

Texans Fight For Big Bend Air Quality

Texans love wide-open skies and bright starry nights, but a shroud of milky-white haze increasingly obscures the breathtaking vistas of West Texas. Recently, a group of West Texans spoke out for clean air in the Big Bend National Park region. On August 21 they testified at an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) public hearing in Arlington, Virginia, where they urged the EPA to adopt rules to cut harmful emissions from the oldest, dirtiest coal-burning power plants. Coalition members included: Mike Davidson, owner of Far Flung Adventures river rafting company;

Karen Hadden, Clean Air Coordinator for the SEED Coalition; Matthew Shetrone, astronomer at the McDonald Observatory; Botanist John Mac Carpenter; Don Dowdey, Chair of the Big Bend Regional Sierra Club, and Fran Sage, Founder and Conservation Chair of the Big Bend Regional Sierra Club.

At a press conference after the hearing, Mike Davidson expressed concerns about the economic impact of air pollution in the Big Bend region. "In America's rural areas, tourism is the best hope for sustained economic growth," he said. "Reducing pollution would

one of the country's ten most endangered national parks due to declines in both air and water quality. On very clear days, maximum visibility is 243 miles, but clear days are becoming less frequent at the Park. In 1999, there were only 43 days with visibility over 100 miles. There are now times when the air pollution is so bad that one cannot even see ten miles, and nearby landmarks as well as entire mountain ranges are obscured. Botanist John Mac Carpenter noted, "Studies show that air pollution is starting to affect grasslands, soil is becoming more acidic, and, if the process

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The haze that is filling the sky and obscuring views in Texas' Big Bend National Park could be reduced by cutting emissions from the oldest, dirtiest coal-burning power plants.

benefit tourism, which is one reason it is important to find solutions to air pollution. The BART rules now on the federal register could help by reducing the sulfur largely responsible for hazy skies in West Texas," Davidson added. BART is the acronym for *Best Available Retrofit Technology*, the current standard for pollution controls.

Big Bend was recently listed as

continues, shifts in vegetation may occur."

The haze that covers Big Bend consists largely of sulfate particles, one of the byproducts of coal-burning power plants. These tiny sulfur particles can be breathed deeply into lungs, and may carry toxic compounds with them.

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Renewable energy investments are more important than ever.

Energy politics – how we produce it, who wins, and who loses – is never far from the front burner of American politics. Since September 11th, the energy discussion has a new and profound meaning. While the country mourns the loss of life from the terrorist attacks, the energy industry is using national security concerns to promote their business agenda and lock in profits at public expense.

The push to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling has never been stronger – or more threatening. This summer's House Energy Bill includes \$38 billion in subsidies to the oil & gas, coal and nuclear industries, according to US PIRG (www.newenergyfuture.org), which are being trumpeted as the path to energy and national security. The list of sneak attacks, budget-busting special loopholes and provisions for giant energy companies is enormous.

New threats in a new time

Unfortunately, current energy proposals will do little to assure national security, let alone safe or clean energy. Maintaining our dependence on oil, even if some of our need were to be met in the short term, virtually assures we will be compelled to continue our involvement in affairs in the Middle East. Traditional central electric-generation plants are highly vulnerable to attack. Terrorists knocking out a nuclear plant would create a ground zero that dwarfs the imagination. Even the loss of a large

coal plant could thrust states and regions into upheaval and confusion.

Then there is the environmental rational. We know that oil and coal are warming our planet and choking our cities. We know there is no safe way to handle nuclear waste. There is no sense in paying the richest companies in the world even more taxpayer dollars for more dirty and dangerous energy. This is not to say we can shut down every coal and nuclear plant and refinery now – we can't. But there is a better way to invest in and secure our future, and if we don't start now, when will we?

Better technologies will better protect America

Energy efficiency, renewable energy and the next generation of advanced energy systems – read fuel cells – are where our collective energy and dollars should be put. The United States wastes over 30% of the electricity generated because our homes, buildings and plants are inefficient. If we improve our efficiency we free up vast amounts of energy and create fiscal savings that can be used to invest in the economy.

Increasing fuel efficiency standards for cars and trucks would also yield tremendous savings. Just a three-mile per gallon increase in the average fuel economy of our cars would save us more oil than the Arctic Refuge could ever produce.

