



Suwannee-St. Johns Group

Sierra Club

Newsletter

Published monthly except June and August from Gainesville, Florida

VOLUME 36 • NUMBER 5 • May 2006

Adventures in Papua New Guinea

BRIAN MCNAB AND DAVID AUTH WILL DISCUSS THEIR EXPERIENCES IN P.N.G.

BY COLIN WHITWORTH

Two area zoologists will team up this month to talk about their experiences in Papua New Guinea, emphasizing both humans and birds of paradise.

Brian McNab, a Professor Emeritus and past chair of UF's zoology department, and David Auth, the biodiversity issue chair for the Florida Chapter of Sierra Club, will make the presentation.

New Guinea, at 319,713 square miles, is the second largest island in the world, after Greenland, which is more than twice as large (Australia is the smallest continent). Another 25,214 square miles of smaller islands are politically tied to the present two parts of the big island of New Guinea.

Humans arrived around 40,000 years ago. The Portuguese "discovered" it in 1512. The Dutch made it part of the Dutch East Indies in 1660. Unfortunately, the islands were politically divided in 1824, when the English muscled into the eastern portion.

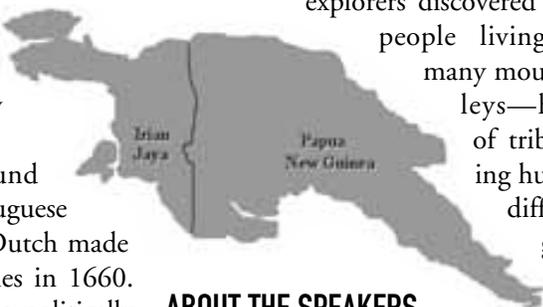
In 1963, Holland finally gave up the slightly smaller western portion, which became Irian Jaya, the easternmost end of Indonesia. England had to split the eastern half of the big island with Germany (1884-1906), which also took over the smaller islands further east.

England turned its southeastern portion

of New Guinea over to Australia when it gained independence in 1906. The Aussies kicked the Germans out in 1914 at the start of World War I and are still there, although Papua New Guinea became an independent country in 1975.

For a brief time in 1942-43, Japan almost gained control of the entire area, except for the interior of New Guinea and its southern coast.

In May 1930, a few Australians reached the central highlands, making first contact with people essentially free of Caucasian interference for 40,000 years. Soon, other explorers discovered a million people living in the many mountain valleys—hundreds of tribes speaking hundreds of different languages.



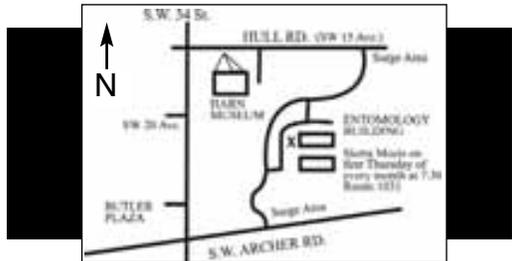
ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Brian McNab is a Professor Emeritus and past chair of the zoology department at UF, with an adult specialization in physiological ecology. After putting many species of mammals in chambers to determine how much oxygen they consume while at rest at different ambient air temperatures, he started doing the same with birds.

McNab slowly became one of the few world authorities of both mammal and bird

GENERAL MEETING
 Thursday, May 4, 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.)

ADVENTURES IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA
 BRIAN MCNAB AND DAVID AUTH



thermoregulation. In 2005 he completed his eleventh trip to Papua New Guinea, to record for all time the metabolic rates of as many bird species as he can catch, measure, and release.

David Auth, the biodiversity issue chair for the Florida Chapter of Sierra Club, had the good fortune to accompany McNab as his field assistant during the first part of his 2005 trip to Papua New Guinea. McNab was on his doctoral committee back in the environmentally hopeful 1970s, when David studied thermoregulation of *Cyclura carinata*, the Caicos Island Rock Iguana.

