

May/June 2012

Austin Sierran



SIERRA
CLUB
FOUNDED 1892

Vol. 43, No. 2

Newsletter of the Austin Regional Group



Sierra Club members joined in the Lake Cleanup with Keep Austin Beautiful (Photo by Jack Graham)

ELECTION MAY 12

VOTE FOR

Brigid Shea (Mayor)

Bill Spelman (Council)

See “Various Futures” (p. 6) and
Endorsements (p. 11)

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Sierra Club General Meetings

The Austin Regional Group of the Sierra Club meets on the second Tuesday of each month, unless otherwise noted, in the north dining room of Scholz Garten, 1607 San Jacinto. Come early for happy hour and ordering eats. The nearest bus, #20, runs along Red River, two blocks away. A bike lane runs along Trinity. Free street parking is available after 5:00 and is usually free after 6:00 in the state parking garages next to, behind and across from Scholz Garten. Directions and menus at www.scholzgarten.net.

MAY 8 7:00 p.m. ULTRALIGHT HIKING ON THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL

John Mackey, Co-CEO of Whole Foods

Mackey will talk about his adventures on the Appalachian Trail and other long hikes and discuss ultralight hiking. John's most recent professional focus is re-invigorating Whole Foods Market's emphasis on healthy eating and lifestyle choices.

JUNE 12 7:00 p.m. "LIVING SPRINGS"

Karen Kocher, Austin-based media producer

Kocher will discuss new media tools that are a welcome addition to traditional documentary film for telling environmental stories. She will show some wonderful examples including her own new work-in-progress, "Living Springs," an interactive documentary about Barton Springs.

Karen works at the intersection of film and digital media. In 2009, "Zilker Trek," an innovative iPod-based scavenger hunt/nature journaling project brought new media into the hands of underserved kids at the Austin Sunshine camps. The 2006 "Austin Past and Present," a cutting-edge interactive documentary, brought the history of Austin into unlikely places, like the Austin City Hall and the baggage claim at the Austin Bergstrom International airport. Karen has been teaching interactive digital storytelling and digital post-production for the Department of Radio, Television and Film at the University of Texas in Austin since 1998.

JULY 10 7:00 p.m. COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK

Vanessa Sarria, Executive Director, CAN

AUGUST 14 7:00 p.m. TEXAS ESTUARIES

George H. Ward, Jr., Center for Research in Water Resources, UT

The *Austin Sierran* (USPS 014-956) is published six times a year by Austin Regional Group, Sierra Club, P.O. Box 4581, Austin, Tx 78767-4581. Periodicals Postage Paid at Austin, TX. POSTMASTER: send address changes to Austin Sierran, Sierra Club, P.O. Box 421041, Palm Coast, FL 32142-6417.

Circulation: The *Austin Sierran* is mailed to club members and subscribers, and distributed through various outlets. Annual Sierra Club dues are \$39, of which \$1.00 is for the *Lone Star Sierran*, the quarterly chapter newsletter, and \$7.50 is for the national *Sierra* magazine.

Address Changes: Sierra Club, P.O. Box 421041, Palm

Coast, FL 32142-6417 or email address.changes@sierraclub.org.

DO NOT SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE EDITOR

Newsletter Policy: All newsletter inquiries should be made to Jan Hullum at jrhullum@gmail.com. Submitted articles should be limited to 350 words. Longer articles may be shortened at the editor's discretion.

Deadline: all newsletter contributions must be submitted by THE 5th OF THE MONTH prior to publication. Send copy by email to jrhullum@gmail.com or mail to Jan Hullum, 2504 Pegasus Ave, Austin, TX 78757.

Congressional Update: Put the Budget "in the Green"

Rep. Lloyd Doggett

Republicans Cut Green in a Budget in the Red

At the end of March, House Republicans released their budget, and it is no surprise that it is riddled with attempts to eviscerate funding for key clean energy initiatives. I wrote about this topic last year and, unfortunately, it is the same old song this year, but worse. Not only have the Republicans proposed almost the exact same misguided policies as they did last year, they actually removed any positive statements about clean energy that were in last year's budget. In fact, acting White House budget director Jeff Zients estimates that the latest GOP budget cuts clean energy by 19 percent over the long-term and would bring decade-long cuts of \$100 billion to science, space and technology research. And it does this while continuing subsidies for Big Polluters.

