



Word from Group Co-chair

Abengoa's Vista Ridge pipeline - green or greenwash?

Spain-based Abengoa is the Vista Ridge project partner responsible for building and operating the wells, pumping stations, pipeline, and filtration

plants to deliver 50,000 acre feet of water to SAWS for 30 years. As a key partner, how much do we know about Abengoa and its plans for Vista Ridge?

Even before the plan went to City Council for approval, Abengoa had issued €500 million in "Climate Bonds" on September 25, 2014, and reported that about 20% of it was for Vista Ridge and Mexico's Zapotillo-Leon water development projects (see globalwaterintel.com/news/2014/39/water-projects-benefit-abengoas-green-bonds.html).

Climate Bonds, also called Green Bonds, were just introduced in 2014. Developed and promoted by Ceres, the bonds are designed to assure private and institutional investors that their investment supports businesses whose products and services are certified as meeting certain environmental, social and governmental global standards.

Although Ceres Principles were developed in 1989 and beefed up in 2010 as Ceres Roadmap, there are still no specific standards for water infrastructure projects. This is especially worrisome because, as the AltEnergy stock advisory (and others) cautions, water development projects are especially complex for green bonds because they can have bad, conflicting social and environmental outcomes (see altenergystocks.com/archives/2014/06).

This has been true of other Abengoa water projects. One was Abengoa's involvement in the 1999-2000 Cochabamba Water War, aka the Bolivia's Water War. Abengoa was guaranteed 15% annual ROI in for development of this \$2.4 billion water/wastewater/power project in one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere. A wave of popular demonstrations against the project resulted in the government cancelling it.

The Zapotillo-Leon project is also highly controversial, with many of the same concerns as Vista Ridge. It has considerable institutional and professional opposition centered in El Observatorio de Agua, a Jalisco State Government-formed water advisory committee (verdebandera.com.mx/en-jalisco-la-guerra-por-el-agua-comenzaron-hostilidades and cronicadesociales.org/tag/el-zapotillo).

While a Climate Bonds Expert Working Group just met for the first time in November 2014 to develop the criteria to back up climate bonds-certified water

investments, Abengoa seems to have already budgeted, planned, and raised green funds for Vista Ridge without specific criteria to assess the environmental integrity of the bonds or project.

How will Abengoa and its subcontractors (such as Pape Dawson, et al.) adhere to principles such as:

- How will the biosphere be protected?
- How will the release of any substance that may cause environmental damage to the air, water, or the earth or its inhabitants be minimized?
- How will natural resource use be sustainable, such as in land use, transportation, equipment, and materials?
- How will wastes be reduced and recycled?
- How will energy conservation, use of clean energy, and net zero carbon goals be assured?
- How will the advice and counsel of persons in communities affected by this project be sought and the public informed?
- How will management commitment to these principles and best practices be assured?

Because Vista Ridge will mine groundwater to support senselessly explosive growth and urban sprawl, it is destined to produce a "bad, conflicting outcome." Also, Abengoa, by selling itself as a green company and raising project funds through green bonds, is ethically obligated to live up to these commitments. It will take concerted efforts to assure this. Please take time to let Abengoa (catie.romero@abengoa.com) know you want answers to these questions.

-Margaret Day, Executive Committee Co-Chair

Alamo Group Events

For updates on all events check the Alamo Group website, alamosierraclub.org.

EcoCentro programs

Third Tuesday each month, 6:30 pm at EcoCentro, San Antonio College, 1802 N. Main, at the northeast corner with Locust St. Free and open to the public.

Lion's Field programs

Fourth Wednesday each month, 6:30 pm, at the Lion's Field Adult Center, 2809 Broadway at Mulberry. Free and open to the public. Service by bus routes 9, 10 and 14.

Event Schedule

February 17 Tuesday

EcoCentro, San Antonio College, Topic: *Learn about commuter rail between San Antonio and Austin.*

Joe Black, Rail Manager of the Lone Star Rail District, will provide an update on progress of the LSTAR Commuter Rail between SA and Austin. It will utilize the

General meetings venue change

No longer at the Witte Museum due to increased charges. Now at EcoCentro, see above.

