

Environmental Exchange

A publication of the Citizens' Environmental Coalition

February 2004
Newsletter &
Calendar

The Houston-Galveston area's most comprehensive coverage of environmental news and events.

Study links air pollution to death from heart disease

by Renee Feltz, Contributing Writer

While links between Houston's air quality problems and respiratory illness are well known, a recent Harvard University study found that long term exposure to air pollution actually poses a greater risk of death from heart disease.

Harvard scientist C. Arden Pope and his colleagues released the latest findings in December from an ongoing study that compares levels of air pollution to the number of people who die from cardiovascular disease. The study looked at 150 cities and more than half a million individuals, using risk factor and mortality data collected by the American Cancer Society and the Environmental Protection Agency. University of Texas school of public health physician George Delclose

said that for Houstonians, the most compelling finding from the study was that 45 percent of deaths from heart disease were attributable to air pollution.

"In Houston we have air quality problems and a lot of cardiovascular disease," he said. "We need to pay attention to the results of this study. Even though (heart disease) is most strongly linked to things like cigarette smoking, high blood pressure and cholesterol, that doesn't mean we should ignore the contribution of air pollution to those deaths."

Though researchers are convinced of the statistical links between air pollution and heart disease, information about the biological mechanisms involved remain largely speculative. The director of environ-

mental health for Baylor College of Medicine's disease prevention and control research, Winifred Hamilton, said there are several hypotheses concerning how pollution may affect heart function. For example, she said fine particulate matter may be breathed into the alveolar sacs deep in the lungs. Because some particles are too small to be cleaned out through the lung's natural filtration system, they pass through cell membranes into blood vessels and inflame the innermost membrane of the vessel, causing blockages. Pollutants can also interfere with the nervous system's ability to regulate heart function.

While the Harvard study provides obvious implications for residents who suffer

Continued on page 3

Research to begin on wind farm and bird collisions

by Erika McDonald, Staff Writer

Plans to build a wind farm on Pelican Island in Galveston have conservation groups concerned about the safety of millions of birds that pass through the area during migration.

The 150-megawatt wind farm would primarily serve the Port of Galveston, which is backing the plan as part of an effort officials refer to as the "greening" of the port. Currently, plans are to construct five to seven 74-megawatt turbines on the island. Port officials hoped conservation groups would support the development of clean energy technologies.

But when members of the Houston Audubon Society caught wind of the project, they began raising questions about avian mortality. The problem is receiving national attention as reports of bird deaths

from collisions with turbines at other wind farms have environmental groups around the world torn between a desire for renewable energy and wildlife conservation.

Winnie Burkett, sanctuary manager for HAS, said two factors make constructing a wind farm at Pelican Island a risky endeavor. The location serves as habitat for 12 to 15 species of colonial water bird. US Fish and Wildlife Services have documented as many as 30,000 nesting pairs at one time. Pelican Island is also arguably the most heavily populated bird migration corridor in the country. Especially during the spring and fall, 21 neotropical migratory species flock by the millions, often traveling at night. The sheer number of birds that occupy the flyway could result in high

Continued on page 4



Photo courtesy MJ Moorehouse

Environmental Exchange

The Environmental Exchange is published by the Citizens' Environmental Coalition (CEC), an information clearinghouse and communications network for environmental issues in the Houston-Galveston area. The CEC mission is to improve the quality of life and health in the region through education, dialogue and collaboration. CEC serves the general public by bringing many diverse groups together to build awareness and stimulate discussion about environmental issues in the region. Programs include forums that give a balanced perspective on environmental issues, and information vehicles that enhance understanding.

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Perspectives Project brings environment home for Crockett kids

by Lawrence Spence,
Kids' Environmental Education Project

Summer camp is a time to get away from the ordinary routine of school, homework and chores. It's an opportunity to meet new friends and try new things. The setting is fresh and the scenery is different, which somehow opens a kid's mind to see the world in a new light. Maybe it has something to do with being away from your family and teachers. It could have something to do with camp food. However, I like to think it has more to do with the immersion in a natural setting where you can hear the wind moving through the trees during the day and the bugs composing a symphony at night.