Clean Energy for Our Future

As a senior member of the Budget Committee, I object to GOP efforts to turn the clock back on energy policies that promote renewable energy. Clean energy can be the engine of economic growth. Unfortunately, some Republicans in Congress are turning a serious policy debate on federal spending into just another attack on clean energy initiatives. Although we need to make tough choices and carefully scrutinize federal spending, cutting all spending for a clean energy future is no solution. Texas, in particular, is well positioned to reap the benefits of the clean energy economy. Solar resource potential in Texas is among the highest in the nation, and Texas already ranks first for installed wind capacity.

A Continued Assault on Environment and Energy Policies

This Congress began with House Republicans attempting to slash funding for the Environmental Protection Agency. Their war on the environment has continued at full throttle with this latest attempt to use the budget as a vehicle to further tie us to fuels

of the past and slash protections for our environment and public health. The Republican majority has demonstrated reckless shortsightedness as they have pushed for irresponsible and incoherent energy policies. Long-term thinking is the bedrock of wise policymaking. By focusing on the short term and willfully ignoring and misrepresenting the impacts of the choices we make today, the House Republicans are setting us on a dangerous path. Now, more than ever, we need to keep fighting for the health of our communities. We cannot become discouraged by the relentless attacks on science, and on the air we breathe and the water we drink.

Erratum: In "Wildlife Management in Texas" (April-June issue), it was Jack Woodward (not Jack Ward) who helped Maria Wells and Laurie Winnette free the ensnared deer.

Volunteers of the Month

February
CRAIG NAZOR

March
Lauren Smitherman

GREAT JOB!



Outings

In order to participate in one of the Sierra Club's outings, you will need to sign a liability waiver. If you would like to read a copy prior to the outing please use the link on our website's outings page, national's URL at <http://www.sierraclub.org/outings/chapter/forms/> or call (415) 977-5630. To facilitate the logistics of some outings, it is customary that participants make carpooling arrangements. The Sierra Club does not have insurance for carpooling arrangements and assumes no liability for them. Carpooling, ride sharing or anything similar is strictly a private arrangement among the participants. Participants assume the risks associated with this travel.

Listings below are a sample of our local outings. For a complete listing, check our Outings List on the Meetup web site: <http://www.meetup.com/Austin-Sierra-Club-Outings>. You are encouraged to obtain a free user account on [meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com), to be able to RSVP for events. Note that many events have no limits on the number of participants, whereas others have a maximum number. On some events, such as camping trips which have a limited number of campsites and incur costs, an RSVP on Meetup does not reserve you a place on the trip. In those cases it will be listed in the trip description how to contact the leader to reserve a spot.

Unless otherwise indicated, a donation of a few dollars for the operating expenses is requested on all outings.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 2 - TRAVIS AUDUBON MOONLIGHT HIKE

Meet at 7:45 p.m. at the Baker Sanctuary near Cedar Park. From Austin, go north on Hwy 183 and take the last free exit at Lakeline Mall Blvd. Go thru light and turn left at the next light onto Lakeline Blvd. Go several miles and turn left at the light on Cypress Creek. Go to the end and turn right onto Anderson Mill Rd. Go thru the light at Zeppelin and take the second left onto Lime Creek Rd. Go about 1 mile until you see the parking area next to the metal monster. No pets please. For more information call Paul at 940-5435.

SATURDAY, MAY 19 - BRIGHT LEAF HIKE

Join us at 10 a.m. for a hilly 4 mile hike with exceptional views. From the MOPAC/2222 intersection, take 2222 west 1.1 miles. Just after passing the traffic light at Mesa Drive, turn left on Creek Mountain Road. Go 0.1 mile to bottom of hill and turn right on Old Bull Creek Road. Go 0.1 mile and turn left through an unmarked gate to the parking lot. Pets not permitted in the preserve. Join us for lunch afterwards. For more info email Janis at janiss10@yahoo.com.

SUNDAY, MAY 27 - TOUR de VOLENTE BIKE RIDE

Join us at 8:30 a.m. for a moderately paced 20-mile road bike ride along the north shore area of Lake Travis near Volente (the most scenic ride in Travis County). Riders must wear a helmet, bring water, and obey all traffic laws. From Austin, go north on Highway 183 and take the last free exit at Lakeline Mall Blvd. Go through the light and turn left at the next light onto Lakeline Blvd. Go several miles and turn left at the light on Cypress Creek. Go to the end and turn right onto Anderson Mill Road. Go through the light at Zeppelin and take the second left onto Lime Creek Road. Go about 2 miles until you go almost to the bottom of the hill. The mailboxes will be on your left at Fisher Hollow near 11000 Lime Creek Road. For more info call Paul at 249-1976.

