



Suwannee-St. Johns Group

Sierra Club

Newsletter

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Buying Babcock Ranch

IS IT A GOOD DEAL?

BY KATHY CANTWELL

Last November, the state Cabinet Land Gov. Bush approved a contract that could lead to one of Florida's largest land purchases—the 91,000-acre Babcock Ranch.

Owned by the Babcock family for several generations, the parcel is so massive it is spread over parts of Lee and Charlotte counties.

The state initially tried to purchase it a year ago, but the ranch owners were unwilling to accept the state's appraised value of almost \$500 million. By law, the state can only purchase property at a value determined by an approved state appraiser.

Then, in stepped Syd Kitson, a developer. Kitson has negotiated a complex contract involving several state agencies and both counties that is mind numbing in its contingencies.

While this article will not attempt to explain all the complexities, it will try to

summarize the deal and its possible impact on the state's public land-buying program.

Florida has agreed to buy 74,000 acres of the ranch over one or more phases at a debatable appraised value. Kitson will get the right to develop the rest of the ranch (approximately 17,000 acres called "Area 6") at a more intense density than what would be allowed under Lee and Charlotte counties' comprehensive plans (19,000-plus houses and six million square feet of commercial space).

Here are the pros and cons of the deal:

PROS

This will be one of the largest land purchases ever for the state of Florida and will do much to ensure for the future huge contiguous public lands that will provide protected habitat for the Florida panther, Florida black bear, wood stork and many other endangered and threatened species.

The purchase will protect most of the ranch from the thousand small deaths it would have most certainly endured by low-density development in the coming years.

CONS

First, unless separate funds are raised by the legislature this spring, this purchase will severely limit the availability of funds in the Florida Forever program for other projects. Second, this purchase sends a message that you can circumvent the state's "appraised value" rule.

No public agency has calculated the full value of the development rights that Kitson is procuring for Area 6, but it is estimated to be several hundred million dollars.

see RANCH, page 7



SPRINGS PROGRAM

Dr. Harley Means, of the Florida Geological Survey, is the featured speaker at this month's SSJ Sierra Club general meeting.

Dr. Means will speak about Florida's springs, their water quality, and the Florida Springs Initiative.

Our chapter's region contains many springs, and learning about them and the pollution that threatens them is an important task. See you there. —*The Editor*

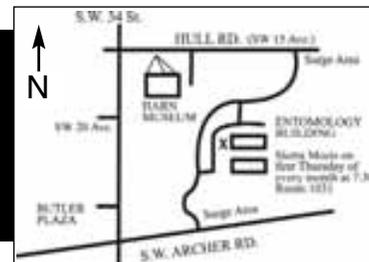
GENERAL MEETING

Thursday, March 2, 7:30 PM

Entomology/Nematology Building on the UF campus
(Just east of the Performing Arts Center. Turn south off Hull Road on to Natural Areas Road.)

THE GEOLOGY OF FLORIDA SPRINGS

DR. HARLEY MEANS
FLORIDA GEOLOGICAL SURVEY



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On Elections and Petitions

BY ROB BRINKMAN

I have been thinking about the March 7 Gainesville city commission elections. The turnout among SSJ Sierra Club members in local elections is probably in the neighborhood of 50 percent, which is far greater than the general population. Still, let's strive for 100 percent.

This election there are two open seats: Chuck Chestnut's District 1 and Warren Nielsen's at large seat; both commissioners are term-limited out of office. Sierra Club groups in Florida are no longer allowed to conduct candidate forums, so please try to attend scheduled forums and question the candidates yourself.

Our endorsements are still pending.

Above all, please get out and vote; local elections are important to the work of the Sierra Club. Getting good candidates elected can mean not having to defend the environment in court, which can be a costly and often unsuccessful last resort.

GET OFF THE GRID

Karen Garren, our Outings chair, is planning a tour of GRU's Deerhaven power plant. As a nice contrast, I have been asked by some members to lead a tour of an off-the-grid, solar-powered home built by SSJ Sierra Club members Liz Seiberling

and Randy Cullom (with which I also helped) in the Interlachen area of Putnam County.

The home has a composting toilet, greywater system and an organic garden. It is situated on 60 mostly wooded acres that have been managed with prescribed burns to enhance wildlife habitat, and is adjacent to two lakes.