In Trinity, Texas, about 90 miles northeast of Houston where the Trinity River widens to become Lake Livingston, the YMCA owns and maintains 800 acres of lake-front forest, which is divided into two youth camps, Cullen and Olympia, leased by the-Houston Independent School District from September to May. Students in fifth grade throughout the district are given the opportunity to attend a four-day, overnight environmental education camp in the middle of the East Texas tall pines during the school year. Instead of attending classes on campus, students arise every morning from bunk beds in a wooden cabin set on a hill below towering deciduous and conifer trees. They dress in the filtered light of early morning and walk with their program leader a mile and a half uphill to the dining hall for a nutritious family-style breakfast. The meal is brought to the table in bowls and students pass food around the table until everyone has had a chance to be served. As students have no access to snacks or vending machines, breakfast is one of only three meals offered each day. After breakfast, the campers are fueled for a full day of activities.

Crockett Elementary Charter School is the second smallest elementary in Houston ISD, tucked in an industrialized community

of the First Ward. Ninety-seven percent of the its 400 students are Hispanic. Located just northwest of downtown near Houston Avenue at Washington Avenue, Crockett is representative of Houston's inner-city Hispanic enclaves where students' homes border highly-traveled rail lines, pipe distribution warehouses and rice processing facilities. All of the neighborhood is developed with the exception of a city park that sits on a corner lot. But the park is small, dilapidated and sparsely planted with Bermuda and St. Augustine grass and several old and unhealthy pecan trees. Needless to say, there is not much chance to be at one with nature in this part of Houston. My students don't have the chance to leave the city very often, either. Their parents work a lot and when they do go out, it's usually to a family member's house or to the movies. So when I received the packet of information from the HISD Outdoor Education Center, I saw a unique opportunity to take the kids into the Texas wilderness.

For most fifth grade students in HISD, this would be the first time not only to sleep overnight in the woods, but to be away from their homes and family for an extended period of time. In fact, out of the 40 students from Crockett that were invited, only 25 were able to return signed permission slips from protective parents. The experiences these students would have at the Outdoor Education Center would be a step toward independence.

The HISD Outdoor Education Center has hosted student groups for 29 years. With a staff of 20, Carol King manages four full-time teachers and 16 programs leaders (similar to camp counselors) who serve an average of 115 students per week for a total of nearly 3,000 HISD students every year. The program focuses on self-esteem, personal growth, environmental awareness, cultural appreciation and team building. Another important component of the program is natural sciences. Since the introduction of the re-designed state assessment tool last year, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills test, all fifth-grade students in Texas are now expected to have some knowledge of applied science. The science-based instruction and exposure to nature that students receive at the Outdoor Education Center is more important than ever in preparation for the state test in April.

Continued on p. 8

Car culture may make Houstonians fat

by Catherine Rentz-Pernot

Contributing Writer

Big Macs and big gulps have thus far played leading roles in America's obesity blame game as covered by the national media. Some state governments, including California, have already begun charging a "fat tax" on snacks and soda. But are governments and others missing the big picture?

Medical research has shown that there is more to obesity than what one eats; gaining weight is also a matter of physical activity. Could our elected governments' car-heavy transportation policies be as guilty in America's obesity epidemic as Big Macs? Many health experts have suspected that spending hours sitting in cars, particularly in sprawling areas not negotiable by foot, contributes more to obesity than other modes of transportation including walking, biking or moving between bus and rail stops, which are not usually found in sprawling areas.

In a recent study by the Surface Transportation Policy Project, "Measuring the Health Effects of Sprawl," the sprawl-obesity hypothesis was backed by statistics for the first time. The analysis showed that residents of sprawling areas tend to weigh more and are more likely to be obese than those living in more densely populated areas. Other research has shown that those living in sprawling, more car-dependent areas do more driving and less walking than those in dense areas with public-transit.

The government escalated the car-based

transportation system and related sprawl with the Eisenhower Federal Highway Act of 1956 and has since spent billions of Americans' gas tax dollars building highways and enabling neighborhoods to move further out. Federal highway spending still outstrips alternative transit spending for rail, bus, sidewalks and bike lanes several times over. The result has been a reshaped society where the overwhelming majority of Americans now live in areas that are less welcoming to pedestrians and bicyclists than they are to cars. The Texas Transportation Institute's "2003 Urban Mobility Study" shows that American urbanites are ever more tied to their cars, spending more time stuck behind the wheel and driving more miles each year.

Researchers are just now beginning to link the country's transportation policies to our obesity, but it is unclear whether the general public is making that connection. Could some Americans be as addicted to cars as they are to cigarettes or to fatty foods? Cars are not physically addicting. But neither are Oreos and that has not stopped the public or the government from taking action.