Outings

SATURDAY, JUNE 2 - BERRY SPRINGS HIKE

Join us at 8:30 a.m. at Williamson County's Berry Springs Park and Preserve for a 3.5 mile hike along Berry Creek. The park is located at 1801 County Road 152 in Georgetown. For more info email Janis at janiss10@yahoo.com

THURSDAY, JUNE 21 - KAYAKING ON LADYBIRD LAKE

Meet at 6:30 p.m. at the Texas Rowing center, http://www.texasrowingcenter.com/map_and_directions.htm (across from Austin High School) for a leisurely hour or of paddling as the sun sets over the lake. Participants must be able to swim. Rental boats available. For more info email Niles Seldon at nseldon@ix.netcom.com

JULY 13-22, 2012 - COLORADO TRIP

Join us on one of our favorite trips - seven days in the high country of Colorado - enjoying wildflowers, cool mountain air, and the smells of conifer forests. Most of our days will be spent hiking in the wilderness areas near Ouray and Telluride, such as Mt Sneffels, Uncompaghre (Big Blue), and Lizard Head. Day hikes are of varying length (3 to 15 miles round trip) and often steep (700 to 3,000 feet of elevation gain). It's best to keep a slow to moderate pace and stop to see the wildflowers and spectacular views. In addition to hiking, you will also have the chance to visit the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument, an awesome deep, dark gorge. The area also offers horseback riding, mountain biking, and whitewater river rafting (optional, at your own expense). After hiking we often go to the town of Ouray to enjoy its Victorian architecture and interesting shops, soak in the hot springs and have a drink at a local establishment.

Transportation: Starting from Austin, we drive in new 15-passenger vans, limited to 10 adults for comfort and luggage capacity. Frequent convenience stops are taken along the way.

Camping: Basecamp is at Ridgway State Park, one of Colorado's newest and most modern. Surrounded on three sides by the San Juan Mountains, it offers convenient restrooms, hot showers, and laundry facilities.

Meals: After arriving in camp, breakfast and dinner will be prepared as a group over an open stove. The fare we serve is legendary! Lunch is make-and-take-your-own (with fixings provided). We are vegetarian friendly. Campers will need to pitch in on some chores (cooking, washing dishes, etc). One night we will dine in town at a restaurant (meal extra).

Fees and Signup: A fee of \$525 covers transportation, park and camping fees, hikes, and most meals. A non-refundable deposit of \$100 is needed to reserve a place; the balance must be received by June 25. For more info, visit our website <http://texas.sierraclub.org/austin/outings.html#major>, or email trip leader Ed Crean at ejc@austin.rr.com.

Conservation Column: Various Futures and Coming Elections

SCOTT SWEARINGEN and members of the Conservation and Political Committees

There is an area in the equatorial pacific on which the weather people keep their eye. If the water warms there at a certain rate, El Nino is more likely. A different rate, La Nina. Rains for us with one, more drought with the other. The computer models are helpful, but not exact by any means. Right now, the patterns could go either way. Or neither; perhaps we will simply have a normal year. Rain? No rain? Some rain? The uncertainty breeds angst as I look at my flowers, my trees, and my (currently green) yard. Seeing a possible future and worrying about it, hoping for another one, trying to figure out ways to get to a better one.

Uncertainty and worry over possible futures are at the heart of things beyond my little yard and wonderful trees. City politics. Austin grows, as it always has. We will double in population -- again -- in the next twenty years. Since he can not utter the phrase "global warming" for fear of losing his State job in Texas, the State Climatologist tells us about our "30 year drought." If it continues? Or if maybe -- just maybe -- global warming is real? And it keeps going beyond 30 years? Either way we are talking little to no water in an area with a fast growing population. The State Supreme Court just ruled that anyone with water under his property owns that water, regardless of whether it flows downstream to people who need it. Regional planning for water will be much harder because of that ruling; a few large landowners may now pump as much water out of the aquifer as they want, for whatever reason they want, including selling it to those who used to receive it downstream for free. You used to have a well on your property? It is dry now? Sorry, but your neighbor just pumped all your water out. You will simply have to buy it from him now. Providing water to a growing population? Keeping water in an aquifer that provides life to an entire ecosystem? This is money, baby! To hell with anyone downstream. Unpleasant possible futures created by a complete lack of leadership and utter disregard for reality at the State level.

