

FROM THE CHAIR...Al Greulich

The latest issue of "National Geographic" contains an informative article about all kinds of deals already finalized for new exploration for oil and natural gas over vast untouched areas of the National Petroleum Reserve. This reserve is a 23 million acre chunk of the western Arctic that is the biggest single block of land in the federal estate.

Biologists have argued for decades that areas of the reserve are more critical to wildlife than the actual wildlife refuge, ANWR. While the battle over drilling in the refuge raged in the U.S. Congress, the Bush administration has leased vast tracts of the petroleum reserve and offshore waters to the highest bidder. These lands are filled with incredible concentrations of all the Arctic mammal and bird species. Many of the newly leased areas are in such sensitive parts of the reserve that even Ronald Reagan's famously anti-environmental Secretary of the Interior James Watt barred them from development.

The Clinton administration decided to open the NPR to oil exploration in the late 1990s and an exhaustive environmental impact statement was commissioned for it. Then Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt extended protection to more than a half million acres representing 13 percent of the reserve. However, some of the hottest oil prospects lie in this area. Last January Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton opened this entire area to drilling.

The National Petroleum Reserve is rugged, beautiful, wide-open country, essentially unchanged since woolly mammoths roamed these steppes. It is difficult to imagine it full of pipes, pump stations, and gravel roads say the native Inuit tribes who have depended on this wilderness for their subsistence for generations.

The prospect of opening these spectacular untouched areas to oil exploration is all the more distressing when the "National Geographic" article explains how the oil drilling equipment and infrastructure will never be cleaned up after the oil and gas have been tapped out. The oil companies assert that the cost is too prohibitive and the technology is not yet developed to conduct any kind of reclamation effort on vast swaths of tundra that will be forever changed.

Drilling proponents, like Alaska Senator Ted Stevens and Governor Frank Murkowski, have long painted the coastal plain as a bleak frozen wasteland good for little but reducing - however slightly - our dependence on foreign oil. It's an

(Continued on page 2)



**SIERRA
CLUB**
FOUNDED 1892

PROGRAM FOR JUNE 8, 2006

The legislative session is over; in what measure do we rejoice or cry? Join us for a guided tour of record money for land and water conservation projects, the Panhandle's new wetlands program, and the Farmland Sprawl bill. We'll touch on the innovative approach for managing the huge Babcock Ranch purchase and examine the complex energy legislation.

FWC VOLUNTEER EARNS NATIONAL AWARD

Tom Palmer, an environmental reporter and columnist doesn't just talk the talk; he walks the walk. His active participation in a volunteer conservation stewardship program with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has earned the eclectic Palmer national recognition for his efforts.

The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) honored Palmer, 58, of Winter Haven, with a MetLife Foundation Older Volunteers Enrich America Award. The nationwide program annually honors 26 outstanding older volunteers for contributions to their communities. This year's award recipients were honored at a ceremony on April 28 in Washington, D.C.

Palmer received a Community Champion Award for his work with the FWC's Ridge Rangers Volunteer Program. Ridge Rangers works with volunteers to accomplish management goals on publicly owned properties in the Lake Wales Ridge area of central Florida.

Palmer became a Ridge Ranger volunteer in 1995 and in 2002 assumed a stewardship role at Lake Blue Scrub, a newly acquired 80-acre preserve managed by the FWC. This piece of rare scrub habitat had become a dumping ground for trash and an eyesore. Tom and others started the cleanup effort by removing tons of rubbish from Lake Blue Scrub over a nine-month period. His continuing efforts at the site help prevent damage to rare plant and animal life found only in scrub habitat. Palmer's vast knowledge of the ecosystem greatly enhances his contributions to protecting the area's natural habitat. Tom continues to volunteer at Lake Blue on a regular basis, monitoring wildlife and plants, removing exotic plants, maintaining fence and fire lanes and much more. By transforming Lake Blue Scrub from a blemish to a community treasure, Tom has created a green space, vital to survival of endangered species and to the quality of life in the community.

All honorees receive an engraved gift celebrating their achievement and each honoree's nominating organization receives a monetary award to further its work. The FWC's Ridge Rangers Volunteer Program collaborates with other land managing agencies to protect the imperiled habitats of the Lake Wales Ridge. Visit MyFWC.com/



Photo by Renee Palmer

(Continued from page 1) From Chair

argument that makes noted wildlife biologist George Schaller shake his head. Dr. Schaller says, "It is the ultimate in patriotism to leave future generations what the past reverts."

HOW SHALL WE GROW?

In concert with its Community Partners, myregion.org will host a series of meetings in each of the seven Central Florida counties to gain participation and feedback on the question, How Shall We Grow?

These Community Input Sessions are divided into two parts and your attendance at both is crucial.

Part One will provide an overview of why it is important to build a regional vision. Participants will then work together to make recommendations regarding where our region could best accommodate the addition of four million people by the year 2050.

