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The Big Bend Sierran

Big Bend Regional Sierra Club
Don Dowdey, chair

February 2007, Issue 103
Trey Darby, editor

Klein to Enlighten Club Members on Solar Production

Thursday, February 15, 7:00 p.m., Lawrence Hall 300, SRSU, Alpine

Our speaker for February will be Keith Klein, Assistant Professor of Industrial Technology at Sul Ross. He is very interested in solar applications and alternative building materials and will offer a presentation on several aspects of solar production. He will share pictures of solar applications, and will talk about his plan to design, construct, and test equipment for the first phase of a demonstration system to efficiently convert sunlight into gasoline and diesel oil.

Klein is also involved in a project to develop and test a system with fixed parabolic trough solar collectors that would capture sunlight, transfer that light into a building, separate the visible

spectrum for growing bio-fuel stock and the infrared spectrum for conversion to visible light, for the production of electricity, or for heating.

If this design proves successful, the visible light would be distributed into an aquaponics system to grow plants and fish in a common water medium and the infrared spectrum (about 50 percent of the energy) would either be processed into more visible light for the plants, converted to electricity, or converted to heat.

The adequate transfer of sunlight into an insulated enclosure could extend the growing season for hot house or aquaculture applications or reduce the cost of

winter heating. The transfer of light would permit the use of an insulated multistory building or even underground chambers at some distance from the collectors for these or other purposes.

In addition to his specialized knowledge of solar production, Kevin is an entertaining speaker. See you on February 15!



Don's Column

At the January meeting of the Lone Star Chapter Ex Com, one of the main agenda items was to set the Legislative agenda for this Legislative session. The priorities are grouped into four main categories: Clean Air, Environmental Flow Protection, Smart Energy Solutions, State and Local Parks Funding, and Water Conservation. The complete list can be found at the Lone Star Chapter's website:

<http://texas.sierraclub.org>. This site also links to the Texas Legislature online, voting records on environmental issues from 1999-2003, and links to the

Alliance for a Clean Texas (ACT), a statewide alliance of 26 organizations working on environmental issues.

I will summarize each legislative priority, and make a few comments on how they affect our area.

Clean Air

Reduction of toxic and other harmful emissions from industrial plants and electric power generating plants, prevention of air quality deterioration by a proliferation of new coal-fired power plants, and reduction of air

emissions from vehicles.

The primary effect on the Big Bend will come from additional coal-fired power plants. Currently, 18 plants are being considered for an expedited permitting process, and while many are being challenged, The Texas Council for Environmental Quality (TCEQ), isn't known for its efforts to stop pollution or greenhouse gas emissions. It is estimated that if these plants are built, their SO₂ emissions will totally offset the reductions created by California's

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Don's Column - continued

widely praised car emissions law. And as the BRAVO study indicated, on our most polluted days, most of the SO₂ which causes our visibility problems can be traced back to east Texas coal sources.

An early effort on this issue will be the Time Out! Stop the Coal Rush rally and lobby day on February 11 and 12 in Austin. The purpose of this event is to ask Texas State Legislators to intervene on the unfair permitting process and stop the permits for 18 dirty coal-fired power plants proposed in Texas. Full information, including registration information, is available at <http://stopthecoalrush.com>.

Environmental Flow Protection

Preservation and provision of in stream flows and freshwater inflows to bays and estuaries necessary to maintain healthy

fish and wildlife populations.

All of Texas' bays are in a threatened condition. As we know, the Rio Grande no longer reliably empties into the Gulf at all, and has recently gone dry in places in the Big Bend/El Paso area. This priority seeks enactment of legislation establishing a process to determine and to meet environmental flow needs necessary to maintain a sound ecological environment in Texas coastal bays and associated river basins.

Smart Energy Solutions

Obviously, West Texas is an important part of alternative energy production, especially wind energy.

State & Local Parks Funding

Given the importance of Davis Mountain State Park and Big Bend Ranch

State Park to our tourist economy, adequate funding for State Parks is very important for us. And the unopened Chinati Mountains State Park could aid to that tourist appeal if funds for its development are available.

Water Conservation

Any efforts to encourage water conservation in the state will make the perceived need to transfer our groundwater out of the area less attractive to speculators.

On a personal note, thanks to everyone who voted to elect me as a statewide representative to the Lone Star Chapter's Ex Com. I plan to use this increased visibility to continue to advocate for the environment of the Big Bend.

