

Oklahoma Sierran

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OUTSIDE INTERESTS PUSH TO HIJACK SIERRA CLUB

by *Drusha Mayhue*

The internal Sierra Club election this spring could prove pivotal and could dramatically alter the direction and mission of our organization. In fact, the Sierra Club we all joined may have a very different look to it next year, depending on the outcome of the 2004 Board of Directors election. That's because current members of the Sierra Club Board of Directors have openly recruited candidates with agendas widely different from the Club's historic conservation mission.



The Sierra Club's direct elections make us unique – and vulnerable. One of the most important opportunities Sierra Club members have is the chance to select our own Board of Directors. Every year members select five directors for three-year terms on our fifteen-member Board. But as the Club has grown, the proportion of our members who vote has declined.

And now the Sierra Club is in trouble – our own democratic process is being used against us to take over our organization and hijack our agenda and assets. Because fewer and fewer members are voting, it has left us vulnerable to take-over efforts by people and parties with narrow, personal, single-issue agendas — like animal rights and anti-immigration. These outside

groups can recruit and run petition candidates from outside the Club who share their ideology.

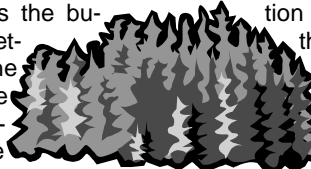
And that's exactly what's happening – with help from some current members of the Club's Board of Directors. Director Paul Watson outlined this effort at an animal rights conference earlier this year, just weeks after he was first elected to the Club's Board. "One of the reasons I'm on the Sierra Club Board of Directors right now is to try to change it," Watson proclaimed.

"And once we get three more directors elected, the Sierra Club will no longer be pro-hunting and pro-trapping and we can use the resources of the \$95-million-a-year budget to address some of these issues," said Watson, who calls fishermen "sadistic bastards" – even though about a sixth of the Club's membership fishes.

Watson noted his task will be made easier by low voter turnout in Club elections: "The heartening thing about it is that, in the last election, of the 750,000 members of the Sierra Club, only 8 percent of them voted. So, a few hundred, or a few thousand people from the animal rights movement joining the Sierra Club—and making it a point to vote—will change the entire agenda of that organization." (Continued on Page 3)

CHAPTER 2004 CONSERVATION PRIORITIES by *Paul Moore*

The annual chapter planning retreat for the upcoming year was held last November on the Glover River near Antlers, Oklahoma. Perhaps the bucolic streamside setting influenced the decisions that were made, but the outcome was that the chapter would focus the 2004 conservation campaign priorities on water issues. This decision was reached after considering a list of issues that included clean air, sprawl, toxics, sustainable agriculture, alternative energy and forest protection. All of these are worthy issues,



and deserve attention by our membership. Some, such as sprawl and toxics, can best be addressed by group conservation committees should they so decide. Others, such as forest protection, require building a local membership near Ouachita National Forest to be truly effective. Water issues, however, seem to unite urban and rural interests in a way that allows us to effectively use our limited resources. Oklahoma citizens understand that Oklahoma wa-

ter supplies need to be protected for the benefit of agriculture, recreation, industry and municipalities. It is our goal to advance awareness of the need to protect the biodiversity of our waters. The three specific campaigns for 2004 will be:

•Creating and implementing a Citizens Statewide Comprehensive Water Plan.
 •Protecting the Illinois River basin from further water quality degradation.
 •Protecting Oklahoma surface and aquifer waters from privatization and sale.

(Continued on Page 3)

Chair's Corner

by
**Tom
Libby**

Since this is the first newsletter since January 1st, let me begin by wishing everyone a Happy New Year.

I would much prefer to be talking about the successes of 2003, like protecting the Arbuckle Simpson Aquifer. Or discussing our challenges in 2004, like stopping the Bush Administration's dismantling of our clean air and clean water protections. Or even how badly we need your monetary donations to keep protecting Oklahoma's environment. However, a new development in the upcoming Sierra Club Board of Directors election has come to the surface, taking precedence over all topics—a lawsuit.

I have included Club President Larry Fahn's memo about this suit in this article. As you will see, voting in this year's Board of Director's election is more important than ever. It is also important that you seek out as much information as possible about the candidates. One source for information is the club's leader website at: clubhouse.sierraclub.org. To log on use "clubhouse" as the user name and "explore" as the password. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to e-mail me at tom.libby@sierraclub.org.

Here is President Fahn's memo . . .