The home has many passive solar design features, as well as 1,200 watts of photovoltaic panels quietly making electricity directly from sun light.

Please contact me at RobBrinkman@cox.net or 352-337-1757 if you would like to attend the tour on a Saturday in late March or early April; let me know what days would be good for you. If there is a lot of interest, more than one date could be scheduled.

ANTI-COAL PLANT PETITION

The Gainesville City Commission is nearing a decision to build another coal plant. Preliminary work done by city consultants, ICF Associates (aka Incompetent Coal Flacks), gives every indication that another coal plant will be chosen.

In response, a group of concerned citi-

zens will launch a petition campaign to place a charter amendment on the ballot in the fall to require voter approval before Gainesville can spend money to plan or build additional coal plants.

It will be very challenging to collect about 8,000 signatures in 90 days; volunteers are needed. Please contact me if you want to help out.

SUWANNEE CEMENT PLANT

In response to a request by the SSJ group, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection held a public hearing on the draft permit for the proposed expansion of the Suwannee American cement plant near the Ichetucknee River.

The proposed expansion will more than double the capacity of the plant and allow it to emit an additional 117.5 pounds of mercury, as well as more than 2 million pounds of nitrogen oxides, further contributing to the nitrate pollution of the Suwannee River and its tributaries.

Although I was unsure how many people would attend as I drove up to Branford for the hearing, about 30 people turned out that night to testify.

Virtually everyone who spoke stated that they knew the permit would be granted over their objection. Most lived in the

see CORNER, page 7



Visit the National and Local Sierra Club Websites!

National: <http://www.sierraclub.org> • Local: <http://www.gatorsierra.org>

Suwannee-St. Johns Group Chairs & Executive Committee

Chair	Rob Brinkman	337-1757	robbrinkman@cox.net
Program co-chair	Bill Radunovich	375-2354	billrad@mac.com
Program co-chair	Anna Peterson	337-2957	ALP@religion.ufl.edu
Conservation Co-Chair	Josh Dickinson	373-2377	josh@foresttrust.com
Conservation Co-Chair	Paula Stahmer	373-3958	paulastahmer@aol.com
Secretary	Annette Long	352-490-8930	MLongAKorn@aol.com
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Membership Chair	Whitey Markle	392-0270	markle@ufl.edu
Administrative Chair	Russell Roy	372-7305	rroy4@bellsouth.net
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Events Coordinator	Sherry Steiner	375-2563	s.camil@att.net
Political Chair	Dwight Adams	378-5129	adams@phys.ufl.edu
Government Liaison	Steve Williams	386-397-2945	old-time-florida@earthlink.net
Environmental Education Chair	Rudy Rothseiden	352-318-3844	rudy.rothseiden@gmail.com
Newsletter Folding	Scott Camil	375-2563	s.camil@att.net
Webmaster	Louis Clark	373-5377	klouisc@bellsouth.net
Newsletter Editor/Design	Colin Whitworth	372-2464	colinwhitworth@cox.net

FOLDING PARTY

Interested in hosting a newsletter folding party? Contact Scott Camil at 375-2563

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Cool Nights, Warm Days

BY KAREN GARREN

As this article goes to press, red buds, maples, plums, and spiderwort are flowering, titmice and cardinals are twittering their territorial songs, cranes are massing for migration, and cool nights offset warm days. So, sing a song, roll down a hill, and go fly a kite.

Our Crystal River paddle was a lot of fun despite adverse weather and miscommunication on the meeting place and time. We saw dozens of manatee; their laid-back attitude and gentle rise to the surface for breath was very peaceful. In a cutover field near Three Sisters Springs, hundreds of White Ibis probed the ground for invertebrates, groups lifting in waves. Lovely.

We met folks with diverse opinions of the benefits of human/manatee contact. Did you know that South Florida manatee have little of the good will enjoyed in North Central Florida? The animals there remain dispersed year around, so there're few opportunities for educational eco-tourism. In South Florida, manatees are mostly regarded as boating obstacles.

Manatee censuses have indicated increased population levels, but is this due to the protection of boating speed zones and refuges or to improved census methods? With the species' status being down-listed, they can use all the friends they can get.



