



**SIERRA
CLUB**
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Alamo Group of the Sierra Club Newsletter

The Alamo Sierran **November 2015, Vol 49 #9**

Word from the Chair

Update on SAWS

The city's Water Policy Study was leaked in draft form to the media. The final report, after its lead author Dr. Calvin Finch was removed, is now expected the first week of November, with Council discussion November 12, and vote November 19. The 2 month public review process originally set by Manager Sculley has been reduced to 2 weeks. Despite all our criticism of Vista Ridge as an unnecessary \$3.4 B boondoggle to sate the thirst of developers, Council still appears ready to vote in support of cumulative 50% rate increases for SAWS customers over the next few years. We urge lots of public outcry about this before the Council votes.

We do hope for some good to come from the Water Policy Study, which makes many good points, at least in its current leaked draft form. It emphasizes issues important to our water security that we have raised for years: the risk of contamination to the Edwards Aquifer from the continued sprawl occurring over the recharge zone. It also emphasizes the contamination risks of using coal tar sealants on our roads and parking lots, which have been banned in Austin, but seen no action by Council here.

Update on Air Quality

City of San Antonio and AACOG do appear ready finally to take some actions to improve our deteriorating air. The new ozone standard is lowered to 70 ppb, from the previous 75 ppb. 70 may still draw lawsuits from Texas and the business community as too expensive. Most environmental and public health organizations hoped for a standard of no higher than 65, and preferably 60, to improve the health of our children, elderly, and those who work outside or have respiratory illnesses like asthma. San Antonio is looking at an anti-idling ordinance to limit emissions from vehicles, and also at electrifying its own vehicle fleet. Vehicle smog inspections may also be initiated, as well as high occupancy vehicle lanes and ways to encourage more public transit. Our local cement and gravel industry is one of the largest in the country, and a major emitter of ozone forming pollutants (as well as particulates that are also a health risk). We are also urging CPS to close its Deely coal plant earlier than the scheduled 2018. San Antonio will no doubt be declared in "non-attainment" for ozone by EPA, and required to take action to clean up our now dirty air.

By Terry Burns, Executive Committee Co-chair

Alamo Group Events

For updates on all events check the Alamo Group website, sierraclub.org/texas/alamo, under *Get Involved*.

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. [Here's our web page](#) with map showing EcoCentro.

Lion's Field programs

Usually 4th Wednesday each month. But...

October 28th is canceled due to the important Vista Ridge topic at the city council meeting same evening (see below).

November and December will not be held due to the holidays. See you in January!

Speak out about Vista Ridge!

Prior to the City Council vote on VR November 19 there are Citizens to be Heard (CTBH) sessions, below. Have a look at the revised water policy study, which when available there will be a link for at sierraclub.org/texas/alamo#speak. Check here for event updates also.

CTBH sessions at the San Antonio City Council meetings, 6 pm, Council Chamber, Municipal Plaza Bldg., 114 W Commerce (entrance on Main Plaza, just to the right of San Fernando Cathedral).

Oct 28th Wednesday, CTBH

Nov 4th Wednesday, CTBH

Nov 10th noon, in front of City Hall: rally/demonstration with people against VR from San Antonio, the Hill Country, and other counties to be affected by the pipeline and pumping.

Nov 11th Wednesday, CTBH

Nov 12th Thursday 6 pm, City Council A Session, on the Water Policy Study

Nov 18th Wednesday, CTBH

To register to speak, sign up in advance on the "[Citizens to be Heard](#)" webpage (only between 8 am and 5 pm), or in person between 5 and 6 pm in the foyer of the Council Chamber. You may also want to review the "[Appearing Before Council](#)" page.

Tell the City Council

[Click here](#) to tell City Council you oppose SAWS' proposed rate structure and the Vista Ridge pipeline.

Event Schedule

November 17 Tuesday

At EcoCentro: *Questions about the Vista Ridge Water Pipeline Plan*, led by Jim Smyle.

It is a good idea to ask questions from all angles when it comes to expensive projects. Was enough information presented to the City Council? Can Abengoa Vista Ridge LLC truly provide water to cover bonds issued, or will risks of water allocation lead to conflicts in future? Can these actually be resolved? How will calculating water savings from conservation or adding more brackish water desalination add to our knowledge? Hear about the questions and the answers. Weigh the options.