Dear Sierra Club Members:

This week, three candidates for our Board of Directors—Richard Lamm, Frank Morris and David Pimentel—filed a lawsuit in the California Superior Court in San Francisco against the Sierra Club. They have also sued me as an individual, and our Executive Director, Carl Pope, as an individual.

The lawsuit is without merit and the Club will vigorously defend itself, as will the individually named Defendants. Within hours of filing the suit, and before all of the parties had even been served, the lawyers for Lamm, Morris and Pimentel had hired a high-powered corporate public relations firm (which also represents the American Chemical Council) to try their case in the media. They shot out press releases to media outlets all across the country. I have been besieged by press calls, some asking me to respond to "Governor Lamm's comparison of the Sierra Club's leadership to Tammany Hall." I have stated that such a comparison is "simply ridiculous".

The lawsuit seeks to remove three candi-

dates—Phil Berry, Barbara Herz, and Morris Dees—from the ballot in the upcoming election, even though they are Sierra Club members and like the 3 Plaintiffs, obtained the required number of fellow Club members signatures to appear on the ballot. The lawsuit claims that these three candidates are "fake candidates" since their ballot statements support other candidates, instead of seeking votes for themselves.

This lawsuit also mischaracterizes me as a Sierra Club staff member, with no right to speak out on the issues I believe are facing the Sierra Club in this election. It further takes the position that the Sierra Club has no right to provide its members with the names of outside organizations that are attempting to influence our elections.

The lawsuit also seeks to prohibit Club chapter and group newsletters, email and web pages from reporting on the actions of sitting members of the Board of Directors or candidates in connection with the election.

In fact, the lawsuit even seeks to prohibit Sierra Club volunteers from distributing any information about any candidate in any forum unless they distribute materials about all candidates. We believe that Club leaders need to understand the background and the facts about this litigation.

Contrary to the Plaintiffs' claim, neither the Board, nor its President or Executive Director have expended Club resources to support, oppose or disparage any candidates. The Board of Directors has not endorsed or opposed any candidates in this year's Board election. While the Board was asked by 13 former Club Presidents to urge Club members to support only candidates put forward by the nominating committee and could have taken that step under California law, the Board agreed unanimously that it did not want to endorse or oppose any candidates or use Club resources on behalf of any slate of candidates.

The Board did decide—on a split vote—that there were important facts about this year's election that Club members need to know. This year, an unprecedented number of outside organizations, some with explicitly racist agendas, have attempted to manipulate the Club's election process. These groups sent out emails and posted website notices that urged people to join the Club for the explicit purpose of voting for board candidates who support anti-immigration and animal rights causes. We

do not know if any of these groups provided financial support to any candidates.

In addition to the lack of legal merit in this lawsuit, it is quite clear that those who filed it have no understanding of the Sierra Club and how it works. This may not be surprising, since none of them appears ever to have attended a Sierra Club meeting (group, chapter, regional or national) and one of them, Governor Lamm of Colorado, joined the Club shortly before filing to run for the Board of Directors.

This lawsuit is a fundamental attack on the free speech rights of the Sierra Club and its leadership. We should all be outraged that these three candidates have sued a volunteer leader, for the purpose of muzzling me from freely communicating my own personal views on candidates for our Board of Directors.

This lawsuit challenges our organization's right to inform and communicate with our members and the right of our volunteer leaders to participate in its governance. Moreover, it is extremely unfortunate that the Club's time, energy, membership dues and other resources will now be diverted from achieving our core mission to defend and protect the environment.

This unfortunate episode is already having an impact on our ability to educate and inform the American public about how the Bush/Cheney administration is systematically dismantling more than 30 years of environmental progress. Today I was informed by the Op/Ed page editor at the San Francisco Chronicle that an Op/Ed piece I had submitted, and they were planning to run, would not be appropriate to run, now that the news of a lawsuit by Board candidates against the Sierra Club has broken. The news of the lawsuit was on today's front page.

We will be meeting with our attorneys over the next few days to determine our legal response. Meanwhile, Club leaders should have every confidence that this election will be conducted in a fair and legal fashion. The integrity and competence of our volunteer and independent Inspectors of Election are beyond reproach, and the Club's democratic process has endured for 112 years.

—Larry Fahn, President



Noted outdoors writer Jim Shepherd characterized this statement as an "attempt to hijack the Sierra Club," an effort Watson confirmed at the Club's annual September meeting, when he admitted that he's trying to "take over" the Sierra Club and its agenda.

