



Suwannee-St. Johns Group

Sierra Club

Newsletter

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Eagle Creek Valley in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Chad Kister.

GENERAL MEETING

Thursday, Feb. 2, 7:30 PM

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

ARCTIC QUEST

CHAD KISTER

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST



Arctic Quest

AN ODYSSEY THROUGH A THREATENED WILDERNESS

BY BILL RADUNOVICH

Program Co-chair

Our February speaker will be Chad Kister, an environmental activist who has been at the forefront of trying to save the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) from oil exploration.

Last December, the United States Senate turned back an effort made by the House of Representatives to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil exploration. This was the latest skirmish in a long battle by the oil industry and its allies

in Congress to open up one of the last wildlife areas of the Alaskan wilderness to development. Many environmental organizations, including the Sierra Club, have consistently opposed drilling in ANWR, because of the area's unique role in the Alaskan ecosystem.

Chad Kister has been at the forefront of this battle. In 1991, he undertook an amazing 700-mile journey across ANWR and Prudhoe Bay, backpacking, meeting many of the native Gwich'in people and learning of their close relationship with the

arctic environment. He wrote a book, *Arctic Quest*, documenting his experiences. Before that, he had been an environmental activist in his native Ohio, working to end the damage done to the forests of his native state by logging, mining and oil interests.

During his hiking trip, Chad photographed the damaged Prudhoe Bay area of Alaska. Where drilling began in 1960 and oil spills and environmental degradation are the long-lasting legacy of the pipeline. A recent report prepared for Congress by the US Geological Survey has reaffirmed what Chad documented, describing the "cumulative environmental effects" that drilling has had on the Prudhoe Bay area, and finding dramatic effects on both plant and animal life.

Chad is now in the fight to prevent

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Planning and Prioritizing

BY ROB BRINKMAN

SSJ Group Chair

In keeping with tradition, the SSJ executive committee used its first meeting of the New Year to set priorities for the coming year. This serves to focus the committee on the myriad of issues confronting us. Below is a short paragraph describing each issue, presented in no particular order.

New membership recruitment. New members serve to infuse new energy and ideas into our group. SSJ has been growing steadily, if not rapidly.

However, efforts to recruit, particularly the younger generation, and to increase the diversity of our membership are viewed as particularly important. It would be great to form some local Sierra Student Coalitions to complement our group.

Electing conservationists to office is especially relevant in what looks to be an important election year. It is far more effective to elect candidates with strong conservationists values to office than to be forced into fighting bad legislation in the courts.

At most 50 percent of our membership votes in local elections, while this is much greater than the general population, if we could motivate more

Sierrans to vote in elections, the added turnout would be a deciding factor in close races.

Water resource issues (water wars) are particularly important in the North Central Florida region our group calls

home. In fact, we are a significant groundwater recharge area for much of Florida's water supply. From nitrates polluting our once pristine springs to the continuing destruction of wetlands due to development, our water supply is at risk.

Despite the fact that the permit for the Rodman Dam and Reservoir has expired, the St. Johns Water Management District is planning to study the reservoir for use as a water supply for portions of Florida's east coast. I fear we may not know what we had until it is gone.

Smart growth policies focus on increas-

ing the quality of life in a community, not the number of homes, cars and pollution. While some compare communities based on their annual rate of growth in purely economic terms it is worth remembering that growth for growth's sake is the ideology of a cancer cell. Should government spend tax money on "economic development" if it will not improve everybody's quality of life?

“Clean Energy is the number one priority of the national Sierra Club, it is also important in our area with two new coal plants in our group's area alone”

CHAIR'S



CORNER

see PRIORITIES, page 5

Visit the National and Local Sierra Club Websites!

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

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

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Get In The Water

BY KAREN GARREN

Outings Chair

FEB. 4, SATURDAY—Canoe paddle at Crystal River for Manatee Viewing, **EXPERIENCED PADDLERS ONLY**. Meet in Gainesville at 7 a.m. to carpool. Reconnoiter at the National Wildlife Headquarters at 9 a.m. Outing will include discussion of the endangered species' habitat needs and precarious future, but it will be canceled in the event of inclement weather.

Bring snorkeling gear and a wet suit for swimming in the springs. Arrangements can be made for canoe and gear rental.

Bring water, lunch, and a change of clothes. Please contact Karen Garren at (352) 371-0008 or email ILuvFla@bell-south.net to participate.