Sierra Club Notes

Congratulations to Don Dowdey, Chair of the Big Bend Regional Sierra Club, on his recent election to the Lone Star Chapter (our state organization) Executive Committee. Don is now a member-at-large. We are proud of his position and are pleased that he will be able to bring the West Texas perspective to the committee.

Our own Executive Committee now consists of Lala Battista, Don Dowdey, John Ehrke, Martha Latta, and Barbara Novovitch. The committee will be meeting in early February and will elect officers at that time.

At our Christmas Party at Front Street Books, Jackie Siglin won the food prize and Margaret Deardorf won the wine prize. Sierra Club calendars were given to them. Thanks were extended to Jean Hardy for use of the Annex and thanks also to Donna Ehrke for the decorations and arrangements.

At recent meetings a new outings committee was formed. See article elsewhere.

The Water Issues Committee is getting organized with Lala Battista, Trey Darby, and Martha Latta. They will have an organizational meeting on February 2nd. Fran Sage will assist.

IN MEMORIUM: JUDGE DUDLEY HARRISON

I learned last month that a long time member of Sierra Club passed away in Sanderson. I have a special place in my memory for Judge Harrison. He had been a long time Sierra Club member, joining long before our group existed. When my husband and I were trying to form the Big Bend Regional Sierra Club, Judge Harrison sent us a donation to help as we got underway. Not only did we need any help we could get, but his unsolicited donation had symbolic meaning too. Until then we had only our own money but his contribution gave us hope for support from others and a lift of spirits and I have never forgotten what that meant to us. -Fran Sage

Update on Texas Parks and Wildlife Funding

On January 8, Rep. Harley Hilderbran (R-Kerrville) filed HB 6 removing the cap of \$32 million on the sporting goods tax to adequately fund the long neglected park needs. Last session the appropriation passed did not even provide the cap amount; instead \$20 million was appropriated for the parks with \$5 million of it reserved for local parks.

Currently the sporting goods tax raises about \$105 million dollars. Under HB 6 all that money could go to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, though some would be reserved for grants to local, urban parks. With many sponsors and support from the state leadership, we can look for improved prospects. But, of course, what really matters is what happens in the appropriation process. Whatever the legislature funds will be what parks and wildlife gets regardless of whether it is eligible to get the full amount produced. The tax is not a dedicated fund. It is just special bookkeeping in the comptroller's office of the sales tax. Certain sporting goods items are tracked and set aside as a sporting goods tax. No one buying those goods is paying a special tax above the usual 8.25% regular sales tax. In the past a cap was put on how

much of that money could be spent on Texas State Parks. With the cap removed the legislature could appropriate the entire amount generated by that bookkeeping process.

OTHERS SEEKING MONEY FROM THE FUND.

While Governor Perry says he wants full funding for the parks, he was quoted in an Associated Press article January 12, 2007 as saying he wants Parks and Wildlife to spell out how they propose to spend the money as he has questions about Parks and Wildlife's ability to efficiently spend the money. He talks about a refund for sports goods buyers, which it is hard to make sense of since that could only mean refunding part of the sales tax leaving sports buyer paying less tax than the buyer of any other goods subject to the sales tax.

In addition to the Governor's position, the Land Commissioner, Jerry Patterson, has requested \$30 million over the next two years to shore up coastal protection and could see it coming from the sporting goods tax, although he also said he supports full funding for parks.

What one wants to understand is what

both of those officials mean by full funding.

Rep. Hilderbran is quoted in a Houston Chronicle article, (January 12th) saying "that the department faces between 140 million and \$200 million in critical repairs and up to \$400 million in total repair needs."

Another indirect move is being made to transfer a number of the Parks and Wildlife's historical sites to the Texas Historical Society. (Fort Leaton is on the potential 21 sites that could be switched.) The Speaker of the House, Tom Craddick, has brought the issue forward, apparently at the request of the Historical Society. So far no bill has been filed. Let's keep a watch on all this. It is a distraction from the main effort to adequately fund the parks.

NOTE: A public meeting will be held February 8, 2007, at 7 p.m. at Kokernot Lodge in Alpine for Texas Parks and Wildlife to present its draft user plan for Big Bend Ranch State Park. Please attend and offer your comments. The draft is online at

http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/business/feedback/public_comment/.

