



SIERRA
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CHAPTER

Delta Sierran

Summer 2013

Delta Chapter of the Sierra Club protecting people
and the environment in Louisiana for 40 years

Ironton Celebrates Resilience



On Sunday, May 5, in the small town of Ironton, Plaquemines Parish, the St. Paul's Missionary Baptist Church held a celebratory service. Normally, this wouldn't be news, at least not the kind of news that the Delta Sierran covers. But this was a special service—the first to be held since August 28, 2012, when Hurricane Isaac brought more than 5 feet of water into Ironton and the surrounding areas.

Ironton sits within a growing industrial corridor, home to the Alliance Refinery, International Marine Terminal and United Bulk coal export facilities, and the CGT and Allied grain export terminals. They are now threatened by the proposed RAM Terminal, another coal export facility that threatens to further burden the community with more noxious coal dust and water pollution. Last year, several residents from

Ironton joined hands with neighbors and concerned groups to question the wisdom of permitting another coal export facility in the area. In September, just before Isaac struck, the Christian Missionary Baptist Minister's Association of Plaquemines, of which St. Paul's is a member, joined Sierra Club, LEAN and the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic in a legal challenge of RAM's air permit, granted without a public hearing or an environmental analysis by the Department of Environmental Quality.

Environmental Justice remains a key priority for the Sierra Club on all levels, and our work to stop the rush of coal export through the Gulf could not happen without the key support and participation of communities like Ironton and churches like St. Paul's. As an attendee of the service, I can say that those of us in the environmental movement can learn a lot from places like Ironton and St. Paul's Church, not just about remaining strong in the face of overwhelming odds, but also learning to fully acknowledge and rejoice in our victories with song, food, mirth and true fellowship. The Sierra Club commends the Ironton community's resolve, and celebrates their resilience and partial recovery from both environmental and political struggle.

By: Devin Martin

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**DELTA
CHAPTER
Sierra Club**



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FOUNDED 1892

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The Delta Chapter is 3,000 of your neighbors supporting the work of the Sierra Club in Louisiana. We advance the cause of protecting Louisiana's environment in a variety of ways: including sponsoring a campaign to take Mercury out of the environment; identifying and protecting the state's scenic rivers; working to save the cypress; and keeping the Atchafalaya Basin, America's greatest river swamp, wet and wild. We work to raise public awareness about the effects of human caused climate change and to develop clean energy solutions. We advise the state legislature in Baton Rouge on issues related to public health and the environment. In addition, we conduct outings and informational events so that our members and friends can get outside and enjoy our beautiful state. The National Sierra Club's members and supporters are more than 1.3 million of your friends and neighbors.

Visit the Delta Chapter website for updated contact information and current topics at www.lasierraclub.org

Like us and become a "friend" on facebook. To find us, just search facebook for "Sierra Club Delta Chapter".

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View From The Chair

Environmental issues do not usually command attention in the once every other year Louisiana legislature's "fiscal session." However, there was concern by solar advocates that the solar tax credits could be a target this year. So Louisiana solar installers worked ahead of the session with the Governor's office and the Legislative Fiscal Office to propose a compromise that would keep tax incentives in place but phase them out in a few years.

The trouble with the solar tax credits is that they have been way too popular. A program started in the 2007 legislature that was envisioned to cost the state about \$1 million in annual tax revenue ended up approaching a \$100 million hit to the state bottom line.

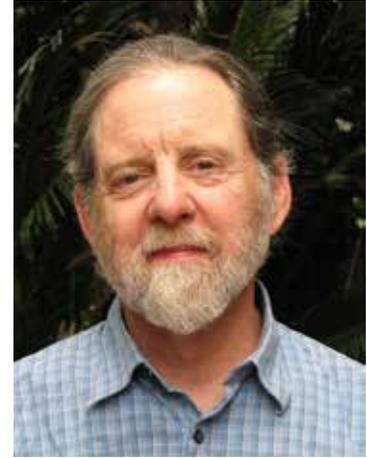
It turns out that about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the tax incentives were being claimed not by our local residential installers but by leasing operations. The good thing about leasing is that it can provide solar for homeowners who don't have the up front cash or credit. The bad thing is that we were getting some quick and shoddy installations from out of state leasing outfits.

This resulted in the leasing angle being a target of the legislative fiscal hawks and the resulting legislation (HB 705 by Erich Ponti) clamps down on tax credits for leased solar installations and phases them out altogether by end of 2017.

Additional restrictions for all solar installations were put in the bill that included compliance with the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA), meaning not made in China, and that installers must be licensed by the Louisiana State Licensing Board for Contractors.

So we get to keep our solar energy tax credits for residential solar pretty much as they are now until end of 2017. If a real need for them to continue can be shown, we could work to get them extended in a future legislative session under a different governor. Most everybody except the leasing guys seemed reasonably happy with the compromise.

