



Suwannee-St. Johns Group

# Sierra Club

## Newsletter

Published monthly except June and August from Gainesville, Florida  
VOLUME 40 • NUMBER 4 • April 2010

**THE FLORIDAN AQUIFER:**

# Connecting Man and Nature

**BY DWIGHT ADAMS**

Florida's unique features are its springs, not its beaches. They are literally its crown jewels, with nothing like them found anywhere else in the world. Unfortunately, if you haven't enjoyed one of these jewels already, it may be too late.

Sadly, for decades we have watched, apparently helplessly, as the springs have steadily declined. Instead of crystal clear, springs are now green with algae and flows have declined. Our beloved Ichenetucknee Springs world-famous for "tubing" is no longer pristine but has algae growth from pollution seeping into its basin all the way from Lake City. Flow is reduced because of Jacksonville's consumption of water.

Declining flows are a death knell: the list of springs that are drying up and becoming "algal bowls" grows longer every year. Even Silver Springs, formerly the world's champion in terms of long-term flow, is declining more than can be explained by decreased



rainfall in the springshed. The documented decline over the last 56 years is about 200 cubic feet per second – roughly the equivalent flow of Volusia Blue and Wekiwa springs combined.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) has identified the problem: "The introduction of nitrogen is the most obvious stressor to the ecology of springs in Florida, stimulating profuse overgrowth of algae and an imbalance in ecosystems of spring runs." The springs with highest nitrate concentrations are in agricultural areas or former agricultural areas. The springs with low nitrate concentrations are in undeveloped areas dominated by managed and unmanaged forest lands.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) plans to promulgate numerical nutrient criteria for flowing waters in Florida have met with wide-spread squawking about the costs of improving discharges, cries that "we will be put out of business," and legislation in opposition.

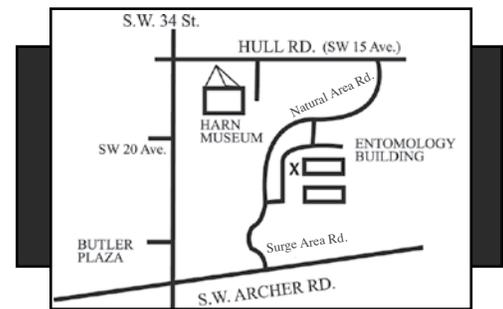
Dr. Robert Knight will discuss the interconnection of man and nature that is producing such drastic changes in Florida's

Springs. He is an aquatic and wetland scientist and has been conducting applied research in Florida's springs and wetlands for over 30 years. Dr. Knight is president of Wetland Solutions Inc. in Gainesville and teaches graduate-level courses in springs' ecology and the use of constructed wetlands for water quality improvement at the University of Florida.

**GENERAL MEETING**  
Thursday, April 1, 7:30 p.m.  
Entomology/Nematology Building on the UF campus,  
**\*\* room 3118 \*\***  
(Just east of the Performing Arts Center. Turn south off Hull Road on to Natural Areas Road.)

**THE FLORIDAN AQUIFER**

ROBERT KNIGHT



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# Money and Environmental Politics

BY ROB BRINKMAN

Recently *The Nation* magazine featured an article, "The Wrong Kind of Green?" about the so-called corruption in many major environmental organizations, including the Sierra Club. I use the term so-called because one specific allegation involved the Club's support of Bill McKibben and the point 350.org folks who advocate publicly for an atmospheric concentration goal of 350 ppm (parts per million) while opposing it in Congressional lobbying efforts.

The Nation cites Sierra Club attorney David Bookbinder's criticism of the practicality of the 350 ppm goal as being representative of Sierra Club policy; this is not necessarily the case.

Though few specifics were given, there was an accusation that money from cor-

porate polluters was causing organizations such as Sierra Club to betray their true missions. Allegedly, money from Shell and BP, among others, was behind grudging support for cap and trade legislation versus support for more economically efficient carbon taxes that are easier to implement.

