

POLK GROUP

Issue: 06-10

FROM THE CHAIR...Al Greulich

Every great cause has its galvanizing moment when the world finally takes notice. Then comes the hard part - - sustaining the commitment long enough to make a real difference. The environmental movement in the United States has another chance at that galvanizing moment with the specter of global warming now firmly in the public eye. A chance to sustain the commitment needed to overcome the scary scenarios we have all heard about with climate change is about to present itself with this November's elections.

There are not many ways in which our lives today are shaped by the actions of the past presidential administrations more than with wilderness policy. In one hundred years, this administration's mistakes in Iraq may not matter anymore, but our wilderness heritage lost on its watch can never be restored. Time spent in the wild is the best way for humans to tame our arrogance, to remind ourselves that we are temporary intruders upon a larger canvas.

Many appointees made to key government posts having to do with the natural heritage of our country have, from a preservation standpoint, proven to be the wrong people. In my opinion, many of them and their underlings do not realize the importance of what they have been given stewardship to manage. In the eyes of some of these appointees, nature seems to be just so much "green trash". They think of nature the way an illiterate person might think of a library as a big stack of firewood. What has already been lost of the federal estate due to the "opening up" of irreplaceable natural resources to the various extractive industries is enough to give us a sense of great loss for the present and future generations of Americans. If we can elect a new Congress in November, some of the destructive and short sighted policies regarding our wilderness heritage can be stopped.

Housecleaning Time

Fall is the ideal time to clean your nesting boxes before the ducks and owls get in the mood to brood.

If you need a new box, call Bob at 863-439-2251.



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OCTOBER 2006 NEWSLETTER

serving DeSoto, Hardee, Highlands and Polk County

PROGRAM FOR OCTOBER 12, 2006



The **World of Bats** will be presented by **Cyndi and George Marks** of the Florida Bat Conservancy. Bats are probably the most misunderstood of all the mammals. Yet these shy, gentle animals fill a vital role in maintaining balanced ecosystems throughout the world. The program will include a slide presentation on bats around the world, live bats and a sample bat box.

TIME TO ADJUST YOUR ATTITUDE

Halloween will be upon us soon - a better time doesn't exist to explore the world of bats. Ironically, by taking a closer look at the only mammal that can truly fly the sinister myths that have made it a favorite Halloween fright object will be debunked.

Indeed, bats (except for the ones in your belfry!) are of great benefit to mankind. They are considered the most important natural controller of night flying insects, often eating from 2/3s to 100% of their body weight each night. That's a lot of mosquitos! By eating those mosquitos and other crop pests, bats lower pesticide use which has far ranging benefits.

All of Florida's thirteen native species of bats eat insects; in south Florida there are occasional "accidental" bats that sup on fruit, nectar and pollen. At night when bats feed they rely on echolocation to navigate and catch insects in total darkness but they are not blind as myth would have us believe.

Another myth: there are no vampire bats in the United States and even vampire bats in the tropics don't suck blood; they lap it up from a small scrape they can make with their sharp incisor teeth.

But what about rabies? Less than one percent of bats ever contract rabies and when they do, they usually die within three or four days. They never become aggressive so the only precaution you need to take is the same precaution you take with any wild animal: never handle a wild animal with bare hands or arms. And don't allow your cat or dog to mess with one found on the ground.



Graphic with permission of the Florida Bat Conservancy

Bat Trivia: Today there are at least one thousand species of bats living all over the world except in Antarctica and the most extreme deserts. Most bats live in the tropics. The fossil record shows that bats have been on earth for 65 million years. Their wings are like our hands. Bat ecotourism is an over \$8 million business in Texas.

Bats need roosts. In Florida they prefer mature or dead trees or caves - sites that are scarce in our area. A bat house in your yard will provide habitat for these shy gentle creatures and they in turn will work on your mosquito problem. For more information on bats visit www.floridabats.org

....Frances H. Coleman

MESSAGE FILMS

Over the past year we have seen several "films with a message" appear locally. They rarely stay long and often the Polk Theater in Lakeland will be your only chance to see them. These films are not so much entertainment as social documentaries. Michael Moore's "Fahrenheit 9/11" comes to mind and recently Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth" fit that mold. They get plentiful amounts of free advertising and have a growing amount of influence in the USA. People who see these movies are jarred into thinking that truly everything is not as they have been led to believe. Lies and misinformation have become commonplace.

