-8708 (Home)
504-427-18856 (Cell)
<dmw@bellsouth.net>

LOCATION: Mississippi River road between New Orleans and Baton Rouge



Photographs on this page were taken by Sierra Club volunteer, Barbara Vincent, on one of the "Cancer Alley Toxic Tours".

PURPOSE: To make people aware of the number of African American communities that are located next door to large petro-chemical plants and the issue of environmental justice in Louisiana.

WHO GUIDES THE TOUR:
Darryl Malek-Wiley and a number of local community leaders which varies with each tour.

WHO IS INVITED: Everyone. Have done the tour for students, professors, lawyers, community leaders, teachers, members of the media, and the Sierra Club National Board of Directors.

HOW OFTEN HAS THIS TOUR BEEN PROVIDED: Average 3-4 times a year for the last 10 years

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE OVERALL TOUR: The tour changes with each group due to size of groups. I have lead tours in a car, a van, a 25 passenger bus, a 47 passenger bus, the largest tour was of three 47 passenger buses. The time of the tours is between 4 and 6 hours depending on the number of stops and if a meal is included (lunch or dinner).

WHAT IS POINTED OUT AND WHY? How the land use patterns in Louisiana (system of plantations) has carried on in to the 21st Century, with a large negative impact on the African American who live in Cancer Alley.

WHAT EFFECTS DO THESE TOURS HAVE? Most people are overwhelmed by the size and scope of the environmental justice issues in Louisiana along Cancer Alley. One of the key things that I try to impart to the persons taking the tours is that every person can make a difference if they are willing to stand up and become an activated member of the American Democracy that we live in.



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(Surveys, cont'd from p.7)

TOUR NAME: Toxic Tour of Memphis

GROUP WHO RUNS THE TOUR:
Sierra Club Environmental Justice Office

CONTACT INFORMATION:
2600 Poplar Avenue #216
Memphis, TN 38112
Phone: (901) 324-7757
Fax: (901) 324-7797
E-mail: rita.harris@sierraclub.org

LOCATION: Tour Memphis area active polluters as well as brownfields, water treatment facilities, and Superfund sites.

PURPOSE: To raise awareness of the close proximity of toxic sources to community residents, and in many cases the disproportionate burden of multiple facilities in a neighborhood area. Participants will get a close up view of a large portion of Memphis' environmental justice neighborhoods. The South Memphis area is a hodge-podge of sites that include, many industrial facilities, a hazardous waste treatment company, a wastewater treatment plant, a medical waste incinerator, brownfields, threatened parks, and endangered wetlands & rivers. See firsthand how these toxic sites affect the quality of life for neighborhood residents living near them. Hear about the struggles many neighborhood residents have waged to take back their communities.

WHO GUIDES THE TOUR:
Environmental Justice Organizer,
Rita Harris
It could vary with local Sierra Club volunteers sometimes leading tours as well.

WHO IS INVITED: Any group of four or more persons may request a Toxic Tour; which includes any church or civic association group, or a group of concerned citizens.

HOW OFTEN HAS THIS TOUR BEEN PROVIDED: Usually three or four times a year, but depends on the interest level of the community and what special events are going on that would heighten interest in pollution issues. We have found the best approach to take is to offer tours on request rather than trying to provide a regular schedule for the tours.



Photograph of "Memphis Toxic Tour," taken by Sierra Club Environmental Justice Grassroots Organizer Rita Harris

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE OVERALL TOUR: An average tour lasts about two and one-half to three hours. It depends on what locations are included. It varies depending on the request or interest of the tour participants. It is a driving tour, preferably in a van or bus so that participants are all-together and can have the benefit of the guide's commentary along the way and questions from the other

participants. There can be a few places that we stop and walk outside.

WHAT IS POINTED OUT AND WHY? Tour participants get to see major polluters, brownfields, areas that communities fought for cleanup, some that are still pending, and Martin Luther King Park that was threatened to be chopped off for use by an oil refinery. Also, included is the community that suffered an explosion from a hazardous waste recycler several years ago. The main goal of the tour is to raise awareness of the disproportionate burden some communities bear in living near these type facilities and the need for stronger environmental protection.

WHAT EFFECTS DO THESE TOURS HAVE? Some people that do not frequent the parts of town that are included in the tour are always shocked at the nearness of homes, playgrounds, schools, and parks. They get to see firsthand the environmental insult to residents (of having these polluters so close to homes), as well as the noxious odors that permeate the neighborhood. Toxic tours can give the best up close and personal view of what poor communities are faced with and cause some participants to want to do more to help in some way. And most participants say they cannot imagine living with these conditions daily. It makes them more supportive of efforts to clean up these facilities and toxic sites.

TOUR NAME: South Baltimore Toxic Tour

GROUP WHO RUNS THE TOUR:

Cleanup Coalition with several neighborhood groups

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Terry J. Harris
107 Scott Street
Baltimore, MD 21201
410-625-0559

LOCATION: The South Baltimore Peninsula, including Fairfield, Wagner's Point, Hawkins Point, Curtis Bay, Brooklyn

PURPOSE: Depends somewhat on the audience and whether there are particular battles going on at the time. Typically though, it is a tour to show people an environment they are not usually familiar with.

WHO GUIDES THE TOUR:

Again, depends somewhat on the audience and purpose, but typically one or two community members and one or two environmentalists.