Right now, wind power in west Texas is enjoying the largest building spurt

for renewable energy in a long time, anywhere in the nation. Wind power is bringing inexpensive, clean energy to Texans and it is helping to rejuvenate rural economies. Ranchers and farmers are benefiting from royalty checks on wind power, just as they used to profit from pump-jacks.

Advanced energy technologies like fuel cells promise to provide us the best kind of power in our future – and they are coming tantalizingly close to market. Fuel cells generate power with virtually no emissions and can be small enough to power a cell phone or big enough to power an entire office building. Hard to attack and free from pollution, fuel cells should be getting the public investments and emphasis.

I'm proud that the SEED Coalition and its citizen activists have been part of creating a foothold for these changes in Texas. In the last four years, we have dramatically cut down pollution from power plants, secured a place for renewable energy in our electric system, and created a vision for the future that is smart and achievable. By continuing to work hard and help citizens participate in the democratic process, I'm confident we can continue to make tremendous gains for our state, our nation and our future.



Peter Altman is the Executive Director of the Sustainable Energy & Economic Development Coalition. He can be contacted at 512-479-7744

Legislative Roundup

Environmentalists won several victories during the 77th session of the Texas Legislature. You can find a report of the results by the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club at texas.sierraclub.org. The following is a summary.

TNRCC Reauthorization

At the heart of the bill are new regulations that allow the agency to reward compliance with regulatory flexibility while requiring tougher enforcement standards for chronic bad actors. Two big victories in the bill, closing the Grandfather Loophole and controlling “upset” air emissions, will reduce air pollution relatively quickly.

Closing the Grandfather Loophole

Grandfathered facilities east of I-35/I-37 must install pollution control equipment by March 1, 2007.

Grandfathered plants elsewhere must install pollution controls by March 1, 2008. These plants will all be required to install equipment that conforms to a 10 year-old standard of “Best Available Control Technology” (BACT).

SB 5—Clean Air Incentives

SB 5 provides an array of incentives for reducing air pollution. The bill establishes three types of incentive programs: retrofitting or replacing diesel engines; reducing pollution that results from cooling homes, offices, and government buildings; and rebates ranging from \$1,250 to \$5,000 for the purchase of the cleanest cars sold in the United States.

These programs will provide tools to help Texas cities meet the EPA “one hour” ozone standard, while preparing the state to meet EPA standards for “8

hour” smog readings and ultra-fine particles. If implemented successfully, these programs will also reduce the gases that contribute to global warming.

A Loss: the Polluter Volume Discount

Under Texas law, \$26 per ton pollution fees are capped at 4,000 tons for each pollutant. The largest sources of pollution in Texas effectively get volume discounts, while the average small business pays the full fee on all emissions. Sixty-five of Texas’ largest polluters enjoy this discount while more than 1,800 pay the full fee. The Texas Center for Policy Studies, Environmental Defense and Public Citizen proposed a thoughtful, balanced measure to drop the fee to \$20 across the board. While increasing fairness, it would increase funding for badly needed air quality programs by roughly \$7 million per year. The proposal was rejected by the house and stripped out of the Senate by industry lobbyists. ♦PA



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The Sustainable Energy and Economic Development (SEED) Coalition is a network of Texans that advocate the use of renewable resources and energy efficiency to meet Texas' electric needs and create new jobs.

SEED educates Texans about the economic, environmental, and health benefits of a sustainable and renewable energy strategy, tracks relevant policy and legislation, and informs the public of opportunities to voice their opinions.

SEED is supported by contributions from foundations as well as individuals, businesses and organizations.

The SEED Coalition would like to thank all those who contacted decision makers, speakers who attended events, and everyone who made 2001 such a successful year. We greatly appreciate all of your hard work.

These folks went above and beyond the call of duty:

Rick Abraham • Joe Bevilaqua • Faye Blackmon • Sherril Blackmon
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Global Warming and Texas



For more than a century, Texas has been a world leader in energy production. Now, “business as usual” is threatening our environment and our way of life. But you can help Texas stop global warming, clean our air, and become a world leader in a clean energy future.

An overwhelming majority of scientists agree that the burning of fossil fuels is releasing greenhouse gases, which cause global temperatures to rise. The main component of these compounds is carbon dioxide.