OUTINGS

Saturday, March 11 (tentative date, contingent on scheduling, please contact Karen Garren or see web site for update)—Tour of GRU Deer Haven Power Plant. Come get an inside look at where our energy comes from. Join us for brown-bag discussion of ways and means and needs of the community. Do you have an informed opinion on this issue? What will be the quality of life in North Central Florida throughout the 21st Century? This is an issue of regional impact.

Saturday/Sunday March 25-26—Car camping at O'Leno State Park. When is a huge amount of water rising out of the ground not a spring? When it's a river. O'Leno has a "land bridge" where the Santa Fe River goes down a sinkhole and comes up at River Rise a few miles further. Come visit this lovely park, learn about karst geology and about threats to NC Florida's underground aquifers, bring canoe/kayak and hiking staff. Spend the day or join us to camp and share meals and build a campfire. This outing is rated "easy"; the restrooms and many trails are handicapped accessible.

BE A LEADER

How would you like to show off some of your favorite natural areas? Do you live somewhere other than Alachua County? Would you like to contribute to educating folks on local environmental conservation issues? Please contact SSJ Outings Chair Karen Garren to discuss outing possibilities.

Along with participation in Outings planning, your SSJ Sierra Club needs interested and involved leaders. We'll have an Outings Leader Training workshop in Gainesville in June. The benefits are improved public contact skills and increased personal confidence. Give to your community and to future generations appreciation for a good quality environment by participating in the SSJ Outings program.

news¬es

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE CONFERENCE

A free statewide conference on environmental health and justice is scheduled for March 3-5 in Winter Park.

Hosted by the Center for Health, Environment and Justice, the conference, titled "Taking Action For Environmental Health, Justice and Economic Prosperity," aims to teach new skills and enable people to share their experiences.

Planned panel discussions and workshops include:

- Organizing: A Troubleshooting Workshop
- Media: What You Want in 30 Seconds or Less...A Soundbite
- Environmental Justice and Protective Actions

The Center for Health, Environment and Justice planned this event with members of a Florida-based Planning Committee that includes the Farmworker Association of Florida, Florida Organic Growers, Florida A&M University-Institute of Public Health, Legal Environmental Assistance Foundation, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Florida PIRG, WildLaw ACES, among many other groups.

To reserve a space, call (703) 237-2249, ext. 21, or e-mail childproofing@chej.org.

By Colin Whitworth

GRU COAL PLANT BATTLE CONTINUES

ICF Consulting was hired by the City Commission in December to come up with "innovative" options for meeting future electricity needs. The consulting firm is a favorite of electric utilities that are part of the rush to coal.

Knowledgeable citizens feared that ICF would simply parrot GRU's arguments, and ICF's presentation Jan. 26 confirmed these worries. ICF's "innovative" options were a rehash of GRU's proposals.

City Commissioners have now tentatively agreed that the emphasis should be on investing in energy efficiency and other programs that reduce needs for new generators, in order to delay a decision on a large system as long as possible.

Whether ICF Consulting will provide any useful guidance toward this goal is doubtful, but the city commissioners should be urged to reject GRU pressure for any immediate commitment on a new power plant. Scheduling of decisive votes on this issue keep changing, like a shell game, as if to avoid public scrutiny, so contact the commission soon.

By Paula Stahmer, SSJ Conservation Co-Chair

Two Sides of the Creek

TWO SSJ SIERRA CLUB MEMBERS GIVE THEIR ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE HOGTOWN CREEK CHARTER AMENDMENT



Opposed

THE AMENDMENT WILL DESTROY PROTECTION OF THE FEW REMAINING CONSERVATION AREAS WITHIN THE CITY

BY PAULA STAHLER

The Hogtown Creek watershed is a fragile and important ecosystem has been protected since 1998 by a charter amendment put forward by referendum initiated by the Greenspace Preservation Association, an organization of concerned citizens.

The referendum became essential when the city promoted a huge development scheme in conservation areas, especially those flanking Hogtown Creek. Indifferent to literally years of public outcry and environmental concerns, the city was determined to spend more than \$1.2 million of our money to pave 800 feet of asphalt road

through sensitive woods and animal habitat.

The Hogtown Greenway amendment, passed in 1998, prohibits the construction of paved surfaces for transportation use or recreational facilities in areas designated for recreational or conservation use. The applicability of the prohibition was limited by a city map contained in the 1990-1991 Comprehensive Plan.

