

# FRESH AIR



## February Program - Polar Bears and Harp Seals

Canada is home for two of the premier animals of North America: the Polar Bear is the top predator, and the baby Harp Seal is at the top of the "cutie" list. Polar Bears are 500-1200 pounds of casual majesty. Most of the year they live on sea ice and ice flows, hunting seals and walrus. When the ice melts in July, they come ashore. In early November they gather near Churchill (in Manitoba) waiting for the ice to form again on Hudson Bay; this is a great time and place to see these wonderful animals up close (but not too close.) Harp Seals give birth to their "whitecoat" pups in early March on sea ice and ice flow in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and then abandon them after only ten days of motherhood. Conservation efforts in the 1970's and 1980's led to an end of the killing of "whitecoats" for their fur. Both of these areas in Canada also have an interesting geologic and human history.

February's program will be presented by Kenneth Johnson of the Oklahoma Geological Survey and will be a discussion and slide presentation about these fascinating creatures. Ken visited both the areas mentioned above in 2003; his talk is well suited for scientists and non-scientists. All are invited to attend.

The meeting will be held on Thursday, February 26, at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (1309 West Boyd in Norman). Refreshments will be served at 7:00 p.m. with the program beginning at 7:30.

## Report From the Chair

There is a bit of good environmental news here in Norman that other communities might be interested in as well. Sierra Club member Geoff Canty and the City of Norman have secured an EPA grant to restore a stream-corridor riparian area on a tributary of the Little River, which flows into Lake Thunderbird, an important source of Norman's water supply.

These riparian wetland areas provide environmental and economic benefits to our communities since they improve water quality, protect the stream's environment, and provide habitat for wildlife.

The restoration project will consist of a number of different components. Some minor earthwork will lead to the construction of small berms to enhance water containment. Between 6 and 15 acres of hardwood forest will be established in the riparian area, creating 50 to 100 feet of buffer on each bank of the stream.

Some of this work will be done by volunteers, and, in fact, the educational component of the project is perhaps its most exciting feature. Educational seminars will be held to instruct students, city planners, and other citizens about the importance and the makeup of riparian wetland zones. The restoration area will be made available to groups, both of Norman citizens and of folks from other communities who wish to learn about the benefits and the implementation of such a project.

Development of the restoration plan is to begin by late spring or early summer of this year. For more information, contact Geoff Canty (gcanty@swbell.net).

## Urgent Election Notice

This year there is an unprecedented level of outside involvement and attention to the Sierra Club's Board of Directors' election. Outside, non-environmental organizations have endorsed candidates in the Club's Board elections. Several outside organizations have endorsed Club Board candidates and are urging their supporters to join the Club as an means to influence Club policy in line with their non-environmental agendas.

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## Election

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Those outside groups that may be attempting to intervene in the Club's Board of Directors' elections include:

**Center for American Unity - VirginiaDare/Vdare.com collective that includes "white nationalist writers."**

**Coloradans for American Immigration Reform**

**Federation for American Immigration Reform**

**Fur Commission USA**

**Limitstogrowth.org**

**HempflagUSA.org - promotes marijuana legalization**

**National Alliance - "ideology from a white racial perspective"**

**National Immigration Alert (NumbersUSA)**

**People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)**

**Project USA**

**Social Contract Press**

**Southern Poverty Law Center**

**White Politics Inc./Overthrow.com**

The Sierra Club has become an even more influential and effective voice in American society over the last decade. Now it appears that non-environmental groups are trying to take advantage of the Club's open and democratic nature to influence the composition of our Board of Directors and our policies.

Faced with this threat, the Board of Directors urges every member of the Club act to ensure that the Sierra Club remains faithful to its environmental mission and principles. Please cast your vote in this year's election as a means of demonstrating to outside groups your values and vision for the future of the Sierra Club. Vote for candidates whose experience matches what you believe the Club needs. Vote for candidates endorsed by Club leaders whom you trust.

In addition to the information about candidates found in the ballot, some chapter and group newsletters will carry additional information. More can also be found on the Sierra Club candidate forum which you can reach from the Club's website.