Senator J.P. Morrell told me later that he thought it was a well considered bill that received a full debate. He said he wished all of the tax exemptions could get such



a thorough debate. Senator Morrell had asked a great question in debate on the Senate floor, something like "Why are we so concerned with the solar tax credit when we are not even looking at the huge credits and exemptions that big industry is getting." (my paraphrase). We emphatically say yes to that idea for future legislative sessions.

One conclusion to draw from this is that if you want a solar system on your home in Louisiana you had better get it done before end of 2017. If you want to install a system from a leasing company you best do it before Jan 1, 2014.

You can see more details on this and all of the legislative updates on the Delta Chapter web site at:
<http://lasierraclub.org>.

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Earl's Pearls

Alligator and Cellphone

I have a great third-career job. I work two days a week as a National Park Service ranger at the Barataria Preserve of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park in the swamp south of Marrero. On Fridays I conduct the guided tour on the Bayou Coquille Trail. Visitors are fascinated by the Louisiana wetlands, both American citizens and the surprising number of international tourists. In halting English, some of them, with eyes wide in anticipation, ask about the “crocodiles.”

Sorry, no crocodiles in the wild in Louisiana, but there are alligators, lots of alligators. Everybody wants to see the alligators. As I start the tour and explain the geology, the prehistory, the origin of the clam shells that gave Bayou Coquille its name (“Coquille” is French for “shell”), and begin to talk about trees and flowers, I keep an eye out in the bayou so that I can interrupt my spiel with a sighting of an alligator.

The popularity of the so-called “reality show” on The History Channel, “Swamp People,” has increased visitors’ curiosity about the big reptiles. Usually a child on the tour, obviously not interested in what I have to say about bald cypress and tupelo trees, will ask, “When are we going to see an alligator?” Then I have to explain that Barataria is not a zoo, not Disney, and that I can’t promise that we’ll see any alligators. But usually we do.

The water was up in the swamp in late spring. Persistent winds from the southeast had driven

Lake Salvador into the marsh, backing up the rainwater that had fallen over several days. Water was at the edge of some of the trails. So was an alligator. Looking for a place to bask in the sun, a small gator lay down in the middle of the Bayou Coquille Trail, head up, looking around like a dog in repose. When I approached, it waddled off in an almost comical gait, a reptilian Charlie Chaplin. A few days later, the gator was back again, now stretched out right at the edge of the trail. I was leading the Friday tour when we approached.

“I’ll stomp my feet,” I told the group. “That usually gets them to move along.” I stomped



The alligator’s only movement was to blink. Another stomp, another blink.

“OK, folks. It looks like we’ll have to go around.” I led them along the outer edge of the trail away from the prone alligator, who still didn’t move except to blink while the visitors took pictures as they gingerly gave the

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www.lasierraclub.org

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The **Acadian Group** meets the second and third Wednesday of the month. Our meeting starts promptly at 6:30pm. All members, friends of the Sierra Club, and the general public are welcomed to attend, listen, and participate.

Location: First Methodist Church - Lafayette, Louisiana, corner of Lee/Main/Johnston downtown, 700 Lee St. The Meeting Hall is upstairs, enter through rear doors facing parking lot. Check out the Acadian group web page at <http://acadiansierra.blogspot.com/> for meetings and fun outings.

The **Baton Rouge** Group meets on third Thursdays of the month. The location is in the Backpacker, the store is located at 7656 Jefferson Hwy in Baton Rouge. The meeting is held every other month. On alternate months, there's usually an outing. Call Nancy Grush at (225) 938-9353 for more info. All are welcome. We often do Biking, Hiking and Paddling outings.

The **New Orleans** Group meets monthly at the Audubon Zoo.
Next Meeting is July 11, 2013.

Meetings are at Dominion Auditorium near the main Zoo entrance, 6500 Magazine St. Drive to the front entrance to the Zoo, just off Magazine St. To the right of the Zoo's main public entrance, go through gate and bear right to the Dominion Auditorium. There will be signs for directions.

Doors open at 6:30 pm and the program starts at 7:00 pm. Admission is free and all are welcome.

To get the latest details, call 1-504-836-3062.

The **Honey Island** Group (Northshore of Lake Pontchartrain) is on hiatus right now.

The **Kisatchie** Group works on water and air quality issues in northern Louisiana. Contact Jeff Wellborn at jwellborn@seaber.com to get involved.