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Bad Bills

COURTESY OF FLORIDA LAWMAKERS

BY ROB BRINKMAN

It has been a beautiful, if dry spring in North Florida. What ruins this time of year, however, is the fact that the Florida Legislature is in session.

Each session, bad environmental bills sprout like mushrooms in the night, and this year is no exception. One way to keep track of them is the bill tracker on the Florida Sierra Club website—www.floridasierraclub.org/tracker.

One of the worst bills is HB 7163, which would take away the ability of local governments to have wetland protection regulations that are more protective than the state law.

There are others:

- HB 1343 would allow the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to take over permitting for wetland impacts that are less than 10 acres from the US Corp of Engineers.

- HB 749 would prohibit local governments from requiring developments be connected to central sewer systems if it costs more to extend the lines than it would to use septic tanks.

- Both the State House and Senate have energy bills that would take away local gov-

ernment control of power plant and transmission siting decisions and provide for an expedited fast track permitting—this at a time when at least six new coal power plants are planned in Florida.

- There is pending legislation both to prohibit local governments from applying noise ordinances to airboats and to remove current provisions that require engine mufflers (see “Making Some Noise in Tallahassee”, page 3).

The legislature is also placing amendments to the Florida Constitution on the ballot that will make it extremely difficult for citizens to place amendments on future ballots. Interestingly, the legislature is responsible for far more amendments on the ballot than have reached the ballot by petition.

If there is a unifying theme to this years legislature, it is anti-local control and anti-citizen. I urge Sierra Club members to contact their state representatives and speak out for the environment.

NEWSLETTER NEWS

A few months ago members were encouraged to help reduce recurring expenses by accessing this newsletter online and volunteering to be taken off the mailing list for the paper version. There has been little response to this request. At the April Excom meeting, the newsletter advertising rate was increased. We are also

researching other fundraising possibilities. While there is no immediate short-term funding crisis, I am determined to either cut recurring expenses or increase revenues to make our finances sustainable.

Increasing revenues would have the additional benefit of expanding the range of activities we could use in defense of our natural resources. If you have any fundraising experience or have a specific idea to increase revenue, please contact me.

CHAIR'S



CORNER

WATER WARS

Our air and water continue to suffer from pollution. Meanwhile, most of Florida is simply using too much water, and South Florida officials are still looking to our region of North Florida to make up the shortfalls due to unsustainable levels of use in South Florida.

The Suwannee River Water Management District is setting a minimum flow level standard for the Suwannee River that would allow huge quantities of water to be sent south. Meanwhile the St. Johns Water Management District is studying the use of the Rodman Reservoir as a water supply, despite statements by Gov. Bush and the US Forest Service that the dam must be removed.

Our group is committed to the restoration of the Ocklawaha River as a natural

see CORNER, page 3

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
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Membership Chair	Whitey Markle	392-0270	markle@ufl.edu
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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

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

Suwannee-St. Johns Group Sierra Club Newsletter (UPS 317-370) is published 10 months a year, **except June and August**, by the Suwannee-St. Johns Group Sierra Club, 1024 NW 13th Ave, Gainesville, 32601. Non-member subscription rate is \$5.00. Periodicals Postage Paid is paid at the Gainesville, FL 32608 post office. **Postmaster: Send change of addresses to Suwannee- St. Johns Group Sierra Club Newsletter, c/o The Sierra Club, Member Services, P.O. Box 52968, Boulder, CO 80328-2968. Send both your old and new addresses and a Sierra address label, which contains your membership number. PLEASE ADDRESS ALL GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE FOR THE SUWANNEE-ST. JOHNS GROUP OF THE SIERRA CLUB TO: P.O. BOX 13951, GAINESVILLE, FL 32604.**

Airboats Making Some Noise in Tallahassee

IN FLORIDA, IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE LAW, JUST ERASE IT

BY WHITEY MARKLE

On the surface, two bills floating through the Florida Legislature this session seem to offer hope and relief to victims of airboat noise. Upon deeper reading, however, the bills present bewilderment and hopelessness.

