



# THE ALAMO SIERRAN

THE ALAMO GROUP OF THE SIERRA CLUB NEWSLETTER - VOL. 40 No. 4 APR 2006

## Smith On Renewables

Ethanol and biodiesel can significantly reduce carbon dioxide, other greenhouse gasses, and our dependence on foreign oil, said Russell E. Smith March 21 to a large Alamo Group audience.

Smith, speaking on "Renewable Energy: Its State of Development in Texas," is the Executive Director of the Texas Renewable Energy Industries Association, based in Austin. The TREIA was formed in 1985 because the Texas Solar Energy Society, which Smith had previously directed, could not be as political as it needed to be.

Smith said there are always trade-offs. Biodiesel, which has a lot of positive attributes, increases nitrogen oxide in the atmosphere. Both biodiesel and ethanol are produced by Archer Daniels Midland, a mega-corporation that makes some environmentalists uncomfortable.

Smith pointed out that ethanol has few other drawbacks. Contrary to claims by some, it produces more energy than it takes to produce it. Smith labeled it "a net winner environmentally." He called for a federal government mandate that all new vehicles be engineered for flex-fuel and be able to use E-85 fuel (a gasoline blend that is 85% ethanol)

Addressing solar, wind and geothermal, Smith stated that while photovoltaics are still 4 to 5 times as expensive as current electricity sources, the costs are coming down. And solar water heating is the most effective solar technology around.

As for wind, Smith recommended against individual windmills in San Antonio as there is almost no wind

*Continued on page 2*

*Continued on page 2*

## Big Bend Ranch State Natural Area Backpack

Too early on Friday, February 17, five bleary eyed backpackers and two leaders began their long trip to Big Bend Ranch. The state natural area is less visited than the national park and lies to the west near Lajitas. After a lunch stop in Alpine, we arrived at the park, procured our permits, and traveled to the campground to set up camp for the night. A side hike to Closed Canyon was next on the agenda. The very narrow canyon provides drainage to the Rio Grande during rains and is an excellent example of water erosion on the rock structure. Dinner that night consisted of the usual pot luck, where everyone brings a dish to be shared.

Saturday morning arrived with temperatures in the low 40's as we all crawled out of our tents and started preparing our packs for the adventure ahead. After breakfast we headed for the east Rancherías Loop Trailhead and the start of our backpacking adventure. The trail headed north up an arroyo. Crossing a saddle, we descended into Acebuches Canyon, where lunch was enjoyed in a cottonwood grove fed by a seep spring, a welcome relief from the now high 60 degree temperature. We hiked on and crossed over into Panther Canyon, coming upon an abandoned homestead from the early 1900's. We camped nearby close to a small spring fed stream.

Sunday morning greeted us with temperatures in the 30's as we hiked up to the back of the canyon past an old shelter cave that was used by Indians and later by pastores (goat herders). At the top we intersected an old wagon trail that ran between Polvo

*Continued on page 2*

## WORD from the Chair by Tom Dukes

And now for something completely different. - Monty Python

New circumstances demand new solutions. Our February general meeting explored the challenge of Peak Oil, that inevitable day when, sooner or later, world oil production will max out, then slowly and inexorably decline. One predicted result will be the end of suburbia as we know it. As expensive gasoline makes private vehicles more costly to operate, living close to work and using efficient public transit will become increasingly popular choices. Distant homes and long commutes will be a losing proposition. Sierrans, as is usually the case, are way ahead of the curve on this issue.

Recently I attended several meetings to address our city's proposed toll roads, starting with U.S. 281, the highway lobby's "foot in the door" toll project. What amazes me about this unpopular beast is the apparent absence of consideration by the Texas Department of Transportation, (TxDOT), for any alternatives that do not merely prolong the status quo. Mass transit, light rail, or, at the very least, lots of carpooling in high occupancy vehicle lanes are vital to the future of San Antonio in general and the 281 corridor in particular. Yet all are roundly and soundly ignored in the rush to toll and

General Meeting: 7:00 P.M., 3rd Tuesday each month at the Witte Museum located at 3801 Broadway just south of Hildebrand Ave. Socializing begins at 6:45, program at 7 P.M.

## April 18, 2006: Solar Cooking by Monica Salyer of Texas Solar Cookers.

Learn to cook with the Sun outdoors from the experts. See some of the solar ovens available.

## May 16, 2006: The Headwaters Project.

The Incarnate Word Community presents a new project for the ecological restoration of the San Antonio River Headwaters area in the Olmos Basin.