Big Bend Regional Sierra Club Outings Program Back on Track

February 17: Strenuous Outing to Mining Cable Tower

We will hike to the old ore terminal from the Bacillus canyon road in Big Bend National Park. It will be a loop trip of 8 miles with about 1200 ft. of elevation gain and loss. The first three miles will be up the stream bed in a scenic canyon. It may be a little brushy with some scrambling over rocks so wear clothing which protects legs and arms. The rest of the hike will be on a lightly used trail. This is a strenuous hike through dry country so carry at least two quarts of water, and protection from the sun. Pam Gaddis will be the trip leader and Roger Siglin will accompany the group to provide interpretation based on his knowledge of the Puerto Rico mine and the entire route on both sides of the border.

Contact Pam Gaddis for time and meeting place: pamelagaddis@yahoo.com

March 24: Easy to Moderate Outing to Cattail Falls

Cattail Falls is a magical place, a rare permanent waterfall on the side of the Chisos Mountains. The pool at its base is surrounded by ferns and columbine. The hike to the falls is about 4 miles roundtrip on a smooth easy trail with minor ups and downs. Just before reaching the falls, there are some big rocks to climb around. Lalae Battista will be the trip leader, and Jim Sage will be along as a guide.

Contact Lalae Battista for time and meeting place: battista@wildblue.net

SC Files Action to Halt “Fast-Tracking” of Coal Plants

The Sierra Club, represented by the Austin office of Environmental Integrity Project (EIP), took legal action on December 27 to stop the “unprecedented, unreasonable, and ... illegal” plan by Governor Rick Perry to “fast track” administrative hearings for construction of up to 18 dirty coal-fired power plants in the state. Most of the plants in question are being proposed by the Dallas-based utility giant TXU.

EIP Austin Office Counsel Ilan Levin filed the petition on behalf of the Sierra Club to intervene in a state district lawsuit originally brought by Environmental Defense over the processing of coal plant permits. This legal action by Sierra Club stems from a recent state agency decision

to consolidate six proposed TXU coal plant permits into one hearing, and to set those permits for a speedy decision. The lawsuit seeks to halt Perry’s controversial executive order of October 27, 2005, directing the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) to accelerate consideration of permit applications and the Texas State Office of Administrative Hearings (SOAH) to issue unusually fast decisions on air pollution permits for new electric power plants.

The Usual Process

Usually each power plant application would be considered separately with a full review of the risks associated with its additional pollution impact. The new plants also would be examined to verify

that they are using the best available technology in order to not degrade air quality.

The current efforts to “fast-track” these permits negatively affects the reasoned and thorough review of situations specific to each proposed plant. Moreover, the shorter the time frame for the review of the permit applications for these plants, the more likely it is that potential problems with the plants are not going to get adequate scrutiny before a decision is made on the applications.

The intention of the Sierra Club’s action is to see that all of these issues are reviewed by the courts and to see that the rights of citizens to protect themselves in pollution permitting cases are upheld.

A Note on Sierra Club Outings...

The BBRSC is re-activating its Outings program in accord with the policies and protections of the National Sierra Club. Little has really changed, but a few details are new and relevant. You can see the full BBRSC policy on the group’s website.

All participants on an Outing must sign a liability waiver acknowledging the risks inherent in outdoor activities. Anyone leading an Outing must have first aid training as well as outdoor leadership training from the Sierra Club. (A few experienced local leaders have been exempted from that training so we can get started.) Carpooling always saves gas, but it is voluntary, and the leader must not assign anyone to any particular vehicle.

As always, BBRSC Outings are open to members and non-members. Reservations are needed three days before the Outing (Wednesday for a Saturday Outing.) Contact the leader of the Outing and discuss your own stamina and the suitability of the Outing for you. Outings will be labeled as Easy, Moderate, or Strenuous. The leader has the authority to say who will be part of the Outing.

Member Profile: Trey Darby

Trey Darby turned his world upside down this fall. After living and working in north Texas for many years, he uprooted himself and followed a dream to Alpine. He wanted to change his life, to find something he loved to do all day, every day. He knew he had a strong interest in reading and writing, and he decided he would enroll in the English degree program at Sul Ross.

After one semester, he has no regrets and a lot more to learn. The size of the campus fits him and he likes his classes. He is a student assistant in the English department and will be writing articles for the

Skyline, the student newspaper. He also has become the editor of the Big Bend Sierran. If his plans work out, one day he will be the professor behind the podium teaching English at the university level.

Trey describes himself as an idea man, and he has brought his energy and enthusiasm to the local chapter of the Sierra Club. He had been a member of the North Texas chapter for five years, but lived far from where the meetings were held and was not an active participant. Once he discovered the Big Bend chapter held its meetings on the Sul Ross

campus, he realized he had no excuse. He joined the outings committee and volunteers at the recycling trailer. In addition he is helping on the water and coal plants issues and is most appreciative of the opportunity to learn from the members who have been involved for a long time.