WHO IS INVITED: We've had tours for politicians, journalists, students, bureaucrats, other communities, other enviros, etc.

HOW OFTEN HAS THIS TOUR BEEN PROVIDED: As needed, usually a couple of times a year.

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE OVERALL TOUR: Again, depending on the particular audience and any particular focus, it may vary. But usually we'll pile into buses or vans and drive. Most of the sites are within a few miles of each other. There are from three to six stops depending on the amount of time/depth/interest, running from 90

minutes to four hours.

WHAT IS POINTED OUT AND WHY?

1. Wagner's Point - a community of 300 people in 70 row homes surrounded by chemical plants, tank farms and a sewage plant, now relocated due to a variety of toxic threats. 20 cases of cancer, including tragic deaths of community leaders. Three major chemical accidents, each with ineffective emergency response (there is one road in and out of the community which was blocked by response units or the accident itself.)

2. Fairfield - a community of a dozen people, originally a thriving African American neighborhood, just opposite a tank farm and a chemical plant from Wagner's Point. Also relocated.

3. The chemical industry nearby - 13 chemical manufacturers within a 5 square mile area, including FMC (pesticides), Condea Vista (surfactants), Millenium Inorganic (pigments), Delta (chemicals for sewage treatment), Grace (a number of products).

4. Valley Proteins - a rendering plant, famous in the neighborhoods for the smell. Famous elsewhere for its role in the Oprah trial (remember? About beef? - a local reporter wrote one of the first articles in the U.S. about the fact that rendering plants produced ingredients in animal feed, making the U.S. not immune from threats like mad cow disease.)

5. Phoenix Services - the largest medical waste incinerator in the world. With a long and often

twisted local history of corruption, union busting, bankruptcy, and community activism.

6. Fort Armistead Park - a forgotten and under-maintained City park underneath the Key Bridge. With a view of Bethlehem Steel Sparrows Point facility across the Harbor and two BGE power plants. A site of frequent fish kills and advisories. And inevitably subsistence fishermen are there at the park with lines in the water.

If there's interest and time (some are not strictly in South Baltimore):

7. The City Landfill - also with a long story of corruption regarding contracts for environmental maintenance.

8. The Chromium landfill - the haz waste landfill in which chromium-contaminated soils, dug up in reclamation of the harbor and surrounding industrial sites, are buried

9. Soil Safe, Inc. - the "soil recycling" facility that "treats" oil-contaminated soils. The treated soil, however, isn't much better toxics-wise, but it gets used as fill dirt all over the state. A frequent OSHA violator, with a recent death of a worker at the facility, another recent accident involving their truck killed one innocent motorist and critically injured several.

10. Allied Chemical - a \$300 Million chromium cleanup on prime Baltimore inner harbor real estate. Plans for big development on the site, but which would compromise the effectiveness of the pump-and-treat cleanup. Lessons here in brownfields and

(Surveys, cont'd. on p.10)

(Surveys, cont'd. from p.9)

superfund liability.

11. Camden Crossing - a long-proposed development on the site of a burned-down iron works. Developers want to put up housing, but don't want to pay for the cleanup. The contamination is minimal, and development desperately needed on the site, but financing games have continued for 12 years, with developers never getting enough tax dollars to make a big enough profit. More brownfields lessons.

12. Phipps Construction - a rock-crushing facility fought by neighbors. Although neighbors lost the war (the facility exists), they won all the battles -- and the facility must abide by very strict operating conditions.

13. Potts and Callahan Dump - a

proposed landfill for "clean fill" - supposedly dirt and excavation debris from the demolition of public housing projects around the City. Through loopholes in state and federal waste laws, such facilities are essentially unregulated, requiring only a one-page "grading permit" from the City. In an old quarry near a stream valley park, the landfill would have been in operation for 10 years, 300 trucks full every day, 6 days a week, with the landfill rising to more than 100 feet directly above the stream bank. The new Mayor, however, opposed the landfill in his campaign and as a result he owed a great deal of support to nearby precincts (Consistently the largest turnout in the city in working class African American neighborhoods.) The Mayor refused to issue any grading permit.

WHAT EFFECTS DO THESE TOURS HAVE?

Inevitably the Wagner's Point and Fairfield portion causes gasps and eventually tears as the incredible story is told in the run-down playground where the community meetings were held. The sewage plant smells and the pesticide plant smells mix, and the incredible proximity of the small houses to the large chemical and petroleum tanks never ceases to amaze the tourists. The toxic tours for politicians played a major part in getting the relocation remedy for the two neighborhoods. The area, despite being only several miles from downtown Baltimore, is very isolated and most people on the tour have no idea of the scale of the operations, or the environmental and public health threats involved. A common reaction of a tour-goer is "I had no idea."
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GREAT NEWS!

The Sierra Club Environmental Justice Committee and the Sierra Club Environmental Justice Grassroots Organizing Program joyfully announce the continuation and expansion of the EJ Grassroots Organizing Program begun in late 1999! In addition to continuing the efforts of our current organizers in the DC, Detroit, Memphis, and Los Angeles sites we will:

- * hire two more organizers this year (see p.6), and hope to hire more in upcoming years;
- * hire an attorney this year to assist our members and partnering communities around the country with environmental justice legal issues;
- * hire a full-time media person who will also provide assistance throughout the country to our members and community partners in their EJ campaigns;
- * continue the successful Environmental Justice Special Projects Fund for small projects that bring Club volunteers and suffering communities together on joint campaigns to promote environmental justice;
- * host an annual meeting to bring together Club leaders, organizers, and community members to strategize on how to advance our mutual goals;
- * fund the production and mailing of this newsletter, the EJ Times, allowing our small committee budget to be dedicated towards other efforts.