Unpleasant possible futures for our little town of Austin, too, growing like crazy. As Austin

grows, we lose creeks, water, and land to suburbanization. Five hundred new houses are built on a field over the aquifer recharge zone, 1000 new cars drive on roads that were not there a few years ago. Repeat ad infinitum, every few months. We see a possible future we do not like. We look for answers, look for leaders. Where are they? Is there a way to structure the city so that growth has fewer negative effects? Possibly. But it would have to be run by people who are constantly thinking about how to do that.

We are moving into the campaign season now, hot and heavy. A mayor and three council members are up for re-election. Our Conservation Committee talks about possible futures, and how to get there. We talk about city policy that may determine them. Our Political Committee talks about who can best help get us there -- or not. The two go together, conservation and politics. Among us there is general unease, a sense that city policy is crafted to facilitate the kind of growth that harms. Nothing new there, of course. Austinites have been dealing with that for 40 years. But you'd think we might have learned something in 40 years.

The way we do things now makes Austin less and less affordable. Roads and highways are built over the most sensitive environmental features in the region, despite the desires of our citizens and the stated positions of (some) politicians. We sense that current policies to promote "new urbanism" and "infill" miss the boat; they promote expensive housing for some, forcing many out to the very suburbs we claim to be stopping with "infill." How can that happen? As the central city becomes less affordable, people must move out to places they can afford, and then drive an hour back in on the new roads in order to play on the lake, shop downtown, visit 6th Street. National Sierra Club policy is for density and infill, but as means of reducing sprawl, not as ends in and of themselves. When Austin city policies facilitate sprawl with infrastructure placement, road building, and giveaways to various development projects, we see some very nice, but very expensive,

Conservation Column (continued)

condos pop up in the central city, while sprawl expands ever outwards. If we are just building playgrounds for the rich -- expensive downtown and university area, expensive housing in central city neighborhoods, a lake bounded by high rise buildings affordable only to those with lots of money -- what have we accomplished? Playgrounds for the rich, less water and foul air for the rest. Is that the possible future we envision?

We sense a lack of leadership in the present Mayor, an unfortunate tendency towards green platitudes instead of firm green policy. Calling Austin the Green Capital of the world doesn't make it so. We see an unfortunate willingness by some of the Council to just glide along on the current path to that unpleasant future. We see the Council approve policy that allows a racetrack to be built for the sake of vague economic promises (promises uncertain now that said track is mired in lawsuits). We see housing becoming less and less affordable for most, as electric and water rates increase. We see policies that promote water use rather than conservation and reuse: water rates set by how much water the utility can sell, rather than by how much we conserve; water infrastructure built in the wrong place for the wrong cost at the wrong time (with the attendant overrun in cost estimates).

Our endorsements reflect our discussions, our observations, our desire for possible futures. In the mayor's race, we see an incumbent whose policies promote the wrong possible future. On the other hand, we see a woman whose drive, determination, and leadership we have known for years. Brigid Shea shares our desires for a different future Austin, and we believe she has the qualities we need to help shape that future. We see in her the leadership to move us in a direction we should go, and a person who has the ideas to steer us there.

We see Council members who are really nice people, but who seem to be along for the ride to the predictable, undesirable future rather than directing us towards a better one. Our non-endorsements in those places reflect that. We endorse Bill Spelman again, as we did before.

His main opponent reflects the wrong possible future. We appreciate Spelman's unequivocal opposition to SH45, and hope he will engage in a more meaningful dialog with ASC to help shape a better environmental future for all of us. We look with interest at some of the other challengers and hope that if they win they will bring new ideas and new energy to our very pressing need for a better, more sustainable, Austin.

How do you conserve that which is best about Austin? Our land, our water, our air, our neighborhoods, our sense of who we are as a city, a people? How do we shape a community that reflects and creates the kind of place that so many love? Once again, at election season, we ask that driving question, that question of possible futures, and we look for those who will lead us toward a cleaner, healthier, more affordable, more livable future.

Austin Elections

May 12

Sierra Club Endorses

Brigid Shea
Mayor

Bill Spelman
City Council

Don't forget to vote
for a better future!