Despite spending \$40,000 of taxpayer money to defeat the citizens' referendum, the city of Gainesville lost by more than 60 percent. Ever since, the city has mounted a succession of failed attempts to overturn the amendment.

Now the city is back with a deceptively worded charter amendment on the March 7 ballot, which if passed will overthrow the hard won environmental protections. The wording of the city's ballot summary and amendment suggests that paving will only be allowed in areas designated recreation while continuing protection of conservation lands.

This is NOT the case. The city's proposed language also removes protection from the conservation areas except for the prohibition on paving trails. Thus, if the city amendment passes, we will be left with the anomaly of paved conservation lands that have non-paved trails.

If the city's proposal passes, Conservation areas that have been protected by the citizens' referendum will be

see **OPPOSED**, page 5



For

SSJ SIERRA CLUB EXCOM TAKES NO STANCE ON GREENWAY AMENDMENT

BY ROB BRINKMAN

The SSJ Sierra Club Executive Committee did not take a position on the Gainesville Charter amendment commonly known as the Hogtown Greenway amendment.

At the February meeting, Excom members discussed the issue at length, but no one felt strongly enough to advocate that the SSJ Sierra Club group make an endorsement either way. Some members thought the issue had the potential to be too divisive.

What follows is solely my own opinion and does not represent the position of the SSJ group.

It appears to me that amendment word-

see **FOR**, page 5



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FOR, from page 4

ing still prohibits paved trails or transportation corridors on city-owned land designated as conservation in the Hogtown Creek watershed. It does appear to allow recreational facilities, such as tennis courts, in areas designated for recreation.

The intent, as I understand it, is to allow expansion of recreational facilities in parks in West Gainesville.

Westside Park is frequently mentioned as a site for expanded facilities, but Northside Park and others could also benefit from improved facilities.



While I was not a resident of Gainesville in 1998, I did follow the issue in the paper. Had I been a city resident, I would have voted for the Hogtown Greenway amendment.

I am a city dweller now, and I will vote for this proposed modification because it will protect the creeks and conservation areas. Paved trails adjacent to creeks are not appropriate, besides pollution from asphalt pavement; erosion would increase due to runoff from the impervious surfaces. Yet there is a clear need for expanded recreational facilities that this proposed amendment will permit, while protecting Hogtown Creek and its tributaries.

OPPOSED, from page 4

opened to any number of destructive paving projects. Woods that provide wildlife habitat and respite for humans will be irreparably damaged. The neighborhoods that have been the beneficiary of wooded buffers will be subject to flooding because the ground can no longer absorb excess rainwater during storms. Flooding is already a chronic problem due to widespread paving of vast areas in the Hogtown Creek watershed upstream of Loblolly woods. Runoff from paved surfaces will dump pollution into Hogtown Creek. Costly, ugly public works projects will be needed to alleviate

the damage. The city's future recreation needs can be met with an amendment that allows construction of recreation facilities in Recreation areas while retaining protection of the Conservation areas. In fact, GPA offered such an amendment in 2001 that would have lifted the paving prohibition in recreation areas only, but the city rejected the offer. The city is intent on paving it all. The city's proposed Charter Amendment is in defiance of the will of the citizens, indifferent to the importance of our precious remaining urban greenspaces, and is also contrary to its' legal obligations.

BALLOT LANGUAGE

**CITY OF GAINESVILLE CHARTER AMENDMENT
PARKS AND RECREATION AREAS**

Currently the City Charter does not allow spending any federal, state or local monies to pave for transportation purposes or recreational facilities in Conservation or Recreation areas within the Hogtown Creek Watershed (Watershed). Should the City Charter be amended to allow paving for parking or recreational facilities on Recreation areas (parks), as provided in Ordinance 041138, while continuing to prohibit paving for trails or transportation corridors on City-owned property designated Conservation within the Watershed?

- q YES
- q NO

BALLOT RESOLUTION TEXT

As passed by the City Commission

5.06 Funds for Construction of Paved Surfaces in Designated Areas. The City of Gainesville, Florida ~~will~~ shall not expend, use, ~~nor~~ seek, permit or allow the use of any city, county, state, private or federal funds for the construction of any paved surface for transportation use or recreational facility in the area designated under the City of Gainesville Comprehensive Plan, 1990, for recreational use or conservation use in the Hogtown Creek Watershed from the date of adoption of this charter amendment surfaces for trails or transportation corridors on City-owned land designated as Conservation, as shown on the map dated May 1998 and on file in the Office of the Clerk of the Commission, within the Hogtown Creek Watershed. This provision is not intended to restrict paving for parking or recreational facilities constructed on land designated as Recreation on the aforementioned map. [Underlined words are additions to the original 1998 amendment; words with strike through are deletions.]