If Texas were a sovereign nation,

she would rank seventh in the world in greenhouse gas emissions. Texas ranks first in the United States in these emissions. As a major contributor to global warming, Texas has the responsibility to reduce those emissions and the opportunity to take the lead.

In the last century, the Earth’s temperature has risen more than one degree Fahrenheit. While this may not seem significant, consider that this is the fastest warming in ten thousand years and that the warming is in proportion to the levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Climate scientists are predicting another 2.5 to 10 degrees Fahrenheit of warming over the next 100 years. To put

the projected rate of warming in perspective: the last Ice Age resulted from a drop in 4 to 9 degrees Fahrenheit over tens of thousands of years.

The consequences of global warming pose a grave threat to Texas. Droughts and flooding are increasing, and cases of dengue fever (a disease usually confined to the tropics) have appeared in Houston and the Rio Grande Valley. Rising sea levels, combined with reduced fresh water flow to the coasts, will endanger the fragile coastal estuaries so important to the fishing and tourism industries. Texans must also be prepared for the long-term effects on agriculture and drinking water supplies if global warming continues unchecked.

Texas-Sized Solutions / Texas-Sized Opportunities

Reversing global warming will require significant efficiency measures and our transition to clean, renewable energy. And doing so will also benefit the Texas economy. A recent study of the state’s economy by the Tellus Institute found that early, aggressive policies to cut greenhouse gas emissions would yield significant economic growth for the state. Using a mix of market-based financial incentives and regulatory changes, Texas could cut carbon emissions 34



The Cool Texas Network, cofounded by the SEED Coalition, sponsored five global warming forums featuring Pulitzer Prize-winning author Ross Gelbspan and nationally recognized ecotheologian Reverend Sally Bingham across the state. (Clockwise from left: Rev. Sally Bingham, SEED Coalition Dir. Peter Altman, Ross Gelbspan, and Texas Impact Dir. Bee Moorhead.)

Join SEED's Push for a Texas Global Warming Plan!

Go to www.coolTexas.net to find out more and take action on global warming in Texas.

Or contact SEED at 800-580-8845 or info@seedcoalition.org.

percent while creating a net 84,000 new jobs and saving the average Texas family \$700 a year by the end of the decade (log on www.coolTexas.net for the full study). This is possible in part because Texas leads the nation in potential to generate renewable energy from wind, solar and biomass sources. We can and must take advantage of these resources to help stop global warming, but doing so would also substantially improve air quality and thus help to solve one of Texas' most challenging public health problems. Clean energy solutions can cut emissions of smog-producing nitrogen oxide by a third and lung-clogging soot particles by 40 percent.

Clearly, Texas must develop a plan that will help stop global warming, clean our air, create jobs and boost the Texas economy.

In August of 2000, the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC) took the first steps to develop a global warming plan for Texas. The TNRCC Commissioners decided to develop a global warming gas inventory and asked staff for recommendations on rules to reduce emissions. The inventory is a great step, but TNRCC now appears to be shying away from its own commitment to look at policies to reduce emissions. The final report will be made available on January 18, 2002. ♦AT

What can you do?

Some ways you can help stop global warming in your daily life: switch to a renewable energy provider, reduce and combine car trips or buy a more fuel-efficient car, replace light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs, insulate your water heater and turn its thermostat down to 120 degrees, and recycle at least 50 percent of your cans, bottles, plastic and papers.

You can help!

Write to the TNRCC decision-makers and urge them to stand by their commitments of last year by creating rules that will help stop global warming, clean our air, create jobs and boost the Texas economy. Remember to send your letter no later than January 1st, 2002!

These are some items that we suggest you use in your letter to make it more effective.

1. Emphasize that global warming is a serious problem that will affect everyone living in Texas. Solving this issue will involve action from everyone. I urge you to do what you committed to do last year and create rules that will help stop global warming, clean our air, create jobs and boost the Texas economy.
2. If you plan to take any of the emissions reducing steps suggested above, tell the TNRCC so in your letter.
3. Ask the TNRCC to respond to your comments in writing.

