



Suwannee-St. Johns Group

Sierra Club

Newsletter

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Map of the Orange Creek Basin.

Working to Improve Our Water Quality

BY ROB BRINKMAN

State environmental officials have been meeting with stakeholders for over two years to develop a plan to clean up polluted water bodies in the Orange Creek basin.

A subset of the St. John's River basin, the Orange Creek basin is comprised of eastern Alachua County and northeast Marion County. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection has been meeting with stakeholders about water pollution there. The DEP has set the maximum amount of pollutants that can be released in these water bodies (called Total Maximum Daily Loads). All permitted users of these water bodies must comply.

The stakeholders include local environmental organizations, local governments, state agencies and forestry and agricultural industry representatives. Gainesville, and particularly Gainesville Regional Utility, must commit to some expensive projects in this plan, because they are significant contributors to pollutant loading from both stormwater and wastewater systems.

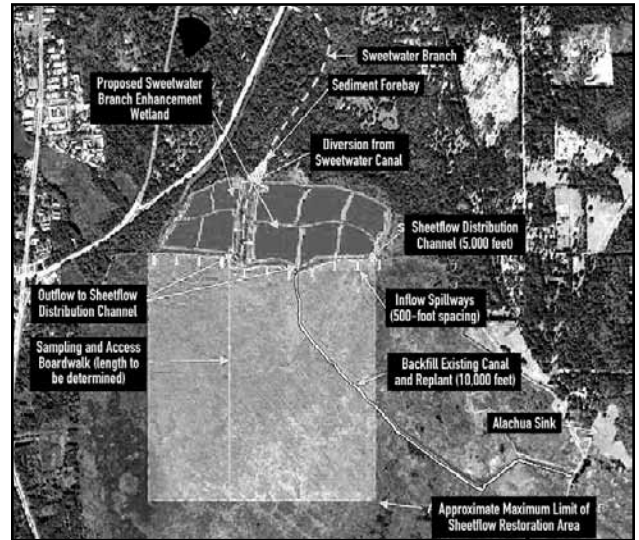
The July program will feature one of these projects, from the Orange Creek Basin Management Action Plan. This is the plan to meet the Alachua Sink TMDL. Alachua Sink is in Payne's Prairie Preserve State Park and is impaired by nutrients. The major source of these nutrients is storm water discharges from central and

east Gainesville and effluent from the GRU Main Street wastewater treatment plant.

For more than 100 years, the city has had a significant impact on Payne's Prairie and Alachua Sink. Treated sewage goes into Sweetwater Branch Creek from the GRU treatment plant and directly into Alachua Sink, which is connected to our water supply. The hydrology of the prairie has been greatly altered, as well, through ditching and draining to accommodate cattle ranching in the 1930s.

The Payne's Prairie sheetflow restoration project is designed to restore historic water flow levels to 1,300 acres of the Prairie and to reduce nutrient levels to their historic background levels. Artificial wetlands will be created, using some state park lands, to treat the nutrient problem. This will involve the city trading lands with the state park, a controversial issue. The land needed for the sheetflow restoration project is east of South Main Street, where it intersects Williston Road. Gainesville already owns about 30 acres; up to another 125 acres will be needed of state lands.

At our July 7 meeting, Jim Weimer, state biologist for the Prairie, and Carol Lippincott, of the St. John's River Water Management District, will discuss the sheetflow restoration project.



Please see the article on page 3, about Newnan's Lake, to learn about another controversial Orange Creek Basin plan to meet TMDLs.

GENERAL MEETING

Thursday, July 12, 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.)

WORKING TO IMPROVE OUR WATER QUALITY

JIM WEIMER
PAYNES PRAIRIE BIOLOGIST
CAROL LIPPINCOTT
ST. JOHN'S RIVER WATER MGT. DISTRICT



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Forming Coalitions

BY ROB BRINKMAN

SSJ Sierra Club Chair

Alachua County citizens won a major environmental, financial and growth management battle last month when the Alachua County Commission denied the expansion of the SpringHills development.

In May I wrote about the pivotal decision facing the County Commission on the future of growth in the area. It took two meetings, but in the end the commissioners got it right, voting 5-0 to deny the requested comprehensive plan amendment for a substantial deviation to SpringHills' already approved Development of Regional Impact. I must admit when this issue started, I feared that the vote by the County Commission would end up being 4-1 to approve.