If these bills pass, 15 years of legal precedent will be neutered. The legislature passed the existing vessel muffler law in 1991. After years of wrangling, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission last year finally came up with a definition of "muffler" would have mandated good mufflers on all water vessels.

Now the FFWCC is back, alongside the Florida Airboat Alliance, attempting to nullify that work.

This legislation is a mirage. It's author, Rep. Charles Dean (a former sheriff), is an avid airboater and receives contributions from the Florida Airboat Association. Maybe that's why the bill does not define mufflers or "adequate sound abatement." That omission could be of little consequence, though, as it is likely that the bill will have great loopholes for every airboat to be excluded from enforcement—for example, because the airboat is on "trial run for a regatta," as one proposed loophole suggests.

This bill is deceitful and just plain tricky. It speaks of "not discriminating" against airboats, although I can't understand how an inanimate object can be discriminated against.

More importantly, if this bill is passed in its present form, local governments will have been robbed of their home rule by requiring a supermajority vote (four of five votes) to restrict nuisance noise makers (read: airboats) on the water.

Even with effective mufflers, airboats are still a defined nuisance by law. This bill will essentially nullify local government's right to put airboats on restrictions, such as curfews or off limits as has been established in several counties.

Sheriffs Ed Dean (Marion County) and Steve Oelrich (Alachua County) have been actively involved in negotiating against these

ment, and most importantly social justice.

Commissioners have directed GRU to implement all cost effective programs using the TRC test. Gainesville is also looking for a new GRU general manager, which presents an opportunity for a change in philosophy and direction for GRU, when it is most needed.

The original coal plant proposed by GRU is no longer being considered, and biomass, a renewable carbon neutral local resource, is getting more attention.

In acknowledgement of all the recent developments, Citizens for Affordable and Renewable Energy is suspending the peti-

news¬es

BE A FORCE FOR CHANGE

This summer, let the Sierra Student Coalition change your life.

Have you ever seen an environmental problem in your neighborhood or on your campus, but you weren't sure what you could do about it? Want to get involved or be more effective for the environment in your school or community?

Every year, the Sierra Student Coalition runs a series of weeklong summer programs for environmentally minded high school and college students. While there, you will meet people who share a common love for the environment and new ideas for how to make things better.

The programs combine rustic settings and outdoor activities with intense training on how to plan and run environmental campaigns, communicate effectively and build campus environmental groups. Guest speakers provide new insights into the problems facing our planet and how all of us can get involved to solve them.

Many past participants have gone on to become leaders in their student environmental groups and Sierra Club Chapters.

Get more information at www.ssc.org or by calling 1-888-JOIN-SSC.

2006 STUDENT SUMMER TRAINING PROGRAM

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 July 17-23: Washington
 July 24-30: Environmental Justice,
 near Los Angeles
 August 14-20 Pennsylvania
 Puerto Rico: TBA (Native Spanish-speakers only, please)

ills. They deserve a lot of credit for their efforts. Also, state Sen. Rod Smith, a Democrat from Alachua, is on the Senate Environmental Preservation Committee and needs to get involved in this issue. His phone number is 1-850-487-5020.

All of our state representatives need to be contacted so that when these bills are being voted on, our representatives will vote No. It's going to be a long, hot, noisy summer.

CORNER, from page 2

free flowing river. We need volunteers for an Ocklawaha issue committee, to be chaired by Whitey Markle.

PETITION DRIVE SHELVED

The Gainesville City Commission seems to be moving in the right direction on the coal power plant issue. While coal is not totally off the table, commissioners have added a new cost effectiveness test for conservation programs. The Total Resource Cost test incorporates the impacts of programs on health, environ-

tion campaign for a charter amendment to require a referendum if a coal plant is chosen. If a coal plant is chosen later, CARE has a list of thousands who have signed our petitions, and the charter amendment could be re-filed.