I am not aware of the Sierra Club receiving money directly from either corporation, but I may be uninformed. However, I would be interested in the amount of such revenue as a percentage of total budgets before drawing the conclusion that the Sierra Club had sold its proverbial soul. Differences in legislative strategy and acceptance of limited gains versus the status quo are not definitive evidence of corruption.

Corporate influence can be problematic, however corporate funding can also make programs possible. Longstanding tax breaks for charitable contributions motivate companies to fund conservation efforts, as do the resulting public relations benefits.

While many good causes benefit from such tax-deductible donations, they do represent a subsidy of corporate public relations. Often such trade-offs are accepted as a price that has to be paid.

Maybe someday we will fund things we want to encourage and tax those that are undesirable. For instance, we could tax carbon rather than employment (income). Just because some are not willing to radically change our tax structure does not make them corrupt, even though they may accept corporate funding.

So while the Sierra Club stands accused in *The Nation* magazine of sabotaging efforts to enact sufficiently stringent carbon dioxide reduction targets, locally our efforts would seem more effective at significant GHG reductions. SSJ, along with others in the community, has successfully dissuaded Gainesville from building a second coal plant and instead has become a national leader in renewable energy, with both the



CHAIR'S  
CORNER

see CORNER, page 6

## Visit the National and Local Sierra Club Websites!

National: [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org)

Local: [www.gatorsierra.org](http://www.gatorsierra.org)

### Suwannee-St Johns Group Chairs & Executive Committee

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## FOLDING PARTY

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.**

# SSJ Newsletter Going (Mostly) Paperless

**YOUR RESPONSE IS REQUIRED IF YOU  
WANT TO CONTINUE TO RECEIVE A NEWS-  
LETTER IN SOME FORM!!!**

*If you are already receiving an email notice of newsletter availability OR previously have notified us of your desired method of newsletter delivery, please disregard this article!*

Over the past couple of years, many Sierra Club groups in Florida and the US have made the transition to an electronic version of the newsletter in the effort to save trees, save energy, and save money.

Early last year, the Suwannee St Johns Group decided to give its membership the opportunity to “opt out” of the paper newsletter and receive an email copy instead. While we had some members take us up on this offer, the response was underwhelming, to say the least.

This year, we are taking a new approach. For the past few months, we have asked our membership to “opt in” to a paper copy. If you want a paper newsletter mailed to you, **YOU MUST LET US KNOW.** If you want an email notice of the availability of the newsletter online **YOU MUST LET US KNOW.** In other words, we must hear from

you either way or you will not receive any news of our many activities, meetings, issues, and volunteer opportunities.

## WHY ARE WE DOING IT?

1. We are a CONSERVATION organization. We want to save the planet, and we need your help. That means reducing our use of paper and all the energy and resources that go into the paper, printing, and mailing of our newsletter.

2. Publication of the newsletter is the single largest item in our budget and every issue consumes hours of volunteer time. We believe that the money and time would be better spent directly working to improve the environment and spreading our environmental message in the community. Our revenues are dropping.

We haven't yet had to decide between spending money to fight the battles to protect our natural areas from unnecessary development/pollution, and the newsletter. But, someday we may have to. We'd rather have the money to help save the environment.

## WILL WE DELUGE YOU WITH EMAIL?

NO! Here's our promise: Two emails per month, MAXIMUM. There will always be an UNSUBSCRIBE option. And your email address will NOT be given to anyone.

## HOW SOON WILL THIS HAPPEN?

The Suwannee St. Johns Group is committed to informing members of the many activities of the Group on a regular basis. We will continue to provide a paper copy of our newsletter for those of you who want one. **BUT, THIS IS THE LAST PAPER NEWSLETTER** you will receive unless we

hear from you.

## WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?

COMMUNICATE WITH US PLEASE. To join our email newsletter list, send a note to [ssjierranl@bellsouth.net](mailto:ssjierranl@bellsouth.net). In the SUBJECT line put the word NEWSLETTER. Please include your complete name and address including zip code.