For the Suwannee-St. John's Sierra Club group, this story started in January when the Executive Committee approved a \$500 donation to the Coalition for Responsible Growth, which was organized to fight the expansion, and offered to provide whatever assistance possible.

The SpringHills issue demonstrates the need to organize, collaborate, and work hard even though the chances of succeeding seem slim. CRG had been hard at work

before they contacted our group; its members had done a lot of research and were building an organized opposition. I am proud of the role that SSJ played in assisting the CRG, and I am pleased that we have found an able partner in efforts to control growth.

While many SSJ members put their time and energy into the effort, special thanks go to Scott Camil and Sherry Steiner, both of whom are Excom members. They took on most of the efforts to send out mailings, recruit volunteers and make the connections with others in our community who could help.

The SpringHills issue was one of the most recent and prominent instances of issue advocacy by two competing sides. There were print and media ads, letters to the editor and commissioner campaigns. The developer, the Pennsylvania Real Estate Investment Trust, waged a campaign of misinformation and scare tactics which backfired badly by alienating the Alachua County Commission.

In the end those who checked their facts and educated the public on the actual impacts and costs of such intense development projects prevailed. While the end

result was good in this instance, there is an inherent danger when media campaigns become the focus of political decisions making; the other side usually has far more money and resources.

The first public hearing on May 1 was amazing. Although it was often hard to hear in the gymnasium at Santa Fe Community College, I never would have imagined that 1,250 people would attend. The May 3 meeting saw a packed commission chamber, with an overflow crowd in conference rooms watching on TV. The CRG gave a great presentation, with several expert witnesses. During the commission debate, every commissioner took a turn at chastising the representatives of PREIT for their negotiating tactics and misleading media campaign.

Many commissioners also commented that perhaps the best thing to come out of the debate was the increased level of public awareness and participation. People are becoming empowered and it is influencing the decision makers.

Another issue that the Sierra Club supported and participated in was a local neighborhood group opposing plans by the City of Gainesville to combine the GRU and city fleet maintenance facility, tripling the size of the maintenance buildings in a

CHAIR'S



CORNER

see CORNER, page 5

Visit the National and Local Sierra Club Websites!

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

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FOLDING PARTY

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

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news¬es

FREE SPEECH BATTLE IN PUTNAM COUNTY

On Earth Day weekend, a local hydroecologist filed federal suit against the state and an government official, alleging that Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation and its executive director violated her First Amendment rights of freedom of speech and freedom to petition government.

Dr. Sydney Bacchus, who addressed the March general meeting of the SSJ Sierra Club, is asking the court for an injunction quashing a 2005 cease-and-desist order by the DBPR, in which the state threatened Bacchus with criminal prosecution for her comments to the Putnam County Commissions about the harmful environmental impacts that could result from a proposed mining project.

SSJ Sierra Club and the West Putnam Lake Association were objecting to an application by Florida Rock to allow mining in a key cross-Florida wildlife corridor. The Putnam County Commission decided not to allow the land use change.

Following Putnam County's ruling, Florida Rock filed a complaint against Bacchus with the DBPR, based on her comments about the environmental impacts the mine. After a highly questionable investigation, DBPR threatened Bacchus with prosecution, fines up to \$5,000 and other penalties and issued a permanent order prohibiting any future speech of the same nature.

Now Bacchus is fighting back. Her suit, against both DBPR and its current executive director, Holly Benson, claims that advocating for or against an environmental decision before a governmental body cannot be classified as the unlicensed practice of geology any more than advocating for or against disconnecting the feeding tube of Terry Schiavo could be called the unlicensed practice of medicine.

Bacchus seeks a prohibition on future interference by DBPR with free speech, monetary damages, attorney's fees and

related costs. The state must file its response to the suit before the end of June.

By Kathy Cantwell

SAVED BY THE FIRE

Fire is a natural factor in maintaining Florida ecosystems. It removes dead plant fuel, reduces fire intolerant plant species, and promotes fresh green forage for deer, rabbits, and other herbivores resulting in healthier carnivores which maintain ecological balance. Long before Europeans came to the New World, indigenous people purposely burned areas to promote forage plant growth.

