



# Ancient Islands

The Polk Group also serves Desoto, Hardee and Highlands Counties

Issue: 08-09

September 2008

## SOLAR ENERGY REVISITED

**FROM THE CHAIR...Paul Anderson**

### THE POWER OF THE PEN?

Below is an open letter sent by me, August 16th, on behalf of the Polk Group of the Sierra Club to the Letter to the Editor section of the Ledger, as well as to the Polk Board of County Commissioners. At this writing I do not know if the Ledger will publish my letter, or if the County Commissioners will heed my requests. Most of the letters I have written to the Ledger have been published. My predicted outcome is that the Ledger will print my letter, but that a majority of the County Commissioners will not heed my requests. If this is so, this column will serve as an early alert that we all need to work to see that these three amendments are thoroughly exposed for what they are. The October newsletter will contain a status report and recommendations. If the Board of County Commissioners heeds my requests then this will serve as an illustration of the power of the pen, and the press.

Dear Commissioners:

On behalf of the members of the Polk Group of the Sierra Club, we offer the following comments. On August 6 the BOCC passed a motion to consider putting three anti-citizen amendments to the County Charter on the Nov. 4 ballot. This was done very quickly with almost no discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of these measures. These three amendments fly in the face of democracy, especially the first, which would require 60 percent voter approval, whereas now 50 percent plus one votes is sufficient to pass an amendment.

This makes it very difficult for citizens to amend the Charter, and is another example of government further restricting citizens' rights. The only justification I recall is that one of the Commissioners said, "If the State can do it, we can do it." Two wrongs do not make a right. The second and third amendments would require all special elections and sales tax measures to be held during a general election. Again, this takes away a right that citizens now have. Presently, these elections can be held at any time.

We ask that the BOCC drop these proposed amendments, or refer them to the Charter Review Commission which is mandated to be convened in 2009. This is the right thing to do. Failing that, we ask that these three amendments be discussed and voted on individually.

Thank you. ....Chair, Polk Group of the Sierra Club

Solar energy has long been touted as an alternative to the importation of foreign oil while helping solve the energy crisis. Global warming concerns about carbon dioxide release have also played a part in the growing interest in solar power. Solar panels (solar photovoltaic) have produced a lot of press lately and advances are announced almost monthly, however another solar technology is potentially far more important. This technology is cheaper; less than 10 cents per kilowatt hour, virtually carbon dioxide and pollution free and reliable over much of America. It has been calculated that a 92 square mile grid in our desert southwest could theoretically produce enough energy for the entire United States.

Solar electric thermal or concentrated solar power (CSP) is an old technology based on using long mirrors to concentrate the sun's rays to heat a fluid to 700 degrees Fahrenheit or higher. It suffers only from the availability of cheap oil and natural gas. Unfortunately those days are gone, with oil over \$120 a barrel and a world nervous about carbon emissions and global warming. CSP may be our salvation.

Making electricity is fairly straight forward. Water is heated, using coal, oil, natural gas, or nuclear, to produce steam. The steam is forced past the blades of a turbine generator, causing them to spin, and out flows electricity. The advantages of CSP is that it uses mirrors focusing sunlight on pipes filled with a fluid like oil or molten salt, which can retain high temperatures for hours, to produce heat. This heats water producing steam which spins the turbine without any pollution or carbon emission. The beauty of the operation is that when the sun goes down you can store heat from the molten salt, which can be stored 20 to 100 times more cheaply and efficiently than storing electricity. Thus the station can produce power 24/7. For example a CSP plant in Nevada produces 64 MW of electricity from 98% solar power and only 2% natural gas. Nuclear power is also carbon free but is potentially dangerous and is heavily subsidized by the government. Over the years nuclear power research and development has exceeded \$80 billion. Meanwhile CSP plants are already on line in Spain, China and at least three American States. Dozens more are in advanced planning stages. No government money will be required, only a commitment to the use of alternative, green power. A Federal bill requiring a 20% alternative energy production for the nation would be the only incentive required.

CSP uses very little water because it is air cooled. In Florida it could be used to desalinate sea water. It would be a boon to less developed countries with few natural resources.

Al Gore wants to switch our production of energy to alternative green sources. CSP plants can help make his dream come true. It can happen perhaps not in ten years but easily before 2050. If America can produce electricity safely, cheaply, and cleanly with out using foreign oil, we may be number one once again. Add to that electrically driven automobiles and trucks and maybe, just maybe, we can make the world a better place.

....Charles Geanangel

## **LAWSUIT WOULD STOP PHOSPHATE STRIP MINE IN PEACE RIVER WATERSHED**

### **US Army Corps of Engineers Permit Would Destroy 480 Acres of Wetlands**

Earthjustice, on behalf of the Sierra Club, ManaSota-88, People for Protecting Peace River (3PR) and the Gulf Restoration Network, recently filed a lawsuit challenging federal approval for Mosaic Phosphate to destroy 480 acres of high-quality wetlands within the Peace River watershed.