Medical experts have warned that obesity is rapidly reaching epidemic proportions. But how at fault is our car-based transportation system, which Americans pay for each time they fill up?

Many might say this would just be another attempt of Americans to blame others for poor personal decisions. Others might say choices about how to get around town are a bit more limited than what to order for dinner.

Whatever the case, people are looking for someone to hold accountable for the country's expanding waistline and weight-related health costs. Fat taxes and lawsuits against fatty food providers have been the first attempts at accountability.

Many, including the STPP researchers, say the state and federal governments should diversify their road diet with more sidewalks, bike lanes, and public transportation. It may also be time for government to take another look at the provisions in gas tax law. ☺

Catherine Rentz-Pernot studies regional transportation issues for the Gulf Coast Institute.

Heart disease

Continued from page 1

from the city's poor air quality, there is no large population-based study that looks at air pollution and heart disease in Houston. Hamilton said the closest thing to such research is a study commissioned by the Houston city council in 1999 that compared levels of fine particulate matter in Houston's air to two California cities where heart disease studies were conducted. Based on the remote studies, Houston researchers estimated that roughly 400 heart-related deaths could be linked the area's level of fine particulate matter.

Delclose said more support from regulatory agencies is needed to conduct local studies that compare regional air quality with Houston mortality rates.

"That (information) has important policy implications. I think it would be of value to people who have the ability to make decisions and write policies here locally," he said. "I'm talking about the mayor's office, I'm talking about the state of Texas, and I'm talking about the different departments of health and different regulatory agencies for air quality."

Other factors, like the proximity of Houston neighborhoods to its sprawling freeways and unique weather conditions, indicate a need for more local, narrowly defined research.

A lack of local information and public dialogue means Houston-area residents are regularly exposed to environmental health hazards they may not understand. Media sources generally convey warnings about links between the city's air pollution and lung disease. Because the link to heart disease is more complex, the issue is not often discussed.

The Galveston/Houston Association for Smog Prevention's executive director, John Wilson, said although researchers have known about the link between heart disease and air pollution within the last decade, it is difficult for groups like GHASP to share that information with the public.

"When I am speaking to most media or even most public audiences they are only interested in a quick sound bite," he said. "People just don't think of air pollution as impacting the blood, the heart muscle and the heart tissue. . . " *Continued on p. 4*

Resource Corner

Helpful hints for CEC member organizations

Health/Environment Journal now available free on line

Environmental Health Perspectives is a peer reviewed journal published monthly by the National Institute of Environmental Health Science.

The publication contains articles of general interest topics, news from national publications and scientific research papers on the effects of the environment on human health. EHP is now an open access journal and all content, including back issues, is available for free online. Visit <http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/docs/admin/openaccess.html>

Heart disease

Continued from page 3

It's easier to say what has an easy connection, so that (for reporters) the story is tight and expresses the main point, which is air pollution is bad and you need to avoid it," Wilson said.

Because of the difficulties in conveying the message about the link between dirty air and America's number one killer, clean air advocates in Houston are hoping that the Harvard study will help draw attention to the problem.

Bonnie New, a Houston area environmental and occupational health physician who co-founded Doctors for Clean Air, said the importance of the connection could not be overstated. "This should come as another one of many wakeup calls to the general public that our air quality crisis is a public health crisis and not some sort of political football," she said. ●

Renee Feltz is the producer for KPFT News on 90.1 FM.

Wind Farm

Continued from page 1

mortality.

The island is also home to such sensitive species as the blue heron, the grey egret and the brown pelican. The brown pelican, from which the island get its name, is currently listed as endangered. Burkett described Pelican Island as "America's gateway" for migrating birds.

"Making sure this flyway is safe is not only critical to Galveston, it's critical to Ohio, Michigan and other (bird) destinations," she said. "What we do on the Texas coast impacts bird populations across the country."

However, other factors make the location a prime spot to construct a wind farm. According to George King, environmental consultant for the port, strong frequent trade winds from the southeast are an untapped resource for the area.

He also said Galveston's increasing population and industrial density created a viable market for wind power. The proposed farm would provide 100 megawatts for the port and its related industry and the remaining 50 megawatts would provide power to some of Centerpoint Energy's residential and commercial customers

in Galveston.

King said that when it comes to deaths from bird collision, wind turbines pose less of a risk than tall buildings and communications towers.