Beyond Coal: Town Hall Meeting September 11

Ian Davis

WHO:

Cyrus Reed, Sierra Club Lone Star Chapter, Conservation Director
Eva Hernandez, Sierra Club Beyond Coal Campaign, Field Manager

WHAT:

Beyond Coal Town Hall
Analyzing Austin Energy's Study on Phasing out of Fayette

WHEN:

Austin Sierra Group Regular Monthly Meeting
Tuesday, September 11
7:00 - 8:30pm

WHERE:

Scholz Garten
1607 San Jacinto Blvd, 78701

RSVP:

Click on our web site, www.AustinBeyondCoal.org
Call Ian Davis at (512) 466-6939

CYRUS REED:

Cyrus has a Ph.D. in Geography from the University of Texas at Austin, with a focus on water policy and the dispute over the Rio Grande water with Mexico. Prior to becoming conservation director, he served as Sierra Club's lobbyist on energy and air quality issues during the 2005 and 2007 legislative sessions, and also directed the Texas Center for Policy Studies, an environmental policy and advocacy organization based in Austin, for five years. He is currently working on energy issues and their impacts. Cyrus has also worked as a journalist and has spent considerable time in Mexico, Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Cyrus is married and has two sons and a daughter.

EVA HERNANDEZ:

Eva Hernandez is the Texas Organizing Manager for Sierra Club, working statewide on energy issues to move away from dirty energy and towards renewable energy and energy efficiency in Texas. Eva spent her formative years in Kansas and attended University of Kansas. Before working with Sierra Club, Eva worked as an organizer for several national environmental and social change groups including MoveOn, GreenCorps, Dogwood Alliance, Corporate Accountability International, and US Public Outreach Group. She has also worked on several Congressional and City Council races, as well as the presidential elections in 2004 with New Voters project and 2008 with Sierra Club. Eva currently is the chair of the Board of Directors for Dogwood Alliance, and serves on the board of Environment Texas.

Get Involved with Austin Beyond Coal

Colin Clark

A recent *Mother Jones* article, "How a Grass-roots Rebellion Won the Nation's Biggest Climate Victory," chronicles the success of Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign, working coast-to-coast with a host of allies to stop new coal plants from being built and shutting down existing coal plants – over 160 and counting!

Here in central Texas, Austin Beyond Coal is making progress by organizing, building our grassroots strength, and demanding closure of our own dirty coal plant. We are not there yet, but with on-going recruitment, organizing, and your involvement, we can get Austin and the Lower Colorado River Authority to shutter their two coal burning stacks at the Fayette Power Plant about halfway between Austin and Houston in Fayette County. The LCRA owns outright one additional stack at Fayette.

Austin Beyond Coal is putting pressure on the Austin City Council to get out of the Fayette coal plant by 2016. The City Council serves as the board of directors of Austin Energy, our rate-payer owned electric utility. The year 2016 reflects a reasonable amount of time to transition off of dirty coal while stepping up our energy efficiency, wind, geothermal, and solar sources of energy.

Lone Star Sierra Club (our state chapter) director of conservation Cyrus Reed, Ph.D., has presented to Austin Energy and the City Council a plan to get out of our dirty coal plant by 2016 at the cost to ratepayers of about \$3 per month more than Austin Energy's current plan.

It could even be cheaper to get out of Fayette than stay in, given the dropping price of wind and solar energy and the real risk of higher coal prices and costs to add new pollution controls. Is that a risk we can afford to take?

As Dr. Reed told our winter Town Hall crowd, "Fayette is a water-sucking, pollutant-emitting, pecan-killing, mercury-contaminating, global-warming causing, societally expensive way to bring trainloads of coal from Wyoming and then burn them to boil water to turn a turbine. And we should get out of it." The Fayette coal plant also consumes 5.7 billion gallons of water per year,

water that could stay in the Colorado River.

Our dirty coal plant pollutes air, land, and water, and we have to keep buying coal to make electricity with it. In 2008 and 2009, Austin Energy spent \$85 million per year to haul in Wyoming coal.

We ship our money out of Austin to bring pollution to the residents of Fayette County and beyond. In exchange, we get 608 megawatts (MW) of electric generation capacity.

To put that 608 MW into perspective, we could replace it with 2.5 percent of Germany's photovoltaic capacity. **2.5 percent.** Texas is almost twice as big as Germany and noticeably sunnier. Conveniently for us, our peak electric demand roughly coincides with the sunniest times of day in the sunniest months.

By the time this issue of the Austin Sierran is published, we will have held what we hope to be the largest Beyond Coal aerial photo in the country. Building on the momentum of that Earth Day photo, we are organizing a volunteer leadership training and a water-themed outdoor activity for the summer. Please check sierraclub.org/coal/Austin and the Austin Beyond Coal page on Facebook for the latest details.

