



Ancient Islands

The Polk Group also serves Desoto, Hardee and Highlands Counties

Issue: 08-06/07

June/July 2008

FROM THE CHAIR...Paul Anderson

ANCIENT ISLANDS

PROMISES MADE--PROMISES NOT KEPT !

WHAT ONCE WAS - WILL BE AGAIN?

When Amendment 1, the property tax reduction amendment, was being discussed, both the Republican State Legislative leaders and Governor Crist promised to hold the financing of the public school system harmless. This promise was not kept. The amendment passed earlier this year - largely through Governor Crist's massive TV campaign, and his border to border, 24/7, air travel, promoting passage of this amendment. When the legislature met in March and April, little was done to protect public school funding and huge reductions in funding occurred pre-K through university education. When several tax remedies were proposed, including closing tax loopholes or raising the sales tax, Governor Crist said flatly "no new taxes". A Ledger editorial labeled this hypocrisy since many state fees were raised which were, in effect, tax increases. Homeowners can expect to see an average reduction of \$240.00 in property taxes per year. But statewide Amendment 1 is expected to cut \$12 billion from city, county, special district and school board budgets over the first 5 years. A Ledger editorial called Amendment 1 "fumbling in the dark" and "lemon lawmaking". Amendment 1 has made Florida dead last in spending on education. Florida SAT scores are below the national average in reading, writing and math; and Polk scores are below the Florida averages in all three categories.

The Group voted in May to change the masthead of the newsletter in response to two dynamics:

- 1. The name 'Polk Group' does not adequately reflect the fact this group represents three additional counties
2. We have the perfect opportunity to call attention to the consequences for Florida of global warming.

And now they are at it again! The state Tax and Budget Reform Commission, mostly appointed by Jeb Bush, has placed an amendment on the November 4, 2008, ballot. This amendment called the 'Tax Swap' amendment would reduce overall property taxes by approximately 25 percent by eliminating most property taxes for schools in 2011. Supposedly the more than \$9 billion reduction would be replaced by lawmakers increasing the sales tax, eliminating sales tax exemptions, extending taxes to services such as lawyers or cutting other state spending. I do not expect this promise to replace the \$9 billion lost by education would be kept either. One only has to look at history and the power of the lobbyists to be convinced that this promise is worth little.

The first problem almost needs no explanation. It's not a positive for the Sierrans in Highlands, Hardee and DeSoto counties to invoke the name of their Sierra Group (Polk!) when making presentations before their respective county commissioners. Changing the name of the group itself will require a formal process between group, chapter and national and take time; we can move immediately on the masthead alteration which signifies a change in attitude and is our most prominent medium of presenting ourselves.

The second dynamic presents the perfect opportunity. With global warming comes rising sea levels. Our peninsula has been almost submerged before; in the millennia past the rising and ebbing of ocean levels has been due to natural glacial stages and took place over long stretches of time - we are now facing much more rapid sea level rise due to global warming.

Purists will say that 'Ancient Islands' should only be used to refer to the Lake Wales Ridge and other smaller ridges in Lake, Polk and Highlands counties that were never submerged - and some parts of our four counties were submerged when ocean levels were at their highest. But we've chosen to use 'Ancient Islands' because the term evokes a past that strikes a cord with most Sierrans and the general public - in a most dramatic fashion people know what we're talking about. The idea of your descendants advertising your home as ocean frontage should make climate change a personal issue.
....Frances Howell-Coleman

There are already eight other amendments on the November 4 ballot, two deal with allowing religious and private school vouchers, which are also attacks on the public school system. Please study these amendments, discuss them with others, and sharpen your "no" pencil for several of them on election day.

See Geanangel's article on page 3 for the Legislature's conservation record.

CIRCUIT RIDING

Back by popular demand! Summer has become our time for more relaxed meetings, fellowship, and strategic planning for the upcoming year. We try to meet at various locations around our large area to accommodate, by providing a shorter drive, those who live a long way from the Nature Center. A meeting place for August has yet to be determined; if you have a suggestion, call Frances at 956 3771. It is anticipated that as soon as the Educational Center at Circle B Bar is open, we will have frequent meetings there. We want to make it easier for Sierrans to get involved - a little bit or a lot - in activities which will provide a better quality of life.

TAKE ACTION AGAINST PLASTIC BAGS Make This a Personal Crusade!

We hate them. We complain about their littering the landscape. We grieve over the wildlife they kill. Then we accept and use them and feel virtuous about recycling a few. Maybe it's time to quit procrastinating.

A little background: plastic bags are made from petroleum or natural gas. It is estimated that Americans throw away about 100 billion bags a year - think of that as roughly 12 million barrels of oil. Only about 2% of the bags are recycled in the United States; the other 98% will spend eternity in our landfills - or worst in our environment blowing in the wind, washing into rivers and out to sea where pieces of the bags kill hundreds of thousands of birds and marine animals every year.