These enhancements, along with the efforts already underway, allow us to reach out to more communities, provide more support, and stand more solidly with our brothers and sisters confronting environmental injustice.

Join with us in celebrating these wonderful new opportunities - and we will keep you posted!

Border Lines: Issues in the Lower Rio Grande Valley

By Alejandro Queral

Images of dusty, highly industrialized towns, maquiladora workers, health problems, and toxic waste are abundant along the U.S.-Mexico border. However, none of these images alone renders an accurate description of the complexity of the problems facing border residents. The current policies of rapid industrialization and free trade advocated by the US and Mexican governments have given rise to a multitude of environmental and social problems that place an undue burden on the poorer communities living along the border. Water pollution and associated health problems are exacerbated by rapid industrialization and population growth, as the lack of infrastructure is unable to keep up with the demand. Lax enforcement of environmental laws, lack of transparency, and aggression toward community activists make the problems along border towns appear insurmountable at times. Tackling these problems will require innovative solutions spurred by a great deal of cross-border organizing. Citizens in both countries must work together to pressure their governments to ensure respect for their rights and their quality of life.

Since the mid-1960s, Mexico has attracted investment by foreign companies by creating industrial zones where they could establish assembly plants or maquiladoras with a minimal cost: cheap labor, very low or no taxes, low utility costs, easy access to assembly materials, and easy access to the

US market. But after 35 years, the environmental and social costs of this development are raising new questions about the wisdom of policies that encourage rapid industrial and unplanned urban growth without regard for the environment or human rights.

During a number of recent visits to the lower Rio Grande Valley I have had the opportunity to observe firsthand many aspects of the problems associated with the maquiladora industry: toxic dumping, health problems, shantytowns or colonias inhabited by maquiladora workers lacking basic services. Anyone visiting them will undoubtedly recognize the link between the social and environmental problems facing the colonia residents.

While there are many factors that have contributed to the environmental degradation occurring along the border, the rapid industrialization that has taken place over the past 35 years is a primary culprit of the existing air, water and soil pollution. While the electronic and auto assembly plants are the predominant industries, the chemical industry has also had a presence in the area since the late 1980s. There have been many documented cases of pollution and associated health problems directly linked to the chemical industry. In the early 1990s, the Chicago-based Stepan plant dumped xylene, a toxic solvent linked to birth defects, into open canals near a colonia, a practice that continued until they were sued in US courts. Locals now know the industrial park where Stepan is located as "Chemical Row" - a sad testament to their legacy. Around the same time, the National Toxics Campaign Fund -

Citizens, Environmental Laboratory conducted analyses of soil samples obtained near assembly plants in Tijuana, Nogales and Matamoros and detected a wide range of pollutants, including petroleum by-products, xylene, chromium and copper. The Mallory battery plant is another case in Matamoros that made headlines in the US. Located in downtown Matamoros, Mallory used to make lead-acid batteries. The process left behind toxic by-products like PCBs, chloroether, and trichloroethylene. Citizens living nearby and workers in the plant organized and eventually filed a lawsuit after the incidence of harmful genetic effects such as hermaphrodites and intestinal malformations skyrocketed. Although the Stepan and other high profile cases curbed the clandestine dumping by factories, the practice continues today. Factories have to pay about \$300 to \$500 for each barrel to legally be taken to the Mina Hazardous Waste Disposal facility in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, so in order to cut costs, many factories dump the waste by the side of the road in plastic bags. Mexico has no disposal facilities in the entire border region, and the Mina facility is the only waste disposal site in Mexico, located several hundred miles south of the border. This drives the costs of disposal up and encourages illegal dumping. In 1991, the National Toxic Campaign Fund reported that one third of sites tested for toxic discharge exceeded levels of toxins permitted by US law by 20 to 215,000 times. Despite the attention in the media and the environmental community, these problems continue today: In Matamoros, "chemical row," tests revealed levels of xylene exceeding US standards by more than 50,000 times.

(Border, cont'd. on p.12)

(Border, cont'd. from p.11)

Matamoros and Brownsville were once again the center of national media attention in 1991 when a local clinic reported six anencephaly cases during a five-week period. This was not the first time anencephaly had been reported in the area: between 1986 and 1991 there were 80 cases reported. Anencephaly is a very rare and fatal disease in which babies are born without brains. That year, there were 13 anencephaly cases reported for Brownsville alone, more than six times the expected norm. Although there is no certainty as to the causes for this disease, the cluster and high rate of incidence suggest that there were environmental factors related to this problem.

The presence of the maquiladora industry has also spurred a rapid growth in population as workers from other parts of Mexico migrate in search of better paying jobs. Most of the new arrivals stake a claim on a piece of land in a colonia and build houses out of leftover construction material, wood and cardboard. Often, the city cannot keep up with the rapid urbanization and many of the colonias lack services such as trash pickup, running water and sewage systems. Matamoros has more than 16 kilometers of canals that function as sewage for domestic and industrial waste, an obvious health hazard.

Despite these problems, the US and Mexican governments continue to push for free trade agreements that, like NAFTA, are giving corporations sweeping new rights while making it more difficult to hold them accountable. Free trade agreements like NAFTA effectively set sharp limits on the ability of

local and federal governments to protect the environment.