One great thing about the Austin Beyond Coal campaign is the opportunity for citizen activists to participate. Whatever your interests or skills may be, you can find a role in the Beyond Coal campaign. Interested in promotions and events? Contact Lorena Pesantez at lorep8@gmail.com. Want to help coordinate volunteers and recruit new citizen leaders? Contact Jeff Crunk at midbosque@gmail.com. Concerned about how much water is used by the Fayette Coal plant (5.8 billion gallons/year)? Contact me at sprinklerintherain@gmail.com. Want to help pecan farmers near the coal plant devastated by dwindling pecan harvests? Contact Kunda Wicce at kunda@mygrande.net. Unsure where to start? Just ask Ian Davis at ian.davis@sierraclub.org.

With your involvement, we can add to the list of coal plants the Beyond Coal campaign has put to rest.



Austin Sierrans at the annual picnic (Photo by Jack Graham)

Special thanks to everyone who helped make our annual picnic a great success:

Eco-Wise for donating biocompostable plates, cups and utensils.

5-year-old **Rafi Miller** for donating over \$136 to Austin Sierra Club. He collected the donations in lieu of receiving birthday presents.

John Yarber and **Chuck Byrd** for bringing the plates, cups, utensils, iced tea and water.

Bruce Melton for the great music.

YOU, our members, for the food, fun and friendship!

Austin Sierra Club Political Endorsements

Karin Ascot and Scott Swearingen, Political Committee

Our city continues to grow. The basic question before us as a community is how to manage that growth in such a way that our people and our environment are not sacrificed to the profits of a few, or an ideology that simply accepts social and environmental destruction as "normal." Our endorsements were driven by those concerns, and we have chosen to endorse - and not endorse - based upon them.

In the Mayoral race we endorse Brigid Shea. Shea has a proven record of working on environmental issues. She was a founding member and early Executive Director of the organization that is now Save Our Springs Alliance, and later, a member of the first "Green City Council" of Austin. She has been an active leader in neighborhood issues, helping to reduce the impact of large-scale development in central Austin neighborhoods. She has run her own business focused on reducing carbon emissions, particularly from coal plants in our region. Shea has specific ideas of how to make development pay for itself. Shea is simply more convinced than our current Mayor of the need to change the direction we are going.

One major issue is the proposed construction of SH45 Southwest, which would connect 1626 to Mopac, adding up to 30,000 more cars per day on Mopac, and making our central city a parking lot. Commutes and movement would become much more difficult. Like all new highways, this one would perpetuate sprawl. Worse, it would pave over more than 300 recharge features, a disaster for the aquifer, and impact areas we are targeting for open space preservation and water quality protection. Shea says we can find other solutions to our traffic problems, and she will work to make them a reality.

Water is another defining issue. Lake Travis is still below 50% capacity. Mayor Leffingwell formed the Water Conservation Task Force in the mid-2000s, but the goals ultimately set by that group fell short of ambitious. Current City policy favors more development of expensive water infrastructure over saving money through conservation and reuse. But we are in the middle of a new drought of record while our popu-

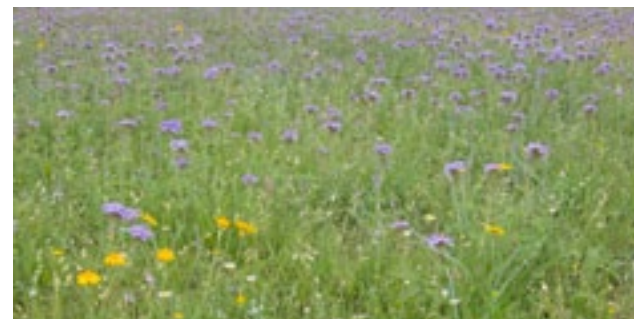
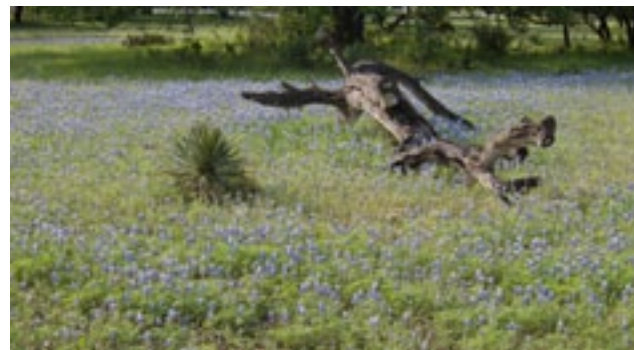
lation increases. These circumstances require much greater efforts toward conservation and innovative methods of water reuse, and we feel Shea would be more likely to undertake them.