Do we have your e-mail addr?

This newsletter will be sent by e-mail only, and accessible on the group website, beginning next year. See *About This Newsletter* on page 4.

Union Pacific track and make stops in San Marcos and New Braunfels. Progress is being made in Austin to move the project forward. San Antonio needs to become aware of this new future commuter service from San Antonio to Austin.

February 25 Wednesday

Lion's Field, topic: *Images of the West*

Gary and Michelle Krysztopik have been traveling in the west and will present images of creative sustainable ideas that they spotted plus new design concepts. They also have interesting images of changes to landscape including extreme weather events.

News and Contributions

Alamo Group Conservation Activities

Water

SAWS is restructuring its water rates, in part to pay for Vista Ridge. We remain very concerned about SAWS plans to develop Vista Ridge pipeline to bring water 140 miles to supply more suburban growth around SA. We may already be seeing a consequence of this anticipated new water source. The 1/8 cent sales tax for Edwards Aquifer Purchase Program, which has raised over \$350 million for purchase of lands over the Aquifer, must be renewed every five years since starting 2000. This year its renewal is threatened by short sighted interests who think "enough" has been done, and the money is needed elsewhere.

Endangered Species

The city and county are asking for an "incidental taking permit" from Fish & Wildlife Service to allow for "incidental" destruction of endangered species habitat. This is a grave threat to golden cheek warbler and others, and would encourage still more sprawl around SA.

Air Quality

EPA has proposed to lower ozone standards from 75 ppb, to somewhere 60-70 ppb. Lone Star Chapter and Alamo Group are working to support lower standards to improve air quality and health, while TCEQ and industry say of course that these standards are too costly.

Transport sprawl

We support smart growth, including infill redevelopment within Loop 410, walkable neighborhoods, safe biking, and effective public transit. We are

monitoring city Comprehensive Plan work. We are working with VIA to further transit options. We are supportive in principle of Lone Star Rail District plans for passenger rail service between SA and Austin. We are concerned about plans to expand Hwy 281 north of Loop 1604. There is strong evidence that adding freeway lanes never relieves congestion and encourages more sprawl.

Other issues

Including efforts to ban disposable plastic bags, ban tar sealants on roadways, improve cement plant operations, reduce emissions from Eagle Ford, etc. WE NEED YOUR HELP! Please contact the Executive Committee if you can jump in, see the box on page 4.

-Terry Burns, Executive Committee Co-Chair

Lone Star Chapter Report

Director Walker resigned late 2014 to take another job. Our interim director is Reggie James, who has extensive experience with Consumers Union. A search is on for a new long term Executive Director, and hope is this will be completed by June.

Cyrus Reed is Conservation Director and will be our chief lobbyist during this session.

Legislative Priorities Include:

- Monitoring water management post approval of the state water plan.
- Resisting efforts to bring high level nuclear waste from around the country into Texas.
- Improving fracking and oil & gas impacts on the environment.
- Maintaining the public's access to rulemaking. The State Office of Accessible Hearing is in "sunset" and there are efforts to restrict the contested case hearing process whereby affected citizens can challenge rules.
- Providing adequate funding for State Parks, eliminating diversions of dedicated tax funds.
- Protecting Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards and clean energy incentives.

Chapter Development:

LSC needs more non-tax exempt (c4) funds to support office staff and state lobbying activities. More needs to be done to encourage membership, financial support for lobbying efforts on these important issues that affect us, and building communication between Groups and Chapter.

-Terry Burns, Executive Committee Co-Chair

SA's Tree Preservation Ordinance at Risk

By Richard Alles

Governor Greg Abbott announced recently that [dismantling San Antonio's Tree Preservation Ordinance](#) is one of his top priorities. Abbott, who frequently rails against federal laws that affect Texas, wants state government to overrule San Antonio's local control over its growth and environmental health.