Still, King said he and other port officials recognize the seriousness of the avian mortality issue and said they intend to work closely with conservation groups and government agencies to assess the risks.

King argued that there are mitigation technologies that reduce the risk to birds. For example, painting the blades with reflective paint helps increase visibility. Another alternative is to attach whistles to the ends of the blades so that birds can hear the turbines when visibility is low. There is also the possibility of employing sophisticated monitors to track migration patterns and turn the turbines off during peak migration.

But all of this will take a great deal of research said US Fish and Wildlife Services spokesman Phil Glass. The agency will be working with the port and conservation groups to make sure the placement of the turbines does not violate the Migratory Bird Act. The agency plans to monitor the risk assessment phase of the project. The groups are asking for at least one year of study.

If the monitoring reveals a high level of collisions, both the Audubon Society and the USFWS will oppose the project.

"No one wants to discourage the development of wind energy, so we're keeping an open mind," Glass said. "But the Migratory Bird Act is pretty straight forward and we need to gather as much information as possible to make an informed decision."

The port has already adjusted its plans over concern for bird kills. Engineers reduced the number of turbines from 35 to seven and moved their location to an area that experiences less bird traffic than the site originally proposed.

The changes came after a preliminary study that lasted two weeks. Burkett said more detailed study would require at least one year to take into account seasonal changes, wind patterns and bird prey populations that affect migratory patterns.

For now, both sides are hoping to balance concerns about avian mortality with the environmental benefits of supporting wind energy development throughout the state.

"The Pelican Island project is ideal as a pilot project in the state's effort to increase revenue by advancing clean and renewable energy," King said. "It's essential that we develop, not only the technologies, but the production capacity to support that. That would be a benefit to this region."

In fact, how the project takes shape will set precedent for further energy development along the Gulf Coast. The Texas General Land Office is behind a massive push to advance renewable energy as state revenues from oil and gas are slipping.

The first phase of the Pelican Island wind farm will begin with a risk assessment study of bird collisions in March. ●

Coalition Notes

Local events focusing on water issues kick off this month

The Shell Center for Sustainability will host public forums on state water issues including supply, quality and management at Duncan Hall, McMurtry Auditorium, Rice University, beginning Feb 10, 2004. This is the beginning of a global forum on one of the most valuable resources on the planet. Sponsors are Fotofest 2004, the Environmental & Energy Systems Institute, the Shell Center for Sustainability and the Center for the Study of Environment and Society at Rice University.

Training workshop to help save endangered sea turtles in Galveston

The National Marine Fisheries Services will host a sea turtle training, Saturday, Feb. 28, at 9:30 am. Participants will learn what to do if they find a nesting turtle or hatchlings. The event will include a tour of the so-called turtle barn where loggerheads are currently being raised for turtle excluder devicetesting. TEDs have proven to be effective at protecting sea turtles from shrimp trawls. Everyone who enjoys the beach and is interested in helping the sea turtle

is encouraged to attend. The training will be held in the conference room of the NMFS facility at 4700 Avenue U in Galveston. For more information, contact Carole Allen of HEART/Sea Turtle Restoration Project at (281) 444-6204.

Third film scheduled in environmental series

The CEC, Mothers for Clean Air and the Houston Sierra Club anti-sprawl campaign will co-host a screening of the environmental film *Save Our Land, Save Our Towns*. The film is the third in a video series focusing on urban Sprawl, quality of life and the effects on our health. *Save Our Land, Save Our Towns* will be shown Friday, Feb. 27, 7 pm, at the Upper Kirby District Building, 3015 Richmond, which houses the Houston Environmental Center. The film will be preceded by refreshments and networking at 6:15 pm.

EcoNotes

Appellate court blocks administration changes that weaken clean air act

On Christmas Eve, a federal appeals court temporarily blocked some of the Bush administration's changes to the Clean Air Act, agreeing with more than a dozen states and cities that claimed the changes could cause irreparable harm to the environment and public health.

Late last year, the Environmental Protection Agency, with an interim director at the helm, approved changes to the new source review program of the federal Clean Air Act. The changes would have allowed power plants, refineries and other industrial facilities to make repairs in the name of routine maintenance without installing additional pollution controls even if those changes resulted in increased emissions.

In addition to the state and city governments, environmental and health groups, including the Natural Resources Defense Council and the American Lung Association, also challenged the rule in the appeals court.