Encouraging other Sul Ross students to join the Sierra Club is also a high priority for Trey. He hopes to find ways to educate the campus community about the local concerns for the environment and to develop a campus wide recycling program.

—Jackie Siglin

80TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION

ENVIRONMENTAL BILLS FILED THROUGH January 25, 2007

HB 6 Hilderbran Removes cap on the sporting goods tax for state parks and urban grants. (See article)

(Companion bill SB 252 Estes.)

HB 231 Ritter regulation of certain renewable energy technology by a property owners' association.

HB 269 Anchia energy efficiency incentive programs administered by electric utilities.

HB 270 Anchia use of the Texas emerging technology fund and other incentives to promote new energy technology; imposing a tax.

HB 299 Farrar testing and warnings related to mercury levels in certain fish

HB 300 Farrar requiring warning signs regarding mercury levels in certain fish.

HB 344 Stama implementation by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality of a low-emission vehicle program.
(Companion bill SB 124 Ellis.)

HB 375 Anchia development of a state strategy for increasing the availability of low-emission automotive fuels for Texas drivers.

HB 440 Hernandez controlling emissions of air contaminants under the Texas Clean Air Act; penalties

HB 467 Pickett Relating to an energy efficiency products pilot program.

HB 545 & 546 Gallego Would allow water districts in Brewster and Presidio Counties (respectively) to regulate export and import of municipal water.

HB 547 Farrar monitoring and controlling emissions of air contaminants under the Texas Clean Air Act; providing a penalty.
(Companion bill SB 93)

HB 548 Farrar implementation by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality of a low-emission vehicle program.

HB 549 Farrar Relating to environmental review of toll projects.

HCR 43 Anderson Urging the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to impose a 180-day moratorium on applications for pulverized coal-fired power plant permits.

SB 93 Gallegos monitoring and controlling emissions of air contaminants under the Texas Clean Air Act; providing a penalty.
(Companion to HB 547 by Farrar)

SB 124 Ellis implementation by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality of a low-emission vehicle program.(Companion to HB 344 by Stama)

SB 252 Estes allocation and use of the sporting goods sales tax revenue to fund state and local parks (Companion to HB 6)

To read text of these bills go to <http://www.legis.state.tx.us/Reports/General.aspx>

La Entrada Conference

On Wednesday January 10, Roger Siglin attended the Third Annual La Entrada Corridor Conference in Odessa co-sponsored by TXDOT and MOTRAN (Midland Odessa Transportation Alliance). Following are some of the points covered at the meeting.

- A truck route is being built around Ojinaga, and a second crossing is being considered to speed truck traffic.
- 25 million is budgeted for road work in Chihuahua State, and 15 million in Sinoloa State.
- 20 million is being spent on Hwy. 67 projects. This was earmarked money by Senator Cornyn.
- Sixty percent of NAFTA trade is bound for the Chicago area.

Brian Swindell, the consulting transportation engineer doing the feasibility study funded by a \$1.7 million appropriation, talked about the La Entrada feasibility study now underway. He is a senior transportation engineer and worked for TXDOT in the past. He gave the following schedule for the study:

- First public meeting in the first part of March 2007.
- Alternatives to existing corridors and possible reliever routes will be studied.
- Second public meeting in July 2007.
- Viable alternatives will be prepared by October 2007.
- Third public meeting January 2008.
- Corridor development plan prepared by March 2008.

As part of his work he will study truck/rail diversions, and establish a baseline for future NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) studies.

Roger noted that TxDOT will propose a four lane roadway. Roger was interested that all the maps show the route through Alpine with no alternative routes.

Manuel Alderete, economic expert from Chihuahua State, said that there are 202 km of unpaved road across the Sierra between Topolobampo and Chihuahua City. There is heavy promotion of the railroad and highway connection between the two cities.

- Daily truck traffic crossing at Presidio is 49/day now.
- 550/day projected in 2010
- 965/day projected in 2015
- 1,455/day projected in 2020

If these projections come true, Roger believes the impacts on Alpine will be substantial

Armando Correa, a mining expert in Chihuahua State, discussed Presidio as the Chihuahua City to Dallas shortest route as well as the Asia to the eastern United States route.