This will be particularly destructive in our huge,

densely populated city with air pollution, Edward's Aquifer contamination, storm water runoff and flooding problems. A uniform statewide prescription that treats the East Texas Piney Woods like the West Texas Desert will not work for San Antonio.

According to the Express-News, Abbott said: *"Now think about it — few things are more important in Texas than private property rights. Yet some cities are telling citizens that you don't own some of the things on your own property that you have bought and purchased and owned for a long time. Things like trees."*

Unfortunately, Abbott fails to understand that San Antonio's ordinance, like most others in the state, does not apply to individual homeowners and property owners, only to developers. Abbott further decries that *"Texas is being California-ized"*. Ironically, a California corporation will be one of the primary beneficiaries of his legislation.

Abbott ignores the effects of land development on surrounding property owners, which may be the biggest flaw in his argument. When trees are cut, land paved over, and hundreds of buildings erected, large amounts of pollution begin to be discharged into our air and water. The cars in a typical subdivision spew millions of pounds of air pollution annually into the air we all share.

There is a huge increase in storm water runoff that often necessitates flood control measures paid for by taxpayers. Moreover, contamination in the form of pesticides, herbicides, dog excrement, motor oil and chemicals is carried away in the runoff and ends up on other people's property or in the Edwards Aquifer, our drinking water source.

San Antonio enforces its Tree Preservation Ordinance because trees help mitigate this pollution. Abbott's plan to axe our ordinance puts the profits of developers and corporations ahead of the health of the people of San Antonio and must be stopped. I encourage you to [contact your State Legislators](#) today in opposition to Abbott's legislation.

Sustainable Economic Growth Requires Community-Wide Protection and Restoration of Eco-System Services

By Meredith McGuire, Conservation Co-Chair

The San Antonio Chamber of Commerce claims that the City's economic growth depends on SAWS acquiring water from another part of the state to supply a greatly increased population moving here to live in the huge number of new homes that developers are already proposing (mainly for the northern and western outskirts of San Antonio). That image of economic growth is utterly unsustainable, because it requires the destruction of some of our most important resources.

To have sustainable economic growth, San Antonio - as a community working for the common good - must invest in protecting, conserving, and restoring our entire eco-system, as much as possible. The bats of Bracken Cave, our beautiful Bluebonnets, and our maturing trees are all producing valuable services, loss of which would cost a lot. Much of our eco-system is invisible to us - even those of us who like to hike and garden, so it is too easy for us

to fail to recognize how important those eco-system services are.

Two largely invisible, but critical, features of San Antonio's eco-system are the Edwards Aquifer and our entire watershed (from the Hill Country to the Gulf of Mexico). And there are several eco-system services that the aquifer performs: (a) various surface features, like sink-holes, capture rainwater and funnel it through limestone formations; (b) purifying the water of some contaminants as it passes through the surface and subterranean karst formations, (c) storing the water in an underground river where it is better protected from pollutants than surface water reservoirs and rivers, (d) where the aquifer emerges through natural springs, the pools of the springs and the creeks they feed provide natural habitat for numerous aquatic and riparian species that provide additional eco-system services.

Unsustainable growth in the past - especially the last 20 years' of building dense suburban housing and commercial developments over the aquifer recharge, continuation, and transition zones - has done much irreparable damage. [See the map of these zones, with relevant creeks, at:

aquiferguardians.org/images/Aquiferlarge.gif]. The impervious cover (e.g., buildings, roads, parking lots) over hundreds of acres of surface features that previously funneled rainwater into the aquifer has reduced the aquifer's recharge capacity. Sewage from subdivisions over the aquifer has seeped into the aquifer and threatens water quality, while storm water laden with oil and other toxic contaminants works its way down creeks into the larger watershed.

