

Oklahoma Sierran

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Inside this issue:

Chair's Corner	2
David Suzuki on the Importance of Action	2
Book Review: Radical Simplicity	3
2004 Important Election	3
Oklahoma Rivers Exhibit at Capitol	3
How to Be A Conscious Consumer	3
Lake Tenkiller Action Alert	3
Environmental Education Update	4
Oklahoma Water Forum Listserv	4
Keith Smith Honored as 2003 Civil Libertarian of the Year	4
Create an Environmental Legacy	4
Chapter Leadership Directory	4

Lawsuit Planned to Protect Scenic Rivers *by Susie Shields*

Ed Brocksmith, Sierra Club member and President of Save The Illinois River (STIR), issued an ultimatum to the EPA: Approve Oklahoma's water quality standard for phosphorus or see me in court. In an October 16 letter, Brocksmith gave EPA 60 days to take action. "It's time to get this show on the road," he said. "We fought hard to get a standard, and now we are being let down by the EPA."

STIR, Sierra Club and citizens from all over Oklahoma worked to get the Oklahoma Water Resources Board (OWRB) to adopt a standard for phosphorus in our scenic rivers. Excessive levels of this pollutant choke rivers and streams with algae. Most of the phosphorus comes from large chicken factories that spread manure on pastures and from city sewage treatment plants.

Responding to the widespread support, OWRB adopted the standard early last year. It was officially submitted to EPA on November 1, 2002. Nearly a

year later, EPA has still done nothing. The standard does not become effective under the Clean Water Act until EPA approves it.

The action was filed by Tulsa environmental attorney Chuck Shipley on behalf of Brocksmith. The letter points out that under the Clean Water Act, EPA had 60 days to approve the new standard or 90 days to disapprove it. "As of the date of this notice", the letter said, "EPA has failed to make a determination upon that submission." The letter said Brocksmith "intends to file a complaint in the district court, seeking an order compelling the EPA to fulfill its duties".

EPA has held up action on the standard as it tried to broker negotiations between Oklahoma and Arkansas over how the new standard would be implemented. Five of Oklahoma's six scenic rivers start in Arkansas and are

heavily impacted by factory chicken farms and sewage in that state. Those negotiations have not been fruitful, largely due to the refusal of the poultry industry and other agricultural polluters to take responsibility for their mess. "We have been talking with these guys forever, and they just won't move," Shipley said. "How much does it take? How many excuses before they do something?" "I'm not sure if that is



even the role of EPA," said Brocksmith. "I think their job is to get moving on this rule. Out of respect to the over 600 people who submitted letters to the water board, supporting not only this standard but an even more stringent standard," he said, "the EPA should do its job."

We in Sierra Club agree wholeheartedly. If it comes to a court fight, we will be looking for ways to help out and support this important lawsuit.

Celebrating the Clean Water Act

by Rick Poland, Water Quality Issue Chair

Reading about the 31st anniversary of the Clean Water Act last month made me think about how much cleaner waters are than they were 30 years ago. Instead of being reassured that the Clean Water Act will continue to protect and clean up Oklahoma's waters for generations to come, I am deeply concerned about the future of our lakes and rivers at the hands of the Bush administration.

Instead of enforcing the Clean Water Act, which has made many of Oklahoma's lakes, rivers and wetlands cleaner and

safer over the past three decades, the Bush administration is making it easier for polluters to dump waste in our streams and pave over our wetlands.

It is foolish to think that we can dump waste in the waters upstream without polluting the waters downstream. It is time for the Bush administration to do what we know works —enforce and preserve the Clean Water Act—not give in to pressure from corporate polluters. Why should we settle for anything less than clean water?

Join the Sierra Club's *Protect Oklahoma's Water Campaign* now! We especially need members to attend meetings throughout the state where water issues are a point of concern. Also needed are people to write letters to the editor. Don't worry about lack of knowledge—we can fix that by providing you with an *Oklahoma Water Campaign* briefing booklet. E-mail me at <rgpoland@swbell.net> to become an active part of protecting Oklahoma's water for our families, for our future.