Florida has more lightning strikes than just about anywhere else, so fire is a frequent occurrence during summer time. Plants adapt to fire with thick corky bark or by storing energy below ground. Pine needles and wiregrass promote fast burning fires resulting in open pine savannahs with scattered clumps of saw palmetto and small groves of sand live oak. Gopher tortoises burrow dozens of feet down into the cool moist sand providing refuge for other animals during fire. Fires come through sandhill regions regularly every 5-10 years. Without occasional fire the entire ecosystem structure changes, hard woods fill in, leaf litter and shade reduce combustibility, fuel builds up and when fires inevitably happen, they're catastrophic. Effective land management methods include prescribed burns. Managers are trained to prepare a burn site, provide personnel and equipment, and to gauge the best time of year and day for a burn, usually in the morning when winds are low and during summer time when afternoon rains can be expected. After a fire, birds come in to pick over insect and lizard victims. In the following weeks, green sprouts come up.

The worst fire in Florida's recorded history was in 1936, when all of Central and North Central Florida burned from the Tampa/St. Pete area east, until the Ocklawaha River slowed its progress. In recent years during severe drought, much of Volusia and Flagler Counties burned,

Mallory Swamp burned, and now the Georgia/Florida Bugaboo Fire burned the area from Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge to Osceola National Forest. Thank goodness Tropical Storm Barry swept through and provided assistance to the beleaguered fire fighters. With Global Climate change, with El Niño/La Niña effects, droughts may become more severe and fire in unmanaged regions more frequent. The main economic problem is when scattered 5-20 acre "ranchettes" develop into fire prone areas, a scenario which will become more prevalent as more people move north from south Florida. This should be interesting....

By Karen Garren

OCKLAWAHA FOR SALE

This Spring has brought about several good turns of events in Tallahassee, but in Palatka, the old river isn't faring so well.

In April, thanks at least in part to Karen Ahlers and the Putnam County Environmental Council, as well as Susie Caplowe, the Sierra Club lobbyist in Tallahassee, the Senate Environmental Preservation committee voted 4-to-2 against a bill that would have set the Rodman Reservoir and Kirkpatrick Dam aside as a special "preserve," thereby making it more difficult to restore the river (as was recommended by state environmental officials and ordered by Gov. Lawton Chiles in 1995).

That was great news. In May, Gov. Charlie Crist, in a line item veto, removed proviso language for a Putnam County request for \$100,000 for a trailhead park and hurricane debris removal (another \$100,000). That was also great news.

But on May 6, the *Ocala Star-Banner*, in an editorial column, notified the public that the St. Johns River Water Management District is planning to build a water treatment plant on the "upper Ocklawaha."

Coincidentally, Marion County just

see NEWS & NOTES, page 6





New solar panels on the home of Josh and Sally Dickinson.

Let The Sunshine In

SOLAR POWER IS GROWING IN GAINESVILLE

BY ROB BRINKMAN

It used to be that if you wanted to put a solar electric generating or photovoltaic (PV) power system on your roof, you had to pay \$200 for the privilege of connecting into the GRU power grid. Now, that fee is gone, and GRU has a rebate—\$1.50 per watt of rated peak power of a PV system—for systems connected to their grid. Additionally all Floridians can apply for a \$4.00 per watt rebate

from the State for grid connected systems that have at least a 2,000 (2KW) peak watt rated power.

It gets even better: the Federal Government provides a 30 percent tax credit up to \$2,000 a year. This is not a deduction, but a credit that directly reduces the amount of taxes owed.

Taken together, this adds up to a significant subsidy for PV power systems, if you have the means to take advantage of the rebates and tax credits.

The results are appearing on roofs around Gainesville and other communities. One such PV system was installed on the roof of long-time Sierra Club activists Josh

and Sally Dickinson's home.

A Sunday morning brunch was held to show interested parties what a PV system looks like up close and personal. At least 50 people came out to hear Wayne Irwin, the proprietor of Pure Energy Solar, explain the system and its installation.

In recent years, the Dickinsons have spent up to 10 days without power after hurricanes. Because their home has a private well, that means no water. For them, having a battery back-up was essential.

The 16 heavy duty, deep cycle batteries, originally designed for locomotives, are capable of providing back-up power for three days with no appreciable sunshine.

Given reasonably sunny days the house is capable of supplying enough power for the most important loads for as long as necessary.

So far the Dickinson's system has generated a surplus of 1,067 kilowatt hours, or over a million watt-hours of solar energy, which was sent out into the GRU grid.