There are better ways to protect our eco-system services for water sustainability:

- The City Council should promote and the voters approve re-authorization of the Edwards Aquifer Protection Program (that uses a fraction of sales tax revenues for conservation easements)
- All new development over these zones should be required to engage in most of the same conservation practices as required of ranches receiving conservation easements (e.g., only a very small percent of land surface could have impervious cover; minimal disturbance of Endangered Species habitat)
- SAWS should cease any approvals of new water service or sewage systems over the Aquifer recharge, continuation, or transition zones, and should require replacing deficient sewage systems in existing subdivisions
- All SAWS customers (including commercial customers) who use lots of water should be asked to pay extra for restoring or mitigating some of the eco-system services that have been damaged in the past
- All businesses whose impermeable-surface footprint is excessive should be required to build storm-water management features that turn that water into an asset, rather than liability, for the community
- All residents and businesses should greatly reduce their consumption of water, so the Edwards Aquifer is never drawn down faster than its natural recharge rate.

Sierra Club Membership

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

About this newsletter

Due to the high costs for this paper newsletter, beginning 2016 it will be available only by e-mail and on the website. The e-newsletters have been produced eight times annually anyway, and the paper editions only four times a year.

So if you wish to continue to receive this newsletter we must have your preferred e-mail address. Please update your info if necessary by e-mail to Loyd Cortez at lcc227@earthlink.net. Provide your name, address, and membership id if possible.

We apologize for any inconvenience this change may cause. But this will streamline our website and publishing efforts, and reduce administrative costs and save trees.

Thanks!

...To SA Offset Printing, Inc. 4115 Gardendale, San Antonio, 692-9166 for our nominal newsletter cost.

Food for thought

The snake kills by squeezing very slowly. This is how the civilized world slowly, slowly pushes into the forest and takes away the world that used to be.

-James Cameron

Alamo Group of the Sierra Club
P.O. Box 6443
San Antonio, Texas 78209

PERIODICAL



Alamo Group of the Sierra Club

Website: alamosierraclub.org

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

Executive Committee Officers and Members

Phone area codes are 210 unless noted
Co-Chairs: Margaret (Peggy) Day 829-5632,
Terry Burns 739-2472
Vice-chairperson Dave Wells 271-0640
Secretary Libby Day 602-568-0308
Treasurer Dave Wells 271-0640
Loyd Cortez 674-9489
Dan Cancilla 364-6539
Lili Gonzales 287-6712
Gay Wright 343-0222

Administrative Contacts

Programs: Barbara McMillin 734-4170
Publicity: Lili Gonzales 287-6712
Website: Richard Alles 494-2088
Fundraising, Membership, Mailings open
Newsletter editor
Kevin Hartley khartley@windstream.net

Committee Contacts

Outings Chair: Jerry Morrissey 382-2614
Inner City Outings (ICO):
Anne Pearson 408-6321
Political: Dave Wells 271-0640

Conservation Contacts

Conservation Co-chairs: Meredith McGuire
830-980-4390, Terry Burns 739-2472
Green Buildings: John Hertz 413-4100
Education: Peggy Day 829-5632
Fluoride Issues: L. Van Coppenolle 492-4620
Organic Gardening: Dave Klar 485-6880
Recycling: Margaret Day 829-5632
Tree Conservation: Richard Alles 494-2088
Transportation: Barbara McMillin 734-4170
Water Issues: George Rice 737-6180
Climate Change: Mobi Warren 496-4942
Drought: Alyssa Burgin 381-4021
Endangered Species: Mobi Warren 496-4942

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US Congresspersons

Rep. Lamar Smith 821-5024
Rep. Joaquin Castro 684-6896
Rep. Henry Cuellar 271-2551
Rep. Pete Gallego 512-463-0566
Rep. Lloyd Doggett 866-916-5921

Mayor

Ivy Taylor 207-7060

City Council

E-mail to district[n]@sanantonio.gov

Dist 1: Roberto Treviño
Dist 2: Alan Warrick
Dist 3: Rebecca J. Viagran
Dist 4: Rey Saldana
Dist 5: Shirley Gonzales
Dist 6: Ray Lopez
Dist 7: Cris Medina
Dist 8: Ron Nirenberg
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