In addition to Watson's efforts to commandeer the Sierra Club, the anti-immigration forces which have been targeting the Sierra Club for more than a decade have now joined forces with the animal rights activists. Ben Zuckerman, another Club Director with close to zero Club experience when he was elected to the Board, has recruited candidates to run for the Sierra Club board from an obscure organization called the Diversity Alliance for a Sustainable America. This organization shares his desire for the Club to become involved in closing down immigration into the United States. The DASA has been funded in part by grants totaling \$125,000 from foundations controlled by the notorious Clinton hater and right wing patron Richard Mellon Scaife and his family. According to the Washington Post, "Scaife and his family's charitable entities played a central role in the rise of the right, giving at least \$340 million to conservative causes and institutions."

Director Zuckerman's principal focus on the Board has been a relentless effort to persuade his fellow Directors to overturn the membership vote several years ago to unite the Club by remaining neutral on the question of immigration policy. Zuckerman has compared immigration to cancer, defended Colorado Congressman Tom Tancredo—an anti-immigration zealot who earns an average LCV score of 15%—as "the person in Congress doing the most for the environment," and called for the Club to work on halting immigration as a means of fighting the war against terrorism. A number of anti-immigration web sites have recently been urging people to join the Sierra Club in order to elect the candidates recruited by Zuckerman.

These unrelenting efforts to undermine the Sierra Club, its conservation agenda, assets, and democratic process prompted the Southern Poverty Law Center, perhaps the nation's leading organization in exposing hate group activities, to advise the Club's volunteer leadership this fall: "We think that members of the Sierra Club should be fully

alert to the methods and motives of some of those who are trying to shift it from its historic mission."

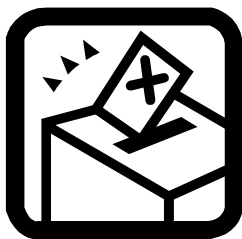
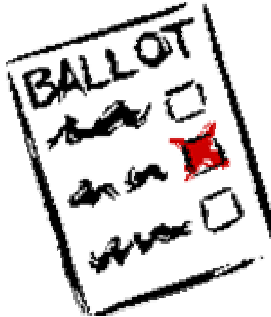
So consider yourself alerted to these take-over efforts, this deliberate attempt to undermine our democracy and hijack the agenda chosen by a majority of Sierra Club members. Consider all that is at stake in this Sierra Club election – our democracy, our direction, our ability to stop the Bush administration's assault on our environment and overcome some of the most serious environmental challenges we have ever faced.

Don't sit on the sidelines this election!!

Ballots will be mailed to all Club members at the end of February, and must be filled out and received back by the Judges of Elections by April 21. Every Sierra Club member will receive a ballot and an accompanying statement, in which each candidate describes his or her background, qualifications, and goals for the organization. These last are often written in rather general language, but the Club and the candidates provide internet mechanisms through which they can be questioned more specifically about their views. Take the opportunity and question them.

"Sierra Club Board elections are a fine opportunity for our members to look at our Club and determine the directions they want the organization to go," says Club President Larry Fahn. "I urge all our members to study the candidates carefully. And I urge all members to vote. It is member participation that has made the Sierra Club the most effective environmental organization in the world. It is member participation that will empower us to stop George Bush, and will allow us to carry on our wonderful tradition of effectiveness into the future."

"Drusha Mayhue is a long time Club grass roots leader, and has held many positions including Chair of the Houston Group. She currently sits on the Montana Chapter Executive Committee. Contact her at: drusha_m@yahoo.com.



To make these campaigns a success in 2004 a wide variety of volunteer activities will be possible for Sierra Club members. We will need to further develop state government contacts by participating on related committees and boards, improve our media presence by providing detailed and reliable information in all media formats and reach out to our progressive allies in the state. To encourage member involvement in this work the chapter is committed to listening to member interests, supporting members with training and advice, planning interesting events to increase our turnout at public hearings and utilizing our improved web page for communication.

These campaigns can be a great success for Oklahoma's environment in the coming year, in addition to being an enjoyable and education experience for us all. Please consider involving yourself whenever your interests take you.

Looking for Club Action on Your Favorite Issue?

The Oklahoma Chapter Conservation Committee (OCCC) does not have a set membership list. It is open for any member interested in becoming more active on an issue. Face-to-face meetings are held several times each year throughout the state. We are not, however, able to take on every issue that comes along, although we would like to—we can only do so much since we do have to spend some time making a living rather than doing volunteer work. A few members who are single-focused sometimes get upset that we are not addressing their primary area of interest. **The answer to this dilemma is to get more members involved!** That way, there will be more people to address more issues. There are many issues that need our involvement—we will certainly never run out of issues to work on. Is there something YOU think we need to be working on? Then join your Chapter (statewide) Conservation Committee and lead the way on your issue.