Net metering is when the utility credits,

see SOLAR, next page

SOLAR, from previous page

or buys, from homeowners the energy that solar PV systems supply to the grid. GRU currently pays a little over 7 cents a kilowatt hour. This is significantly less than what GRU charges its customers for electricity.

Some cities, like Tallahassee, pay the customer exactly what they charge customers or full retail. Ashland, Oregon, with a small municipal utility, recognizes that solar PV is worth more because it has much less environmental impact; consequently Ashland pays customers 125 percent of the full retail rate.

A local developer has approached Gainesville with plans to build an "energy neutral" subdivision; he would like to put solar PV systems on all 27 homes planned. The developer has found it difficult to explain to potential customers that when their system generates more power than the house is using, GRU will pay less than what they charge when the house is using utility power.

A utility customer with a grid-connected PV system makes power when the sun shines. This is often more than they need at that time, so power is sent to the utility. When they need power, such as at night,

they take power from the utility. In effect the utility is functioning as a battery for the customer's PV system, storing power until it is needed.

Grid connected systems are more efficient than off-grid PV systems that use batteries, because there is at least a 20 percent power loss to store electrical energy in batteries. The grid can be viewed as a battery with very small losses, unless the utility pays less than full retail for the PV power.

While it would seem reasonable for utilities to expect compensation for providing energy storage for PV systems, it must be remembered that unlike the fossil fuels used to generate most utility power, PV power is renewable and green.

To encourage more homeowners to install PV systems or to buy homes in energy neutral neighborhoods, paying full retail for PV power sold to the utility is a crucial element.

Someday, when most homes have PV systems, it may be necessary to revisit such a full retail price net metering policy, but that is exactly the kind of problem we need to have if we are going to transition to a renewable energy future.

Congratulations to Josh and Sally Dickinson and thanks for investing in our energy future by leading the way.

CORNER, from page 2

quiet, environmentally sensitive residential neighborhood.

The city brought the petition for a site plan approval to the Gainesville Development Review Board after more than six months of delay. It was a formal quasi-judicial hearing to approve Gainesville's proposal for the expansion. After several hours of presentations, public comments, questions and discussion, the DRB voted unanimously to deny the site plan approval.

This decision throws a roadblock into the city's plans; another attempt cannot be made for one year. It is hoped that Gainesville will find a more appropriate place for vehicle maintenance than next to Springstead Creek and the Stephen Foster neighborhood.

While the primary issue was noise, there was also evidence of significant impacts to Springstead Creek from previously leaking fuel tanks and inadequate stormwater facilities.

Both recent examples highlight the effectiveness of hard work and perseverance. Another benefit in both cases are the coalitions that formed, and the mutual support that occurred and hopefully will continue. SSJ and CRG have agreed to exchange liaisons and continue working together on issues of mutual concern.

Many Gainesville neighborhood associations are beginning to seek mutual support from each other of issues that are impacting them. I look forward to SSJ working with partners that share our concerns and to more successes in the future.

COAL OUT THE WINDOW?

There is a new attitude in the Governor's office concerning the wisdom of building new coal power plants. Gov. Charlie Crist lauded the decision by the Public Service Commission to deny the needs determination certificate to allow construction of a two billion-watt capacity coal plant near the Everglades.

This has cast a shadow on the needs certificate for an 800 million-watt capacity coal plant in Taylor County; that decision by the PSC is still pending. Meanwhile, Tallahassee has now signed to power purchase agreements with two renewable biomass power plants. A small east coast municipal utility has sent out a request for proposal for renewable energy capacity only, and the City of Gainesville recently voted to send out a RFP for a biomass plant to fulfill its future energy needs (coal was discarded as a possible fuel).

The Florida Legislature earlier this year directed the PSC to hold hearings on and to propose a Renewable (energy) Portfolio Standard for Florida utilities. Almost half of the states have an adopted an RPS already, which mandates that by dates certain, such as 2025, utilities must produce a certain percentage of their energy from renewable sources, often 25 percent.

While recent developments are encouraging, there is still a long way to go to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Our quality of life and the survival of many species depend on continued increases in our efforts to reduce emissions of green house gases.

There is plenty to do and something that everyone can do. I hope everyone will take some time this summer to develop a personal plan to reduce their energy usage.