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Candidates Get Their Say

BY DWIGHT ADAMS

Voters will elect two new Gainesville city commissioners March 7 to replace outgoing commissioners Warren Nielsen and Chuck Chestnut IV, who are out because of term limits. There are two candidates for each race—Tony Domenech and Jeanna Mastrodicasa in the at-large race and Scherwin Henry and Barbara Sharpe in the District 1 race.

The SSJ Sierra Club asked each candidate to fill out a questionnaire, which we've published below along with the answers (TD = Tony Domenech, JM = Jeanna Mastrodicasa, SH = Scherwin Henry and BS = Barbara Sharpe).

Each candidate provided comments in addition to the numerical answer to many of the questions. Those can be found at www.gatorsierra.com.

What the Sierra Club political committee considers to be the "correct" answer is denoted by SC and follows the candidates' answers in parentheses. Elaboration, when offered, is given in brackets following the statement.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Most wetlands in the city have already been seriously degraded, so little effort should be devoted to protection of wetlands. TD-2, JM-2, SH-2, BS-1 (SC-1)

2. To reduce dependence on the auto and sprawl growth, the City must promote denser infill, including taller buildings, mixed use and traditional walkable neigh-

borhoods. TD-4, JM-5, Sh-5, BS-4 (SC-5)

3. Traffic calming devices such as roundabouts and street narrowing, e.g. Main Street and University Avenue, just slow up traffic and should not be used. TD-3, JM-2, SH-4, BS-5 (SC-1)

4. A significant portion of any future increase in gas tax should be committed to provide alternative modes of transportation and free bus service to all residents. TD-2, JM-3, Sh-3, BS-5 (SC-5)

5. Transportation concurrency exception areas should NOT be used since these just allow more traffic congestion. TD-3, JM-2, Sh-2, BS-4 (SC-1)

6. The City should not contribute to efforts to lure businesses here since the experience throughout Florida is population increase without a reduction in poverty. TD-3, JM-2, SH-1, BS-5 (SC-5)

7. The City's economic development efforts should concentrate almost exclusively on nurturing local businesses, especially start-up ones that create 80% of new jobs, and ones that locate in East Gainesville. TD-5, JM-4, SH-2, BS-5 (SC-5)

8. In order to reduce water usage, mandatory restrictions on lawn watering with much higher rates for this use should be implemented. TD-3, JM-5, SH-2, BS-4 (SC-5)

9. The City can afford to spend more for recreation, which must have its own priority like other services such as police,

5-strongly agree, would actively support.
4-agree, would support.
3-no position.
2-disagree, would oppose.
1-strongly disagree, would actively oppose.

fire, etc. TD-3, JM-4, SH-3, BS-? (SC-5)

10. GRU must go ahead with the coal-fired power plant since conservation and other approaches advocated by opponents to the coal-fired plant are ineffective. TD-3, JM-1, SH-3, BS-1 (SC-1)

11. The City should NOT subsidize developments such as University Corners and The Lofts since taxpaying citizens must make up the lost revenues. [The wording may make this a "loaded" statement; tax increments for redevelopment are considered appropriate under certain circumstances. See candidates' statements at our website.] TD-5, JM-2, SH-1, BS-4 (SC-1)

12. The City should enact strict new ordinances to control the problems of student renters in single-family neighborhoods. [This is considered a problem but because of lack of enforcement of existing ordinances. See candidates' statements at our website.] TD-5, JM-4, SH-2, BS-4 (SC-1)

13. With threats such as Koppers contamination of the wellfield and sewage leakage into creeks, the City should add a surcharge on water bills to provide an emergency fund for maintaining a clean water supply. TD-2, JM-5, SH-3, BS-3 (SC-5)

see ELECTION, page 7



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National Sierra Club Election Coming Soon

BY STAFF

The annual election for the Club's Board of Directors is now underway. In March, you will receive in the mail your national Sierra Club ballot. This will include information on the candidates and where you can find additional information on the Club's website.

