

POLK GROUP

Issue: 06-02

FROM THE CHAIR...Al Greulich

Many of our Sierra members subscribe to "National Geographic", and I hope you have had a chance to look over the January 2006 issue. Two articles were of interest to me as an environmentalist: "Geographica" and "Arctic Hunters on Thin Ice". Both articles are disturbing. "Geographica – Farewell to Frogs" explains the current demise of amphibians. The other article chronicles a depressing hunt that some of the last of Greenland's native hunters undertook with little success. The article ends with this quote from the lead hunter: "In my whole life, and that of my father and grandfather, there has never been anything like this at this time of year. Without ice, we can't live. Without ice, we're nothing at all." Environmental collapse is already the order of the day in the earth's polar regions.

As a counterpoint to these two "National Geographic" articles, the January 19th edition of "The Ledger" reports in an article titled "Former EPA Chiefs Say Bush Ignores Warming" that six former heads of the EPA (five republicans and one democrat) accused the Bush administration of neglecting global warming and other environmental problems. Our club has been telling the nation this for the last five years.

The possible extinction of frogs and polar bears brings us to the terrible revelation that two species near and dear to our human culture could be the next victims of global warming. To think that someday, in reading traditional fairy



tales to our children, we might have to explain that frogs so often used as characters in these allegorical tales are creatures no

longer possible to find in the wild, is almost unbelievable to me! Sierrans know about the dire threat that global warming poses to our world, and our government's lame response toward it, all too well. I hope that with the huge readership of "National Geographic" more citizens will become alarmed and demand action.

As is the case with "National Geographic" readership, the Sierra Club has a huge membership, and our organization is governed at the national, state, and local levels. I attended my

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SIERRA CLUB
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FEBRUARY 2006 NEWSLETTER

serving DeSoto, Hardee, Highlands and Polk County

PROGRAM FOR FEBRUARY 9, 2006

Water, Wildlife and Wilderness - Polk's Director of Natural Resources **Jeff Spence** has a power point presentation for us focusing on the soon-to-be **Environmental Education Center at Circle B-Bar Reserve**. This is a joint effort between the Southwest Florida Water Management District and Polk County with input from the Polk School Board. The Center's purpose is to educate the public on all of this area's unique natural resources.

RURAL LANDS STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM A NEW APPROACH?

With the support of the Polk County Commission, a small group representing diverse interests is working to build broad based support for assessing and possibly implementing a Rural Lands Stewardship and/or Transferable Development Rights Program as important Smart Growth tools. This Steering Committee, which was established in response to heightened concerns about the impacts of sprawling development and the loss of agricultural lands, plans to build a diverse alliance made up of agricultural, development and business interests, large land owners, elected officials, conservation and civic organizations as well as the general public.

The Goal of the Rural Lands Stewardship Program (RLSP) as provided in Section 163.3177(11)(d), Florida Statutes, is to provide rural landowners with economic incentives for stewardship of rural lands to both protect environmental features and beneficial agricultural uses and to allow development in appropriate settings.

Traditional Regulatory Approaches have severe limitations. By regulating the use of land, we create winners and losers among landowners. The winners enjoy great economic gain by the ability to serve the needs of a growing population, while the losers are locked out of the gain by holding land that the public deems too valuable for its ecosystem benefits to allow conversion to other uses. Even setting aside the issues of fairness, the creation of winners and losers by regulation has the following adverse effects:

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LOVE IS IN THE AIR

Valentine's Day is almost upon us - do you have a unique and appropriate remembrance selected yet? A nesting box carries with it the qualities of caring and concern that will show just what a sensitive type you are! These cypress wood boxes are yard or lake appropriate and are very easy to put up. A minimum donation of \$50 is requested and all monies in excess of costs will be donated to the Richard Coleman Scholarship Fund. Contact Bob at 863 439-2251 or Frances at 863 956-3771 for immediate delivery.



Photo by Bob Taylor

(Continued from page 1) Rural Lands Stewardship

- Entitlements tend to be used prematurely to avoid risking their loss through a change in regulations;
- Natural resources tend to be degraded through the use of regulatory loopholes, especially if there is a perceived opportunity for vesting entitlements later;
- The things we value as a society like protection of endangered species are feared by the individual landowner because of the disproportionate burden placed on those lands harboring an endangered species; and
- Fear of regulation and the creation of winners and losers destroy the incentive to cooperate to meet collective goals.

The RLSP Approach by contrast, uses a planning process that is not limited by current economic values based on maximum allowable density, but which includes the values of natural ecosystems, farmlands, and open space. A limited trading program is created within the stewardship area that allows the owner of valuable natural ecosystems to participate in the economic development of the land suitable for conversion. In fact, the more valuable the natural ecosystem is or can be restored to be, the more the owner of that land can participate in the economic benefits of development.