In addition to the obvious environmental problems that have resulted from current industrialization policies, the environmental justice issues in this region also extend to the working conditions inside the factories. Workers in Matamoros told me how they have to work with powerful solvents like trichloroethylene, xylene, and cyclohexanone and about the recurring health problems they experience, ranging from headaches, nausea and dizziness to coughing and fainting spells. Workers in electronics assembly plants spend their entire shift using lead solder in enclosed spaces without proper ventilation or protection. Many end the day feeling nauseous and dizzy and as they described it, "with a yellowish dust around my nose and eyes." None of the workers were told about the potential hazards of working with these toxic chemicals, and they were rarely given appropriate protection such as respirators or gloves. Pregnant women were not excluded from these activities and were never told about the potentially harmful effects.

Communities and workers are responding to these problems by organizing and demanding better working conditions and services. But activists, particularly those who expose the poor working conditions inside the factories or who are simply trying to educate workers about their rights, run the risk of harassment. Local government officials and factory managers have threatened activists in the Mexico side of the Rio Grande Valley. Eliud Almaguer is the leader of a group of workers at the Duro Bags factory who received threats to his family

and his life for his efforts to create an independent union. According to his testimony, two managers of the factory have threatened to kill him on several occasions and he suspects they are responsible for an attempt on his life. The Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras is conducting a campaign to ensure Almaguer's safety and to demand an investigation into the arson and other threats.

Such problems along the US-Mexico border illustrate some of the issues associated with the globalization movement. The residents of colonias and the maquiladora workers are the faces of globalization: individuals who are carrying an unduly burden because of the environmental degradation and social inequalities that are the result of industrialization policies.

In the global economy, corporations prey on those who have the least, promising better jobs and higher wages. While opportunity is greater in the short run, the rapid, unregulated boom along the US-Mexican border will surely wind down, leaving tens of thousands of families without the infrastructure necessary to meet their basic human needs.

While foreign investment may hold a promise for jobs and a better life ^ a promise that is not always fulfilled and that benefits few ^ the toll that these policies have taken on the environment and human rights should be a central part in establishing new policies. The unfettered growth and lure of a \$40-a-week paycheck fails to provide these families with sanitation, garbage collection, health care, or even rat control, and the long-term cost to

public health and the environment along the entire length of the border is a burden we all share. But what can be done? To begin with, more Americans should hold corporations accountable for their actions, regardless of where companies operate. One way of doing so is by requiring that foreign subsidiaries and contractors disclose information about toxic releases, plans for resource use and extraction, labor practices and conditions, and their human rights standards.

Empowering individuals with access to such information is only the first step in protecting the environment and human rights. This must be a battle that is waged across borderlines, one in which citizens from both countries work together to ensure that local activists are free to organize their communities to protect their rights and the environment. Together, we can ensure that future development is clean, green and fair. *-ejt*

Alejandro Queral is the Program Director for Sierra Club's Human Rights and the Environment Program. He can be reached at 202.675.6279.

Interested in applying to the EJ Committee?

If you are interested in helping us promote EJ in the Sierra Club, we want to hear from you! Deadline for applications is March 31, 2001. Please contact Phaedra Pezzullo for the full announcement and complete application information. (Phaedra's contact information is on page 2 of this newsletter.)

MORE INFORMATION ON COMMITTEE VACANCY:

THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE: The EJ Committee is one of seven national Sierra Club issue committees that report to and advise the Environmental Quality Strategy Team. The other committees are: Air, Water, Community Health, Waste, Workplace Environment, and Corporate Accountability. The EJ Committee is responsible for providing support and guidance to Club activists at all levels who are attempting to deal with environmental justice issues, for encouraging better communication among EJ advocates both inside and outside of the Club, for helping to shape national Club policies and positions that have environmental justice implications, for supporting the efforts of the Environmental Justice Grassroots Organizing Program, and for assuring that the Club's historic commitment to the principles of environmental justice is understood and sustained in all of the Club's endeavors.

THE EJ COMMITTEE'S ACTIVITIES: The Environmental Justice Committee works to educate Sierra Club member on the issue of environmental justice, underscoring that EJ is a vital thread already running through the whole fabric of Club environmental work. The Committee's charge also includes assisting Chapters and Groups regarding local issues; building better networks of activists around EJ issues; and, as time and expertise permit, internal Sierra Club EJ policy development and implementation, and commenting on issues of national precedence and importance.

Major efforts of the Committee involve the publication of the EJ Times and supporting the efforts of the EJ Grassroots Organizing Program. We anticipate, with the new administration in Washington DC, major assaults on critical environmental protections. The committee will participate in many of the defensive struggles that lie ahead.

Recently, the Committee has submitted comments on behalf of the Sierra Club regarding EPA's proposed guidance to enforce Title VI of the Civil Rights Act in its permitting decisions; offered EJ language as an amendment to the newly revised Grazing Policy, which resulted in similar wording being included in the draft finally approved; sought to establish relationships with the national Priority Campaigns and Programs to offer these efforts assistance as they seek to address EJ in their campaigns; and has begun a major outreach effort to Chapters and Groups to offer our perspective where appropriate.