Democracy really does work--but only if we all vote. Help maintain the Sierra Club's tradition as America's preeminent democratic and grass-roots advocate for the environment.

**Larry Fahn, President.**

In the 2003 Board of Directors' elections, 786,178 ballots were mailed and there were 68,474 returns. Of the 5 members elected, 3 were nominating committee candidates and 2 were petition candidates. The candidate elected with the least number of votes received 24,349 votes. This means that a candidate can be elected to the Board of Directors with support from as little as 3% of the total membership. This is not meant to cast doubt on any of the Board members elected in 2003 but rather to point out the vulnerability we have to outside manipulation of our elections and the importance of voting and particularly of casting an informed vote.

## This is Serious

The attempt to take over the Sierra Club that is described by Larry Fahn in the accompanying article is no joke. These "take-over" efforts have made national news:

CNN reported that the Club has "a particularly democratic system for voting and that could backfire for this organization," noting that the Sierra Club is facing a hostile takeover by anti-immigration groups.

A Santa Fe New Mexican editorial worried: "Word would get around Capital Hill that this is no longer the Sierra Club of John Muir and its lobbyists may be ignored with little risk to one's political future... it could wash the Sierra Club down the drain."

And from the Philadelphia Inquirer, "What's happening in the Sierra Club illustrates that members of an organization take for granted that the most venerable of groups cannot be diverted from a worthy mission. Clearly, they can. This is no time to lose the Sierra Club's voice. It's a time for people who care about the environment to pay more than dues. They need to pay attention."

The Los Angeles Times editorialized, after their initial article breaking this story, cautioning Sierra Club members "to save their venerable organization" and to consider "a clear lesson in this turmoil for millions of Americans who consider themselves members of advocacy organizations. For these groups to play a constructive role in a democracy, members must pay attention to them. Discuss the issues. And vote."

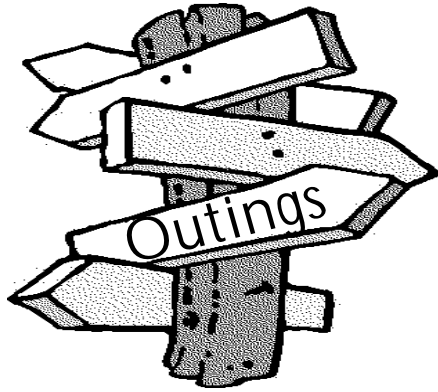
### Grass-Roots Policy Aids Takeover Effort

Ironically, the very policies which have made the Sierra Club the most respected environmental organization in the country are the same policies that make it possible for outside organizations to gain seats on our Board of Directors.

At the national level, a nominating committee submits a list of candidates to be placed on the ballot (just as we do at the local level). In addition, any member can file a petition to be placed on the ballot as long as there are sufficient members' signatures on the petition (this is also true at the local level). There are no length-of-membership requirements for election to the Board of Directors. A person can join the Sierra Club today and immediately file a petition as a candidate for the Board.

There are also very strict rules governing what we can say in our group and chapter newsletters. We cannot advise you to vote for one candidate over another. We cannot publish anything that could be construed as an endorsement of a particular candidate or group of candidates. We must remain neutral.

In last year's election, only 8.7% of the members voted. It is vitally important that more members vote, but it is also vitally important that they cast informed votes. Follow Larry Fahn's advice: read the candidates' statements carefully and ask Club leaders that you know and trust for their opinions (all of the Red Earth Group Executive Committee members phone numbers and email addresses appear in every issue of this newsletter).



**March 13:** Blue River and Pennington Creek Update. Earl Brewer will guide this hike which is shaping up to be an exciting event, as 23 people have already signed up to hike the beautiful trails replete with wild birds that Earl can help us to learn to identify. This trip will also be an opportunity to become educated on water issues, especially as related to this area.

Bring packable snacks, lunch, and water. Soft drinks and other beverages will be provided at lunch time. We will rendez-vous at the Target parking lot at 8:00 A.M. and will meet Earl at the court house at Tishomingo about 10: A.M.

**April 17:** Wichita Mountains. John Raeside will guide a semi-rugged hike through Charon Gardens. John is an experienced hiker and is very familiar with the fauna and flora of the area. Further details will follow in next month's newsletter. I hear a trip to The Riverside Cafe might be a necessary remedy for hikers' runaway appetites.