Advantages of RLSP

- RLSP is voluntary and landowners opt in when they feel an incentive to do so.
- RLSP utilizes market rewards as incentives to protect environmentally sensitive lands.
- RLSP provides greater certainty about the value of rural lands.
- Using RLSP does not create winners and losers among landowners. The burden of environmental protection is shared among landowners, as is the gain of development.
- RLSP removes the incentive for premature development.
- RSLP removes the incentive to degrade natural resources using regulatory loopholes.
- RLSP maintains the rural character of an area by concentrating development and preserving the surrounding agricultural and environmental land.Marian Ryan

HOW GREEN IS YOUR THUMB?

Would you like to help with environmental enhancement and restoration projects for Polk County's Environmental Land sites? If you like to grow plants and have some spare room for a "backyard nursery" you can become a "Park Partner" volunteer with the Friends of the Parks Foundation. We are looking for volunteers willing to grow various shrubs, small trees, grasses and wildflowers to no more than 1 gallon sizes. These plants can be grown from seeds, cuttings or from small plugs that could be provided. If this sounds like something you might be interested in, please contact Marian for more information about the program and benefits. (Marian Ryan (H) 863-293-6961 e-mail: mryan@pipevines.net)Marian Ryan

(Continued from page 1) From the Chair

first FLEXCOM, Sierra's state governmental body, meeting last week at Spring Hammock in Longwood. As chair of the Polk Group, I am a voting member of this committee. I was quite impressed with the structure and content of this two-day meeting. As I stated in last month's newsletter, Sierra chapters and groups thrive in every state and its members determine the club's priorities. I saw this mission in action at the FLEXCOM meeting as the delegates implemented changes decided upon at the Sierra Summit back in September of 2005 in San Francisco to further advance the interest and autonomy of the local groups.

As fine an organization as the Sierra Club is, we cannot be successful in reversing the broad swath of environmental decline by going it alone. We need to continue our collaborative efforts with other environmental organizations across the nation. There were informative updates at FLEXCOM concerning several lawsuits in which our club is involved, and in many of these legal actions we are teamed with such organizations as Audubon and Defenders of Wildlife. The chances of successful resolutions to our lawsuits are greatly enhanced by these alliances with other organizations. Communications with other environmental organizations are ongoing in our Polk Group. Ridge Audubon provides our meeting place for a nominal fee, and several members of our executive committee are members of such other clubs. Many of you likely belong to other excellent environmental organizations, and I commend you for that.

One happy note about the FLEXCOM meeting was the sharing of environmental victories around the state about which each group reported. I believe that many of these victories were made possible through collaborative work among the various environmental clubs, and that by working together we can accomplish much more!

ENVIRONMENTAL LANDS GIFTS FOR TOMORROW

The Friends of the Parks Foundation has developed a Gifts for Tomorrow guide which is now available on their website at www.friends-of-the-park.com

The guide is designed to allow interested persons to make financial or in-kind contributions to enhance parks and recreational opportunities in Polk County. Of special interest to Sierrans are the sections for the Polk County Environmental Lands Program and the soon to come Environmental Education Center.

The environmental lands wish list includes everything from trail maintenance to picnic shelters and benches to contributions for ecological restoration projects that are part of the Living Forest Program.

The Environmental Education Center, which will be located at the Circle B Bar Reserve, is still on the drawing board, but it's not too early to make donations towards educational exhibits and signs, Eco-Adventure classroom kits, or books and field guides.

A donation made in someone's name makes a unique gift for a special occasion or for a memorial. For more information call Marian Ryan at 863-293-6961.

....Marian Ryan

OUTING PAST

LAKE WALES RIDGE STATE FOREST ARBUCKLE HIKE

"It's so green. So why does it burn?" Senior forester Dave Butcher chuckled as he told our outing participants that non-Floridians ask why scrub areas burn when, after all, they are so green! We were standing next to a clump of saw palmetto which burns quite quickly - in either a prescribed or natural burn. Strangers to this area are accustomed to forests back home that only burn when they are extremely dry (and therefore brown). Saw palmetto and other scrub plants burn so readily because they contain oils and waxes that allow them to burn easily, regardless of whether the plant is green or not.

About 20 participants hiked this relatively easy (1 hour) Arbutle Tract in the Lake Wales Ridge State Forest with Dave and his plant ecologist Keith Clanton. It was a blustery and brisk morning, and even though the sky was clear and blue, we were all glad to have a few minutes out of the wind as we gathered in the McClean cabin at the trailhead before the walk.

Dave told us how this property had been purchased by the State of Florida during the 1980s and had formerly been used for cattle grazing. We can be extremely proud and thankful that through the foresight and hard work of



Photo by Gail Bagley

Sierrans back then, the state was made aware how valuable this land would be to us and future generations. Because of the unique location and geology of this narrow ridge, it is home to many endangered and threatened species.