Required application information:

Name:

Membership # (required):

Contact information (address, phone(s), fax, email):

Sierra Club activities and leadership positions held, with dates:

Environmental work (community, state, national level):

Statement reflecting interest in and experience with environmental justice issues:

References (3):

Profile: Julie Eisenhardt

Tell us a little bit about your background and how you were drawn to community organizing.

I was raised in a union, activist family. (In Madison, people called people like me "red diaper babies." My parents are in no way communists, but my mother is definitely a progressive.) As early as high school, organizing was the way I approached problems ranging from a too-short lunch hour to a lack of school recycling program. In college, I worked on campaigns for queer rights, women's rights, and labor rights. In every case, I loved the way that diverse coalitions and creative strategies could come together to give people who usually have little power control over their lives.

What is your past experience with unions or labor more generally? How did that prepare you for your current work in environmental justice?

I've worked very closely with a number of unions in the past. As part of a student-labor group in Baltimore, I worked with UNITE! (Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees) to curtail the union-busting activities of the University

I was attending against the laundry they were organizing. I've also done similar student-labor work with different HERE and SEIU locals. I really think the problems labor and communities face are one and the same: If you have an unjust job, you have low pay, lots of hours, and no health care. Communities of lower-paid workers are usually

targets for environmental injustice, largely because of the low income and the lack of time to organize against it. Then, community health declines, pointing the residents back to the need for health care at their jobs. (This happened constantly in Baltimore: Johns Hopkins hired area residents for minimum-wage, no benefit jobs. Hopkins also burned its trash in the neighborhoods where their workers lived. Then, they'd give out "free health care" to those neighborhoods and call it charity rather than granting the workers the dignity of having a health plan.)

What was your perspective on the environmental movement and why were you interested in taking up the challenge of being a Sierra Club EJ organizer?

If someone had told me a year ago that I would be working for the Sierra Club, I would have probably laughed. My interest in justice is something that I'd never seen in the Sierra Club before. I saw the "big environmentals" as a movement for people of privilege-- people who already had decent jobs and decent housing and decent health care and had the luxury of worrying about owls and things. Environmental justice was something I associated with the small neighborhood organizations in Baltimore that fought the incinerators, organizations that had night-and-day differences with the Sierra Club.

I didn't know the Club was doing EJ work until I saw the job posting. I had to think hard about this one-- was I giving up the struggles I was engaged in to work with the luxury of a large, national organization? I saw the position, though, as an



opportunity to continue the bridging work I had done all along. Only, this time, instead of bridging students with communities, it would be Sierra Club members.

In your current EJ work, what do you find to be the greatest impediment? What's the strongest asset that either you or the Club or both bring into the picture?

I think the greatest impediment I experience is racism. This is the same racism that causes the problems of environmental injustice but has a different face. Sometimes, the racism comes in the form of Sierra Club members' prejudices about the neighborhoods we work in. Sometimes it comes as neighborhood residents questioning me in their neighborhood. (Once, as I was canvassing, a man came to the door and started telling me he had "paid up." I didn't understand what was going on, so I began my pitch about the trash transfer station. When he realized what was going on, he laughed. He said the only time a White person comes to his door is when he owes money.)

What importance do you place on forging coalitions? What type of

organizations are you looking to work together with and involve in your action?

I believe that coalitions are the only sure way of making progress on issues. Opponents of justice are careful to make sure that their victims feel alone, small, and isolated. They try to make the neighborhoods feel different from the rest of the city, even in opposition to the rest of the city. To overcome our opponents, we have to draw the connections between quality environment, fair jobs, liveable housing, and more. Already, the DC EJ program is working with resident and neighborhood associations on many issues. I'd like to branch out to work more cooperatively with unions and housing advocates, whose goals are so closely tied to ours. I also would like to get more students from DC involved with the neighborhood campaigns.

Tell us about one of your experiences as an EJ organizer that represents the most hopeful sign for the success of EJ work in the future.

The first event we coordinated was attending a hearing for the local sewage plant's air pollution permit. We rented a bus and joined 12 community members to testify

about the poor health and disgusting smell in the neighborhood. When we arrived, the hearing room only had 10 chairs. The hearing officer looked at us and said, "We've never had anyone show up at one of these hearings before. We didn't know anyone cared." People do care, though. Half the problem is that people don't know about these hearings or other processes that effect their lives. By just letting the neighborhood know about the hearing, we had solved a big part of the problem-- lack of information.

Where would you like us (the EJ movement in Sierra Club) to be in 10 years?

I would like to see a movement that is not separate from the other campaigns of the Club. While it's integral to have EJ organizers in neighborhoods, we also need the other campaigns to recognize the effect their issues have on low income communities and People of Color. I'd love to see the sprawl campaign be 1/2 sprawl and 1/2 urban reinvestment. I'd like to see the public lands campaign recognize the importance of urban greenspace and devote some time to preserving green cities. I think we're getting closer-- a great example is the changes in the

grazing policy.

If you have a personal hero/ine, who is he/she, and what do you most admire him/her for?