News and Contributions

Moms Clean Air Force

There's a very well done website about fighting for clean air, momscleanairforce.org. Their mantra is *Fighting for Our Kids' Health*. You can join the force by [signing up](#). Over ½ million already have.

Environmental group opposes state water grid

...Is the title of an [article in the El Paso Times](#) September 20th. The article says "The state's largest environmental group is voicing strong opposition to a proposed study of a state water grid — a network that would distribute water across the vast and often dry expanses of the Lone Star State.". That environmental group is the Lone Star Chapter of Sierra Club.

The proposed study would include evaluation of options for re-distribution of water from east towards west Texas. Instead, Ken Kramer, water resources chairman of the Lone Star Chapter says, "the concept of a water grid sounds eerily like a hugely expensive water-importation scheme that voters narrowly rejected 46 years ago. ... Instead of examining a statewide system that would import water from faraway places the way Los Angeles does ... the state should study how regions can better conserve the water they have."

Lone Star Chapter Blog

Mom's Clean Air Force and the EL Paso Times info above came to our attention via the [blog page](#) at our state website, sierraclub.org/texas. There are a raft of interesting short articles on a wide range of topics. Check it out!

Heard of this national park?

By Kevin Hartley

The Nature Conservancy's website has an article [10 Great National Parks You've Never Heard Of](#). One of these is Great Sand Dunes, in southeast Colorado, on the west side and south end of the Sangre de Cristo range. Just a long day's drive from central Texas.

I stopped here for a couple days on my way back from western Colorado in early October. Here are amazing dunes, among the tallest in the world, with the Sangre de Cristos as a backdrop. One dune is 750' tall.

The dunes are very photogenic, as you can see from my pictures. Very hot in the summer, they are great the rest of the year, though can still burn bare feet afternoons. If you have big sandals and aren't too heavy you can often walk the dunes on invisible crusts without breaking through, though it is usually 2 steps forward/1 back on the steeper slopes.

There are great photo ops and easy hiking in the course of Medano Creek, which is between the dunes and the campground/visitor center. Here is an [NPS web page](#) on the creek and [another](#) on the hydrology of the area.

Don't get caught far into the dunes after sundown, as then can't see whether you are sliding into 200' holes between dunes you must climb out of. Otherwise easy traverses between dunes are often possible.

The national park includes a large preserve area to the northeast, up to the crest of the Sangre de Cristo



Great Sand Dunes, southwest corner. The rabbitbrush, aka chamisa, flowers Sept-Oct and so is quite spectacular this late afternoon. Early Oct 2015.

range. The rest of the range is included in Rio Grande National Forest.

The Nature Conservancy's [Zapata Ranch](#) preserve is to the south; there is a 1 mi trail, ranger led tours, and great views. To the west and south there are three national wildlife refuges, of which [Baca](#) is the largest. To the southwest is [San Luis Lakes State Park and Wildlife Area](#). Together these entities protect a big section of the San Luis Valley, the southern end of which is included in the Rio Grande River headwaters. Wikipedia has an [article](#) on the San Luis Valley.

If you wish to visit, the national park campground has two loops, one of which is reservable at [recreation.gov](#). The state park has campsites. There are motels and restaurants in Alamosa, just to the southwest.



Great Sand Dunes, southeast corner. From the course of Medano Creek, with Mt Herard (13,300'), and Medano Pass to the right. Early May 2011. Zebulon Pike's 1807 expedition crossed Medano Pass Jan 27th and was taken captive by the Spanish.

About this newsletter

Due to the cost of paper copies for this newsletter, beginning 2016 it will be available only by e-mail and on the website; so we'll need your e-mail address please. You can update your info if necessary by e-mail to Loyd Cortez at lcc227@earthlink.net. Provide your name, address, and membership id if possible.



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. Our national website: sierraclub.org.

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Sierra Club Membership

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

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Rep. Will Hurd 202-225-4511
Rep. Lloyd Doggett 866-916-5921

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Dist 8: Ron Nirenberg
Dist 9: Joe Krier
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