You can send your letter back to our office and we will use it during a press event, or you can send it directly to the TNRCC. Address your letter and envelope: Executive Director Jeff Saitas TNRCC PO Box 13087 MC 109 Austin, TX 78711-3087

Global Warming and Texas FACTS

September 5th, 2000 is considered to be the hottest day in the history of Texas with 15 local record highs broken including Possum Kingdom Lake at 114 degrees and Austin not far behind at 112 degrees. During June of 2001, Houston was ravaged by Tropical Storm Allison. With damages exceeding \$5 billion, it is the costliest storm in U.S. history.



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December, 2001

Dear friend,

From fighting coal burning power plants, to cleaning up oil refineries, to creating policies to solve global warming, the Sustainable Energy and Economic Development Coalition, better known as the SEED Coalition, is taking action. We are successfully advocating for policies that are reducing pollution, promoting clean energy, and building a sustainable future for Texans.

And we are doing it with the help of people like you.

The dirty air in Texas causes cancer and aggravates asthma. It is ruining our natural heritage in places like Big Bend. And the burning of fossil fuels also has a global impact: climate change. What we do in Texas directly affects people in other parts of the world.

The SEED Coalition believes that citizens working together can create **a vision of a healthier future: one in which clean energy meets most of our needs, children are not exposed to toxic air pollution, and policies make environmental and economic sense.** So, we use strong research, media advocacy, grassroots organizing, and policy development to achieve our goals.

We are a small group of hard working citizens whose effort is strengthened by people like you who have sent letters, attended regulatory meetings and protests, and helped educate others about our pressing energy issues.

We have an ambitious plan for the next year, and your tax-deductible donation of \$25 or more to the SEED Coalition is crucial if we are to succeed. Together we can build a healthier, more just future.

The problems we are facing with our unsustainable energy use are very real and must be addressed. For example, look at the air pollution problem in Houston. This city ranks first in the nation in the number of smokestacks, cancer-causing chemical emissions from industrial pollution sources, and childhood cancer. With 3.5 million people in Houston exposed to hazardous air pollution, one cannot wonder at the prevalence of asthma, lung cancer, and bronchitis.

And then there's global warming. The most devastating impacts of global warming are expected to hit the very people least likely to protect themselves: From millions in Bangladesh who will be forced to flee lowlands flooded by rains and rising seas, to communities throughout the equatorial region whose already limited agricultural base will be further withered by punishing droughts and higher temperatures, to the poor all over the world who will not be able to afford higher prices for food, water and shelter.

At the SEED Coalition, we know that there are other energy alternatives – ones that will build our future – and *this* is what we are fighting for.

In the ten years since we were founded, the SEED Coalition has made great progress: cleaning up polluting facilities, securing commitments for renewable energy, and educating the public.

Here's a small sampling of what we have accomplished:

- SEED played a key role in developing and implementing state policies that mandate power plants to cut over 130,000 tons of pollution a year and that require electric providers to develop nearly 2,000 megawatts of renewably generated electricity – the largest mandate passed in any state.
- Working with faith and environmental groups, we successfully lobbied the state of Texas to begin its first global warming plan. A report on emissions and possible actions is due in January 2002.
- SEED has helped make air pollution a major issue in Texas by generating high profile news coverage of the issue – including front page stories in the state's flagship newspaper about the state's biggest polluter – TXU.
- In July, the SEED Coalition fought a congressional rollback of the Clean Air Act by organizing the *Gasoline Alley Victims Tour*, which brought individuals from refinery communities in Texas and Louisiana to Washington, D. C., to tell Congress to keep the law strong.
- Last summer, the SEED Coalition organized tours, protests and press conferences around the country to counter Bush's Energy Plan, which we dubbed *the Bush Toxic Two-step*.

(continued next page)

We have accomplished quite a lot in the last year, but we need your support to keep the pressure on the polluters. Please send your generous tax-deductible donation to the SEED Coalition today.

Rest assured, in the new year we plan to do even more to advocate for clean energy and work to protect the air we breathe and the water we drink.

- We are launching a nation-wide effort to prevent toxic pollution from oil refineries – the Refinery Reform Campaign. Not only will this clean up the air, but it will also protect the communities that neighbor these polluting facilities.
- The SEED Coalition will continue its efforts to combat global warming through Campaign ExxonMobil. In addition to increasing our outreach to shareholders and investors, we will reach out to a broader segment of the public to pressure this giant energy company to take a responsible position on global warming.
- And, of course, we will continue to fight for renewable energy here in Texas and throughout the nation.

