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Happy New Year! Sierra Sentinel

The Greater
Fort Worth
Group of the
Sierra Club
JANUARY
2006

Think crime doesn't pay? You're right *Big breaks for big polluters is apparent state policy*

■ State collects only 14% of potential fines from air polluters; enforcement case review reveals prosecution lax (or lacking)

When chemical plants and refineries violate air pollution regulations, they can count on light fines from Texas environmental officials, according to a new study by the Galveston-Houston Association for Smog Prevention

(GHASP).

In a review of 26 enforcement cases from the Houston region, GHASP found that the state assessed just 14% of the potential fines that it could have levied against major polluters.

"Over the past five years, the state has routinely given big breaks to big polluters," said John D. Wilson, executive director of the Galveston-Houston Association for Smog Prevention. "In several cases, the fines were hundreds of thousands of dollars less than they

could have been - if the state had strictly followed its own policies."

Three Systemic Problems

The study demonstrated that three systematic problems at the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality contribute to the failure to collect adequate fines: lax prosecution of weak leak detection programs, breaches of the state's penalty calculation policy, and unjustifiable dismissals of enforcement cases.

Though the state did assess most or all the potential fine in some cases, that assessment occurred only if the potential penalty was small. If the potential fine was more than \$40,000, the TCEQ never collected even half of the fine.

"We are asking Texas to adhere to its own policies," explained Wilson, "and we want the US Environmental Protection Agency to step in and hold the state accountable for being so lenient with those companies that violate air pollution regulations."

The report, "Big Breaks for Big Polluters," is available on the GHASP website at <http://www.ghasp.org/>.

GFWSC Conservation Notes

Gas drilling ordinance

A series of public hearings will be held January through March to review the current Fort Worth gas drilling ordinance, with final recommendations to be presented to the City Council on March 14. A citizen's task force has been appointed to determine how regulations may be strengthened to effectively protect impacted neighborhoods from noise, traffic, and potential danger from drilling operations that are becoming common in residential areas of the city. The necessity of proper controls was emphasized when a drilling rig in near-by Palo Pinto County exploded on December 16th. Only minor injuries were reported, but the blast left a crater 250 yards wide and damaged about 50 acres of land.

The first scheduled meetings will be on Jan. 5 and Jan. 19 at the R. D. Evans Community Center, 3242 Lackland

Road, and will afford an opportunity for all residents to voice concerns and offer suggestions. For further information on hearing times and dates call (817) 392-7619.

ANWR drilling defeated

The U. S. Senate has once again stopped efforts to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling. The drilling provision had been attached to a bill funding hurricane victims and overseas military troops, but it appeared obvious that Senate Democrats, as well as some Republicans, would be able to mount a successful filibuster against the bill. Only 57 Senators were in favor of the measure, three short of the number required to break the filibuster and send it to a final vote. It is expected that the funding bill will be resubmitted to the Senate after deletion of the oil drilling language.

Incumbents re-elected

Glenn Ford, Bryon Haney, and Todd Nichols have been re-elected to two-year terms on the Executive Committee of the Greater Fort Worth Group of the Sierra Club. All have completed one term on the board, which also includes Susan Haney, James Moody, and Dwayne Quertermous, all elected in 2004. Those three will rotate off the board next year because of the group's two-term restriction.

Board members must remain off the board for a minimum of one year before becoming eligible to serve again.

A vacancy remains on the board due to the resignation of Jeneanne Carson, who is moving to Austin.

Program
Notes

The Fort Worth Group of the Sierra Club begins the new year with a program that's always timely and never so much as the present. The presentation will be about sustainable and environmentally-friendly architecture. Our speaker is a leader in the field: Gary Gene Olp, AIA, GGOArchitects. Don't forget we're now meeting at Botanical Gardens.

Coming Events

January 18, Wednesday, 7 p.m.

Newsletter deadline. Submit articles, ads, letters, or other information in writing. Articles may be submitted by mail or email. B&W or color nature photos and electronic images (150 dpi or greater) will be accepted (prints returned if submitted with SASE). Photographs of

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(Phone numbers below are Area Code 817 except as noted)

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Mission statement

The purposes of the Sierra Club are: 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.

General Meeting Wednesday, January 18

7:00 Azalea Room of the Fort Worth Botanic Garden Center Complex. Going north on University, take the 2nd entrance into Botanic Gardens. The Garden Center is straight ahead. Program notes on Pg. 1.

Outings or other club activities encouraged. Identify subject of photo and state photographer's name. Do not write on the back of photos. Mail submissions to Newsletter Editor, P.O. Box 1874, Burleson, Texas 76097-1874, bring to the ExCom meeting, the general meeting, or email jmoody166@mac.com.