Denny Larson of the California-based Refinery Reform Campaign has worked with a number of local communities downwind of polluting power plants. He said the appeals court's ruling will help ensure that companies that violate the NSR provision will be held accountable.

Eleven Texas facilities, including four in the Houston area, have lawsuits pending under new source review.

Main Street light rail now up and running

Crowds gathered on News Year Day, to be a part of the inaugural ride on the Main Street rail, the 7.5 line that travels from downtown Houston, through the Medical Center and Reliant Park. Hundreds showed up to take advantage of Metro's free fare promotion which lasted throughout the weekend. The question remains whether the cars will stay full once the novelty wears off. Ridership is just one of the factors rail supporters and opponents will be watching closely in the weeks and months ahead. In November, Houston voters narrowly approved the future construction of more light rail. The Metro Solutions plan includes 72 miles of rail, a 50 percent increase in bus service and double HOV lane miles.

After one decade dioxin still a problem in Houston Ship Channel

The results of a one-year University of Houston study presented to a group of state, local and company officials last week show dioxin in more than 80 percent of the water samples taken.

Tests for the chemicals in sediment found it above normal 83 percent of the time.

But what shocked scientists most were the levels in fish -- which had not changed, or were higher, than a decade ago. Eating fish is the primary way humans are exposed to dioxin.

"We have exceedances just about everywhere," said Hanadi Rifai, an associate professor of civil and environmental engineering at the university, which is conducting the research for the state.

The goal of the research is to determine how much dioxin can continue to enter the Houston Ship Channel while making fish safe to eat -- a lofty ambition for what was once regarded as one of the most polluted waterways in the country.

In 1990, the state health department first warned against eating more than eight ounces a month of certain species of fish in the waterway to Upper Galveston Bay. Since then, environmental laws have clamped down on air and water pollution, and paper pulp mills, which generated massive amounts of dioxin in the paper bleaching process, also closed.

But dioxin can enter water from myriad other sources, such as burning trash and medical waste, or in rain and dust laced with dioxin from smokestacks. Tainted runoff is also a big contributor, the study found.

Scientists across the state are planning or working on 83 waterways according to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, but by far the Houston Ship Channel is the most complex and costly. The five-year study is expected to cost \$5 million.

Houston Chronicle

White selects new city council committee on flooding and drainage

As one of his first acts in office, Mayor Bill White established a new council committee on flooding and drainage.

During last year's election, flooding was identified as a major concern for Houston voters and the issue was identified, along with traffic congestion, as a priority by the White campaign.

The newly appointed committee members include Ada Edwards as chair and Toni Lawrence as vice-chair. Also on the committee are Carol Galloway, Adrian Garcia, and M.J. Khan. White said issues of long term funding will be considered and addressed by the Fiscal Affairs Committee.

How to pay for flood management and drainage infrastructure will prove to be the central challenge for the committees. An opportunity to fund projects was missed last year when a proposal to add a \$2-per-month drainage fee to city water bills was overturned in the final days of the Brown administration. ●

February Calendar

For the most complete and current listing of environmental happenings in the Houston-Galveston region, visit CEC's web site at www.cechouston.org and click on Calendar.