We have an ambitious plan for the next year, and your financial support is crucial if we are to succeed. Our success depends on the participation of people like you, people who care about clean energy, healthy communities, and the democratic participation in the decisions that affect our lives.

We rely on you for sending letters, attending meetings, and making your voice heard. But we also rely on your financial support to help us do the work – from educating reporters to analyzing energy proposals, from organizing rallies in the streets to forwarding progressive ideas for energy policy.

Please send your generous donation today.

Thank you,



Peter Altman
Director

P.S. I know that this year has been difficult for many of us due to the tragic events of September 11th. The work that we are doing is helping to build the foundation of a more secure and just future. Together I know we can make a difference. Thanks.

**You can help make clean, affordable,
renewable energy a reality in Texas.
Join the *SEED Coalition TODAY!***

With your support we will continue to be the state's strongest advocates for a sustainable energy future in Texas. Your generous contribution will make it possible for the SEED Coalition to continue the fight for clean energy and a strong economy for years to come.

"The SEED Coalition is one of the most effective, innovative and exciting groups working on promoting sustainable energy and stopping global warming."

–Ross Gelbspan, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of The Heat is On

**Complete this form to join SEED's campaign for clean air for Texas' children.
Mail the completed form and your tax deductible contribution TODAY!**

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

E-mail _____

- Please send me e-mail updates about Texas energy and air quality issues.
- Please contact me only when there is a new action for me to take.

Enclosed please find my tax deductible contribution of:

- \$15 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$250 _____ (other)

**Mail completed form to:
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Something is Fishy

Mercury Pollution in Texas

Mercury, a toxic heavy metal, is a hazardous pollutant that can cause damage to the human nervous system resulting in learning disabilities, tremors, birth defects, mental retardation and even death. It has also been linked to autism. Fetuses, because of their rapid brain development, are particularly vulnerable.

The single largest source of mercury emissions is coal-burning power plants, which are responsible for 34% of the total mercury emitted by all industries. Although the EPA reports that mercury is the most hazardous air pollutant emitted by utilities, the industry has done nothing to solve the problem. Medical waste and municipal incinerators are being required to reduce their mercury emissions, leaving power plants the only unregulated source.

When released into the environment, mercury transports easily through the air – sometimes for thousands of miles. And a small amount can contaminate an entire ecosystem: just 1/70th of a teaspoon of mercury will contaminate a 20-acre lake enough to make the fish unsafe to eat. Because Texas power plants release over 9,000 pounds of mercury into the air every year, this is a very serious problem.

Mercury deposited in lakes, rivers and oceans is converted to methylmercury by aquatic organisms. Due to “bioaccumulation,” fish can contain mercury levels up to 100,000 times higher than the surrounding water.

Fish and other seafood are the main source of methylmercury in the human diet. Eating contaminated fish

could expose more than 1 in 4 pregnant women to mercury levels that may damage the health of their developing fetus.

Mercury pollution is contaminating fish in Texas lakes and rivers, as well as in the Gulf of Mexico, yet Texas has no routine monitoring and there are many lakes that have not been tested at all for mercury contamination. It is time for TNRCC, Texas Parks and Wildlife, and Texas Department of Health to work together to routinely test fish and inform the public of the results. Parents need to know how to protect not only their own health but also the health of their unborn babies and young children.

Power plants must reduce mercury emissions by at least 90%. The SEED Coalition and Public Citizen’s Texas Office are developing rules that will be submitted to TNRCC to require such power plant clean up.

The SEED Coalition, WE CAN (Longview, Texas) and Texas Black Bass Unlimited representatives have been speaking to Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs, church groups, schools, environmental and community organizations, and are happy to provide presentations. Call 512-479-7744 to make arrangements. ◊KH

Mercury Advisories

The Seafood Safety Division of Texas Department of Health is supposed to issue advisories and bans when consumption of contaminated fish poses a risk to human health. The fish from many lakes have never been tested for mercury. The threshold level for determining mercury advisories, 0.7 ppm in Texas, needs to be tightened to be more protective of health. The EPA suggests 0.2 ppm, although there really is no safe level of mercury.

Fish advisory listings by county are available at:

www.tdh.state.tx.us/bfds/ssd/
or call 512-719-0215.