Chair's Corner

by
Tom
Libby

In September, I had the chance to attend some really great group meetings in OKC and Tulsa. OKC brought in Scott Thompson from the state DEQ to talk about Tar Creek. It was one of the most informative meetings about a complex subject I have attended.

In Tulsa, Les Imboden and Larry Shepard put together a panel discussion on SPRAWL featuring Secretary of State and former Tulsa Mayor Susan Savage, State Representative Lucky Lamons, Brett Hulseby from the Sierra Club's national sprawl campaign and local builders. Another very informative meeting.

We are now starting the planning for our annual January conference in Stroud at the Wilderness Challenge Center. Issues which are identified as Chapter priorities at our Executive Committee planning retreat the first week-end of November will be addressed at the conference. We will also celebrate our hard work that was accomplished in 2003 and make plans for 2004. Everyone who is interested in Sierra Club is welcome to attend!

Several members will be honored for their outstanding contributions in 2003 at our annual banquet November 8 at the Jenks Aquarium. We will also be presenting external awards to the following folks: Earth Care Award for businesses to Staples, an Environmental Education Award to Dr. Suzanne Spradling, and a Media Award to Shauna Lawyer Struby. Details about award winners' good work will be covered in the January issue of the Oklahoma Sierran.

—Tom

Mixed Messages Obscure the Importance of Action *by David Suzuki*

Watching the news, it seems that there's a new environmental crisis occurring almost daily: global warming, pollution, habitat destruction, species depletion and extinction, and much more. The bad news is plentiful and painful.

But then, on a fairly regular basis, a nice-looking man pops up and says that everything you are seeing is an exaggeration. The environment is fine. Everything's fine. Go buy a new SUV. It's OK. Such a nice-looking man. To the average person, it must be quite confusing. What's going on here? Are the stories on environmental calamity really an exaggeration?

The quick answer is NO. On a global basis, the environment we depend on for our lives is in trouble. Natural services that provide us with essentials like a stable climate, clean water, fertile soils, and others are being depleted. We are heading in the wrong direction if we want to leave the next generation with the quality of life and opportunities that my generation took for granted when we were young.

So why the mixed messages? Well, part of the problem lies in the way the media present news stories. First, they are presented as episodic, focusing on single events rather than issues and analysis. Second, media stories are driven by conflict, so reporters are always encouraged to find someone to contradict prevailing opinion, turning complex problems into a simplified, false "he says, she says" dichotomy. And third, there are well-financed interests at work who are vested in maintaining the status quo, lobbying hard to make sure their voices are heard.

Scientists have a duty to warn society of any potential environmental problems. But because of the incremental nature of science, not all predictions made come to pass. Sometimes, action is taken to avert the problem, and sometimes the prediction turns out to be wrong. When that happens, it enables critics to say that there never really was a problem in the first place, and environmental scientists are merely Chicken Littles who should be ignored.

To see if there is any truth to this argument, scientists at Princeton Univer-

sity and others conducted a study that looked at the costs and benefits of society's

reaction to environmental alarms. Their report, published in the journal *Science*, examines the costs and benefits of measures such as the Clean Air Act in the United States and others to see if society truly benefited from these actions.

It has. The researchers found that, for example, regulation has played the dominant role in improving air quality in the United States, earning Americans more than \$22 trillion in net benefits over 20 years.

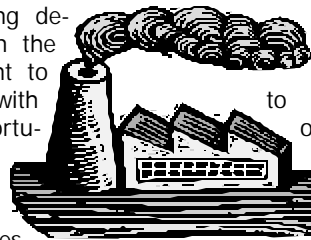
Furthermore, they found that in states or nations with equal wealth, those with higher memberships in "green" organizations and higher civil liberties have lower levels of air pollution. And they go on to point out that the costs of responding to environmental problems are often far less than originally anticipated.