Mon, Feb 2

Ornithology Group February Meeting

Where: Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet

When: 7 pm

Contact: Kathy Farr at (713) 939-9375

Fee: Free

Master Gardener Registration

Where: Mercer Arboretum

When: 8 am-3 pm

Contact: (281) 443-8731

Fee: \$150 for the 12 week session

Tue, Feb 3

Ethics of Environmentalism

Where: Houston Arboretum

When: 7-9 pm

Contact: (713) 681-8433

Fee: 15 for member, \$20 for non-member

Wed, Feb 4

Rice Design Alliance Spring Lecture # 3

Where: Brown Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

When: 7:30 pm

Contact: (713) 348-4876

Fee: 7 for member, \$10 for non-member

Fri, Feb 6

Audubon Docent Guild February Winter Owl Prowl

Where: Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary

When: 7-9 pm

Contact: ADG at (713) 464-4900

Fee: \$5; Reservations required

Sat, Feb 7

Houston Arboretum Spring Volunteer Orientation

Where: Houston Arboretum

When: 9 am-12 noon

Contact: (713) 681-8433

Fee: Free

Early Morning Birding

Where: Armand Bayou Nature Center

When: 7:30-9 am

Contact: (281) 474-2551

Fee: Non-members: \$4 adults, \$2 children & seniors; Members - half-price

Sat, Feb 7-Sun, Feb 8

Houston Zoo Overnight Family Program

Eating in Africa

Where: Houston Zoo

When: Call for more information

Contact: (713) 533-6550

Fee: 45 for member, \$55 for non-member

Sat, Feb 7

Houston Zoo Wild Art Class

Where: Houston Zoo

When: 8-10 am

Contact: (713) 533-6550

Fee: 45 for member, \$55 for non-member

Sun, Feb 8

Piney Woods Wildlife Society February Field Trip

Where: Contact for details

When: Contact for details

Contact: Kathy Coward at (281) 893-1816

Fee: Free

Wed, Feb 11

Rice Design Alliance Spring Lecture # 4

Where: Brown Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

When: 7:30 pm

Contact: (713) 348-4876

Fee: 7 for member, \$10 for non-member

Houston Audubon Society February Meeting

Where: Cullen Hall, University of St. Thomas

When: 7:30 pm

Contact: (713) 932-1639

Fee: Free

Lunch Bunch: A Year in Bulbs

Where: Mercer Arboretum

When: 12-1 pm

Contact: (281) 443-8731

Fee: Free

Thu, Feb 12

Outdoor Nature Club February Meeting

Where: Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet

When: 7:30 pm

Contact: Calvin Blakley at (281) 358-5407

Fee: Free

Sat, Feb 14

Houston Audubon Society High Island Work Day

Where: High Island

When: Contact for details

Contact: Winnie Burkett at (713) 932-1639

Fee: Free

Hands-On Workshop - Roses

Where: Mercer Arboretum

When: 9-11 am

Contact: (281) 443-8731

Fee: Free

Houston Zoo Adult Class - Be My Valentine

Where: Houston Zoo

When: 7-9 pm

Contact: (713) 533-6550

Fee: \$25 for member, \$30 for non-member

Tue, Feb 17

A Sporting Chance

The Ecology of the Harvesting of Nature

Where: Houston Arboretum

When: 7-9 pm

Contact: (713) 681-8433

Fee: \$15 for member, \$20 for non-member

Piney Woods Wildlife Society February Meeting

Where: Mercer Arboretum

When: 7:30 pm

Contact: Kathy Coward at (281) 893-1816

Fee: Free

Wed, Feb 18

Rice Design Alliance Spring Lecture # 5

Where: Brown Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

When: 7:30 pm

Contact: (713) 348-4876

Fee: \$7 for member, \$10 for non-member

Thu, Feb 19

Native Plant Society February Meeting

Where: Houston Arboretum

When: 7:30 pm

Contact: Glenn Olsen at (281) 345-4151

Fee: Free

Fri, Feb 20

Houston Zoo Family Dinner Program - Texas Wild

Where: Houston Zoo

When: 6-8 pm

Contact: (713) 533-6550

Fee: \$25 for member, \$30 for non-member

Sat, Feb 21

Cycads and Where to Plant Them in the Modern Prehistoric Landscape

Where: Mercer Arboretum

When: 9-11 am

Contact: (281) 443-8731

Fee: Free; bring money to buy plants

Houston Zoo Program - Peek-A-Boo (ages 4-5)

Where: Houston Zoo

When: 9-10 am or 10:30-11:30 am

Contact: (713) 533-6550

Fee: \$15 for member, \$20 for non-member

Thu, Feb 26

Houston Audubon Galveston County Group

Where: Wortham Auditorium, Rosenberg Library, Galveston

When: 7 pm

Contact: (409) 737-1759

Fee: Free

Sat, Feb 28

Naturalist Explorer Class - Nice Mice & Radical Rats (for ages 5-12)

Where: Houston Arboretum

When: 9 am-12 noon

Contact: (713) 681-8433

Fee: \$9 for member, \$15 for non-member

Houston Audubon Society Field Trip - Damuth Sanctuary

Where: Meet at McDonald's in Cleveland, TX at FM 105 and U.S. Hwy 59

When: 7:30 am

Contact: Carlton Collier at CColl53971@aol.co

Fee: Free

Houston Audubon Galveston County Group Field Trip

Where: Fat Boys bait camp, near Tiki Island exit at the public boat ramp

When: 9 am

Contact: (409) 737-1759

Fee: Free

National Marine Fisheries Service & Sea Turtle Restoration Project Sea Turtle Training

Where: NMFS, 4700 Avenue U, Conference Room

When: 9:30 am

Contact: Carole Allen at (281) 444-6204

Fee: Free

Houston Zoo Program

Dress for Success (ages 6-9)

Where: Houston Zoo

When: 9:30-11:30 am or 1-3 pm

Contact: (713) 533-6550

Fee: \$25 for member, \$30 for non-member

Regular Meetings

Meetings are monthly unless otherwise indicated.