*Word from Chair Continued*

pave. TxDOT's ribbons of ill-advised asphalt are a misguided, costly exercise in failing to plan ahead. Studies have repeatedly proven that more and wider roads only encourage more sprawl, more air pollution, longer commutes, and the destruction of trees and open space by retail development up and down the access roads. Bye bye, scenic hill country. Hello, strip center hell.

It's time for a new solution. I do not oppose toll roads simply because they are toll roads. My concern is that tolls will forever steal money from better options as they encourage pollution and sprawl. Tolls are merely the latest national fad for funding unnecessary highway construction. Once created, toll roads become self-feeding monsters, skimming profits for their operators while politicians moan that there simply isn't enough money available to fund intelligent alternatives. Stop the madness, TxDot. Plan ahead. It's time for something completely different.

*Renewables Continued*

here. But the state of Texas as a whole is well positioned to beat out California as the country's number one wind energy producer. It ranks number two in the U.S., after North Dakota, in wind capacity, but is better favored than North Dakota in terms of getting the energy to where it is needed. He pointed out that Texas has its own electrical grid, independent of the country's other two grids, east and west of the Rockies.

Geothermal heat pumps, said Smith, are efficient, smart, and they ultimately pay for themselves. Geothermal in Texas is different from geothermal in California. We can use lower temperatures and old oil wells to great advantage.

Smith summed up by saying that renewable energy can be a significant part of the solution to global warming and our dependence on foreign oil, but he warned of the difficulty of keeping up with ever increasing demands for energy, particularly with the exponential growth of the Chinese and Indian economies. - Loretta Van Copenolle

*Big Bend Ranch Continued*

(now Redford) and Lajitas. The rest of the day would be spent hiking along the wagon trail, enjoying the views of distant peaks. Our last campsite had an excellent view out over the canyon towards the Rio Grande.

On Monday the temperatures were warmer and the sky was blue. Hiking up to Mesa De Guale, we followed an old wagon trail that leads out to the river. Finally, we arrived at the trailhead where we had left one of our cars. In three days on the trail we had not seen any other hikers, providing us with a true wilderness experience. We closed with a Mexican dinner in Alpine, toasting another successful Sierra Club backpack. - Terry Platt

***VOTE: Sierra Club National Election***

Ballots for the Board of Directors election are due April 24. Please review the bios and send in your ballot. If you have lost your ballot, or want to vote online, go to <http://www.sierraclub.org/bod/2006election/> for more information.

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***Kennedy Addresses Our Environmental Destiny***

On March 1, Robert Kennedy Jr. spoke before an attentive and appreciative audience at San Antonio College's McAllister Auditorium. His topic was "Our Environmental Destiny," and his inspiring presentation ranged across a broad swath of interconnected issues. Kennedy was eloquent, passionate, and scathing of the way that corporate profiteers have infiltrated the very core of our governing bodies to the lasting detriment of our democracy, our resources, our communities and our futures. Delivered with barely a glance at his printed text, it was an inspiring call to action for neophytes to the environmental cause, and an invigorating reminder for veteran activists of why we do what we do. The auditorium was packed, and even the overflow area was crowded, proving that, yes, Virginia, San Antonio does have many concerned and alert citizens.

At least a score of Sierrans were present. Hector Gonzalez, Dave Klar,

*Continued on page 3*

***The Headwaters Project Symposium***

The Blue Hole — Preserving the Headwaters of the San Antonio River  
UIW International Conference Center (ICC), April 22, 2006, 8:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

On Earth Day celebrate the recent establishment of "The Headwaters Coalition," a newly created collaboration between the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, the University of the Incarnate Word, and the San Antonio community. The goal of the Coalition is to set aside the remaining green space on the UIW campus as a conservation easement, thus preserving it for future generations. Speakers will cover topics such as conservation ecology, geology, archaeology, the spiritual and ethical issues related to the land, and the rich Native American history associated with this priceless resource on the UIW campus.

Lunch will be provided. Hiking tours with varying degrees of difficulty will be available at the conclusion of the workshop. Make sure you wear comfortable clothing.

***The Purging of Truth***

60 Minutes' March 19 broadcast of a segment on global warming sheds much light on exactly why there is almost no information on the subject released to the public by the media. The segment, entitled "Rewriting the Science," was largely the testimony of James E. Hansen on how the Bush White House is muzzling him. During 60 Minutes, correspondent Scott Pelley's interview with Hansen, a representative from the government was required to be present, and she taped the interview. Hansen was earlier denied an interview with NPR because it was deemed "the most liberal media in America."