If you wish to continue receiving a MAILED copy of the newsletter, or would rather not get a newsletter at all, please USE THE COUPON ON THE INSIDE BACK PAGE OF THIS NEWSLETTER. It is designed so that when you clip it out your mailing label will be on the reverse side so we know who you are. Fill it out, drop it into an envelope and send it to: Roberta Gastmeyer, 4118 NW 69th St, Gainesville FL 32606.

If we do NOT receive a response from you, you will receive NEITHER the emailed issue NOR the mailed issue after this month.

We are asking for a response from ALL of our members. Take a serious look at this newsletter issue you are holding in your hands. It contains valuable information about fun outings, volunteer opportunities, productive and informative meetings and issues we are fighting for on your behalf, all lovingly produced for you by volunteers. Please let us know how, or even if, you want to receive this information any longer.

We are counting on each of you to respond so we know how best to use our resources to serve you.

*Thanks,*

*Executive Committee*

*Suwannee St Johns Group, Sierra Club*

## book of the month

*What's the Worst That Could Happen?: A Rational Response to the Climate Change Debate*

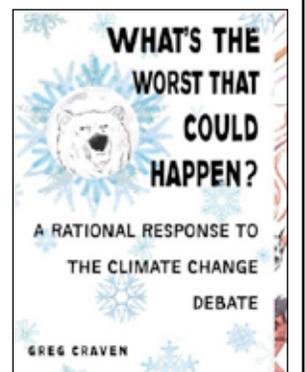
By Greg Craven

A Perigee Book by Penguin Pub, 2009

This short, lucid book was written by an Oregon high school science teacher, who took instant fame with a YouTube video. It takes on the whole issue of climate warming science versus those who scream “it's a hoax.” It's the “warmers versus the skeptics”.

Craven writes in a humorous style often using classroom antidotes.

The book creatively uses a risk management approach laying the four possible consequences of our “action – no action” choices on global warming being true or false. The two negative consequences are that we choose not to act and global warming happened. The other is that we choose to act on global warming and it didn't happen. Craven has interviewed the major players and crawled all over the Internet to present information from both sides of the issue. It is an entertaining and informative book.



# Cleanup Outing on Newnan's Lake

**BY DANICA SPEARS**

*Editor's Note: Danica is a University of Florida Journalism student who responded to a notice in last Fall's UF Newspaper The Alligator. Here are her impressions of the outing. This year's spring cleanup will occur on Saturday, April 17 –see Calendar on p8 and below.*

There's not a better feeling than knowing you made a small difference in the world around you.

While most people in Gainesville sleep in on Saturday mornings, others invested their time to clean up along Lake Shore Drive and Newnans Lake last Oct. 3. A handful of Eastside High School students, members of the Suwannee St. Johns Group of the Sierra Club, Current Problems Inc., and Alachua County's chairman of commission, Mike Byerly, were all present in the cleanup. I covered the event for my UF journalism reporting class, and learned why these people were spending their Saturday morning picking up trash.

I was appalled when Robert Fisher, the

outings chair of SSJ of the Sierra Club, told me Newnans Lake is the second most polluted lake in Florida. Lake Apopka is in first place. I thought if only people would be responsible and throw their trash in the garbage and not in the lake or side of the road.

Trash isn't the only pollution that's affecting this lake's composition. Run-off pollutants from the Gainesville Regional Airport is a major contributor too. The oxygen concentration in the lake is diminishing because of an upset in the ecological balance. Maybe that's why the water from the faucet in my kitchen sink smells funny sometimes.

I just wish more people would get involved in organizations like the Sierra Club where they can be outdoors and socialize with others while making a difference.

I talked to some high school students and one in particular, M. K. Stephan, 17, is a senior and the president of the school's En-

vironmental Action Club. She told me that she enjoys doing cleanups and is very interested in the environment. She tries "to get as many people involved as possible." The world needs more people like her and those who came out for the cleanup.