FEBRUARY 18 & 19, WEEKEND—“Rally for the Rivers,” Show your support for removal of the Rodman Dam

from the Ocklawaha River by participating in this second annual Rally and symbolic restoration. There will be dozens of outings involving hiking, biking, canoeing, botanizing, and many programs discussing

the ecology of this Wild and Scenic River. There will be tree planting along the reservoir, entertainment into the evening at Palatka's Riverfront Park, and lots of food.

I will be leading a Mushroom Identification hike at Welaka State Forest on Saturday, and a hike on the Florida Trail on Sunday.

Check out www.fladefenders.org/river-rally.html for more information (Susan Trammell did the stunning artwork).



The more businesses in Putnam and Marion County realize a restored ecosystem will be a bigger financial draw than the failing fisheries of the reservoir, the more support will be obtained.

Rally For The Rivers

KAREN AHLERS

Putnam County Environmental Council

Join us for the second Rally for the Rivers, a festive and fun three-day event to promote restoration of the Ocklawaha and St. Johns rivers, promote and demonstrate the potential of nature-based tourism, increase environmental awareness, teach the principals of smart growth, and empower activists. Come interact with candidates running in the 2006 election and demon-

strate the economic value of nature-based tourism in a festive and fun atmosphere. Sponsored by the Putnam County Environmental Council, most events are free and all are open to the public.

Scheduled events include:

SMART GROWTH WORKSHOP: Friday, Feb. 17, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. A free, all-day growth management workshop at the Riverfront Inn in Palatka. Space is limited; pre-registration is required. Call Margy Bielling at 352-685-2434 for more information.

RIVERFEST: Saturday, Feb. 18, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Join other restoration and conservation advocates at Palatka's Riverfront Park on the St. Johns River for an arts and crafts show, with live music, food, storytelling, conservation seminars, St. Johns River

cruises, information tables, and a very special raffle. This will be your chance to speak one-on-one with candidates who are running for 2006 state and federal offices. Contact Karen Ahlers at PCECriverrally@hotmail.com or 352-546-3560.

FIELD TRIPS: Saturday and Sunday mornings, Feb. 18-19. More than 50 field trips, mostly free and led by experts, will be offered for adventurers of all types. Contact David Zeigler at davidpzeigler@aol.com or 352-546-4715.

OCKLAWAHA RIVER WRAP PARTY: Sunday, Feb. 19, 1 p.m. Join event organizers, volunteers, and fellow Rally participants for a relaxing afternoon on the banks of the Ocklawaha on the southwest side of Rodman Dam for boat rides, music, food, and campfire fun.

see RIVER, page 7

**RALLY FOR THE RIVERS FEB. 17-19, 2006 EVENT
FEATURES SMART GROWTH WORKSHOP, FIELD
TRIPS, ART SHOW, AND MUSIC FESTIVAL**



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Aerial view of Butler Plaza. Photo provided by Terra Incognita Publications.

Grow Better Not Bigger

BY DWIGHT ADAMS

Political Chair

About 5,000 people move to Alachua County each year, adding to traffic congestion, crowded schools, high taxes, and South Florida-like sprawl engulfing the whole county.

So what should we do—promote more growth? Some commissioners are proposing spending large amounts of taxpayers' money for "economic development" that does just that.

The suggestion by Rodney Long that Alachua County and City of Gainesville each kick in \$1M for "economic development" has excited the Chamber of Commerce, the Council for Economic Outreach and others such as The Gainesville Sun who want to see more rapid growth.

Apparently, the local Republican Party intends to capitalize on census data on poverty as a campaign issue and now has several billboards devoted to this. How they will explain away Republican-controlled counties with higher poverty rates than Alachua's is not clear.

You cannot stop people from moving to Florida, but you certainly don't have to promote it! People like the sunshine but they move here because jobs are available. The national unemployment rate is 5 percent while Florida's, among the lowest of the states, is now 3.6 percent. This magnet of available jobs draws people to the state,

“rather than attempting to lure businesses from elsewhere, efforts to improve the economy should focus exclusively on fostering local businesses, especially start-up ones that create over 80 percent of new jobs”

even more so for the Gainesville Metropolitan Statistical Area at 2.6 percent.

The proposed publicly-funded economic development promotion fails to address key issues: What are the objectives of such a promotion, what approaches work best to meet the objectives, and are there are unacceptable adverse side effects brought on by rapid growth?

An unusually high poverty rate for the County has been cited as a reason for pro-

moting economic development as Marilyn Tubb did in her Gainesville Sun "Speaking-Out" column, December 18, 2005. While Alachua County certainly has pockets of poverty that need to be eliminated, the problem is not nearly as bad as has been depicted. Those familiar with the statistics on poverty realized that the numbers were inflated by including UF and Santa Fe students, most of whom have low-income, part-time jobs that would put them in the poverty group although parents may support them. The County has recently had the calculation revised by having the Census Bureau take the student population into account. The rate dropped from 22.8 percent to 13.9 percent, which is just about the State average.