Recently I saw the movie "Who Killed the Electric Car?" Although not as well publicized as the first two, the message is a powerful one. This movie focuses on the electric car, EV1, build by General Motors from 1996 to 2000 for lease in California. We were told that it was not the normal marketplace forces of supply and demand working but the willful act of some well placed politicians, large automobile makers and international oil companies that conspired to eliminate these vehicles from the landscape. We were told that the electric car was an environmental success and the people who leased them were greatly impressed. Apparently however, the profit margin was not large enough for the company which would rather produce high profit Hummers and gas guzzling SUV's. In the end when the last of the little EV1s were rounded up by GM and hauled off to the Arizona desert to be destroyed, there was sadness in the audience which was quickly translated into anger. How dare they do this to a perfectly good car which was better for the environment and for which there was a consumer demand? What was GM

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT IT WAS SAFE TO GO IN THE WATER

Much has been made in the press lately about the attempts of congress and our own Representative Adam Putman to allow oil drilling in waters much closer to our Florida beaches. It's as much an economic problem as it is an environmental one because billions of tourism dollars are at stake. No one will pay big bucks to go to an oil soaked beach. According to a major U.S. news agency an entirely new threat has developed off our coast from a completely unexpected source...Castro's Cuba. In 1971, Cuba discovered and developed oil fields just north of their coast. It was of low quality but it produced enough product to supply them with 40% of their petroleum needs. Then in 2004 they discovered more oil about 20 miles northeast of Havana. That's less than 70 miles from the Florida Keys. The U.S. Geological Survey confirmed that the new North Cuba Basin holds 4.6 to 9.3 billion barrels of crude and 9.8 to 21.8 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. That's blood in the water for the oil company sharks. Cuba divided the area into 59 blocks covering 74,000 square miles and asked for bids on drilling rights. Cuba has treaty rights to perform commercial activities close to the Florida Keys. In May companies with extensive deep water drilling experience obtained exploration rights to several blocks not far from Key West. Oil exploration is not a sure thing and perhaps no oil will be discovered in these blocks. However, if sufficient petroleum is discovered it could lead to a nightmare scenario of oil rigs off our shores with no environmental standards to give us any protection from oil pollution. Our protection would be in the hands of an unfriendly Cuban government. This is one problem that will not go away.

afraid of? ExxonMobil -- that one's a no brainer.

Forty years ago there was a persistent rumor that an inventor had built a carburetor that got 120 MPG. Supposedly Standard Oil bought the patent and it never saw the light of day. I have never given much credence to conspiracy theories before but now I am not so sure.

Go to this web page if you want to see a preview.
<http://www.sonyclassics.com/whokilledtheelectriccar/electric.htm>.
....Chuck Geanangel

PEACE RIVER CIS AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN INFORMATION

The Department of Environmental Protection and Southwest Florida Water Management District have held four public meetings regarding the Peace River Cumulative Impact Study. A wealth of information was presented at the meetings; videos of the meetings are located on the FTP site at <ftp://ftp.dep.state.fl.us/pub/minerrec/manpho/>. PowerPoint presentations shown at these meetings can be found at the FDEP website at <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/mines/prcis.htm> To date, two stakeholder meetings regarding the development of a Peace River Resource Management Plan have been held in Wauchula at the Hardee County Health Department. Brief summaries of those meetings are on the FDEP website. Additional stakeholder meetings are as scheduled below. All meetings will begin at 9 a.m. and last until around noon.

Sept. 29th - location TBA

Oct. 24th - location TBA

Nov. 9th - Hardee Co. Health Dept., Wauchula

....Marian Ryan



Imagine this 40 miles off Key West!

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....Chuck Geanangel

THIS TIME IT REALLY MATTERS

Florida Sierra's Pelican will soon be in your mailbox. It will have a ballot containing the names of several people who are running for positions on the Florida Sierra Executive Committee. This group sets policy and allocates money for Florida Sierra. In past years the ballot listed only the Nominating Committee's candidates; there was no competition for the positions. This year, because of serious conflict over leadership qualities (or lack of it), transparency in decision making (or lack of it), and access to Chapter documents (or lack of it), five petition candidates have qualified to run.

You may agree with the nominating committee's candidates that today's political climate justifies the shielding of information. Or you may share the petition candidates feeling that the Sierra Club has to be an open democratic organization. If you want more background on the differences between the two sets of candidates, please call any of the activists listed on the fourth page of this newsletter. Sometimes voters complain that there's no difference between the candidates; this time there really is and the winners will set state Sierra's environmental priorities and spend your dues money. Become Informed and Please Vote!
.....Frances H. Coleman



SIERRA CLUB REPORT WARNS POST 9/11 FEDERAL DISASTER RESPONSE POLICIES INCREASE RISKS TO HUMAN HEALTH

New York, NY: A new report issued in September by the Sierra Club warns that despite mounting evidence of the devastating health consequences of pollution caused by the September 11th attack, the federal government has introduced new policies that increase the potential risks to

health in the event of another toxic disaster. The report, Harmful Legacy of Pollution and Deception at Ground Zero: How Post 9/11 Disaster Policy Endangers America, describes new federal policies for national disasters that compromise worker safety standards and fail to require precautionary health warnings for unknown contaminants, and - in the event of a "dirty bomb" attack - allow lower cleanup standards for radiological contamination.