Elsewhere in our groups region, Seminole Electric Cooperative has filed for a permit to build a 750 megawatt coal plant in Palatka. The fate of that project will be decided by the Florida Public Service Commission and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. I hope that the Sierra Club will be an active participant in that process.

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT KENNEDY, JR.

Media Negligence Top Threat to Democracy

Reprinted from the Sierra Club

Waterkeeper Alliance President Robert Kennedy, Jr., helped lead the fight to restore the Hudson River, which in turn spawned more than 125 Waterkeeper organizations worldwide. The author of the bestselling book, Crimes Against Nature, he was recently named one of Time magazine's "Heroes for the Planet."

Kennedy spoke with Planet editor Tom Valtin about the current threats to democracy and the environment, and the need for an independent press in America.

PLANET: What is the biggest environmental problem we face in this country today?

KENNEDY: George W. Bush, without any rival.

PLANET: The Sierra Club obviously feels much the same way. But we found during last year's elections that when we criticized Bush the person, many people—including Sierra Club members—were angered, and consequently less open to our message. How do we oppose the policies without criticizing the person?

KENNEDY: I think you have to do both. Winston Churchill said that you have to just keep telling the truth, and telling it, and telling it. And ultimately, people are going to believe it. It can be frustrating, and of course industry and its indentured servants use every method to discredit you, including saying that you're tree-huggers, or radicals, or against the president. But

you have to persevere. There's a huge systemic problem in our democracy now, which is the endless negligence of the American press and the huge corporate consolidation of the media. That's the principal threat to American democracy, and it's an issue that environmentalists have to take an interest in curing. We have to develop outlets and methods of getting our message across to the American public that don't rely on the mainstream press, which is now controlled by the right wing and giant corporations who are interested

not in informing the public but in entertaining us in order to increase their own revenues.

PLANET: On Arianna Huffington's blog—one current alternative to the mainstream press—you wrote that for the last 15 years King Coal and Big Oil have funded Washington think tanks with aberrant scientists to persuade the public that the science is still out on global warming, and that message is reinforced by people like

Rush Limbaugh who delude the public with junk science. But lately some conservatives have been warning that global warming is real. Do you think we're finally beginning to turn a corner?

KENNEDY: Yes, I think there's a sea change going on now. Cinergy, the biggest utility in the country, just put global warming on the cover of its shareholder's report and devoted 35 pages of the report to that issue. Jeffrey Immelt, CEO of General Electric, has called for a national policy to address global warming. Exxon last week announced a massive campaign to develop technologies to deal with global warming.

PLANET: You've said that every time environmentalists argue for "balance," we lose something because industry controls the debate. What do we do about that?

KENNEDY: The public has to know what's actually happening. If people knew what was going on they'd be on our side.

“If we had an active, independent press that was willing to speak truth to power, the voters in this country would not be behaving irrationally.”

The problem is their information is cooked by industry, by the worst polluters, by the think tanks on Capitol Hill who are dictating what happens in the news.

The press is letting this president get away with policies without ground truth in them, and by that I mean the easily discernible lies of this White House on so many issues—from Medicare to the environment, the Iraq war to the budget. If we had an active, independent press that was

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willing to speak truth to power, the voters in this country would not be behaving irrationally. A democracy relies on an aggressive, independent press, and we no longer have that.

PLANET: So does there have to be some sort of a breakup akin to the Justice Department breaking up AT&T 20 years ago?

KENNEDY: Yes, I think we need to bring back the Fairness Doctrine—the requirement that the press tell both sides of the issues—and break up the big conglomerates that control the press, or ask them to divest themselves, so that the press is locally controlled, there’s diversity of control of the airwaves, and the airwaves are back in the hands of the public.