After people collected trash in their buckets or garbage bags it was sorted and weighed. Plastics of all sorts, glass containers, a safe, metal wiring, a rug, needles, and more were items people picked up. By



noon, about 1,500 pounds of garbage was no longer littered along Lake Shore Drive or Newnans Lake. Thank you, to those who strive to make this world a cleaner and better place for all.

## SPRING CLEANUP OF LAKE SHORE DRIVE

Calling all Conservationists: It's Time for the Spring Cleanup of Lake Shore Drive and Adjoining Conservation Areas (Palm Point Nature Park and Shoreline of Newnans Lake).

Spring is in the air; it's time for the "inner conservationist" in all Suwannee-St. Johns Group members to bloom. Our "Adopt-A-County-Road", Lake Shore Drive, along with adjoining conservation areas need your attention. Since the fall cleanup, "mankind" has not been so kind. There is "much to do" to help Lake Shore Drive and Palm Point Nature Park regain their former scenic beauty, plus removing plastics and other assorted trash from the shoreline of our ailing Newnans Lake, or more appropriately known as Lake Pithlachocco.

We will meet Saturday, April 17th at the Palm Point Nature Park parking lot at

8:45 am. Due to the limited availability of parking in the lot, please park along the road. Please wear sturdy closed-toed shoes, bring water and, depending on the weather conditions, wear a hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen. I also strongly recommend that participants wear long pants.

For further information please contact Robert Fisher at (352) 514-7674 or rbertisher@gmail.com . Sending an RSVP would be very helpful. This service outing is open to the general public.

*By Robert Fisher*

## PRAIRIE CREEK HISTORY AND ADVENTURE

Recently twenty-one Sierra members and others, experienced first hand the real-life affects of past environmental water practices. Paddling the Potano Paddling Trail south from Newman's Lake in Gainesville towards Orange Lake, they glided over the

same path the Potano Indians did many years previous, taking in the diverse selection of water fowl, baby gators, and wild animals. Mike Carter of Kate's Fish Camp spun tales and truths of failed past water policies where man tried taming nature, only to later be shown "Mother" always knows best!

For many, the first exposure of this environmental wonder sitting on the edge of a urban city, will likely further their interest and hopefully involvement in not only enjoying and exploring nature, but in becoming active in protecting her for future paddlers. The warm sunshine brought out the young gators basking on their logs, and you could imagine previous inhabitants in their hollowed out canoes with poisoned tips. We ended with cow and veggie burgers along with a yummy variety of potluck dishes consumed back at Kate's. Join us next time.

*By Knox Bagwell*

# What's goin' on in Tallahassee

BY KATHY CANTWELL

As I write this, the Tallahassee legislative session has been going for two weeks. The budget is a dark cloud that hangs over the heads of the legislators.

Florida Forever. This is the state conservation land-buying program that has been funded every year, until last year. It doesn't look promising this year. Normally it's funded at \$300 million, but this year we will be grateful if it gets \$50 million.

I must point out that we aren't carving \$50 million out of the budget. As when you buy a house, the state takes out a "mortgage" (bond) and pays a down payment when buying land. The rest is paid over time through taxes. Thus, we could buy \$50 million of property if we just used about \$5 million from the budget.

Call your legislator and tell them it's crazy not to fund Florida Forever this year. Fifty million could probably buy what \$100 or even \$150 million bought two years ago.

Springs Protection. As I write this, the Senate Committee on Natural Resources is debating the enormous water bill that has just been released to the public. One section is devoted to springs protection. The bill is unique in that it finally defines springs as being highly impaired if their nitrate level is greater than 1mg/l (before it wasn't even considered polluted unless it was 10mg/l). If the level is .5 to 1mg/l it is considered moderately impaired.

It also designates any county that has a first or second degree spring a "spring protection zone" (most of the counties in the SSJ Sierra Group), and puts limits on the density allowed for septic systems in one square mile (1 per acre). It requires connec-

tion to a central sewer system if the density is higher. We think this is far too dense and would like it to be changed to 1/5 acre density. High efficiency septic systems will be required in the protection zone, something we have wanted for years. Regular septic systems do not remove nitrogen and are a major cause of pollution in our springs.