The researchers conclude that society receives substantial benefits by responding to environmental alarms. In fact, they point out that "our environmental alarm is currently too conservative, not too liberal." In other words, far from being Chicken Littles, environmental scientists are perhaps being too cautious in communicating environmental problems.

Certainly public policy makers are slow to respond. The researchers write, "Problems of detecting warning signals and overcoming vested interests inevitably lead to delay in regulation, often incurring damages that could have been prevented with higher sensitivity."

Critics of this report will no doubt say something to the effect that it's merely a case of alarmists supporting alarmists, but that argument amounts to nothing more than grasping at straws. The sooner we get serious about dealing with our environmental problems, the greater the benefits will be. True, it would be easy to listen to the nice lobbyists who tell us that everything is just fine, but waiting to take action will only make the good news less frequent and the bad news much worse.

Take the Nature Challenge and learn more at: www.davidsuzuki.org/.



BOOK REVIEW

Radical Simplicity— Small Footprints on a Finite Earth *by Jim Merkel*

Imagine you are first in line at a potluck buffet. The spread includes not just food and water, but all the materials needed for shelter, clothing, healthcare, and education. How do you know how much to take? How much is enough to leave for your neighbors behind you — not just the six billion people, but the wildlife, and the as-yet-unborn?

In the face of looming ecological disaster, many people feel the need to change their own lifestyles as a tangible way of transforming our unsustainable culture. *Radical Simplicity* is the first book that guides the reader to a personal sustainability goal, then offers a process to monitor progress to a lifestyle that is equitable amongst all people, species, and generations. It employs three tools to help readers begin their customized journey to simplicity:

?? It builds on steps from Your Money or Your Life so readers can design their own personal economics to save money, get free of debt, and align their work with their values.



?? It uses refined tools from Our Ecological Footprint so readers can measure how much nature is needed to supply all they consume and absorb their waste.

?? And by advocating time alone in wild nature, it opens readers to another reality with humanity as one species among many on a complex and inter-related planet.

Combining lyrical narrative, compassionate advocacy and absorbing science, *Radical Simplicity* is a practical, personal answer to 21st century challenges that will appeal as much to Cultural Creatives and students as to spiritual seekers, policy makers and sustainability professionals.

2004 Important Election Year for the Environment

by Charles Wesner, Political Chair

It may seem early, but the 2004 election hoopla has already begun. Because it is a presidential election year, there is more excitement and more people will be going to the polls. But, they may not necessarily be paying more attention to state legislative races.

Your Oklahoma Chapter Political Committee wants to make sure that those who care about the environment are paying close attention to the races that will make a difference here in Oklahoma. We want to elect as many pro-environment candidates as possible next year and need YOUR help, with **both** financial donations and volunteerism. Please send in your donations as requested in my recent letter or contact me at wesner@qns.com to help with campaigns!

Oklahoma Rivers Exhibit on Display at Capitol



Sierra Club member Kim Baker's **Oklahoma Rivers** photography exhibit will be in the North Gallery at the Oklahoma State Capitol through December 26, 2003. Kim is hoping to help raise awareness about our rivers before the 2004 legislative session.

Kim's desire is that her exhibit will motivate "concerned citizens who will be inspired to inform their legislators that they want Oklahoma's rivers managed in the best possible manner." She has heard from folks in southern Oklahoma that the proposed Texas water sale isn't going away. The old adage that water flows uphill toward money is unfortunately true but in Oklahoma's case it may be through lines to Texas.

How to Be A Conscious Consumer

If you're tired of standing there in the aisle, confused and feeling vaguely guilty, check out the new website developed by the Center for A New American Dream: www.newdream.org/consumer that will make it easier to know your stuff.



The site features ten short films that introduce you to the people and communities that produce the consumer products we take for granted. These films portray the hidden environmental and personal costs of the world economy and the consumer culture that drives it.