It’s ironic that the Bush administration makes the claim that they are an administration of “values,” because all of the things they claim to represent are simply hollow facades that mask the one value that they really consider worth fighting for: corporate profit-taking. They claim to be conservatives, but they’ve torn the “conserve” out of conservatism. They claim to like free markets but they despise free markets. What they fight for is corporate welfare—capitalism for the poor, socialism for the rich. They claim to like property rights, but only when it’s the right of a polluter to use his property to destroy his neighbor’s property or the public property. They claim to like law and order, but they’re the first ones to let the corporate lawbreakers off the hook. They claim to like local control and states’ rights, but they only embrace states’ rights when it means chopping down the barriers to corporate profit-taking at the local level. They claim to embrace Christianity, but they’ve

violated every one of the manifold mandates of the Christian faith that we care for the environment and treat future generations with responsibility and the earth as stewards.

PLANET: Considering the times we’re in, what gives you hope?

KENNEDY: The great source of my optimism is that if you look at the values that Americans share, there’s no difference between rank and file Republicans and Democrats. We all want a clean environment. According to the latest Gallup poll,



81 percent of Republicans want stronger environmental laws and want them strictly enforced. The problem is that the Republican leadership is controlled by big polluters and large corporations and the press is not reporting the truth to the American people.

PLANET: You’ve said that when you focus on corporate accountability, you get a good response whether you’re in a “red” state or a “blue” one. How can we translate this consensus into stronger environmental protection?

KENNEDY: Again, I see very little philosophical difference between red-state residents and blue-state residents. The dis-

tinction is really a huge information deficit among the people who supported President Bush. A recent PIPA (Program on International Policy Attitudes) survey by the University of Maryland found that Americans basically share the same values. I give over 100 speeches a year, more than 40 of them in the red states, and on the issue of corporate accountability, I get the same response as I do from blue-state residents, except for this: red-state voters are always asking, “How come I haven’t heard this before?” The reason is that they’re getting their news from Rush Limbaugh, Fox News, and the Sinclair network, which are not telling them the truth. So they have all kinds of misconceptions about environmentalists, about environmental laws, about the war in Iraq, etc. The PIPA Report showed that 65 percent of the president’s supporters believed that Bush strongly supported the Kyoto Protocol and strong labor and environmental standards in our international treaties. But when PIPA asked them, “What do you believe,” there was almost no difference between the core beliefs of Republicans and Democrats. In essence, 80 percent of Republicans are just Democrats who don’t know what’s going on. The press is not doing its job. All the talk about changing our message or fine-tuning our communications—it’s all nonsense. It’s like changing deck chairs on the Titanic. The system is broken, and we’ve got to repair [it] if we want to start communicating with the American people.

PLANET: That sounds like a long-term project, not an overnight fix.

KENNEDY: There is an overnight fix. It’s called the Fairness Doctrine. We need to bring it back. That’s the most important environmental law that we can pass.

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Growth Promoters on Steroids

BY DWIGHT ADAMS

Growth promoters in Alachua County must be on steroids, judging by recent reports in the news media (The Gainesville Sun, March 30 and April 11). They have launched a massive continuation of growth promotion efforts—euphemistically called economic development—that “will shape the future of this area,” as proclaimed by UF President Bernie Machen, who is part of the campaign.

Machen is right that the effort will shape the area’s future if “Opportunity 2010,” as they call it, meets its goals. The new jobs that Machen and others hope for will accelerate the population boom, and the area will look a lot like Ocala or maybe even Orlando in a few years.

Those promoting economic development know that people move here because of the jobs, not the good weather—unless they are retired and do not need a job. Stoking the growth drives up the value of real estate, and that’s how bankers, realtors, builders, newspapers, and others who profit from growth make a killing.

“We can’t be a top ten university without working together with the community,” Machen says. He apparently thinks that his objective of making UF a top ten university (academically, not just in sports) will be helped by rapid growth.

Instead of promoting growth, he needs to be working for a dramatic increase in state funding to double the size of the faculty and increase faculty and staff salaries by 100 percent. The state is now wallowing in cash and could do this if so much money did not go to state growth promotion efforts.