I've always admired Emma Goldman. No, I'm not an anarchist, and I think she would have been more effective had she advocated non-violence in her campaigns. But she was an immigrant woman with a deep belief in justice, and she didn't let anything stop her from acting on that. She handed out birth control literature in the 1910's and 20's. She believed in women's liberation and organized a resistance to World War I. She believed in the rights of workers, saying that even an eight hour day was too long. She was one of the first activists to make the connections between women, labor, and peace movements. Most importantly, to me, though, she struggled her whole life but kept a sense of humor. She was in and out of jail for believing in such radical things as the minimum wage and women's control over their destinies. "If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution," she said. -ejt

VIRTUAL TOURS



Many communities and organizations are beginning to place photos and descriptions of their toxic tours on the internet. To see some examples, go to:

- * Love Canal, NY: <http://www.globalserve.net>
- * Chester, PA: <http://www.penweb.org/chester>
- * Cancer Alley, LA: <http://www.greenpeace.org/toxics/bustourtext.htm>
- * Southeast Los Angeles, CA: <http://www.cbela.org/selatt.htm>

Statement in Opposition

The Sierra Club's Challenge to Sprawl Campaign, Global Population and Environment Program, and Board of Directors all recommend that you vote no on this proposal. The Board's existing policy will accomplish the goals of this proposal, without micromanaging our efforts. Under this proposal, if we followed it strictly, we couldn't even have a bumper sticker that says, "Sprawl costs us all." We couldn't talk about sprawl in St. Louis, where population has declined, without finding some way to bring in population, which in that city is irrelevant.

Efforts were made to work out acceptable language with the ballot measure authors. It was suggested that they take out the word "all," which creates a host of problems. They declined, and under the Club's rules they are entitled to a vote of the members on the language they submitted. But we strongly urge you to reject this unfortunately poorly worded proposal.

While inefficient land use and population growth are interrelated, they are distinct problems with distinct solutions. The Sprawl campaign has developed materials addressing population, and plans additional materials. Insisting that ALL Sprawl Campaign materials emphasize the same population message everywhere is unwieldy, unwise and factually indefensible.

Census figures show that Las Vegas is both sprawling and growing. Places like Pittsburgh are experiencing a different phenomenon: land consumption has increased while population has declined. The simplistic, uniform message the initiative would require is inadequate to describe all local circumstances.

Inefficient land use has profound social and economic as well as environmental costs, and provides strong reasons to reach out to other constituencies and create a broad coalition eager to rebuild communities suffering from sprawl. The Sprawl Campaign is working to develop these coalitions across the country. Programs and messages that respond to local circumstances lead to success.

The Challenge to Sprawl campaign has worked with the Club's chapters to develop messages that work best in each state. Our flexible approach has allowed us to develop messages that are more intellectually honest, powerful, and useful in forging alliances. Forcing the universal use of a particular message, regardless of local conditions, would undermine the coalition-building that is so essential to the Sprawl Campaign's success.

Please vote "no" on this poorly worded attempt to micromanage one of the Club's most important campaigns.

Robert Cox, President, Board of Directors
Tim Frank, Challenge to Sprawl Campaign Committee Chair
George Klein, Global Population and Environment Program Committee Chair

Statement in Support

Shortly before his death last November, Sierra Club pioneer David Brower said, "The [U.S.] population explosion is our worst problem.... We have to address [it]." Several months earlier, frustrated largely because of the Club's inaction on U.S. overpopulation, Brower had resigned from the Board.

A "YES" vote requests the Club's sprawl campaign to target both population growth and better land use in fighting sprawl's destructive impacts on our lives and on nature.

Recent studies* reveal that most sprawl is tightly linked to population growth, and The Nature Conservancy's comprehensive book "Precious Heritage" shows high correlation between U.S. endangered species and areas with population-driven sprawl, including California, the Southwest, and Florida.

Since 1950, our population has exploded from 150 to 275 million. With current trends, the Census Bureau projects U.S. population doubling within the lifetimes of today's children.

Yet in five sprawl reports totaling 150 pages, the Club acknowledges that population needs to be stabilized in only two short paragraphs, and through omission implies that as long as development is "smart", destruction of open-spaces, wildlife habitat, and farmland isn't sprawl! Common sense tells us that hundreds of millions more Americans will overwhelm "smartgrowth" and produce massive sprawl.

In regions like Los Angeles, Seattle, Dallas, San Francisco Bay, Miami, Phoenix, Portland, and Denver, sprawl is overwhelmingly due to population increase, not poor planning*. In regions with little population growth (e.g., Detroit), there's much less sprawl*.

This initiative's purpose is not to micromanage the sprawl campaign nor to wastefully reprint existing materials – its sole intent is to reintroduce population into Club discussions. In November 2000 we petitioners accepted compromise wording proposed by Board member Anne Ehrlich that substituted "educational components in Club sprawl campaigns" for the stronger "essential components in all Club sprawl materials and programs". The Board rejected the compromise.

John Muir must be turning in his grave: the Club he founded to protect nature combats sprawl ineffectually for fear of confronting overpopulation.

Sixteen Club chapters nationwide* (including Loma Prieta, Los Padres, Maryland, Ohio, Oregon, Rocky Mountain, San Francisco, San Diego, Tennessee, Ventana, Vermont) passed resolutions asking the Club to incorporate U.S. population stabilization as a component of the Sprawl Campaign. Please join them and endorsers:

Lester Brown, President, Worldwatch Institute**
Jean-Michel Cousteau, President, Ocean Futures Society**
Dave Foreman, former Club Director
Martin Litton, former Club Director, John Muir Award
Gaylord Nelson, founder EarthDay, Senator 1963-1981
Galen Rowell, nature photojournalist
Stewart Udall, U.S. Interior Secretary, 1961-1969
Paul Watson, founder Sea Shepherds**
E.O. Wilson, conservation biologist, Harvard

**for identification

VOTE YES!