January 27, Friday

Noon meeting for Sierrans unable to attend the evening general meeting. This group meets the last Friday of each month at 2 p.m. in the Red Room at the Tin Cup, 1025 W. Abram, Arlington. Bonnie Bowman will be head-

Encourage NCTCOG to submit a meaningful clean air plan to EPA

Join others to care about air quality at the next COG steering committee meeting

If you care about clean air, then join other concerned environmentalists in the campaign to clean up the air in the Metroplex.

February 15, 2006 marks the deadline for The North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG), along with elected officials, to submit a new State Implementation Plan (SIP) with new measures to meet the EPA's goals for clean air in the region. At risk is our area's highway funds, our health and more.

Downwinders at Risk, along with other environmental and civic groups, are asking citizens to help push officials to make the best air plan possible.

The next North Texas Council Of Governments Clean Air Steering Committee (NCTCOG) meeting will be held at the: University of Texas at Arlington, Workforce Building, 140 W. Mitchell St. on the 2nd Floor.

Directions to the meeting from Fort Worth: east on I-30 from Ft. Worth to the Lamar/Cooper exit or take the Collins exit and go south to Road to Six Flags. Take a left and head west to Cooper. Head South on Cooper to the

ing up this meeting.

January 31, Monday

Newsletter folding party at Braum's, 6770 Bridge St. at 6:30 p.m. Call Steve Turner, 457-7131.

February 7, Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.

Fort Worth Sierra Club ExCom Meeting, 6:30 p.m., at Spiral Diner, 1314 W. Magnolia. For more information, contact Susan Haney, 254-582-8228.

February 7, Tuesday

Outings Meeting immediately following the ExCom meeting to plan new outings and reminisce about old trips. See location above. Contact Claudia Blalock, 817-924-6242.

Conservation Committee Meeting

The Conservation Committee meets on an as-needed basis. All members are welcome. For meeting information, contact: Chair Glenn Ford, 469-6540, Earl Burnam, 244-2328, or Bob Scott, 282-1372.

UTA Campus. Continue through the campus on Cooper to Mitchell. Take a left, heading east on Mitchell. Cross Pecan Street and the Workforce building sits on the corner of Mitchell/Pecan at 140 W. Mitchell. There's plenty of parking.

Numerous environmental, congregational, and other group leaders will meet for lunch at Birra Porretti's after the NCTCOG meeting. We have reservations for 12:30 and they will try and get us seated as soon as possible.

To get there from NCTCOG, head north from the meeting on Cooper. Just a block or two shy of I-30, you will see Road to Six Flags. Take a right, heading east toward Collins. Right before Collins, you will be at Lincoln Square. Birra Poretti's is on the North side (Bed/Bath/Beyond faces it across the street. (If you get to Collins, you've passed the restaurant). Birra Poretti's address is 668 Lincoln Square. Phone is 817-861-1752.

Note from your friends at Downwinders At Risk and other allies for clean air: if you can't make it to the NCTCOG meeting, then meet us for lunch if you can.

RSVP if you are coming so Rita Beving can reserve you at lunch spot. Call her at 214-373-3808..

The Greater Fort Worth Group of the Sierra Club

No pets, firearms or radios are allowed on Sierra Club outings. All children (17 years or less) must be accompanied by a parent on any outing. All overnight trips require preregistration with the trip leader. A donation of \$5 per person to the Fort Worth Sierra Club is requested for all overnight trips.

January 7, Saturday

River Legacy Park Dayhike - East. Hike 4-6 miles on the newly-opened paved trail in north Arlington with opportunity to observe the Trinity River bottom forest, wildlife and open areas east of the park. The river and wildlife (herons, egrets, beaver, turtles and more) are more visible on this section than along the west trails of the park. Pace will be about 3 mph. Bring water and sunscreen. From I-30 in Arlington, exit Collins and take Collins north past Green Oaks Blvd. After crossing Green Oaks approx. 400 feet, turn left into the new River Legacy Park east entrance and park at the south section (walk south from the parking lot to find the map). Meet at 9 a.m. by the foot bridge near the parking lot. Leader: Claudia Blalock, 817-924-6242 and Judy Cato. Please no dogs on hike and if raining, hike is cancelled. No reservations needed-just show up.