Growth promoters in the Chamber of Commerce and its tax-exempt Council for Economic Outreach have a goal of raising almost \$3 million for Opportunity 2010.

Amazingly, they have already raised almost \$2 million from 58 contributors, for an average contribution of close to \$32,000 each. Even with 35 percent tax breaks (which hits up taxpayers everywhere) that is still a substantial contribution.

However, it is not so much “giving back to the community,” as it is an investment. If you are among the group who makes a killing off growth, this is as good an investment as buying Google stock.

Among several other objectives, the CEO is planning to contact 500 prospective companies to try and interest them in moving to Alachua County. Never mind the effect on the communities that these companies abandon when they move (e.g. Dollar General’s leaving Homerville, Georgia, a few years ago). The CEO’s promoting of local business and helping them to prosper is commendable.

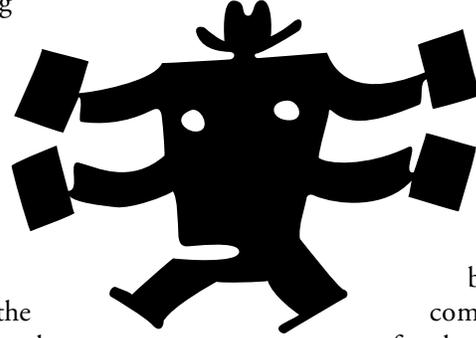
Not content unless they are getting a direct subsidy from the City and County, the CEO has recently obtained a tentative commitment from the City for \$320,000 over five years to help support its growth promotion efforts. Then there are the \$1

million in subsidies from the city and county that Rodney Long is touting.

for new schools. They refuse to consider impact fees so that the growth pays part of its own way.

On the energy front, the push for a huge new coal-fired power plant that we do not need was with anticipated growth in mind. Although this will not be paid for directly through a tax increase, we will pay for it with higher electric rates, projected to increase by 40 percent by 2011. A gas tax increase (which could be a good thing to discourage needless driving and to support mass transit) is now on the back burner because four county commissioners required for the super majority do not have the stomach to enact it. This could change with the fall elections.

Unless we are able to thwart growth promotion efforts, this area’s future is indeed the same as Ocala’s. For some time, people have been leaving South Florida for this area to add to those moving from the north. The only thing that will stop it will be that the congestion has become intolerable—or that water quality and quantity have become severe problems. The aquifer



“Stoking the growth drives up the value of real estate and that’s how bankers, realtors, builders, newspapers, and others who profit from growth make a killing”

million in subsidies from the city and county that Rodney Long is touting.

Unless you are among the few who make a killing from rapid growth, you should be concerned—very concerned. The results of the rapid growth will be more crowded schools, congested roads, and higher taxes for infrastructure needs. With the gutting of the comprehensive plan that took place in 2002, the growth will fill up the county (and beyond) with wall-to-wall sprawl, leaving little in the way of natural areas that are not in public ownership. If you have money to invest, put it into real estate.

Meanwhile, the school board plans to seek voter approval for a sales tax increase

supplying the GRU wellfield is contaminated under the Coppers site. Whether this pollution can be cleaned up rather than reaching the drinking water remains to be seen.

The water management district has projected shortages soon that will be exacerbated by the growth that the CEO hopes for. Ironically, the CEO has chosen a water theme as a logo for the Opportunity 2010 campaign—droplets of falling water creating a ripple effect.

It may not have occurred to them that water could be the key to continued growth in the area.

Contact me by phone or email if you are interested in working on this issue.

'Endangered' Endangered?

WHY THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT WORKS, AND WHY WE NEED TO KEEP IT STRONG

BY TIMOTHY LESLE

Congressman Richard Pombo claims that there's a big problem with the Endangered Species Act—only 10 of the species listed have recovered enough to be removed from the list (it's actually 15), and the act is “a failed managed care program that checks species in but never checks them out.”