A few countries and a few US cities have passed laws aimed at curtailing the use of plastic bags; but note - in the US the 'Coalition to Support Plastic Bag Recycling' (love the name!) is challenging a recently passed Oakland CA law. In the US promoting less waste by law is a long, drawn out process. In Ireland there is a 22 cent tax on plastic bags which has decreased usage by 90% since

2002 - what's the chance of that becoming law here?

Plastic bags can be recycled if the consumer takes them back to a store which has established a recycling system. The bags are made into other products - not back into bags. (Note: don't put the bags in your recycling box where they will most likely clog the sorting machinery at the recycling center.) And just asking for paper bags is not a good solution. It takes millions of trees to produce the billions of paper bags used annually in the US.

Large supermarkets in Germany have a neat solution to this 'bag' problem: the consumer pays a deposit and 'rents' a cart. As usual all products are placed in the cart until they're put on the check-out counter. The clerk scans them and puts them back in the cart. The customer pays and then pushes the cart to his car where he puts the products in containers already in the trunk. The cart is then returned and the deposit is given back.

But until our area gets a little more progressive what's a conscientious consumer to do? I took the plunge recently: using one fairly large canvas bag and one small one, I transported \$80 worth of groceries to my car. Hint: instruct the clerk to put all large items (i.e. laundry detergent) back in the cart without the shrouding plastic bag; fragile items (i.e. fruit) go in the small bag and cans and jars in the large one. It works! Except for the bag on the newspaper, I've been 'bagless' for a week! Reduce comes first then Reuse and Recycle.Frances Howell-Coleman

RUSTLE THE LEAF
BY RONCE & WRIGHT



(c)2006 Go Natur'L Studios, LLC. RUSTLETHE-LEAF.COM "Rustle The Leaf" Comics characters courtesy of Go Natur'L Studios, LLC, 2006. The "Rustle The Leaf Comics" properties copyright and trademark of Go Natur'L Studios, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

STEERING COMMITTEE APPOINTED

To manage Florida Sierra during the suspension the Executive Committee of Sierra's National Board of Directors unanimously approved the Search Team's recommendation and appointed seven Florida Steering Committee members and two alternates (who will fill future vacancies): **Marian Ryan**, Winter Haven; Linda Bremer, Jacksonville; Craig Diamond, Tallahassee; Alan Donn, Tampa; Betsy Grass, Miami; Tom Larson, Jacksonville Beach; Rudy Scheffer, Safety Harbor; 1st Alternate: John Swingle, Fort Myers; and 2nd Alternate: Brian Paradise, Ponte Vedra Beach.

We would like to express our appreciation to Search Team members Rebecca Falkenberry, Julie Morris, Frances Howell-Coleman, Laurie MacDonald and Lane Boldman for their outstanding work in recruiting 28 candidates and identifying a well-qualified leadership team for Florida.

The Steering Committee has been charged with rebuilding and managing statewide Sierra Club functions in Florida, rebuilding trust among volunteer leaders and with the Board and staff, and preparing for a transition to a well-functioning member-elected Florida Chapter leadership.

The Board ExCom and support staff will be moving forward in the next few weeks to orient the new Steering

Committee and help them to begin assuming their responsibilities.

....Robert Cox, President

ENTER THE CONTEST RENAME THE POLK GROUP!

The Polk Group of the Sierra Club represents members in Polk, Highlands, Hardee and DeSoto counties. Our Executive Committee has decided it is high time that our group name reflects that fact! Our counties have things in common, like we are all interior to the state. Highlands and Polk share the Lake Wales Ridge Scrub Ecosystem. Many Polk, Hardee and DeSoto residents live in the Peace River Basin, where the Bone Valley Formation occurs and work to fight the impacts from past and future phosphate mining. Our geographic area has a diversity of ecosystems and conservation challenges. A new name should project this.

Please submit your suggestion(s) for a new group name to Marian Ryan at mryan@pipevines.net or send by mail to Sierra Club - Polk Group, P.O. Box 7544, Winter Haven, FL 33883 to be received by September 1, 2008. The winning name will be selected by the Polk Excom from the entries at the September Sierra Club meeting. A special prize will be awarded to the winner!Marian Ryan



Photo by Marian Ryan

These baby screech owls have just emerged from a Coleman Memorial Nesting Box - this is the fourth year Mom and Dad Owl have used this box. Request your box now by calling Bob at 863 439 2251 and you too may have the delight of watching - in your own yard - owlets learning to fly!