Essentially every local government in Florida has been promoting economic development for decades and has experienced jobs growth and the accompanying population growth. Thus, if this approach were effective in reducing poverty, fast growing locations would now have greatly reduced poverty rates. Census data shows this not the case. For example, Marion County, one of the fastest growing in the state has a poverty rate of 13.1 percent, about the same as the state average.

In the decade from 1990 to 2000, Florida saw a population increase of over 3 million fueled by economic development activities. However, there was scarcely any change in the poverty rate, and the number

in poverty actually increased by over 300,000. Although newly created jobs may pay decent wages, there are an ever increasing number of low-paying jobs in service industries, e.g. fast food industry. The new residents keep the economy humming and some people do very well indeed.

Frequently, increasing the tax base is cited as a reason for luring businesses here. This would improve the net tax revenue

see GROWTH, next page

GROWTH, from previous page

only if the business came and paid taxes, with no other effect. New residents are attracted to the jobs provided, requiring more outlay in new infrastructure than the "increased tax base" provides. Additionally, the businesses expect and receive corporate welfare in the form of subsidies for roads, sewer, water, buildings, reduced tax rates, etc. Studies have shown that local governments never recover enough in new taxes to pay for these subsidies. Furthermore, the business may pick up and leave for another community that offers more incentives, as Dollar General did when they left Homerville, GA to move to Alachua.

A study in the book "The Living Wage: Building a Fair Economy," by economists Robert Pollin and Stephanie Luce has shown that economic development activities are ineffective in reducing poverty and in improving wages for those at the low end of the scale. Living wage ordinances (LWO) that require employers contracting with local governments to pay a wage sufficient to support a family of four above the poverty level (now about \$20,000 per year)

are much more effective and have been enacted in many locations.

The City of Gainesville has passed a mild version of the LWO, and pays their lowest-paid employees close to a living wage. While two sitting county commissioners supported a LWO in their 2002



campaign, there has been no movement on this since the election. Opposition to LWO by the Chamber of Commerce and others who advocate economic development may be an influential factor.

Rather than attempting to lure businesses from elsewhere, efforts to improve the economy should focus exclusively on fostering local businesses, especially start-up ones

that create over 80 percent of new jobs. Naylor Publications, which was begun here with 10 employees by local entrepreneurs, now has 150 and expects to expand, is just one example of this.

The focus should be in adding jobs to economically depressed areas in the community, notably East Gainesville, and on socially responsible businesses that provide health benefits and daycare for young children. The County Commission should amend policies that promote development to the west at the expense of older areas of town. Places of employment should be accessible to low-income housing and not require a series of bus rides across town or travel by an old clunker.

In addition to the Pollin and Luce book, Eben Fodor's "Better not Bigger" should be required reading for anyone promoting a better community.

What you can do: contact city and county commissioners to let them know that you do not support use of public funds to promote growth. Emails for all city and county commissioners are clerk@cityof-gainesville.org, and Bocc@Alachua.fl.us, respectively.

PRIORITIES, from page 2

This is going to be a front burner issue this year in some communities and we will be prepared to counter those who will resist reasonable regulations.

Sustainable management of public lands is becoming increasingly important as both the state and local governments continue to purchase lands for conservation. SSJ will champion the utilization of the ecological expertise available in this area to improve public lands management policies and monitor the results.

Environmental coalition building may be the only practical way to reverse the negative trends evident in recent years. In the 2004 elections the environment was hardly ever mentioned, we must work together with people of like minds to demonstrate that the environment is not an either/or proposition.

Protecting our natural resources is good for the entire community, cleaning up pollution is far more expensive than preventing it.

Outings are an integral part of the

Sierra Club experience, locally we have a lot of room for improvement, and I must admit to being part of the problem. The only outing I have been on was more a social gathering than typical outing.

The excom feels that we can build a stronger club by increasing community involvement in outings and by making at least some of them more of a social event, attractive to members and non-members alike. This will also help with recruitment.

Buying locally not only builds a vibrant community, particularly with respect to food it can reduce our environmental impact.

At the January general meeting Dedee Delongpre, executive director of Sustainable Alachua County (SAC) spoke of the 100-mile diet. The idea is to see if one can eat only food produced within a 100 mile radius. When we buy produce shipped from California we are consuming more gasoline and oil, due to transportation, than food.