*www.SprawlCity.org

Sprawl/Population Question

“Shall the Sierra Club emphasize both regional and national population stabilization as essential components in all Sierra Club sprawl materials and programs?”

The following resolution was passed by the national Environmental Justice Committee on January 18, 2001. It is presented here as an editorial statement from the Committee.

RESOLVED, The Environmental Justice Committee of the Sierra Club urges a vote against the initiative on the National Sierra Club’s spring ballot sponsored by the so-called “Sierrans for U.S. Population Stabilization” that would mandate to Club activists fighting sprawl that they must use language in all of their materials stating that U.S. population stabilization is an essential component to fighting sprawl. Notwithstanding the questionable factual premise of the group’s ballot initiative, the proposal would prove to be unwieldy, unnecessary, and potentially very divisive.

WHEREAS, On the fundamentals, the supporters of the initiative miss the point. At the core of the fight against sprawl is inefficiency. It is a relational battle about the use of resources growing at a greater rate than the population. The sprawl-related environmental issues in the U.S. are much more related to irresponsible patterns of consumption and poor resource management than population “instability.” In Charlotte, for example, the rate of growth in urbanized land grew at a rate twice that of the population from 1960-1990. Meanwhile, in places like Cleveland, population is declining while land consumption increases. Moreover, a single simplified message on “population stabilization” simply doesn’t work when it is a complex set of circumstances that cause sprawl.

WHEREAS, Indeed, if the fight against sprawl is to be successful, it will be because environmentalists will have joined with other constituencies to work in coalition on a common agenda. And the proposal threatens the ability to form these crucial coalitions. Make no mistake, the call for “U.S. population stabilization” has overtones of the anti-immigration rhetoric that continues to fester in some far corners of the Club. The reality is that immigration into the U.S. in the 1990s is only slightly more in absolute numbers (9 million or so) than the immigrants arriving between 1900 - 1910 (8.8 million) . And obviously, on a percentage basis, immigration into the U.S. is much smaller in the 1990s - barely one third of what it was back then. The current proportion of U.S. residents that are foreign born is only 8%, high by recent standards but lower than every decade between 1850 and 1950. The main difference? Today's immigrants aren't uniformly European and white. So what is it about the U.S. population that is so “unstable”?

WHEREAS, The Sierra Club's interest in population issues has been, until these recent immigration controversies, properly deliberate. The issues of global population growth and the environment are indeed serious and worthy of our venerable organization's attention. The Club is absolutely justifiable in its strong support for full funding of global family planning programs, for example. But bringing U.S. population stabilization to the forefront of the national anti-sprawl campaign, by inflexible mandate, is perhaps the ultimate act of NIMBYism.

WHEREAS, The problem with population forced into every discussion of sprawl is that despite the claims of objectivity and neutrality and the use of slippery-slope terms like "carrying capacity" and "quality of life" the fact remains -- population control always comes down to which populations and by whom? The Environmental Justice Committee urges the Sierra Club membership to stand up against forces within the Club that would use misinformed and misguided pseudo-environmental arguments as a vehicle for anti-immigrant population ideologues.

Grazing Question:

“Shall the Sierra Club advocate ending all commercial livestock grazing on all federal publicly owned lands in the U.S.?”

Last year, after thorough consultation – involving hundreds of Sierra Club activists – the Board adopted a grazing policy with the visionary goal of protecting and restoring native biodiversity to our public lands. This policy boldly states that we will not accept the degradation of native ecosystems, loss of biodiversity or taxpayer subsidized and irresponsible grazing. It achieves the same conservation goals that the petition seeks, but provides more effective tools for activists.

Grazing by introduced livestock – cattle, sheep, goats – continues to damage public lands but inappropriate grazing is not the only danger to public lands. Prohibiting grazing on all public lands ignores other problems. Fences needed to implement the policy could be a disaster for wildlife and a nuisance to recreationists. Abruptly removing domestic livestock before reestablishing native herds could diminish biodiversity in places like the Great Plains, where species such as the black-tailed prairie dog, and the prairie itself require the presence of large grazers. This policy allows for continued livestock grazing where ecosystems require large grazers and where native grazers are not feasible.

Reasons to Support Current Policy:

strongly supported by Club leadership nationwide (Board, Regional Vice-Presidents, Council) including some original petition proponents who believe the Board-passed policy should be given a chance.

establishes strong guidance for achieving goals, but provides flexibility that allows local activists to work with responsible ranchers and local communities;

encourages innovative solutions to protect native grasslands and open spaces;

recognizes that reducing or eliminating grazing may create challenges for cultural and economic stability of Native American, minority and low-income communities, and resolves to help meet those challenges;

grazing activists say this policy is empowering them to stop destructive grazing.

Reasons to Oppose Proposed Petition Policy:

advocates a "one size fits all" solution to a complex problem. Focuses on a single tactic – ending commercial grazing – rather than on the goal of protecting and restoring the biological health of the land and wildlife;

lacks flexibility necessary to tackle the complex ecological and social issues associated with public lands grazing;

undercuts the Club's goals of outreach to rural constituencies, and could alienate those we need to work with to protect open space and wildlife habitat on private lands.

Robert Cox, President, Board of Directors
Dexter Perkins, ND
Mark Pearson, CO
John Sparh, WY
Rose Strickland, NV
Michael McGinn, WA
Elden Hughes, CA

Vote YES to protect and restore our federal public lands from the single greatest threat they face: commercial livestock grazing.