Sixteen deep-cycle batteries for storage of energy generated by solar panels.

NEWMAN'S LAKE

A Questionable Honor

BY KATHY CANTWELL

Along with college football and basketball national titles, Gainesville can add another title, albeit unofficial—Home to Florida's Most Polluted Lake.

However, don't look for any signs along I-75 touting this dubious honor.

For more than two years now, the Orange Creek Basin Working Group—with members from local governments, regulating bodies, environmental organizations (including the Sierra Club), and forestry and agricultural industry groups—has been meeting to try to set standards for pollution in the basin's impaired waterways.

These standards, called Total Maximum Daily Loads, limit how much of a polluting substance that has impaired the waterway can be released. TMDLs do this by trying to determine the sources of the contamination from "non-point" sources of pollution (e.g. everyone fertilizing their lawns in the basin), as well as "point" sources of pollution (e.g. industry discharging into a water body), and then developing strategies and projects to limit the releases.

This month's Sierra program is about one of those projects—for Sweetwater Branch Creek and Alachua Sink (see page 1). This is a very promising solution, and one of the good things to come out of the working group.

Newnan's Lake is also in this basin, but the Newnan's plan is extremely weak. The

lake's levels of nitrogen and phosphorous have increased astronomically in a relatively short period of time and is now the worst in the state.

The problem is that no one is sure what is causing this dramatic rise. Is it the result of fertilizer use in the basin? Is it years of altering the hydrology of the lake? Is it literally coming out of "thin air" (the result of organisms in the lake taking nitrogen out of the air)?

Is it from the draining and channeling of the two creeks (Hatchett and Little Hatchett), which are the major sources of water to the lake?

We believe that this last possibility is at least a significant cause. The ditching of the creeks was done years ago by the city, mainly in the 1960s, in an effort to drain the swamps and "improve" the land.

For example, the Gainesville Regional Airport and the city's Ironwood golf course were both built on a large part of the wetlands that formed the headwaters of Little Hatchett Creek.

One theory is that the ditching and resultant increased flow of the creeks has caused a significant release of phosphorous that had been naturally held in the wetlands' soil for thousands of years.

Because of these unknowns, the plan for the cleanup has been put on hold until further testing can be done.

This is very frustrating because the lake continues to be threatened by development that could damage the wetlands that

supply it.

One very significant threat is a huge development requested by a New York developer planned in the remaining wetlands that are the headwaters of Little Hatchett Creek. This proposed development of almost 2,900 homes, 400,000 square feet of retail space, and 100,000 square feet of office space will surround Ironwood and will be called—ironically—"Hatchett Creek."

With most of the upscale development in the county focused to the west of the city, Gainesville is eager to approve this high-end development, championed by the Eastside Development Board.

We understand the city's eagerness to approve development on the east side, but we don't want it to be a detriment to one of the city's most incredible natural assets, Newnan's Lake.

Please write the Gainesville City Plan Board and/or attend the Planning Commission meeting on July 19, at 6:30 p.m., at the Gainesville City Hall auditorium, located at 200 E. University Ave. Tell them to not approve the comprehensive plan amendment that would allow this development.

It not only could increase the damage but also impede any repair needed for the lake. Frankly, we can't see how this development can be approved, even if Newnan's Lake was not a concern, because most of the proposed development sits in the 100-year flood plain.

Letters to the plan board should be addressed to Chair Peter Polshek, c/o Dean Mims, PO Box 490, Station 11, Gainesville, FL, 32602-0490, and received by July 18. You may also e-mail Dean Mims at mimmsdl@cityofgainesville.org.

NEWS & NOTES, from page 3

completed a three-year, 95-page report called *The Water Resources Management Study*. So, according to the *Star-Banner*, Marion County is now "armed with science" in the upcoming water war against South Florida:

"Right now, about 98 percent of Marion County's water comes from the aquifer. But in less than a decade, the aquifer will be tapped out. So Marion will begin looking now at its rivers for its water.

The rivers are the cheapest alternative source the Water Management District has been able to identify."

The Marion study calls for dramatic steps to conserve water, including stricter land use regulations where water resources are at stake, mandatory use of recycled water for irrigation, and real enforcement of watering restrictions.

"With South and Central Florida lining up to come take our water, Marion County will need all the help it can get to protect its

own local water resources," said the *Star-Banner*, adding that armed with this new study, "Marion County has a powerful weapon—science."