The other major cause is nitrogen in artificial fertilizers. This bill lacks any meaningful regulation of fertilizer use. Instead, another "study" by IFAS is suggested. We don't need any more study; we already know that artificial fertilizer is killing our springs.

However, the Agricultural lobby is very powerful, so we don't see much restriction on Agriculture, just the same old "Best Management Practices" that have really been without teeth. They even say that the BMP's should "reflect a balance between water quality improvements and agricultural productivity," whatever that means.

## OTHER BILLS WE ARE WATCHING:

Recycling Bill. This bill does not have a number yet, but it has a companion in both houses so it is possible to pass it. It will require all state agencies and institutions, including local governments and businesses with greater than 25 employees, to report their recycling rate yearly and to gradually increase the rate to a certain benchmark within a certain timeline. It will also establish an agency that will encourage and help businesses that handle recycling in the state. Overall, it is a good bill though we are concerned if burning of waste to energy is considered part of recycling. We also wanted plastic bags banned but that won't happen this year.

Fertilizer Bill. Rep. Nelson has filed an

omnibus bill with a section on fertilizer that is designed to make it difficult for localities to adopt ordinances to protect water quality before it's too late.

HB 1445 adds new hoops for local government to jump through before it can pass fertilizer ordinances to protect water quality before it is impaired.

The Department of Community Affairs (DCA) is undergoing sunset review. The legislature must pass a law to either reauthorize it, abolish it, or to strip it of some of its powers and responsibilities. DCA is the state agency that serves as the growth management "police", and they tell county commissions that their plans for thousands of new housing units that will create more sprawl don't meet the requirements of Florida's Growth Management law. Sen. Bennett has filed a shell bill 0282 on DCA that only expresses the legislative intent to abolish, continue, or reorganize the Department of Community Affairs.

Off Shore Oil Drilling (HM 563). Called a memorial, this would ask Congress to lift the ban on off-shore oil drilling. We are very opposed to this bill, and have spoken against it in every committee so far. It would allow drilling up to 3 miles from the Florida Coast!

CS/HM 553 Fishery Conservation and Management. This is another memorial which asks Congress to weaken the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act which would restrict fishing of certain species. We are opposed to this memorial.

You can find your State Representative and Senator at [www.flsenate.gov](http://www.flsenate.gov) and enter your zip code in the "Find your legislators" box on the lower left hand side of the page. You can also check your House and Senate district numbers on the back of your voter registration card.

To read the Florida Report, the newsletter from our state lobbyist, Dave Cullen, go to the Sierra Florida website at <http://florida.sierraclub.org/legislative.asp>

*Kathy Cantwell is the Legislative Advisory Committee Chair, Sierra Club Florida.*

PERSPECTIVES  
PERSPECTIVES  
PERSPECTIVES

We link with antiquity everyday. About 300 million years ago, a plant formed the gas molecule that you just burned in your car.

# Voting on FHD Amendment 4

**BY CHUCK HAWKINS**

On Nov. 2 Florida voters will decide on a constitutional amendment that would empower voters with the final decision on permits to change their seven-year local land use comp plans. Local commissioners would vote on the change, but permits are not approved unless the voters approve in the next regular election.

A4 seeks to remove the historic corruption of money on local boards. While there are honest commissioners, too often the permit votes go "3-2" in rubber stamp petition approvals.

To understand the consequences of our current 25-year old Florida Growth Management Act, drive highway US-1 from Jacksonville to Miami, or

drive Ocala south on US-27, or drive US-19 south from Weekiwatchee to Naples, or drive a non-interstate highway route across Orlando. Inhale the experience deeply. Our present system has brought us this Florida feature. Chewing up wetlands and open spaces for new construction makes no sense except to developers whose large profits are at stake.

The stakes are high. Advocates of the present system have targeted \$15 million dollars to defeat A4. Should powerful developers be uncontrolled in forcing changes



that allow condos, apartment complexes, or box stores to replace wetlands or simply

open or forested land that voters want to retain? Sprawl is a Florida word.