Who is Hansen? Arguably the world's most prominent expert on global warming, Hansen is director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies. For over 30 years he has been studying the earth and skies. And what does Hansen have to say that the Bush administration doesn't want us to

*Continued on page 3*

## OUTINGS

NOTE: No dogs, radios, recreational drugs, or unescorted children are allowed on Sierra Club outings. Public consumption of alcohol is prohibited during scheduled activities. Outings are usually suitable for the whole family; check with the leaders about details and to verify dates. All fees will go fully to offset trip and administrative costs and to support the conservation efforts of the Alamo Group.

### MAY 6-7, SAT-SUN: DEVILS RIVER STATE NATURAL AREA CAR CAMPING

Experience the night skies and bright stars of West Texas at this unique State Natural Area. We'll leave early Saturday morning for this one night camping trip. We'll hike to the river and have a potluck dinner Saturday night. The sites are primitive, but you can bring the kitchen sink in your car. Leader: Marsha Meredith, 675-4097 or [marshal205@sbcglobal.net](mailto:marshal205@sbcglobal.net); and Fred Wills, 673-9566 or [user261695@aol.com](mailto:user261695@aol.com).

## GCSNA

APRIL 29, 2006: NATIVE PLANTS OF GOVERNMENT  
CANYON

Mention Spring in Texas and most people think of our state flower, the bluebonnet. However, they are just one of the many varied and wonderful native plants that appear this time of year. Come to Government Canyon State Natural Area on April 29, 2006 from 9:00 a.m. until Noon and follow Master Naturalist Lottie Millsaps with nose to the ground, identifying native plants big and small. This event is open to people 18 years of age and older, and is limited to 25 participants. A minimum suggested donation of \$10.00 covers your entry fee and benefits the Friends of Government Canyon. Reservations are required and may be made no earlier than 12 days prior to the event, beginning at 7:30 a.m. April 17, 2006. To make your reservation, or to get more information, email [educmte@hotmail.com](mailto:educmte@hotmail.com) or call (210) 688-9055. Please include name, email address/telephone # for each reservation.

### GCSNA SATURDAY HIKE

Each Saturday there is a guided hike at GCSNA. All hikes begin at the rainwater harvesting tower at 8:30. Hikes are limited to the first 10 people who show up. Length and focus of hikes will vary. Participants should bring plenty of water and wear boots, or sturdy hiking shoes. These hikes are subject to cancellation; call to confirm (210) 688-9055.

### *Destiny Continued*

Jerry Morrissey, and Tom Dukes staffed a Sierra Club information table and distributed several hundred recruitment cards describing our organization and its goals. Barbara McMillin and Loretta Van Coppenolle took the initiative to print and distribute invitations to our next general meeting at the Witte. All in all, it was an inspirational and invigorating experience.

We close with a quote from Mr. Kennedy's speech, something that every person should take to heart. It is a line we can use whenever the uninformed accuse us of being radical, of selfishly ignoring humans for the sake of a few salamanders, fish, or trees: "THERE IS NOTHING RADICAL ABOUT CLEAN AIR AND CLEAN WATER FOR OUR CHILDREN."

### *Purging Continued*

hear? Well, he says that not only is global warming occurring, it is due mainly to man's activities. Asked if natural changes may be greatly responsible for warming, Hansen answered, "The speed of the natural changes is now dwarfed by the changes that humans are making to the atmosphere and to the surface."

Hansen gives the planet another ten years before we reach the "tipping point," the point at which climate change becomes unstoppable. Identified during the segment was Phil Cooney, a former oil industry lobbyist who became Bush's Chief-of-Staff of the Council on Environmental Quality. Cooney, a non-scientist, edited and re-wrote scientific texts to tone down their urgency. A line in a climate report, for example, that said, "earth is undergoing rapid change" was changed in Cooney's own writing to "may be undergoing change." Last June Cooney quit his White House employment and went back to work for the oil industry.

For a copy of the "Rewriting the Science" text go to <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/03/17/60minutes/main1415985.shtml> The text of an earlier 60 Minutes broadcast, "A Global Warning," is available at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/02/16/60minutes/main1323169.shtml>

### *Victory for Caddo Lake Wildlife Refuge*

Thanks to widespread opposition from the public, the Commissioners Court of Harrison County in northeast Texas voted on February 28 against a plan to build an industrial park on land intended for the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

Acting on behalf of a group of private developers, last September Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison put plans on hold to protect the important wildlife habitat found in Caddo Lake's forests and wetlands.

Over a thousand Texans contacted Senator Hutchison and asked her to reverse her stance, stop the development plans, and protect the Refuge.

In response, Sen. Hutchison said she would defer to the local community to decide the fate of the Refuge. The Harrison County Commissioners Court then voted to ask Sen. Hutchison to lift her hold on plans to protect the Refuge, allowing this Texas treasure to be preserved.