Other issues will come up, issues like the Formula 1 racetrack. Granting city services to F1 is a prime example of profits for the super-rich over the needs of the citizens. Shea pledges to end such welfare for the wealthy. Shea has demonstrated, year after year, that she is a leader who will stand up for the needs of people and the environment. Shea will be more active than the current mayor in protecting all that makes Austin a great place to live.

For Place 5 we endorse Bill Spelman. He is the most likely to change policy direction and get on board with a more progressive agenda. His main challenger represents the interests of unimpeded development, which will only further exacerbate quality of life issues such as traffic congestion, air and water pollution, and development over the aquifer. Spelman has indicated that he will oppose SH 45 and has stated concern for several issues important to us, such as more conservation-oriented electricity and water rate structures, moving Austin off coal, and expanding mass transit. We desperately need more allies on the Council and we have much more confidence in Spelman's ability to support these goals than in that of any of his challengers.

In Place 2, Mike Martinez has regularly been on the wrong side of the votes important to us. His main challenger, Laura Pressley, demonstrates an excellent understanding of our issues and appears to be a promising addition to Austin's political discussions. However, we have some concern that she lacks City experience at this time, and she will need to gain experience in communicating a coherent philosophy of government. We look forward to her continued participation in the political process. In Place 6, Sheryl Cole has not supported environmental causes with any consistency but her challenger Shaun Ireland gave us no reason to support him either. Thus, in Places 2 and 6 we have no endorsements.

Spring in Texas: Abundant Wildflowers and Great Hiking



Clockwise, from top: Enchanted Rock SP (John Yarber), Garner SP (George Edwards), Garner SP (George Edwards), Inks Lake bluebonnets (John Yarber), Enchanted Rock SP (John Yarber)



SAVE BIG BEND!!

WHAT: A retreat to advance Sierra Club's "Save Big Bend" Campaign

WHEN: May 11 – 13th, 2012

WHERE: Big Bend Nat Park

WHO: Concerned citizens, volunteers, and those who want to protect our parks



Thousands of Texans sent comments to the EPA asking for air pollution safeguards that would reduce haze pollution that spoils our National Parks. EPA has announced it will not finalize new haze rules until November, so we're gearing up to keep the friendly pressure on EPA to improve the rule.



For more information, email Stephanie.Cole@sierraclub.org

or call (512) 477-1729.

It Happened at the Ex-Com: February 29, 2012

Bruce Melton

Present: Kay Plavidal, Roy Waley, Bruce Melton, Valerie Thatcher, Austin Adams

At the ExCom this month it was a busy time. We have begun in earnest to transition the electronic world of Austin Region Sierra Club farther into the 21st century! We have found our volunteer coordinator for this effort (Lauren Smitherman) and have started on the website redesign and the newsletter transition to digital. Don't fret about the good old paper newsletter though, it will still be around. One of the first things on our to-do list is to use the State Chapter Sierra Club email list to ask for email addresses of members to make this transition possible. It will be an "opt-in" decision for each individual. The resources saved by this transition will be substantial in dollar value as well as environmental resource conservation. The changes will include an improved calendar; linking to outings as well as many other environmental and conservation events as well as local (regional) action items like email and letter writing, petition signing, and public hearings. Also expect to see a greater connection between the Club and social media. Your favorite links? They will still be there.

Look for an email soon asking if you want paper or digital. It will also ask if you would like to be included on other lists like Outings, Action Alerts and Conservation Events. If you would like to volunteer to help with coding of the new website, contact kplavidal@austin.rr.com. We are continuing to define the new vision for the digital newsletter. This is mostly an electronic exercise. Many of the "solutions" are now better understood following our research on this topic over the last year or two. Before then, many of us on ExCom could barely pronounce the different "solutions," much less understand them!

Craig Nator was selected as our volunteer of the month for February. A long-time activist, Craig currently serves on the Club's regional Conservation Committee. Craig's recent work on the Reusable Bag Ordinance is what puts him in the spotlight this month. These plastic bags are really sinister. They break down into gazillions of teeny pieces that become a part of our ecology. They are a big part of Austin's annual \$800k spending on litter clean-up and they are made

from natural gas, which creates more demand from wells that use fracking to recover more gas. Thanks for your work on this, Craig.