January 22, Sunday

Sustainable Sunday. Continue your sustainable New Year by joining Sierra Club for another plant-based buffet at

Club Outings

Hunan Dynasty, 972 444 9760, 8150 North MacArthur Blvd, Suite 190, Irving/Valley Ranch, one block north of LBJ at Ranchview. This all-you-can-eat buffet is served from noon to 2 p.m. \$8 per person. No reservation needed. Follow with an optional 3-mile urban hike at nearby Campion Trails at 2:30 p.m. No dogs please. Leader: Terry Jensen 972-988-8687 ext 3101(W) or ss@dfwnetmall.com

January 25-27, Friday-Sunday

Cabin Weekend at Beavers Bend State Park. Shake off those winter blues. Beavers Bend State Park is a 5,135-acre park situated along the Mountain Fork River just South of Broken Bow Reservoir in Southeast Oklahoma. Total drive is about 200 miles. The park has cabins of various sizes accommodating 2 - 6 persons. All cabins have kitchens and some are available with fireplaces. We plan to spend Friday and Saturday nights in the cabins and day hike part of the David Boren Trail. There will be a potluck dinner on Saturday night. The winter rates are \$68 - \$130 per night. You must preregister with trip leader since trip is limited to 12 persons. Please make your own cabin

reservations. For cabin information and registration call: 580 494-6300, 580-494-6301 or <http://www.beavers-bend.com>. Leader: Claudia Blalock, 817-924-6242

March 11-12, Saturday-Sunday

Carcamp at Copper Breaks State Park near Quanah, Texas (around 80 miles past Wichita Falls). This scenic park is close enough to Fort Worth to allow us to drive there Saturday morning. Trip will start at 1 p.m. on Saturday. Hike Saturday afternoon on the scenic trails in the park. Optional potluck group meal Saturday night. Hike again Sunday morning before heading home Sunday afternoon. Leader: Claudia Blalock, 817-924-6242. Co-leader: Martha Ohlson, 972-727-5778, e-mail: mjohlson@drs-irtech.com.

March 26, Sunday

Learn about wine at a wine tasting fundraiser at Tony's Wine Warehouse in Dallas at 2904 Oak Lawn on Sunday, March 26 at 5 p.m. Please register by sending a check for \$20 made out to Fort Worth Sierra Club and your e-mail address to Jenny Lehman, 7504 Meadow Creek Dr., Fort Worth, Texas 76123 by Mar 20. For further information, please contact Todd Nichols at 817-937-5217. Email: todd.c.nichols@lmco.com or Jenny at avidhiker@killerfrogs.com.

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Sierra (\$7.50) and chapter publications **F94Q W99901** Entity Code
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Mail to Sierra Club Member Services, 85 Second St.
2nd Floor, San Francisco, Calif. 94105-3441

State Park system financial crisis leads to staff cutbacks

It wasn't a happy holiday season for a number of state park employees. The Texas Parks & Wildlife Department announced it was eliminating 73 positions in its State Parks Division as a result of budget shortfalls. Those 73 positions included 39 current employees and 34 vacant positions that will not be filled. The cutbacks are at parks scattered throughout the state and follow reductions made earlier in the year, including at TPWD Headquarters.

The Texas Legislature for several years has failed to appropriate sufficient funds to keep current parks operating at a level adequate to meet the needs of the public, much less funds to expand the park system to keep pace with a growing population. During this time TPWD executives and staffs have done their best to keep the park system hobbled together, but the situation has reached the stage where the heroic efforts of agency personnel are not enough to keep the patchwork from unraveling. When, for example, the average mileage on TPWD Parks Division vehicles is over 100,000 miles, there doesn't seem to be a lot of "fluff"

in the state parks budget.

Many state legislators and public officials have expressed surprise at the TPWD parks staff cutbacks – saying they didn't realize how bad the situation was. It's difficult to understand how that could be the case. TPWD officials have been highlighting state park funding needs as priorities in their agency's "LARs" (legislative appropriations requests) for years.

Conservation groups including the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club, have pushed during recent state legislative sessions for increases in park funding, especially for acquisitions.

The basic state parks operating budget has been holding steady at about \$50 million a year for several years. Unfortunately, inflation, utility costs, and legislatively-required longevity pay and employee reclassifications have not held steady.

TPWD officials estimate that the agency needs \$10 to \$12 million more each year in order to have an adequate level of parks operations. Plus, agency officials say they need an additional \$15-20 million a year for major repairs

at park facilities.

There is one hope for additional funding in the short term that would help but not solve the problem of inadequate parks funding. A "rider" to the appropriations bill that passed in the 2005 legislative session appears to allow TPWD to be awarded during the biennium any "excess" revenue from state parks that is over and above the estimated revenue for the biennium.

The revenue referred to here is from park fees, concessionaire payments, and oil & gas leasing and production payments. The state comptroller must certify that the excess revenue is there before the Legislative Budget Board issues the authorization to TPWD to spend that money.

As of now, TPWD officials estimate that the actual parks revenue will exceed the revenue estimate in the appropriations bill by about \$3 to \$4 million a year. The comptroller is expected to certify the exact amount around March 1, and TPWD probably will be allowed to use at least some of the excess revenue during the remainder of the biennium.

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