Publicity is central to what the Sierra Club does, everything we do can be improved by making sure people learn

about it. People need to know what the Sierra Club is and what it does, in my experience most only know a small part.

One way to introduce more people to the Sierra Club is by showing the new Sierra Club Chronicles TV series at a local venue. The first show dealt with the impact of air contamination on workers at ground zero in New York City.

Clean Energy is the number one priority of the national Sierra Club, it is also important in our area with two new coal plants in our group's area alone and many more planned throughout the state.

In two months the Gainesville City Commission will likely make the most important decision in our generation, either to increase our community's reliance on fossil fuel or invest in energy efficiency and renewables, known collectively as clean energy.

The above priorities will guide SSJ as we invest our time and energy to build a healthier, cleaner more enjoyable community for our families and our future. Please join in and invite your friends, neighbors and co-workers.

Listening Without Hearing

BY CARL MATTHAEI

My letter to the Crescent City Courier Journal (see inset box) gives you a feeling for the tragedy that occurred this past December in Putnam County Government.

The tragedy? Both the county's Planning Commission and the Board of County Commissioners approved a re-zoning for a Wal-Mart Distribution Center.

The only reason the Commissioners had for their votes was the possibility of bringing 600 \$12-per-hour (and up) jobs to Putnam County.

The reasons mentioned by the people attending the hearing against the rezoning were numerous (5-plus hours worth). I would summarize them as follows:

None of the risks to the environment from air and noise pollution, or impacts on the vast wetlands system in this area, were adequately considered (if considered at all). The Commissioners seemed intent on passing the rezoning before the environmental review process became more extensive, which would occur on 1/1/06.

If anything needs review, it is 65 acres of pavement being used by 1,100 diesel trucks each day, along with a truck washing station, all within sight of Lake Crescent and Reedy Branch wetlands. The source of Little Reedy Creek is actually on the site, presently a potato field.

There is abundant wildlife in the area, including the endangered Florida Panther (actual sightings along with verified tracks by residents), Black Bear and Bald Eagle, not to mention the legendary bass population in the lake itself.

Wal-Mart's refrigerated warehouses use ammonia as a refrigerant because it is more efficient.

However, ammonia is a very dangerous chemical, accidental releases form clouds that tend to stay at ground level and can result in severe injury or fatality to anyone exposed to the ammonia vapor.

OSHA regulations require emergency breathing equipment be placed inside the facility for employee use, but what do the neighbors, much less the wildlife in the sur-

rounding communities do in case of an accidental release?

The serious lack of access to a four-lane highway from this location is an obvious detriment.

The closest four-lane highway to the south is Highway 92 (International Drive) 35 miles away and to the north, Route 207, which is 25 miles away.

The closest east-west corridor to the south is SR40 that cuts through the Ocala national Forest, one of southeastern United States' most important wildlife corridors. All of the traffic is going to go north or south on Highway 17.

The high volume of traffic generated by this project will ruin the character and quality of small towns and rural residents not only in southeast Putnam, as well as north Volusia County.

The risk to public safety inherent in this huge increase in traffic is simply unacceptable.

Southeast Putnam is just now being rediscovered for its grace, quietude and charm, and real estate values have been increasing dramatically.

We're told this project would increase the tax base of Putnam County, but property values in the area are certain to decrease.

The already approved Skinner mixed-use PUD right across Clifton Road to the north will surely fall short of its potential to bring in much needed tax dollars. No one wants to live next to a monstrous industrial warehouse with its constant noise, lighting and competition for room on our narrow roadways.

Old Florida is southeast Putnam. There is very little of it left. What is an 880,000-square-foot building doing in the "Bass Fishing Capital of the World"?

Putnam County needs to move forward in its plan to designate areas for industrial development.

Dear Editor: The 12/20/05 meeting of the Putnam County Board of County Commissioners re the rezoning for the Wal-Mart distribution center has got to be the most baffling example of a Public Hearing ever. Why locate the hearing in Crescent City, where the Commission must have felt they would get the most public response, and why bother being patient enough to listen to all of the public that wanted to speak (some 5+ hours), if you are then going to vote against the overwhelming majority of public sentiment?!

For those of you out there who would still like to be heard, LAKE CRESCENT CITIZENS FOR RESPONSIBLE GROWTH (LCCRG) is carrying on the effort against locating a Wal-Mart distribution center on Clifton Road, just off HWY 17 south of Crescent City in an environmentally sensitive rural, agricultural/residential area with wetlands and wildlife including the endangered Florida Panther. This rezoning change, approved by the Commissioners, will bring a 20-acre building and 65 acres of pavement that will generate 1,100 "semi" truck trips and 5000 total vehicular trips each day along HWY 17.