Call to verify before attending a meeting. To list meetings, call 713-524-4CEC or fax 713-524-3311.

American Institute of Architects Environmental Committee 2nd Tues at noon. AIA office 3000 Richmond, Ste 500. 713-520-0155.

American Institute of Chemical Engineers 1st Thurs, Sheraton Astrodome, 610 Loop S. & Kirby Matthew Kolodney, 713-767-3752.

American Planning Assoc. 1st Tues, 11:45 am, The Court at St. James Place. Bret Keast 713-785-0080.

Bayou Preservation Assoc. 2nd Monday of Jan, March, May, Sept & Nov, at the Houston Arboretum, 713-529-6443. PLease RSVP.

BikeHouston last Tues, 6:30 pm, 3015 Richmond 713-652-2555.

Citizens' Environmental Coalition Board meeting 1st Tues, 6 pm, Houston Environmental Center, 3015 Richmond. 713-524-4CEC.

Cypress Creek Flood Control Coalition 3rd Weds, 7:30 pm, Lakewood Forest Utility District Office, 14223 Lakewood Forest Drive Map is on web site at www.ccfcc.org (281) 469-5161

Electric Auto Association, Houston Chapter. 3rd Thurs, 6:30 pm, HEC 3015 Richmond, Suite 280. Ben Chamberlin, 713-975-7744.

Environmental Educator's Exchange 1st Wed of Feb, May, Aug, Nov, 5 pm. Sites vary. Kelly Drinnen, 409-683-4233.

Friends of Texas Wildlife, 2nd Sat, 10 am, Samuel Matthew Park, 1728 E. Hufsmith Road, Tomball, 281-255-8885 or Lynda Guertin, cell 713-825-4095.

Galveston Bay Estuary Program Quarterly. Call for specific dates: 281-332-9937.

Galveston-Houston Assoc. For Smog Prevention (GHASP) 3rd Thurs, 7:30 pm, 3126 Fairhope. Ron Parry, 713-669-1195.

Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, Monthly walking tours, 4th Sun, 2 pm. Historic Neighborhoods Council Meeting, last Sat. Call 713-216-5000 or visit www.gpha.org for times and locations.

Green Party 3rd Mon, Montrose Public Library 4100 Montrose. 713-866-6285 or 713-880-3219.

Gulf Coast Institute: Houston/Gulf Coast Smart Growth Initiative 4th Wed, monthly at 11:30 am, H-GAC, 3555 Timmons, 2nd floor. 713-523-5757.

Harris County Soil & Water Conservation District 1st Wed, 9 am. Bennie Billington, 713-855-8716.

HART - the Houston Animal Rights Team 1st and 3rd Thurs, 7pm, University of St. Thomas 2nd floor, Crooker Center (the student cafeteria) 713-527-9144 .

Historic Neighborhoods Council 1st Sun, 10:30 am, Heights Branch Library. Ramona Davis 713-216-5000.

Houston Arboretum & Nature Center 3rd Wed, 5:45 pm, Houston Arboretum. 713-681-8433.

Houston Archeological Society 2nd Fri, 7:30 pm, M.D. Anderson Hall, Univ. of St. Thomas. Tommy Nuckols, 713-664-8369.

Houston Audubon Society 2nd Wed, Sept-May. 7 pm, University of St. Thomas, Cullen Hall.

713-932-1639.

Houston Bicycle Club, Inc 2nd Tues, except May. 7 pm, Tracy Gee Community Center, 3599 Westcenter Drive. 713-935-2810.

Houston Canoe Club Gen Mtg 2nd Wed, 7 pm, Red Cross Building, 2700 Southwest Frwy. Social Mtg 4th Wed, 7 pm Jax Grill, 1613 Shepherd. 713-467-8857.

Houston Homeowners Assoc 4th Mon (except November, Aug, and Dec), 5:30 pm, First Presbyterian, 5300 S. Main. Michael O'Brian, 281-496-0752.