Part Two will present two meeting opportunities on different dates and at different locations in each county to make it convenient for citizens to participate. In this session, attendees will be asked for ideas on how they would like to see their particular sector of the region grow. Participation in only ONE of these two meetings is required. For your added convenience, you may choose to attend any of the meetings outside of your county of residence if you are interested in doing so.

Please confirm your attendance at the Part One meeting and your choice of the Part Two meetings at www.myregion.org. You may direct your scheduling questions to Pam Clancy, Community Liaison at 407.835.2443 or via email at pam.clancy@orlando.org.Marian Ryan

KISSIMMEE RESTORATION



Photo by Frances H. Coleman

Our May presenter, Lawrence Glenn, Environmental Scientist, SFWMD, received from Bob Taylor, Chief Carpenter, a Coleman memorial nesting box for placement in the restored section of the Kissimmee River Valley. Sierans were pleased with the official report of birds and fish returning in very satisfactory numbers to the restored section; they were puzzled and dismayed, however, to hear that the quality of the water entering Lake Okeechobee had not improved. A possible explanation may involve an unexplained concentration of phosphorus at the southern end of Lake Kissimmee, immature broadleaf marshes, and dairy farm soil contamination in the southern reaches. Sierans will continue to monitor.

DEJA VU ALL OVER AGAIN Or STEP BACK AND RECONSIDER

Here comes DOT proposing to fill in the edge of another Winter Haven lake. Remember Hwy 540 and Lake Roy? DOT was only going to take a tiny edge of Lake Roy - no lake, just a little wetland, less than an acre - and when we took a boat into Lake Roy after the retaining wall was in place, the depth recorder measured nine feet. That is no small intrusion!

The Department of Transportation presented its options for widening Hwy 542 on Feb. 23. Three options were presented for the widening around Lake Elbert. Option B-4 takes 1.7 acres of wetlands and 0.8 of floodplain, requires some use of the city's parkland but avoids having to buy many residences on the south side of the road and would cost \$21.1 million; option B-10 takes 0 wetlands, 0 floodplain, and 0 parkland and costs \$29.8 million primarily because a good many more residences would have to be purchased; option B-11 takes 1.1 acres of wetlands and 0.8 of floodplain but no parkland at a cost of \$24.2 million. The 'one-way' proposal (east on one side of the lake and west on the other) was not considered an option - "too expensive." DOT representatives at the meeting seemed to favor B-4; citizens who voiced dismay were told, there is always the 'no build option.'

This is going to be complicated. Consider the following issues:

- Winter Haven is The Chain of Lakes City but is faced with damaging one of its major assets.
- The city wants to grow and 542 is becoming another traffic nightmare.
- The city has spent millions on street-scaping. Is there a plan to devise a system of one-ways to handle increased traffic into downtown?
- The Chamber is pushing a 10' to 12' walking path around Lake Elbert which will increase the amount of right of way needed for the new construction. This Lake Hollingsworth-type project is very appealing to many city residents but many Lake Elbert residents feel it is an invasion of their space.
- The residents along the Lake Elbert section of 542 are already complaining about traffic noise. If the B-4 option is used and only a minimum number of houses are purchased for right of way, the remaining residents are really going to have traffic noise.
- There is a proposal to create a South Lake Elbert Historic district. All options would have an impact on a new historic district.

DOT has stated additional public meetings will be held in August or September but as of now no schedule has been set. It is suggested that all who care about preventing adverse impacts to our lakes and those who travel SR 542, go to www.sr542.com to comment, stay abreast of the latest options, and be informed of workshop schedules.

....Frances H. Coleman

BIOFUELS - AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCAM OR THE WAVE OF THE FUTURE?

The rhetoric is heating up now and once again we all have to choose sides. Is ethanol going to be a viable replacement for petroleum or is it going to cause even more problems? First, a few facts upon which almost everyone agrees. A biofuel is a fuel derived from plants such as potatoes, corn, switch grass, forest products (cellulose) or even petroleum. The most commonly mentioned product today is ethanol. Ethanol, or grain alcohol, is found in most alcoholic beverages. Ethanol produces 76,000 BTU/gal of energy while gasoline produces 114,000 BTU/gal of energy. Thus you need 1.5 gallons of ethanol to produce the energy of one gallon of gasoline. This is an important difference.

At this point, things get murky. Scientists try to calculate the amount of energy required to manufacture ethanol, that is, the total energy used to not only produce the ethanol but the energy to grow the plant material, i.e. corn. Corn requires fertilizer and lime to grow efficiently so you also have to figure how much energy is used to crush the lime rock and how much energy to make the fertilizer and how much energy to transport the corn to the ethanol plant and how much energy to manufacture the tractor and equipment, and how much energy to feed the farmers that grow the crop and how much..... well, you get the picture. This is complex stuff to say the least.