One charge is that A4 will hurt Florida's economy. The charge contends that construction workers will be hurt if change petitions are not granted. That industry is hurting because the housing bubble combined with over development brought it to its knees.

There are an estimated 350,000 empty housing units in Florida now, with current land-use plans allowing for development for over 100 million people. Therefore A4 should have no negative effect on the industry even if voters reject change permits.

We should value our construction crafts, and guide them into useful projects such as massive home energy conservation upgrades or new public transportation. Florida's economy will improve if it returns to its more beautiful history.

## CORNER, from page 2

nation's first solar feed in tariff and a planned 100 MW biomass plant. Gainesville is the only city in Florida and one of a few nationally to have a credible plan to meet the Kyoto Protocol goals.

At the March ExComm meeting, by a 9-2 vote with one abstention, the SSJ ExComm voted to oppose the planned biomass plant, known as the Gainesville Renewable Energy Center (GREC). I had drafted a proposal to support GREC and shared a back-up document and several reference documents explaining why SSJ should support GREC.

Because of diametrically opposed positions on GREC and FHD, as well as other national Sierra Club policies I do not support, I am resigning as the SSJ ExComm Chair and will vacate my position on ExComm so that

a replacement can be appointed. The ExComm Chair is authorized to speak publicly on behalf of the SSJ group. Since I clearly no longer have the confidence of ExComm, I no longer feel I can fulfill this role.

It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as a Sierra Club leader for several years. This will be my last column in the last newsletter issue to be mailed to all members. If you do not contact [sssierranl@gmail.com](mailto:sssierranl@gmail.com) and indicate your desire for either a paper copy or an e-mailed link, you will receive no further newsletters after this one.

Please join me in conserving our natural resources by opting to go paperless. I look forward to continuing to work with all my friends and colleagues towards a more sustainable future for Florida. If you see me at a meeting, say hello!

## INNER CITY OUTINGS NEWS

Bad weather in February forced us to cancel two planned outings. But Feb. 20 was a special day as the Nature Conservancy promoted "Take a Hike, Florida" throughout the state. Five volunteers accompanied five boys from the Lake Forest Elementary school from the ICO program.

We joined Meg Neiderhofer, Alachua County Master Arborist, and other hikers on this public event at the Prairie Creek Preserve. She assigned each boy the task of identifying several trees, and soon we had five junior experts counting red maple, wax myrtle, sweet bay, cabbage palm, and bald cypress trees.

On March 10, the Lake Forest ICO group went to Morning-side Nature Center, where four boys and two girls attended a special program on prescribed burning. The park was closed to the public because a prescribed fire was done the day before close to the Education Center. The kids had fun trying on the burn crew clothes. The crew is trained to manage a prescribed burn.

We learned about safety and the special tools that are used to manage the fire, such as "flappers" and "Pulaski rakes." Most of all we learned the differences between a wild fire and a prescribed fire.

I want to thank the volunteers and the Compassionate Outreach Ministries church. *By Maryvonne Devensky*

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Roberta Gastmeyer  
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Gainesville FL 32606

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 (See pages 3, 7)



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**APRIL 2010 CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

**APR 1**—SSJ Sierra Club Group general meeting, 7:30 pm, in the Entomology/Nematology Building on the UF campus, room 3118. See page 1 for details.

**APR 8**—SSJ Sierra Club Executive Committee meeting, 7 pm, at the Santa Fe Community College Downtown Gainesville campus Board meeting room.

**APR 14**—Lake Forest ICO at Barr Hammock Wednesday, 1-3 am.

**APR 17**—Lake Shore cleanup outing, Saturday, Meet at 8:45 am in the parking lot at Palm Point Nature for a 2-hour cleanup.

**APR 30**—Friday, Folding party for the May Newsletter, 7 pm, at the home of Scott Camil and Sherry Steiner. Call 375-2563 for info.

**URGENT**  
**We are Going Paperless Soon**  
 (See pages 3, 7)

**Membership**

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

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