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National Outings 2007

In addition to our local outings, the National Sierra Club has two upcoming Outings in Texas. For more information, please visit: <http://www.sierraclub.org/outings/national/>.

Reclaiming the Rosillos, Big Bend National Park 07429A Dates: 3/11/2007 to 3/17/2007 Be First on Waiting List!

Top Of Texas Service, Guadalupe Mountains National Park 07353A Dates: 10/21/2007 to 10/27/2007 More than 5 Spaces Available.

La Entrada - continued

German Rivera, Director of the Sinaloa Development Council, a private/government partnership dedicated to the economic development of Sinaloa, is working closely with China and the State Government of Sinaloa.

- The road between El Fuerte and Choix will be completed in 4 years.
- Mexico's largest rail company, Ferromex, is increasing its effort in La La Entrada al Pacifico.
- At the Topolobampo port development. 2.5 hectares of new land is being created and 350 hectares of land near the port for a logistics park
- Twenty-three days from China to the eastern US market.
- Spain is interested in doing the development.
- Singapore is interested in the La Entrada corridor.

Ray Perryman was the keynote speaker. In answer to a question from Roger, he said that commodities are best moved by rail and consumer goods best moved by truck.

A West Texas Freight study showed that both rail tonnage and truck traffic would double in 25 years.

Gregory Carey of Goldman Sachs also gave a presentation on public/ private partnerships (P3 as they are called).

Roger said the conference was worth attending for the insights into La Entrada. He goes on to say that public transportation got no mention, nor did any alternatives to truck traffic except for brief comments on train transport.

Roger sent in a much fuller report than the condensed version above. He expects to work on getting a broad committee involved on the La Entrada issue.

Footnote: An article in November 25, 2006 Houston Chronicle on trade routes in west Texas includes remarks from James Beauchamp, director of MOTRAN, which seem to run counter to the conference. According to the article, in response to the difficulty of building the route in Mexico, "La Entrada backers such as Beauchamp have shifted gears, concentrating instead on transporting bulk goods such as agricultural products along the route and focusing on drawing trade from the bustling maquiladoras of Chihuahua City through Presidio instead of El Paso." So which is the actual MOTRAN position?

Tentative Dates Set For La Entrada Public Meetings

Mary Telles-Goins, of the Advance Transportation Department of the TxDot regional office in El Paso, said on January 22, 2007 that tentative dates "look to be March 12 at Presidio High School and March 13 in Alpine, I don't have that location. The next week the meetings will be in Ft. Stockton and Midland/Odessa on Monday and Tuesday. I don't have the locations for those yet. The notices are being prepared so you should be hearing or seeing something official very soon! Notices are usually done 30 days and 10 days in advance."

Recycling News

The Big Bend Recyclers will continue to accept recyclables at the 13th St. location, between the U.S. Post Office and the Alpine City Center, on Saturdays from 10:00 A.M. to 1 P.M. until further notice.

Alpine's new disposal services company, Texas Disposal Systems will be taking recycling over very soon at their new community recycle yard in

the near future. Location and hours of operation will be available soon.

In addition to what has been collected in the past, the Big Bend Regional Recyclers will be accepting rinsed tin cans and #'s 1 & 2 plastic bottles with the neck of the bottle smaller than its base. Please separate your recyclable materials before dropping them off to be recycled.

**"Away, away, from men and towns,
To the wild wood and the downs, --
To the silent wilderness,
Where the soul need not repress
Its music."**

- **Percy Bysshe Shelley**, (1792-1822), "To Jane, The Invitation," c.1820

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Save a tree! To receive your newsletter electronically, email the editor at w3h3d3@hotmail.com.

Big Bend Regional Sierra Club

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Meets third Thursday September-December; February-May
7:00 PM, Lawrence Hall, Room 300, Sul Ross State University, Alpine

LOBBY DAY IN AUSTIN - February 25-26, 2007

Sierra Club members will be joining other environmentalists from around the state to talk to our legislators on our priorities. ACT—Alliance for a Clean Texas will be arranging the meeting. Sierra Club is a part of the Alliance.

We would like to have a group from Big Bend in attendance. We will be leaving on Sunday the 25th to be part of a training session from 4-6 p.m., go to the capitol to talk to our legislators on the 26th and return to Alpine or elsewhere on the 27th.

Please consider joining with other Sierrans to bring our West Texas point of view to Austin. A good hotel rate has been negotiated at Habitat Hotels. Call Don Dowdey at 837-3210 or write him at dwdmdb@wildblue.net for more information. We can work out carpooling and lodging.