Austin's Water Utility is in the midst of multiple meetings to define Stage III Water Restrictions. Issues we are working on include flexibility for commercial and multifamily water customers to vary their watering schedule if they can reduce water use by 25 percent; helping LCRA limit agriculture irrigation releases during Stage III extremes; and developing rules that would allow tree watering to continue in Stage III. Tree-kill is a very important environmental issue in our urban areas because of the long time frames for trees to mature and the great environmental service that they perform by providing shade and cooling the air with moisture evaporated from their leaves. The tree-kill brought on by last summer's extremes is predicted to continue for at least one to three decades. The Club's position hopes to minimize this risk.

Are there any of you out there who want to help with the creation of these Stage III rules? The City Water Utility meetings are quite large, break-out discussion groups numerous and we must have representation for the club and our environment on this vitally important issue at as many of the break-out discussion groups as possible. We need folks who can work as a team, take direction and lead our region in an appropriate direction. Contact Rwaley@Hotmail.com.

Last but certainly not least is Earth Day. This year the celebration will be at the Mueller Airport Development on the 22nd of April. It will focus on the Beyond Coal Campaign. We will be sharing a table with the State Chapter. Volunteers are needed to stand in a field and get your picture taken by an airplane! Hundreds of people will spell out the message AUSTIN BEYOND COAL. Speakers will be Jim Hightower, Fritz Steiner and Lucia Athens. There will be 75 exhibitors, food trailers, a petting zoo, eco-maze, raffle, a talking tree and a drum circle like you've never seen! ZaBoomBa's interactive percussion will provide drums for 1,000 people! Contact Valerie Thatcher: thatval@pipeline.com or go to earthdayaustin.com.

Sierra Club

Austin Regional Group

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<http://www.texas.sierraclub.org/austin>

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Our Mission: To explore, enjoy and protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out these objectives.



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AUSTIN REGIONAL GROUP
 LONE STAR CHAPTER OF THE SIERRA CLUB
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Austin Group Committee Meetings

Executive Committee

Fourth Wednesday of the month at Lone Star Chapter office conference room, 1202 San Antonio St. Next meetings: May 30 and June 27 at 6:30.

Outings Committee Meeting

For information, contact Niles Seldon at nelsdon@ix.netcom.com.

Conservation Committee Meeting

Tuesday, May 22 and June 19 at 7:30 p.m. at Scott Swearingen's house. For more information, contact Scott Swearingen at scottandgeorge@earthlink.net for details.

Inner City Outings Meeting

No meeting in February or March. Contact Ann Clift, anncliftico@yahoo.com, or 924-5358, for information.

Other Related Area Meetings

Austin Butterfly Forum

Meets 4th Monday, 7 p.m., Zilker Garden Center. Details: 577-0250. Link: www.austinbutterflies.org

Austin Paddle Club

Monthly on the 2nd Thursday, 7 p.m., LCRA Colorado Room. Link: www.austinpaddling.org

Austin Metropolitan Trails and Greenways

For details of meetings, contact Jebb Boyt, 475-3786. Link: www.austrintrails.org.

Austin Organic Gardeners

Meets 2nd Monday (exc Dec.), 7.30 p.m., Zilker Botanical Garden. Link: www.Main.org/aog/

Austin Zero Waste Alliance

Bastrop County Audubon Society

Meets 3rd Tuesday, 7 p.m., First National Bank, Hwy 71 at Hasler. Contact: Priscilla, 281-2762. Link: www.bastropcountyaudubon.org.

Bastrop Area Riding Club (BARC)

Bike rides Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Contact: john@risingphoenixadventures.com

Design-Build-Live

Monthly on 3rd Wednesday. Link: www.design-buildlive.org/

Hill Country Alliance

Grassroots conservation org. Contact: 560-3135. Link: www.hillcountryalliance.org

Native Plant Society

Meets 3rd Tuesday, 7-9 p.m. (except Dec.), Wild Basin. Link: <http://npsot.org/Austin/>

Oak Village Commons

Building a sustainable neighborhood in Oak Hill. Meets 1st and 3rd Saturdays, 4:30 p.m. Contact Debbie Dyson, 371-7612. Link: www.oakhillcohousing.org

Travis Audubon Society

Meets 3rd Thursday, 7 p.m., Westminster Presbyterian Church, 3208 Exposition. 300-BIRD (2473) Link: www.travisaudubon.org.

Texas Outdoors Woman Network (TOWN)

Meets 4th Tuesday (exc. Dec.), 6.30 p.m., at LCRA Redbud Center, Link: www.townaustin.org.

The Capital Area Master Naturalists

Meets last Wednesday, 7 p.m., Austin Nature and Science Center. Link: www.CAMN.org