The lawsuit can be viewed at [http://www.earthjustice.org/library/legal\\_docs/complaint-sierra-club-v-usacoe.pdf](http://www.earthjustice.org/library/legal_docs/complaint-sierra-club-v-usacoe.pdf)

The suit contends that the US Army Corps of Engineers violated the Clean Water Act, the Administrative Procedures Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act by failing to hold a public hearing or critically reviewing Mosaic Phosphate's revised permit application. The suit seeks an injunction to halt the mining permit until a full Environmental Impact Statement review takes place. That environmental review, the suit contends, must consider the cumulative impact of large scale mining in the Peace River basin.

Since the 1800's, strip-mining has devastated well over 200,000 acres in the Peace River watershed, which includes the destruction of over 35,000 acres of wetlands and 101.2 miles of streams. Of great concern is the fact that Mosaic is currently seeking permits to mine 34,551 more acres within that same watershed.

Documents obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request show that officials at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are concerned about the cumulative impact of mining in Southwest Florida. At the same time that the agency was evaluating Mosaic's application to mine the Altman tract, the EPA refused to approve Mosaic's application for the South Fort Meade mine extension in Hardee County – another mine in the Peace River watershed. EPA officials insisted that the cumulative impact analysis for the South Fort Meade mine extension had to include "the entire Peace River watershed and include an analysis of the overall mining activities that are currently underway and/or planned for this watershed."

Federal officials wrote that "EPA considers the Peace River, its tributaries, and watershed to be vital to aquatic resources of national importance," and stated that "re-created wetland and tributary systems are rarely able to replace the full range of functions and values of the impacted aquatic resources."

Yet, the Corps - without doing an Environmental Impact Study or holding a public hearing - issued a permit authorizing Mosaic Phosphate to destroy 480 acres of high-quality wetlands by mining the 2,367-acre Altman Tract in the watershed of Horse Creek, a major Peace River tributary.

The Altman Tract has a mosaic of high-quality, inter-related wetlands and uplands, all with important native vegetation and only minor man-made impacts. It has deep marshes, shallow marshes, wet prairie, bay swamps, and mixed forested wetlands. Water quality on the tract is very good, and the tract is used by many threatened and rare species, including the Florida Scrub Jay, gopher tortoise,

eastern indigo snake, Florida sandhill crane, Florida mouse, and Southeastern American kestrel.

The lawsuit contends that the Corps "arbitrarily and capriciously" failed to critically review Mosaic's spurious claim that a man-made landscape, re-created after strip mining, functions as well as, or better than, a natural landscape.

## **SIERRA VOLUNTEERS AT THE CIRCLE B-BAR RESERVE**

Bob Taylor, past group chair, of Wood Duck box fame, has volunteered in the name of the Polk group to build a variety of nest boxes, bat houses and feeding stations for the new Discovery Nature Center wildlife observation area at the beautiful 1,287 acre Circle B-Bar Reserve situated between Winter Haven and Lakeland. He will be ably assisted by Frances Howell-Coleman and Chuck Geanangel of Winter Haven.

The centerpiece will be a Chimney Swift chimney which will be a first for the County. The grand opening for the Discovery Nature Center will be held on the morning of November 1, 2008. It will be in conjunction with the annual "Water, Wings and Wild Things" celebration. This new four building complex will absolutely knock your socks off. There is an outdoor classroom, two indoor classrooms, an exhibit hall and a meeting hall all connected by an elevated walkway. A gift shop is planned along with a wildlife viewing area. No longer will you have to take your children to Tampa or Orlando to experience a state of the art nature center. Because of budget shortfalls the county will not be able to staff the Center as well as they would like and that is where you can make a difference. Volunteers both in the building and on the grounds will be recruited from through out Polk County. Because the Polk Group plans on holding meetings at the Center from time to time your volunteer hours will count toward securing a meeting room for our use. You need not be a biologist to help, a place can be found for anyone who loves nature and the outdoors. Interested folks can sign up to volunteer at the event or call the Polk Natural Resources Division at (863) 534-7377. ....Chuck Geanangel

## **COLEMAN LANDING Shady Oaks Recreation Area**

By a unanimous vote of the Polk Board of County Commissioners on August 6th, the new park on the southwest shore of Lake Kissimmee was named after Richard Coleman, one of Florida's most outstanding conservation activists. For more than thirty years Richard worked on issues ranging from reclamation of phosphate mined lands to protection of the Green Swamp to lake water quality, etc. But the issue for which he is most remembered is the restoration of the Kissimmee River and the protection of its watershed. That's why his name on a park in this area is especially appropriate. A memorial and educational kiosk will be placed in the park by the conservation community with the sincere belief that by recognizing the effective contributions of a citizen activist, users of this resource will realize that they, too, can and should take action to protect it. The park is scheduled for completion by the summer of 2009. ....Frances Howell-Coleman

## KEEP THOSE GROWTH CAP PETITIONS COMING!

Lots of people complain about the intensive development in Polk County, but they've been told there's nothing that can be done about it. WRONG!