By Whitey Markle

Looking for volunteers to get signatures
for Hometown Democracy Petition.

Please contact Rob Brinkman at 337-1757
or robbrinkman@cox.net.

Up The River

BY KAREN GARREN

The May 10 tour of Long Leaf Flatwoods was canceled due to fire; we'll try to reschedule. The Florida Folk Festival was also canceled; it has been rescheduled for November.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 25—Canoe paddle up the Silver River. We can expect Prothonotory Warblers, Limpkins, Rhesus monkeys left over from the 1930s Tarzan movies, and occasional otters.

There are many beautiful flowering plants, red cardinal flowers, white spider lilies, etc.

There are many good picnic and swimming spots. Several years ago the lands reverted to the state and "No Wake" zones were imposed throughout its length making for a much more pleasant experience.

Please contact Karen Garren at 371-0008 or email ILuvFla@bellsouth.net for more information. Any additional outings suggestions will be greatly appreciated. Where's your favorite outdoor site?



TIP OF THE MONTH

Reducing Your Carbon Footprint

BY DWIGHT ADAMS

On average, every man, woman and child in the U.S. produces more than 40,000 pounds of carbon dioxide, which is helping cause global warming. This is higher than most of the rest of the world.

We drive gas-guzzlers, live in big, energy hungry, houses, and throw away huge quantities of waste that could be recycled, saving energy and resources.

By the way, recycling saves more energy than is gained by using the waste as a fuel for electric generation. The "greenest" thing that can be done with waste is to recycle it.

The decades-old refrain, "reduce, recycle, reuse," is an effective way to reduce CO2. Recycling just one aluminum can save the energy of one-half of a gallon of gasoline (10 pounds of CO2). Recycling one glass container will save enough to run a 100 watt-equivalent compact fluorescent light all day; recycling the family's newspapers for a year will save 17 trees, 380 gallons of oil, and 4,000 kilowatt hours of energy.

A national recycling rate of 60 percent, now at only about 35 percent, would equal 50 million cars taken off the road. Don't buy all that stuff that you don't need; you'll save big bucks, as well as energy.

If you have curbside pickup of recyclables, or a convenient drop-off center that you go to anyway (don't make a special trip), recycle everything possible. If recycling is not available to you, bring cans (crushed) and bottles to the next SSJ Sierra Club group meeting, where pickup will be available. If you recycle regularly, you can reduce your carbon footprint by 5,000 pounds a year.

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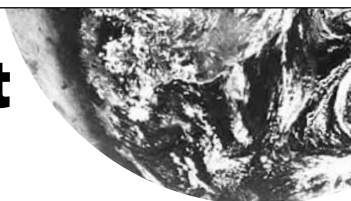
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JULY 2007 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- July 7**—Live Earth Concert potluck at Civic Media Center, 7 p.m. See below.
- July 12**—SSJ Sierra Program on Paynes Prairie Sheetflow restoration project, 7:30 p.m., at the UF Entomology Building. See page 1 of newsletter for details.
- July 19**—Gainesville City Plan Board Meeting on Hatchett Creek Development, 6:30 p.m., at Gainesville City Hall. See article on page 6 for more.
- July 19**—SSJ Sierra Excom meeting, 7:00 p.m., at the SFCC downtown campus board room.
- August**—No SSJ Sierra Club program or newsletter.
- August 9**—SSJ Sierra Excom meeting, 7 p.m., at the SFCC downtown campus board room.
- August 24**—Folding party for the September newsletter, 7 p.m., at the home of Scott Camil and Sherry Steiner. For directions, call 375-2563.
- August 25**—Sierra outing. A canoe paddle up the Silver River. Contact Karen Garren at 371-0008 or email ILuvFla@bellsouth.net for more.

Sierra Club and Civic Media Center Party for the Planet

July 7, 2007, 7 p.m. until ????
 At the Civic Media Center • 1021 West University Avenue



Potluck at 7 p.m., followed by a message from Al Gore and broadcast of part of this 24-hour, 7-continent concert. Eat some good food. Watch some great music.

Contact Kristina at 352-375-1441 or Kristina.jackson@sierraclub.org to RSVP.
 Go to www.LiveEarth.org for more info on the music.

Membership

Yes, I want to help safeguard our nation's precious natural heritage. My check is enclosed.

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