Houston Renewable Energy Group Last Sunday of Jan, April, July, Oct., 2-4 pm, TSU School of Technology, Room 225. 713-524-2492.

Katy Prairie Conservancy 2nd Tues, 5:30 pm, Houston Environmental Center, 3015 Richmond, Suite 280. 713-523-6135.

Keep Houston Beautiful Quarterly meetings at 2700 Post Oak Blvd., Ste. 1728. 713-621-7020.

Legacy Land Trust 3rd Wed, 6 pm, Houston Environmental Center, 3015 Richmond, Suite 280. 713-524-2100.

League of Women Voters of Houston 2nd Thurs or Fri. 713-784-2923.

Mothers for Clean Air Quarterly. Call Jane Laping 713-526-0110.

Nature Discovery Center of Friends of Bellaire Parks 3rd Mon, 7 pm, Nature Discovery Center, 7112 Newcastle. 713-667-6550.

Native Plant Society of Texas 3rd Thurs (except Dec, Jan), 7pm, Houston Arboretum, 4501 Woodway, 713-431-6346.

Outdoor Nature Club 2nd Thurs, Sept-May. 7:30 pm (social begins at 7), Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet. 281-358-5407.

Piney Woods Wildlife Society 3rd Tues, 7:30 pm, Mercer Arboretum, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. 281-443-8731.

Sierra Club 1st Thur, 7:30 pm, Central Presbyterian, 3788 Richmond @ Timmons. 713-895-9309.

Texas Association of Environmental Professionals 3rd Thurs, 11:30 am, Brady's Landing, 8505 Cypress; Reservations: www.taep.org, reservation@taep.org, or 713-629-9119.

Urban Harvest Community Gardens Quarterly Meeting 4th Tuesday in January, April, July, 6-8 pm; Organic Gardening Classes weekly; workshops for outdoor classroom teachers annually summers. 1900 Kane. 713-880-5540.

Vegetarian Society of Houston 4th Wed, dinner mtg. at various local restaurants. 713-880-1055; Outreach volunteers call 713-880-1055.

White Oak Bayou Assoc 2nd Wed, 7:30 pm, Heights Fire House, 12th & Yale. For agenda, Fred Lazare, President, 713-864-9416 or Teresa Matlock, Treasurer, 713-864-3008.

Wildlife Rehab & Education Central/West: Carol at 713-661-5038 date and times. South/East: 2nd Wed 7 pm Sharon, 281-332-8319.

The Woodlands GREEN Quarterly at WCSC, 8203 Millennium Forest Drive. Christina West, 281-291-5876.

Perspectives

Continued from page 2

We arrived by school bus at the Outdoor Education Center along with students from two other HISD elementary schools just in time to eat lunch in the camp cafeteria. After lunch, my students were combined with students from the other schools into a large group of boys and girls. From these large groups, smaller groups of about 10 were formed and assigned to a program leader. For the next four days, my students would eat, sleep, play and learn to work together with complete strangers.

In order to facilitate team building, the groups were invited by the program leaders to participate in a ropes course challenge. Willing participants don a climbing harness, tie into a belay line (a safety rigging) and climb a ladder to a cable suspended between two trees. It was a bit of high-wire act as the kids slowly tested themselves by crossing the 40-foot span 25 feet above the forest floor.

There were many other activities offered

at the OEC including climbing, rappelling, fishing, ecology hiking, horse-back riding, plant identification, bird-watching, geology, fossil hunting, astronomy, archery, a BB gun turkey shoot and lots of games. Twice a day, students wrote in a journal that chronicled their adventures, experiences and lessons learned. I tagged along with a different group every day and was amazed to see their excitement about all the things that can be done outdoors.

On the last night, we all gathered for the campfire. While it was too cold to have the fire outside, we made do inside one of the classrooms. All the kids sat on the floor while each group presented goofy skits, told corny jokes and laughed until there was no question that they were enjoying themselves. Awards were given for various competitions held during the week. Based upon my experiences from several summers spent at camp, these kids were experiencing the authentic ideal. I wonder who is more excited about returning to camp next year. ☾

In this issue:

Study links air pollution to death from heart disease

Research to begin on wind farm and bird collisions

Perspective: Outdoor education project fun for kids

Car culture may be making Houstonians fat

CEC Notes

Coalition Notes

EcoNotes

February-Calendar

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