The Sierra Club is a democratically structured organization at all levels. The Club requires the regular flow of views on policy and priorities from its grassroots membership in order to function well.

Yearly participation in elections at all

**SIERRA
ELECTION**



2006

Club levels is a membership obligation.

Your Board of Directors is required to stand for election by the membership. This Board sets Club policy and budgets at the national level and works closely with the staff to operate the Club.

Voting for candidates who express your views on how the Club should grow and change is both a privilege and responsibility of membership.

Members frequently state that they don't know the candidates and find it difficult to vote without learning more. You can learn more by asking questions of your

group and chapter leadership and other experienced members you know.

Visit the Club's election website: <http://www.sierraclub.org/bod/2006election>. This site provides links to additional information about candidates, and their views on a variety of issues facing the Club and the environment.

You should use your own judgment by taking several minutes to read the ballot statement of each candidate. Then make your choices and cast your votes. You will find the ballot is quite straightforward and easy to mark. A growing number of members find the user-friendly Internet voting option to be very convenient as well as saving postage.

BABCOCK, from page 1

The Charlotte County Commission in December approved submitting the comprehensive plan amendments allowing this development to the Florida Department of Community Affairs—despite the fact that the commission's growth management staff advised commissioners NOT to do this. The staff submitted 36 reservations with the amendments.

The problem with the Babcock purchase is that we really don't know its true cost. Is the Babcock Ranch really worth more than \$750 million, the alleged price that Kitson is paying the family?

It could have been worse.

Sierra Club, along with others, protested when Kitson said he wanted to retain the water rights on the entire ranch. The

cabinet heard our protest and only granted Kitson the water rights on Area 6.

WHAT TO DO NOW

- Contact your state legislators and request that the funds for purchasing this ranch come out of the general revenue, rather than the Florida Forever Program. Because of a windfall increase in tax revenues from the unprecedented flurry of land sales with sky-rocketing land prices the past year, the state will be in an unusual cash-rich position and should be able to do this.

- The state needs to re-examine its land buying policies. We need to set policies that are more flexible as far as what we can

pay for a parcel, but at the same time they need to be more revealing as to the true cost.

There is no question that the Babcock Ranch is a valuable and important ecologi-



cal purchase.

The question is—at what cost?

You can find more information on the Charlotte County website that describes the comprehensive plan amendment allowing the development in Area 6, as well as the staff report on it, at <http://www.charlottecountyfl.com/CDEV/PlanningZoning/Babcock/>

CORNER, from page 2

vicinity. In addition to the chemical pollution, they were very angry about the noise and light pollution that has disrupted the tranquility of the rural life they used to enjoy.

Driving home I was struck by the courage and defiance of the people who showed up to protest, even though they assumed that they would be ignored. However, all comments were recorded and are now part of the official record for these permits.

On behalf of SSJ I requested, among other

things, that these permit hearings should be required and occur early on in the permitting process; rather than on request, as an afterthought, when the permit is all but a done deal.

Many of the citizens who attended resolved to travel to Tallahassee and demand better protection of our environment and quality of life.

I was inspired that people will raise their voices to protest even though they doubt it will matter. We must never concede the birthright of future generations—a healthy natural environment—without protest.

ELECTION, from page 6

14. The City should not spend funds to promote ballot referenda such as that currently on the ballot regarding paving in the Hogtown watershed. [By State law, funds must be spent only for educational purposes, or must be allocated equally to both sides of the issue.] TD-4, JM-5, Sh-3, BS-5 (SC-5)

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MARCH 2006 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 2, 7:30 p.m. SSJ Sierra Club monthly general meeting, in the Entomology/Nematology Building on the UF campus (see page 1 for details).

March 3-5, Winter Park. Taking Action for Environmental Health, Justice and Economic Prosperity, a free conference (see coverage page 3).

March 7, Tuesday, 7-7 p.m. Gainesville city elections. Two open City Commission seats and one referendum. See pre-election coverage inside the newsletter.

March 17, Friday, 7:30 p.m. Folding Party for the April newsletter. At Scott Camil and Sherry Steiner's house. Call 375-2563, after 3 p.m., for more information.

March 25-26, Sat., 9-6 p.m and Sun., 10-5 p.m. Kanapaha Spring Garden Festival. Plants, crafts, music. At Kanapaha Botanical Gardens, 4700 SW 58th Drive.

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