The Growth Cap Coalition is offering an opportunity for Polk County voters to get a growth cap proposal on the ballot by petition. There are a number of upcoming events where volunteers are needed to help collect Growth Cap Petitions. The most important opportunity will be the General Election on November 4th. Please let us know if you are able to help us by getting petitions signed in your neighborhood, church, social club or on November 4th. Petitions are available on line at [www.GrowthCapCoalition.com](http://www.GrowthCapCoalition.com). We can also provide petitions - just let us know. For more information contact Marian Ryan at 863-293-6961 or [mryan@pipevines.net](mailto:mryan@pipevines.net).

### Need Shirts?

Immediately after the September meeting the order will be placed for the Polk Group's royal blue t-shirts with Paul Schulz's wood ducks on the front. This is not a fundraiser as such but donations in excess of costs will be gratefully accepted and forwarded to the scholarship fund. The cost for a shirt up to XL is approximately \$11.10 and for XXL it will be \$12.60. The shirts will be available at the October meeting (think Christmas!) Contact Frances at 863 956-3771.

## RENAME THE POLK GROUP!

We have five submissions: Peace River/Ridge Group, Ancient Islands, Heartland Group, Four Rivers Group, and the Ridge & River Group. Help us select the new name that reflects the fact that our group represents Polk, Highlands, Hardee and DeSoto counties. Our counties have one thing totally in common; we are interior on a peninsula. Someone should have suggested Landlocked! Highlands and Polk share the Lake Wales Ridge Scrub Ecosystem and the Kissimmee River. Many Polk, Hardee and DeSoto residents live in the Peace River Basin, where the Bone Valley Formation occurs, and we work to fight the impacts from past and future phosphate mining. Northern Polk is the site of most of the Green Swamp - an Area of Critical State Concern. Our geographic area has a diversity of ecosystems and conservation challenges.

The winning name will be selected at this September meeting from entries received by September 1st. A special prize will be awarded to the person whose recommendation is selected!  
....M. Ryan/F.H.Coleman

### HEY Mr. Green

Due to the generosity of **Bo Jackson** the Group has a supply of the Sierra Books' guide to green living by Bob Schildgen. Most of you will recognize the name and title because for years Mr. Green has been answering real-world questions about green living in his Sierra magazine column. A limited number of copies will be available at the September meeting - see you there!

## EVENTS/ACTIVITIES

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

**Sep. 13** **Trek Ten Trails Guided Hike - Auburndale TECO Trail - Grand Finale Celebration!** Observe birds and other wildlife with the help of experts. 9AM until noon - call Marian at 863 293-6961 for more details.

**Sep. 25** **Global Climate Change Meeting - Captain Dan Kipnis.** Dan was trained by Al Gore to 'convert skeptics' There will be plenty of photos of reefs, corals, Florida waters, catches, etc. Start 7:30PM at Marine Supply, 717 6th Street, SW, Winter Haven.

**Oct. 7** **Integrated Water Resource Management Conference - PCC/USF Lakeland Campus at US 98.** Experts will do their best to answer questions such as: What are we presently doing to manage the resource? How are water resources inter-connected? What does the future hold? 8AM - 5PM. Registration fee \$25 - lunch provided. Call 863 221-5323 for more information.

**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 start time and other details call the Volunteer Coordinator, Jim Reed, at 863 699-3742 or email [james.reed@MyFWC.com](mailto:james.reed@MyFWC.com)

**Sep. 6** **Tiger Creek Preserve.** Fence Removal.

**Sep. 13** **Carter Creek Tract of Lake Wales Ridge National Wildlife Refuge.** Fence Removal/Stewardship.

**Sep. 20** **Circle B Bar Reserve.** Trash Removal/Planting.

**Sep. 27** **Bok Sanctuary.** Stewardship.

Winter Haven UPKEEP Kayak Program. Participate in the following events and learn to kayak as you clean up waterbodies in the Peace River watershed. For confirmation of details call the Natural Resources Division at 863 291-5881.

**Sep. 6,13,20&27** **UPKEEP Kayak - Peace River.** Each Saturday a different segment will be paddled as part of National Estuaries Days. Space is limited - reservations at 291-5881.

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

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or [address.changes@sierraclub.org](mailto:address.changes@sierraclub.org)

## SEPTEMBER 11 MEETING

### PROGRAM:

#### **Gopher Tortoise Mitigation Park Old Dunham Ranch/SE Polk County**

*Presented By*

**M. Shane Belson,  
FWC Biological Scientist  
Division of Habitat & Species  
Conservation**

*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): (     ) \_\_\_\_\_ **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**

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