Interested? Contact Suzette McDowell at 364-2617. If you are already signed up, give me a confirmation call by March 10 for the March trip.

## The Sierra Club Cleans Up

### Sutton Wilderness

Neither rain, nor gloom, nor game day traffic would deter our intrepid Red Earth Sierra Club members from their appointed task. Clean Up Sutton Wilderness! Many thanks go out to Marg Greer, John Greer, Walter Kelley, Catherine Hobbs, Mark Mills, Nicki Nicar, John Raeside and Judith Wilkins for keeping the Club's commitment as partner in maintaining Norman's Sutton Urban Wilderness. The new gazebo and kiosk are up. It's a good time of year to see beyond the foliage and the raw beauty of Norman's Urban Wilderness.

If you didn't make it last time, you have another chance in March. The Red Earth Group is working with O.U.'s Big Event, a day of student volunteerism. We have listed Sutton Wilderness clean-up as an event. The day is **March 27, 9:30 – 11:30**. The Sierra Club flag will be waving (or at least, draped) and refreshments will be available. A wonderful opportunity to demonstrate to students the appreciation of greenspace within city confines and toot Sierra Club's horn at the same time! Wear a S.C. button if you have one.

### Brookhaven Creek

Cleanups of Brookhaven Creek will be held at Morgan Park on February 28 and March 6 from 10:00am to noon. We will be clearing brush from the creek as well as picking up trash. No experience required. Meet at Morgan Park. For directions or questions call John Raeside, 321-4518.

## Snowmobiles Back in Yellowstone Park

Yellowstone— Tuesday's federal-court ruling concerning Yellowstone National Park today triggered an immediate decision to allow more snowmobiles into the Park, threatening to reverse recent improvements in air - and noise-pollution levels. The court ruling and higher level of snowmobile use depart from what the National Park Service has twice concluded would provide the fullest protection for the health and safety of visitors, workers, and the Park's wildlife and environment.

"This decision is deeply disappointing for Americans who want to protect Yellowstone National Park so their grandchildren can enjoy it unimpaired," said Steven Bosak of the National Parks Conservation Association. "We need to move forward with increased snowcoach access; it is the clean, quiet means by which all Americans can experience Yellowstone's beauty in a way that doesn't harm visitors, staff, or wildlife."

The ruling, by U.S. District Judge Clarence Brimmer, blocked the phaseout of snowmobile use underway in Yellowstone. In response, the National Park Service announced today that it would increase to 780 the number of snowmobiles allowed into Yellowstone each day. This decision reverses the phaseout of snowmobiles which the National Park Service's own study concluded "best preserves the unique, historic, cultural, and natural resources associated with Yellowstone and Grant Teton National Parks" and "yields the lowest levels of impacts to air quality, water quality, natural soundscapes, and wildlife."

Today's reversal of the snowmobile phaseout drew criticism not only from conservation organizations but also from area businesses who said that protecting Yellowstone is vital to the region's economy.

"I'm a small business owner. My business is hurt by the presence of snowmobiles in Yellowstone," said Betsy Robinson, a Yellowstone guide based in Bozeman Montana. "My clients value quiet recreation. They will stay away with the continued presence of snowmobiles."

"This is a setback for Yellowstone and for my community," said Jackie Matthews, owner of Blue Ribbon Flies in West Yellowstone, Montana. "We have to quit playing ping pong on this issue. There's no way any community can plan on anything if it continues to go back and forth. There's just no question that Yellowstone has been moving in a healthier direction this winter and our community is adjusting. We're seeing more people coming and enjoying snowcoach rides into the Park and we're still seeing snowmobilers come to enjoy the adjacent national forest."

*“No matter how cynical you get, it is impossible to keep up.”*  
- Lily Tomlin

### Red Earth Group Officers

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\* indicates Executive Committee member

**If you aren't in the habit of watching NOW with Bill Moyers on PBS/OETA, give it a try. This thought-provoking program often deals with environmental issues and is one of the best things you will find on TV. It airs Fridays at 8:00 p.m.**

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