GROWTH CAP COALITION UPDATE

Growth Cap petitions were included in last month's newsletter. If you haven't already done so, please fill out and send yours in. We appreciate all volunteer efforts to help get the 20,000+ needed to get the issue on the ballot. Mark your calendars for Thursday, June 5th. Polk Vision will be hosting an informational workshop on the Growth Cap proposal from 6-8PM at the PCC-USF Campus in Lakeland. There will be a presentation of the proposal followed by a moderated panel discussion to include a Growth Cap representative, a planner, a land use attorney and a development community representative. It will be broadcast on PGTV.

...Marian Ryan

FLORIDA LEGISLATURE, 2008 FINAL REPORT

In a very bad budget year the environment came out amazingly well. Lakeland's own Senator Paula Dockery, a perennial champion of water and public lands, played a big part in making this a positive session.

Florida Forever, the award winning state program for buying environmentally sensitive land, not only was funded this year for \$300 million but the bonding authority was extended for ten more years at the same level. The restoration of the Everglades received \$50 million - down from \$200 million last year, a disappointment. However, I'm sure you know that only weeks ago the House had not included any money at all for these two items which were top legislative priorities for environmentalists. Your letters and e-mails made the difference here, thanks.

In the energy field, electric power utilities now must work with their customers to reduce demand through conservation and efficiency. In the same bill, a state cap and trade program for greenhouse gases was established. This is a small first step toward combating global change.

Funding was secured for the long overdue Florida Keys wastewater program. A ban was placed on new ocean outfalls in south Florida and a requirement made for existing outfalls to use advanced treatment. Starting this year gambling vessels must treat rather than dump their onboard sewage. Lastly, a bill authorizing the enforcement of penalties against damaging seagrass was passed.

Sometimes your best work involves killing bad bills and most of the bills designed to weaken growth management were defeated.

Not a great year but one we can live with.

...Charles Geanangel

EVENTS/ACTIVITIES

For more activities/events, please visit our web site at <http://florida.sierraclub.org/polk/>

Jun. 7 **Trek Ten Trails Guided Hike - Lake Hollingsworth in Lakeland.** Identify wading birds and other wildlife as you hike one of Polk's most popular trails. Start 9AM - call Marian at 863 293-6961 for more details.

Nov. 1 **Water, Wings & Wild Things - Polk's version of Earth Day.** This event has been shifted to the fall to additionally celebrate the completion of the Educational Center at Circle B Bar.

Service - These Saturday events are Ridge Ranger projects.

For more details, call the Volunteer Coordinator at 863 699-3742 or email ridgerangers@myfwc.com or call Gunn at 863 326-5426

Jun. 7 **Highlands Hammock State Park - Sebring.** Invasive, Nonnative Plant Removal. Start 8AM.

Jun. 14 **FWC Royce Unit - Lake Placid.** Fencing Removal. Start 8AM

Jun. 21 **Lake McLeod - Lake Wales Ridge National Wildlife Refuge - Eagle Lake.** Sign Posting, Fencing. Start 8AM.

Jun. 28 **South West Florida Water Management District's J Creek - Lake Placid.** Stewardship. Start 8AM.

Winter Haven, with the assistance of a grant from the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program, has purchased 12 kayaks. Participate in the following event and learn to kayak as you clean up waterbodies in the Peace River watershed. For confirmation of details call the Natural Resource Division at 863 291-5881.

Jun. 14 **Peace River Clean-up.** 8AM until noon - the group will meet and put-in at the Highway 60 bridge. Reservations required (see above).

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. Florida Seller of Travel Ref. No. ST37115



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.changes@sierraclub.org

JUNE 12 and JULY 10 MEETINGS Second Thursdays

PROGRAM:

**Outreach and Strategic Planning to
Promote the Growth Cap Amendment**

**While Enjoying
Relaxed and Fun Brain-Storming
Sessions**

*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.**

June 12th Meeting: hosted by Janet and Paul Anderson,

July 10th Meeting: hosted by Marian and John Ryan,

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

Sierra Membership Application

Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional): () _____ **F94Q W3311 1**

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

2008 POLK SIERRA GROUP

Paul Anderson
Chair - 965-8241

Marian Ryan
Vice-Chair - 293-6961

Jenny Jacobs
Secretary - 439-1926

Charles Geanangel
Treasurer - 326-5748

Members-at-large

Gunn Honican
Membership - 326-5426

Robert Jackson - 646-1475

Al Greulich - 967-6783

Robert A. Crabbs
941-424-2976

Newsletter Publisher
Paul Daniel

Outings Coordinator
Vacant

FL Chapter Issue Chair
Marian Ryan
293-6961

Email Tree Coordinator
Jenny Jacobs - 439-1926
jennyjacobs1@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor
Frances Howell-Coleman
956-3771