If you would like to get emails about chapter events and updates here in Louisiana, and you are not currently getting them, please send your email address to the chapter chair at hmartin2sc@gmail.com

Acadian Group Outing to Beautiful Lake Martin



On May 19 the Acadian Group and friends passed a good time on Lake Martin in St. Martin Parish. This was one in a series of “Outings with a Purpose.” One mission for the afternoon was to update the entry in the Delta Trail Guide for Lake Martin. Another assignment was to look at damage to non-target vegetation from over use of chemical control for Giant Salvinia. A third purpose of the trip was to have a good time and we sure did that with a potluck and hot dog roast on a grassy picnic area surrounded by water and cypress. All are invited to Acadian Group Outings. You can see them on the Group page at <http://acadiansierra.blogspot.com>

New Orleans: The New Atlantis?

On April 18, 2013, with the help of staff, the New Orleans Group and the Tulane Green Club partnered to host an event called “The New Atlantis: Climate Disruption and New Orleans.”

Presenters included Tim Osborn, scientist for NOAA’s Office of Coastal Surveys; Bruce Fleury, ecology professor at Tulane; and Sierra Club’s own Jordan Macha and Devin Martin.

Speaking to a crowd of nearly 150 students and attendees, presenters discussed current data on climate change and sea-level rise, and why New Orleans is particularly at risk. The presentation was concluded with a discussion of the work Sierra Club is conducting to both mitigate and reduce the effects of climate change, and the need for the public to become engaged in this all-important fight.

We hope to continue partnerships with allied groups throughout the Delta Chapter and its Groups to expand our audience and educate Louisiana’s public on critical environmental issues.



The Alligator Tale...*Continued from page 4*

animal as wide a berth as the trail permitted. We continued along.

“Oh, I hope she sees the alligator.” One of the people in my group had looked back and saw a woman walking along the trail behind us, intently talking into her telephone, not paying attention. She was approaching the alligator at the edge of the trail. I was about to yell, but I was afraid to startle her out of her phone-induced trance, and that she would frighten the alligator into doing something defensive. So I waved, but she did not see me. With teeth clenched, I watched as she walked past the motionless alligator, thinking that she might step right on it and it would suddenly be motionless no more.

Her guardian angel – and probably the alligator’s too – intervened, and the lady’s feet stepped right by the animal, probably no more than two feet away, and the gator moved only its eyelids. The phone talker kept coming, and I waited for her to reach our group.

“You didn’t see the alligator, did you?” “What alligator?” She looked bewildered. I pointed

out the creature alongside the trail, and I could swear that it was looking at us, trying to figure out what were we doing. The woman sort of shrugged, smiled, continued her walking, and went back to her phone call. That call must have been really, really important.

In Bayou Coquille and the connecting Kenta Canal lives what may be the biggest alligator in the Barataria Preserve. He showed up shortly after Hurricane Gustav and got named for the storm. Big Gustav is just a few millimeters shy of thirteen feet long. Sometimes he comes out of the water and stretches out on the bank. I wondered what would have happened if Gustav had been the reclining gator along the trail instead of the four-and-a-half-footer. Would the lady-with-the-phone have missed seeing him too? A much darker question is would he have seen her.

The event impelled me to remember Peter Pan.

In the story of Peter Pan, Captain Hook loses a hand in a sword fight with Peter, and a crocodile eats the severed hand, acquiring a taste for

the rest of the captain. The crocodile has swallowed a clock too, so as the croc stalks the pirate captain, Hook is warned of the reptile’s approach by the steady tick-tock from inside its stomach. Let’s move the story to Barataria.

The oblivious phone-talker replaces Captain Hook, Gustav replaces the crocodile, and the lady’s cell phone stands in for the clock. We won’t be too bloody in retelling the story, so we’ll say that Gustav lunges, misses the terrified lady, but gobbles her fully charged and operating telephone. Everybody is safe.

“What’s your phone number?” I ask the quaking woman who has just lost it. (Her composure as well as her phone.) I punch the numbers into my phone, and, from deep in Gustav’s belly, we hear the ringtones of “Just a Closer Walk With Thee,” an apropos song for someone who has walked too close to an alligator.

Wendy and the lost boys look on, smiling, phones in hand, ready to make their calls.

– Earl Higgins



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Trail Guide Needs Blazers

Delta Chapter and groups have embarked on a project to update the Delta Country Trail Guide. The guide was last published in 1997, and there have been many changes to the landscape and to availability of public spaces since then. The New Orleans Group was the focal point of much of the effort in the earlier editions and continues its leadership in revising the guide. Devin Martin, Conservation Coordinator, has developed a matrix showing all the outing locations so we can keep track of progress. We have a

standard fill in the blanks form that can be used by teams and individuals to go out and update the description for each trail. If you like to “do trails” on your feet or in a boat, you could be a big help to our project. We have about 100 trails and outings locations to update, so all are invited to help.

You can see the list of trails from the old trail guide and information about the update project on our website at: <http://lasierraclub.org/delta-country-trail-guide>

Baton Rouge Benefit

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