You can help! Save Pomona Park, Seville, Satsuma, Pierson, Lake Como, Barberville, Crescent City ("Bass Capital of the World") and all the small towns and residences along HWY 17.

Call LCCRG at 386-698-4229 or 386-569-7050, to volunteer or make a donation for the lawsuit to stop this distribution center.

*Carl Matthaei
Crescent City*

Clean Water In Court

SIERRA CLUB NEWS RELEASE

A coalition of environmental and public health groups, including the Sierra Club, filed a friend-of-the-court brief today in support of the U.S. Government's position in two important Supreme Court cases.

Both cases — *Carabell v. United States* and *Rapanos v. United States* — address whether the Clean Water Act protects tributaries that flow into larger water bodies and their adjacent wetlands and, if so, whether the Constitution gives Congress such authority. The Court is scheduled to hear the cases February 21.

David Bookbinder, Senior Attorney for the Sierra Club, issued the following statement: "Thousands of waterways and the destruction of millions of acres of valuable wetlands are at stake in these two Supreme Court cases. A ruling against the government could remove all federal limits on pollution flowing into our waterways.

"The cases will determine what kind of contamination the Clean Water Act regulates — not just dredged or fill material discharges, but also whether sewage, sediment and toxic chemicals can be released into our waterways and neighboring wetlands.

"The outcome of these cases has such sweeping effects that interested parties ranging from hunter and angler advocacy groups to scientists to public interest groups are filing friend-of-the-court briefs siding with the federal government.

"All are urging the Supreme Court to keep our waters clean and healthy by maintaining the venerable protections offered by the Clean Water Act." To obtain a copy of the amicus brief, please contact Christina Kreitzer at 415-977-5619.

Surely there are more appropriate areas to site projects of this type. In the meantime, LCCRG needs your support in its lawsuit to stop this.

RIVER, from page 3

Bring something to contribute to the soup pot, or bring a dish for the table, as well as your own drinks, a blanket or chair, binoculars, cameras, musical instruments . . . whatever it takes to help you wrap up the weekend and wind down.

Last year, the Rally brought 1,500 people from 34 Florida counties, seven states, and six countries. With the help of Audubon and other conservation organizations, PCEC successfully demonstrated that nature-based tourism does pay. PCEC calculated that the two-day event had an overall economic impact of up to \$288,000.

The Florida Wildlife Federation recognized the importance of the 2005 Rally by awarding PCEC Conservation Organization of the Year.

A block of rooms has been reserved at the Riverfront Inn in Palatka. Call 386-328-3481 to make your reservations at the event rate of \$60-\$75, good through Feb. 2, 2006. Be sure to mention the Rally to ensure the conference rate.

Go to the Florida Defenders of the Environment website at www.fladefenders.org/riverrally.html for more information, including lists of camping and dorm-style accommodations, area restaurants, and field trips. Participants are encouraged to sign up for field trips soon. The most popular trips tend to fill up fast.

ARCTIC, from page 1

ANWR from being devastated in the same way. He points out that ANWR is not so distant as to be irrelevant to people living in the continental United States. Over 160 species of migrating birds breed on the coastal plain of ANWR, the very area that will be most affected by oil exploration. These birds migrate from Alaska to all 49 other U.S. states and 6 continents.

Chad's presentation will be about the damage he found in the Prudhoe Bay area, and the likelihood that the same (or worse) damage will occur if the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is opened up to oil development. He puts the lie to oil companies' claims that their drilling "footprint" would only consist of a 2000-acre area, showing that this claim only includes the actual drilling equipment and not the miles of

roads that will need to be built, as well as ground needed for seismic testing.

This summer, Chad plans another trip to the same area of Alaska with a video camera to further document the endangered wildlife. His book *Arctic Quest* can be bought through an independent bookseller, or online. You can follow his activities through the website www.arcticrefuge.org.



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FEBRUARY 2006 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Feb. 2, Thursday 7:30 p.m. General meeting: Arctic Odyssey. See page 1.

Feb. 8. Writer deadline for March newsletter submission. Send to colinwhitworth@cox.net, or call 352-372-2464.

Feb. 9, Thursday, 7 p.m. Executive Committee meeting at Santa Fe Community College Downtown Gainesville campus Board Meeting Room.

Feb. 14, Valentines Day. Explore, enjoy and protect a wild area with someone you love.

Feb. 17-19, Rally for the Rivers in Palatka. Details page 3.

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