In January, Interior Secretary Gale Norton extended the analogy, comparing the act to a hospital, adding, “The purpose of a hospital is not to keep people there.”

The problem with that, says Sierra Club wildlife expert Bart Semcer, “is Richard Pombo and Gale Norton want to discharge patients from the hospital without giving them any medication at all.”

In fact, the Endangered Species Act, signed by President Richard Nixon in 1973, is a success story and a cornerstone of U.S. environmental law. It has prevented the extinction of 99 percent of all species ever listed, says Semcer. Among the high-profile species it has helped are the American alligator and the peregrine falcon, which have recovered enough to be removed from the list.

But it takes time for a threatened or endangered species to recover, and “most of these species are in such trouble that it's going to take decades to restore healthy populations,” Semcer says. Species recovery plans average 30 to 50 years, and the average number of years a given species has been listed under the act is only 15.5 years.

That's too long for Pombo, a California

Republican who, with Democratic Rep. Dennis Cardoza, also of California, introduced legislation that will drastically change the act. Pombo says it will improve the law, but Semcer says it will actually “gut” it.

What endangered species need most to recover is land—federally recognized “critical habitats” that are carefully managed to promote recovery. Semcer points out that “analysis of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's own data shows that species that have had their critical habitat designated are twice as likely to be heading towards recovery than species without critical habitat.”

But the proposed legislation will remove those very protections from tens of millions of acres of mostly federal land. And as a result, it will be easier to strip mine, clearcut and graze in those habitats.

Besides removing habitat protections, Pombo's bill would:

- Pay developers, agribusiness, and polluters whatever they demand to obey the law and not kill fish and wildlife;
- Give special interests access to government decision-makers by creating a mechanism for them to interfere with efforts to recover species and allowing them—but not citizens—to supply information;
- Let politicians tell professional wildlife scientists how they should do their research

and what kind of information they can and can't use when making their conclusions.

Semcer says the bill is “all about funneling taxpayer subsidies to big developers and has nothing to do with protecting America's fish and wildlife heritage.”

One of the more recent successes stemming from the Endangered Species Act is the Peninsular bighorn sheep, which lives in Southern California's Peninsular Mountains. By the time it was listed in 1998, the Peninsular bighorn population had dropped by 77 percent due to sprawl, overgrazing, and diseases from domestic livestock. In 2000, only 334 individual animals remained. The next year, the FWS designated 854,000 acres of critical habitat for the sheep, and, with the Bureau of Land Management, instituted management practices such as closing

illegal roads and removing livestock. Meanwhile, local communities incorporated bighorn conservation into their planning decisions. Joan Taylor of the Tahquitz Group (San

Gorgonio Chapter) has been working to protect the bighorn for 35 years and drafted the original petition to FWS. “Without a doubt,” she says, “federal listing has helped.” In 2003, the California Department of Fish and Game estimated that 500 Peninsular bighorn lived in the wild, marking a 49 percent increase in five years. Now, says Taylor, “the population has doubled.” She's currently involved in protecting lambing areas crucial to bighorn recovery.

“This is the kind of thing we're just going to have to keep working on.”



The American Alligator, one of many endangered species.

Julie Mountain Hideaway



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MAY-JUNE 2006 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- MAY 4:** SSJ Sierra Club general meeting. See page 1 for details.
- MAY 26-28:** Florida Folk Festival, at the Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park, on U.S. 41 in White Springs.
- JUNE 23:** SSJ Sierra Club newsletter folding party for the July newsletter, 7:30 p.m., at the home of Scott Camil and Sherry Steiner. Call 375-2563 for info and directions.



Photos of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, via Sierra Club, courtesy of The Wilderness Society

Membership

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MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

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CONTRIBUTING	<input type="checkbox"/> \$150	<input type="checkbox"/> \$175
LIFE	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1250
SENIOR	<input type="checkbox"/> \$24	<input type="checkbox"/> \$32
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