The OCCC is looking for Issue Chairs on a variety of concerns. This is a good way to start becoming active. An Issue Chair can function in many capacities, according to the amount of interest and available time. At the top of the list would be keeping up with the (Continued on Page 4)





Explore,
enjoy and
protect
the planet



CHAPTER LEADERSHIP DIRECTORY

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TREASURER: Mark Derichsweiler, 405/297-0179, <mderichsweiler@cox.net>
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OUTINGS CHAIR: Tom Libby, 405/722-2367, <tomlibby@yahoo.com>
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ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: Susie Shields, 405/297-0179, <sshields@cox.net>
WEBMASTER: David Franklin, 405/789-5377, <dfranklin@ussok.com>
NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Susie Shields, 405/297-0179, <sshields@cox.net>

Your Issue (Continued from Page 3)

current status of the particular issue and keeping the OCCC informed. As you get connected to Club resources on your issue, you will likely want to write articles for the website and/or newsletter. It would be up to you to notify the OCCC and the Conservation-Alerts list serv when action is needed on your issue. Some Issue Chairs provide action alerts with talking points for letter-writing sessions at monthly group meetings in Norman, Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

Following is a list of Issues for 2004:

If you are interested in helping out with any of the vacant issues, PLEASE contact Susie Shields, OCCC Vice-Chair: sshields@cox.net, or Paul Moore, OCCC Chair: pfmoore@sbcglobal.net. A mentor will be assigned to help you get started with your issue. Or, if you would like to help on an issue with a chair already listed, please contact that person to get involved.

- Agriculture (Sustainable): Susie Shields, sshields@cox.net
- Air Quality:
- Aquatic Resources:
- Biodiversity:
- Campaign Finance Reform:
- Contained/Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs):
- Corporate Accountability:
- Energy: Merritt Ford, mfbullfrog@yahoo.com
- Environmental Justice:
- Forestry: Paul Moore, pfmoore@sbcglobal.net
- Global Warming/CAFÉ:
- Genetic Engineering: Larry Swanson, lnswanson@juno.com
- Grazing on Public Lands:
- Human Rights (International):
- International Trade:
- Mining:
- Population: Larry Swanson, lnswanson@juno.com Public Lands Management:
- Sprawl:
- Sustainable Consumption: Susie Shields, sshields@cox.net
- Transportation:
- Waste (Solid/Hazardous):
- Waste Water: Russell Garrett
- Water Quality/Supply: Rick Poland, rgpoland@swbell.net
- Wetlands:
- Wilderness/Wildlands:



The 15 Minute Environmentalist

by Merritt Ford

Yatta yatta. You know the drill. Get up. Go to work. Struggle through the day. Pay Bills. Spend some time with the family or friends. Pay bills. Maybe watch a little Jay Leno. Pay bills. Try and train the cat to obey your voice commands. Pay bills. Go to bed. Repeat the process. Pay bills. How can anyone ever have time to do the right thing for the environment? Easy. Become a 15 minute environmentalist. Make the bad guys really feel your pain.

Yup. That's all the time it takes per month. Even less after you get a few simple things set up on your computer. It's fun and it works. What the heck am I talking about you ask inquisitively? By using your computer and the internet to take action on important environmental issues anyone can easily send a professionally written fax or email (written by some professional writer, not you—unless you want to) to a lawmaker, decision maker or individual who will be making rules, policies or laws that affect the environment. Once a month, forget about the cat and try one of the Action sites listed below.

These addresses are links to several excellent environmental organizations action pages. Once you put in the basic information (name, address, email, etc.) on each of the following pages, the next time you come back all you have to do is type in your email address and click send. Presto! You just sent a strong, well worded letter expressing your righteous anger or concern about a relevant environmental issue. It's so easy even your cat could do it. Perhaps with a little practice, even better than you can.

- **Sierra Club:** <http://whistler.sierraclub.org/action/actionindex.jsp>
- **American Rivers:** <http://amriversaction.ctsg.com/action/index.asp?>
- **Environmental Defense Fund:** <http://www.environmentaldefense.org/actioncenter.cfm>
- **Natural Resources Defense Council:** <http://www.nrdc.org/action/default.asp>