"If we don't learn from the past, we are at risk in the future," said Suzanne Mattei, Sierra Club NYC Executive and author of the report. "Our government refuses to admit that its response to the toxic 9/11 pollution caused additional harm. And in the Hurricane Katrina disaster, they did it again. They compared test results to inappropriate guidelines, ignored indoor contamination, gave risky advice to residents and failed to protect workers. It was history repeating itself." The Hurricane Katrina response followed a post-9/11 National Response plan, the Sierra Club report explains, that fails to require enforcement of worker health and safety rules, and also fails to require that health warnings be based on a precautionary, "better safe than sorry" approach to unknown contamination. A major new study by the Mount Sinai World Trade Center Medical Monitoring Program has found that nearly 60 percent of all rescue and recovery workers have contracted long-lasting respiratory illness.

The report also exposes other troubling trends, including new Department of Homeland Security directives that exempt many actions from public environmental review and instruct employees to destroy certain documents when they are "no longer needed." The Sierra Club is concerned that these actions undermine Congressional oversight and public disclosure. The report calls for Congress to strengthen its oversight of environmental disaster response. It also urges that the EPA and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) should carry out their duties to protect environmental health and safety, free from political interference.

.....David Willett, National Press Secretary, Sierra Club

OUTINGS/ACTIVITIES

If you have suggestions for outings or if you wish to lead an outing, call our Outings Coordinator, Gail Bagley at 683-3334. For more activities/events, please visit our web site at <http://florida.sierraclub.org/polk/>

Oct. 14 Hike Circle B Bar Reserve. Join us for the third of our hikes to become more familiar with the lands acquired through Polk's Environmental Lands Program. This will be a leisurely stroll through oak hammocks and hardwood swamp and around marsh and lake shore. We anticipate seeing a variety of wading birds, waterfowl, ospreys, bald eagles and alligators. This Reserve will play a key role in the preservation efforts of the Upper Peace River and Lake Hancock system. Call Chuck at 326-5748 for more information.

Nov. 10-12 Florida Sierra's Annual Conservation Conference. Join Sierrans from all parts of Florida to participate in workshops on Red Tide - Energy - Growth - Wetlands - Biodiversity - Water Quality - Offshore Drilling - and the Everglades. Beautiful Pine Lake Retreat is conveniently located on Hwy 27 just south of Leesburg. Housing options include chalets, lodges, RV or tent camping. There will be great food in the Retreat's cafeteria and the camp is loaded with activities and sport options. More details and a sign-up sheet will be in the fall Pelican.

Nov. 18 Tour the MacKay Estate. The Heartland Native Plant Society is sponsoring a leisurely hike through the Preserve on the shore of Lake Rochelle in Lake Alfred. Participants will see mature sandhill grading into closed canopy hammock, cutthroat seep and bay swamp. Call Frances at 956-3771 to sign up.

In order to participate in one of the Sierra Club's outings, you will need to sign a liability waiver which will be furnished at the beginning of the outing. If you would like to read a copy of the waiver prior to the outing, please see <http://www.sierraclub.org/outings/chapter/forms/> or call 415-977-5528. In the interests of facilitating 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. Please note that some of the above listed activities are events that we think you will find interesting and fun, but they are not official outings.



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OCTOBER MEETING
 Thursday, October 12, 2006



PROGRAM:



The World of Bats
Florida's Natural Defense
Against Mosquitos

By

Cyndi and George Marks
The Florida Bat Conservancy

*General Meeting and Executive Committee Meeting Run
 Concurrently*

Join us for our pot-luck suppers at 6:30 p.m. on the second Thursday of every month. Bring a dish to share, a drink and your utensils. Dress is casual. **The meeting will start around 7:15 p.m.**

Meetings are held at the Audubon Nature Center, 115 Lameraux Rd., Winter Haven. From the traffic light at the intersection of Hwy. 540 (Cypress Gardens Blvd.) and Cypress Gardens Road (look for the Shell station and Blockbuster Video) - Turn east onto C.G. Road and follow around sharp right hand turn & then sharp left hand turn. After left hand turn, Lameraux is fourth road on left, two blocks west of Garden Grove Elementary School. Distance from the light to the Nature Center is about 2.3 miles. (Phone 324-7304)

Web Site: <http://florida.sierraclub.org/polk/>

Sierra Membership Application

Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional): () _____ F94Q W3311 1

- Check One **Individual** **Joint**
- Introductory** \$25
- Regular** \$39 \$47
- Senior** \$24 \$32
- Student** \$24 \$32



Annual dues include subscription to Sierra (\$7.50) and chapter publications (\$1). Dues are not tax-deductible.

Please mail your check and this form to:
Sierra Club, PO Box 52968, Boulder, Colorado, 80322-2968

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