Their purpose is not just to bring that guilty feeling into sharper focus—they want to make your life easier. The sobering pieces are all paired with empowering resources and practical tips. You will be plugged into products that will help you reduce your impact on the environment and contribute to improving labor conditions. Links are provided to online and local sources of all sorts of goods and services that are better for the planet and the people who live on it.

Also provided is info on how to recycle just about anything you can think of, loads of information on eco-friendly labeling, as well as environmental and social responsibility ratings on many of the major corporations you buy things from every day. Feel proud of doing your part as a conscious consumer!

ALERT—Help Protect Lake Tenkiller!!

The Oklahoma Water Resources Board is considering more changes to our water quality standards. We are urging them to correct an oversight that left Lake Tenkiller and part of the Illinois River without any special protection. Even though parts of the river above and below this middle section are protected, the river below Baron Fork Creek and the whole lake are treated just like any dry stream in western Oklahoma.

You can help fix this mistake. Write to OWRB and ask them to designate this section a High Quality Water. This would restrict any additional pollution discharges and be consistent with upstream and downstream protections. Write to: Mr. Derek Smithee, OWRB, 3800 N. Classen, OKC, 73118. Or send email to: drsmithee@owrb.state.ok.us.

(We will be distributing post cards on this issue for signatures at all October group meetings if you prefer to participate there.)



Explore,
enjoy and
protect
the planet.

www.oklahoma.sierraclub.org

Sign up for the **Oklahoma Water Forum** at Save the Illinois River's website: www.illinoisriver.org/
This forum is managed by Ed Brocksmith, last year's recipient of the Oklahoma Chapter Public Servant of the Year Award.



Create an Environmental Legacy.

Bequests have played a key role in the Sierra Club's environmental successes over the years.

Planning now may make your gift more meaningful and reduce taxes on your estate. We have many gift options available. We can even help you plan a gift for your local Chapter. For more information and confidential assistance, contact:

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Environmental Education Update *by Susie Shields*

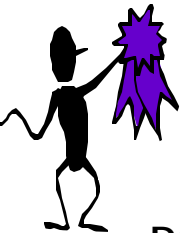
The first Oklahoma Permaculture conference that we co-sponsored was a big success, with 47 folks attending. A "forest garden" was planted at the Oklahoma Food Bank by the attendees. The Daily Oklahoman said several "heavy hitters" came forward to make this event possible. Respect at last!

We co-sponsored and exhibited, thanks to Oklahoma City volunteer Mary Stasner, at the Eastside Environmental Expo held September 13 at Zoo Lake in Oklahoma City. This event was organized by the Eastside OKC Community Group. The members of this newly formed coalition, with Connie Johnson at the helm, were recently designated as Water Sentinels by the Groundwater Foundation. They want to educate their eastside community regarding environmental health issues and work to improve environmental problems in the area.

We sponsored the September issue of the EnvironMentor environmental education newsletter which reaches over 4,000 educators throughout Oklahoma three times during the school year. Check out recent issues at www.okaee.org.

One of our favorite projects, the Eco-Motion mobile EE program which travels to elementary schools to provide interactive demonstrations in soil, water, waste, wildlife, forestry and agriculture, needed canvas bags for teacher materials, so we provided those. We have sponsored the www.edisonthebus.org website for two years by contracting with former Oklahoma Chapter activist Emma McCauley. We also provided folks to work at Frontier City on Edison the Bus Recycling and Sustainability Day. Thanks are in order to Olivia Waldkoetter, Jeanie Herndon, Sarah Kimball, Aubrey Arrington, Nancy Cain and Mary Beth Allen for braving the summer heat to help with kids' activities.

Congratulations to Keith!!!



Keith Smith,
our Sierra Club state lobbyist,
has been honored by the
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
as the recipient of the 2003 Dr. Angie
Debo Civil Libertarian of the Year Award