Our walk took us through four distinct ecosystems: scrub, cut-throat seep, pine flatwoods, and wet-weather pond. We spotted one deer, but missed seeing any birds; they were probably all hunkered down until the wind died down.

After our walk we gathered for lunch at the picnic tables next to the cabin. It was a nice change to have new faces and quite a few non-members participate on this outing!
....Gail Bagley

OUTINGS/ACTIVITIES

If you have suggestions for outings or if you wish to lead an outing, call our Outings Coordinator, Gail Bagley at 863-3334. For more activities/events, please visit our web site at <http://florida.sierraclub.org/polk/>

Feb. 11 TECO Polk Power Station Guided Tour. This plant uses "integrated coal gasification combined-cycle" technology to produce power. Reportedly, this is the most cost-efficient method today of producing commercial electricity as well as being the most environmentally friendly with respect to air emissions. The U.S. Department of Energy Clean Coal Technology Program awarded Tampa Electric (TECO) over \$140 million in funding to demonstrate the plant's technology. The power station is built on a former phosphate mine off Hwy 37 near Mulberry. It encompasses over 1500 acres of land, and now attracts bald eagles, wild hogs, turkeys, and other animals.

There will be a short video presentation, a 30 minute overview, a 30 minute walking tour, followed by questions and answers. TECO will provide hardhats, and protective eye and ear-ware. **Participants MUST wear long pants and close-toed shoes.** We'll get started at 9:15AM and finish about 12:30PM. This is a FREE outing to both members and non-members. Please bring bottled water and a snack, if desired. To participate, please contact the outing leader, Gail Bagley (863-683-3334) no later than Saturday Feb 4th so the plant can prepare the tour. Car pooling, directions and further information will be provided at that time.

Feb. 17-19 Rally for the Rivers at Palatka's Riverfront Park on the St. Johns. This event drew over 1,500 celebrants last year who were entertained, inspired and enlightened by activities like the Smart Growth Workshop (on the 17th); Riverfest (the 18th) with its art show, live music, food, river cruises, and one-on-one contacts with candidates for state and federal offices; Field Trips (the 18th and 19th); and a River Wrap Party (the 19th). This event proves ecotourism does pay: 2 days in 2005 generated an overall economic impact of \$288,000. For further information go to pcecriverrally@hotmail.com or www.fladefenders.org/riverrally.html

In order to participate in one of the Sierra Club's outings, you will need to sign a liability waiver which will be furnished at the beginning of the outing. If you would like to read a copy of the waiver prior to the outing, please see <http://www.sierraclub.org/outings/chapter/forms/> or call 415-977-5528. In the interests of facilitating the logistics of some outings, it is customary that participants make carpooling arrangements. The Sierra Club does not have insurance for carpooling arrangements and assumes no liability for them. Carpooling, ride sharing or anything similar is strictly a private arrangement among the participants. Participants assume the risks associated with this travel. Please note that some of the above listed activities are events that we think you will find interesting and fun, but they are not official outings.



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FEBRUARY MEETING
 Thursday, February 9, 2006

PROGRAM:

**The New Environmental Education Center
 At Circle B-Bar Reserve
 Water, Wildlife and Wilderness**
By
**Jeff Spence, Director
 Natural Resources Division, Polk County**

*General Meeting and Executive Committee Meeting Run
 Concurrently*

Join us for our pot-luck suppers at 6:30 p.m. on the second Thursday of every month. Bring a dish to share, a drink and your utensils. Dress is casual. **The meeting will start around 7:15 p.m.**

Meetings are held at the Audubon Nature Center, 115 Lameraux Rd., Winter Haven. From the traffic light at the intersection of Hwy. 540 (Cypress Gardens Blvd.) and Cypress Gardens Road (look for the Shell station and Blockbuster Video) - Turn east onto C.G. Road and follow around sharp right hand turn & then sharp left hand turn. After left hand turn, Lameraux is fourth road on left, two blocks west of Garden Grove Elementary School. Distance from the light to the Nature Center is about 2.3 miles. (Phone 324-7304)

Web Site: <http://florida.sierraclub.org/polk/>

Sierra Membership Application

Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional): () _____ FRIP No 3311

- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Check One</i> | Individual | Joint |
| Introductory | <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 | |
| Regular | <input type="checkbox"/> \$39 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$47 |
| Senior | <input type="checkbox"/> \$24 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$32 |
| Student | <input type="checkbox"/> \$24 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$32 |



Annual dues include subscription to Sierra (\$7.50) and chapter publications (\$1). Dues are not tax-deductible.

Please mail your check and this form to:
Sierra Club, PO Box 52968, Boulder, Colorado, 80322-2968

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