Professors David Pimental at Cornell and Tad Patzek at Berkley started the ball rolling a few years back by calculating that it takes more energy to produce ethanol than the ethanol contains. They claim that it takes 1.3 gallons of oil to create one gallon of ethanol. Other scientists, working the same problem in 2005, have reached the opposite conclusion. Researchers at the UC Berkley campus concluded that "producing ethanol from corn uses much less petroleum than producing gasoline" The reason for the

discrepancy is simple. The technologies for all the variables are constantly changing, getting better, more efficient. Some of the new discoveries just over the horizon can change the equations even more.

The scientists further concluded that corn was not a good choice because of environmental problems such as soil erosion, excessive use of fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, and destruction of natural lands. Additionally, there was the taxpayer subsidies paid to corn farmers which trouble many. They reasoned that if you made ethanol from woody products, cellulose technology, you could avoid many of these problems. There are billions of tons of waste cellulose products that could be used for the raw material right now. Just getting rid of this material is expensive and a source of environmental concern. Brazil avoids this problem by using sugar cane waste to ferment much of its ethanol at the farm site. Prior to that it was burned in the fields which caused a major air pollution problem.

With the environmental problems diminished, the main concern then would be cost; however, as pump prices move toward the \$4 mark, it may be a moot point. As more research is put into improving the new technologies, and they become even more efficient, costs will level out or hopefully drop. One final caveat: ethanol will be at best an additive. Pure ethanol does not produce the zoom, zoom, zoom that we all love. 15% ethanol mixed with 85% gasoline is the bench mark now and certainly that ratio can be greatly improved. Anything beyond that ratio, however, will require the redesign of the automobile engine which would increase the cost dramatically. So to answer the original question, biofuels will play a role in making our country energy independent but only in conjunction with a whole family of alternative energy sources. Don't expect it to be the silver bullet that some predict. It aint gonna happen. In the end simple conservation measures will be our most productive path to energy independence. And we can do that right now.

....Charles Geanangel

EVENTS/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/>

Jun. 3 Hike Avon Park Air Force Range. Lake Region Audubon is sponsoring this stroll-along hike where you will be able to possibly identify 75 wildflower species including at least 5 different orchids. There should also be some good birding. Participants should bring their own lunches, water, sunscreen and hats and meet at 8AM at the Street Nature Center in Winter Haven to arrange carpooling. Call Paul Fellers for more information at 863 293-0486

Jun. 17 Plant it and the criters will come! At Circle B Bar Reserve we will be installing plants for the sandhill restoration project that we are sponsoring. Because of the weather, we will start early but be finished by at least 11:30 AM. If you plan to participate, please call Tabitha Biehl at Polk County Natural Resources 863 534-7377 to register for this workday. Tabitha will coordinate all volunteers to make sure we have all the tools we need and arrange a starting time and meeting place.

Jun. 24 Landscape Design 101. Learn to analyze site conditions, identify activity areas and develop a landscape plan. This workshop, sponsored by IFAS, costs \$10 to cover materials and you must pre-register. It will be held at the Kelly Recreation Complex (404 Imperial Blvd.) in Lakeland from 10:00 -12:30. Please call 519-8677, ext. 121 to register.

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.



Sierra Club
Polk Group - Florida Chapter
 P.O. Box 7544
 Winter Haven, FL 33883

Non-Profit Org.
 U.S. Postage
 PAID
 Permit No. 1117
 Lakeland, Florida

Published Monthly

Members should send **changes of address** to: Sierra Club, P.O. Box 52968, Boulder, CO 80322-2968
 or address.change@sierraclub.org

JUNE MEETING
 Thursday, June 8, 2006

PROGRAM:

Legislative Wrap-Up
Accolades and Daggers

And

Summer Socializing

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)

General Meeting and Executive Committee Meeting Run Concurrently

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

Sierra Membership Application

Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional): () _____ FRIP No 3311

- Check One **Individual** **Joint**
- Introductory** \$25
- Regular** \$39 \$47
- Senior** \$24 \$32
- Student** \$24 \$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

2006 POLK SIERRA GROUP

Al Greulich
 Chair - 967-6783

Paul Anderson
 Vice-Chair - 965-8241

Marian Ryan
 Secretary - 293-6961

Charles Geanangel
 Treasurer - 326-5748

Members-at-large

Gail Bond
 Membership - 298-8134

Gail Bagley - 683-3334
Bob Taylor - 439-2251
 vacant

Newsletter Publisher
Paul Daniel

Outings Coordinator
Gail Bagley - 683-3334

FL Chapter Issue Chair
Marian Ryan
 293-6961

Email Tree Coordinator
Jenny Jacobs - 439-1926
jenjacobs@ij.net

Newsletter Editor
Frances Howell-Coleman
 956-3771