COMMERCIAL LIVESTOCK GRAZING IS BAD FOR THE LAND, everywhere and all the time. Cattle didn't evolve in North America, and they are no substitute for native species such as elk and bison.

Grazing pollutes water, damages riparian areas, and destroys habitat for endangered species. On public lands, it costs taxpayers \$100 million per year. We actually pay to have our own land degraded, and much of that degradation is irreversible (see www.rangebiome.org).

IT'S TIME TO SAVE THE MONEY AND THE LAND.

The current Sierra Club grazing policy, though recently improved, is still inadequate:

It perpetuates grazing on federal public lands.

Grazing on federal lands represents a tiny fraction of all U.S. grazing. We don't need the beef.

It gives the livestock industry a powerful weapon in their campaign to degrade public lands at taxpayer expense: “Even the Sierra Club believes livestock grazing is good for the environment.”

Condoning livestock grazing on federal lands, like logging, violates the mission of the Sierra Club: “To explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth.” The Sierra Club should unequivocally oppose commercial livestock grazing on federal public lands.

Some members are concerned that removing cows from public lands will lead to sprawl. There is no evidence to support this myth.

As naturalist George Wuerthner has written, "RANCHING CAN'T AND DOESN'T PREVENT SUBDIVISIONS." Sprawl is driven by demand for land, not supply. Grazing on public lands does not reduce this demand.

Our campaign is designed to end the grazing program without harming family ranchers or minority and traditional communities. Some of the enormous taxpayer savings can be used to help the small number of people in these groups. The vast majority of grazing subsidies go to large corporations and wealthy individuals.

The Club's conservation efforts were strengthened when it called for an end to commercial logging on public lands. Membership went up, and legislation once considered impossible now has nearly 100 congressional sponsors.

Let's protect our grasslands from grazing just as we protect our forests from logging.

PLEASE VOTE YES TO PROTECT AND RESTORE OUR PUBLIC LANDS.

For more information, please call 510-841-6761 or email freerange@greens.org.

Chad Hanson,
Director

George Wuerthner,
Grazing Task Force member

Gordon Labeledz, chair
Angeles Chapter

The following resolution was passed by the National Environmental Justice Committee on February 8, 2001. It is presented here as an editorial statement from the Committee.

RESOLVED, The Sierra Club Environmental Justice Committee urges a vote against the initiative on the National Sierra Club's spring ballot that would mandate a "no grazing" policy on public lands. We believe this vote presents the Club with an opportunity to demonstrate our accountability to working people in general and people of color in particular.

WHEREAS, The Sierra Club Board of Directors will soon vote on Principles of Environmental Justice for the Club. These Principles and the voices from environmental justice communities throughout the nation remind us that: (1) we cannot ignore the negative implications elimination of public lands grazing would have for cultural and economic survival of minority and low-income communities; and (2) we cannot fail to include these communities as participants in decisions that affect them so profoundly.

WHEREAS, The Sierra Club is committed to opening a substantive dialogue with representatives of working class and people of color communities to develop a partnership which will identify and implement strategies to protect both traditional communities and the ecological integrity of public lands, without sacrificing either. We believe by working together we can overcome the forces which have led to widespread abuse of public grazing lands while supporting those communities whose values and traditions bind them closely to the land.

WHEREAS, Voting against this ballot initiative will confirm, for the historical record, that we in the Sierra Club are not walking over communities but walking with communities to fulfill our vision for the responsible and sustainable use of the earth's ecosystems and resources.

WHEREAS, The current Sierra Club policy on grazing, adopted in September, 2000, satisfactorily addresses these issues.

We have presented to you our opinions on these ballot issues. While we hope we will be successful in our attempts to persuade, the most important thing we ask of you is to VOTE! Make your voice heard in this election!

Sierra Club
Environmental Justice Committee
715 South Broadway Avenue
Urbana, IL 61801

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT AND REQUEST FOR NOMINATIONS

The Environmental Justice Committee is seeking nominations to fill one vacancy as soon as possible. Appointments to the Committee are made by the Environmental Quality Strategy Team (EQST), based on nominations and interviews with prospective candidates. Interviews are typically conducted by phone. Interviewers will represent EQST, the Committee, and current EJ Program staff.

Service on the EJ Committee requires a serious commitment of time and energy. Activists who are already over-committed, as many of our best leaders are, will have to give up some of their current commitments in order to serve effectively as a Committee member. Nominees must be current Sierra Club members.

If you are interested in submitting your name or someone else's for consideration, please read and follow the instructions completely. Failure to do so is likely to result in rejection of incomplete or inadequate nominations. Please do not submit someone else's name unless and until you have discussed the matter with the nominee and he/she has agreed to serve if selected, and you have obtained all of the requested information to submit with the nomination.

NOTE: We are especially interested in candidates with experience, expertise, and/or a strong interest in the following areas: critical review and analysis of technical documents in a variety of fields, campaign development, and network building. Particular skills in writing and "watchdogging" are appreciated.

Selection of a new committee member will be based on several criteria, including areas of interest and/or expertise; location; a willingness to make a serious commitment to create an integrated program of environmental justice at the national level; remain active on the committee for at least two years; communicate effectively through traditional means, email, and regular conference calls; and work independently while remaining in contact with the committee for guidance and consent. Please see page 13 for more information regarding the application process.