This illustrates once again why it is so important for each of us to write, call, and act on behalf of the environment. Thank you for all of your efforts! It's really paying off.

### *Volunteer Opportunities*

Earth Day, April 22, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., Woodlawn Lake; contact Loyd Cortez at 674-9489 or [loyd.cortez@earthlink.net](mailto:loyd.cortez@earthlink.net)

Solar Fest, June 17 9 a.m. - 5 p.m., Maverick Park

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# MEETING DATES AND CONTACT INFO

General Meeting: ..... 3rd Tuesday 7 p.m. .... Tom Dukes ..... 828-3721  
 Executive Committee: ..... 4th Monday, 7 p.m. .... Tom Dukes ..... 828-3721  
 Newsletter Mail Party: ..... 2nd Tuesday, 7 p.m. .... Jim Stewart ..... 692-0727  
 Outings Committee Meeting: ..... 2nd Tuesday every 2 months, 7 p.m. .... Lee Dodge ..... 647-0216  
 Conservation Committee Meeting: ..... 4th Thursday, 7 p.m. .... David Klar ..... 495-2148

## ALAMO GROUP OF THE SIERRA CLUB

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OFFICERS & MEMBERS

Tom Dukes ..... Chair Person ..... 828-3721  
 Loyd Cortez ..... Vice Chair ..... 674-9489  
 Hector Gonzalez ..... Treasurer ..... 226-6069  
 Mary Gallatin DiGiacomo .. Secretary ..... 244-3239  
 Jerry Morrisey ..... 497-5470  
 Eloise Stoker ..... 828-0919  
 Derek Trobaugh ..... 824-7915  
 Carolyn Wells ..... 271-0640  
 John Westerhoff ..... 494-9475

### ADMINISTRATIVE CONTACTS

Programs ..... Eloise Stoker ..... 828-0919  
 Membership ..... Loyd Cortez ..... 674-9489  
 Publicity ..... Michele Petty ..... 490-4133  
 Mailings ..... Jim Stewart ..... 692-0727  
 Newsletter ..... Marsha Meredith ..... 675-4097  
 Website ..... Loyd Cortez ..... 674-9489

### COMMITTEE CONTACTS

Outings Chair ..... Lee Dodge ..... 647-0216  
 Political Committee ..... Beck Steiner ..... 342-6694  
 Community Outreach ... Carolyn Wells ..... 271-0640

### CONSERVATION CONTACTS

Conservation Chair ..... Dave Klar ..... 495-2148  
 Co-Chair ..... Derek Trobaugh ..... 824-7915  
 Endangered Species ..... Fred Wills ..... 673-9566  
 Fluoridation ..... L. Van Coppenolle ..... 492-4620  
 Genetically Modified Organisms Michele Petty 490-4133  
 Organic Gardening ..... Dave Klar ..... 495-2148  
 Recycling ..... L. Van Coppenolle ..... 492-4620  
 Tree Conservation ..... Richard Alles ..... 494-2088  
 Water Issues ..... Jerry Morrisey ..... 497-5470  
 Population ..... John Westerhoff ..... 494-9475

### U.S. CONGRESSPERSONS

Charlie Gonzalez (210) 472-6195  
 Lamar Smith (210) 821-5024  
 Henry Cuellar (210) 271-2851  
 Henry Bonilla (210) 697-9055

### CITY COUNCIL

Mayor: Phil Hardberger; 207-7060; mayor@sanantonio.gov  
 Distric 1: Roger Flores Jr.; 207-7279; district1@sanantonio.gov  
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 Distric 3: Roland Gutierrez; 207-7064; district3@sanantonio.gov  
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 Distric 5: Patti Radle; 207-7043; district5@sanantonio.gov  
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Contributions, gifts and dues to the Sierra Club are not tax deductible; they support our effective, citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts. Your dues include \$7.50 for a subscription to *Sierra* magazine and \$1.00 for your Chapter newsletter.

### MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

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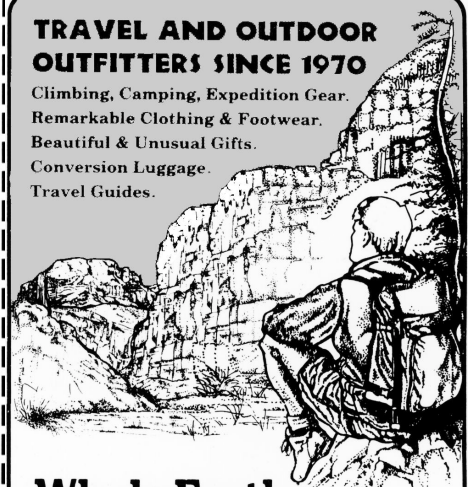
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