More mercury information is available at www.seedcoalition.org.

Act Now!

The Clean Smokestacks Act of 2001 by Waxman and Boehlert, introduced in March, will clean up four major power plant pollutants. Current cosponsors include Rep. Martin Frost, Sheila Jackson Lee, Sylvestre Reyes, and Eddie Bernice Johnson.

- Download our mercury petition off the web site and gather signatures (or we can mail you a copy)
- Go to www.seedcoalition.org to write and fax a letter to your Congressional Representative, asking them to cosponsor the Clean Smokestacks Act.

Empowering Democracy

SEED Coalition staff took a giant step forward on promoting democracy and citizen activism by initiating, organizing and hosting the first-ever “Empowering Democracy” Training to help activists and citizens understand how to challenge corporate power, demand accountability and organize effectively.

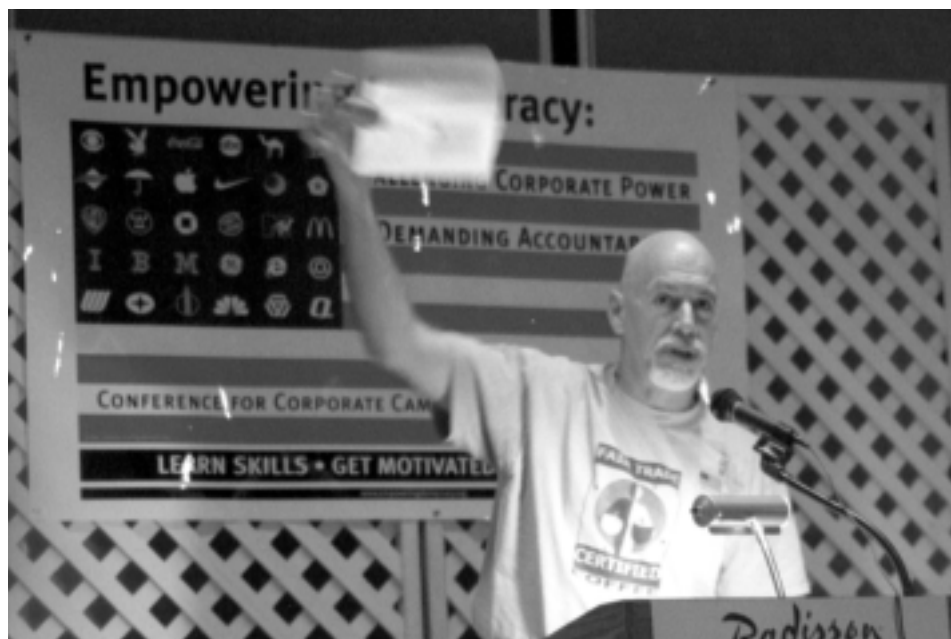
From May 27th - 30th in Dallas, Texas, some of the biggest names in the environmental, labor and social justice movement combined forces to organize the first annual conference to teach organizers and community groups how to take on big corporations. Roughly 200 people, representing at least 40 different groups attended the conference entitled “Empowering Democracy: Challenging Corporate Power and Demanding Accountability.” The Conference featured training workshops and plenaries on topics such as “Coalition Building” and “Corporations in Your Community—How to take them on.” Keynote speakers Jim Hightower, Kevin Danaher of Global Exchange, Baldemar Velasquez of the Farm

Labor Organizing Committee, and others gave the conference attendees a variety of perspectives on corporate campaigning.

Prompted by the growing movement for corporate

people engaged in corporate campaigns together on a regular basis.

Over 50 of the top trainers in the country came to Dallas to teach organizers how to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of their corporate targets, develop campaign strategies that will work, and train people in the many tactics and skills



Kevin Danaher, cofounder of Global Exchange, speaking at the Empowering Democracy Training. Photo by Harold Daniel.

accountability to achieve political, social and environmental goals, this annual conference was established to create a powerful training ground for organizations as well as to bring

that a successful corporate campaign may draw upon. Participants also put their new skills to work by joining in an action aimed at ExxonMobil at its annual meeting on May 30 in Dallas.

The Empowering Democracy Conference could not have happened without the generous financial support of the Beldon Fund, Turner Foundation, and others. Their support also helped many with limited resources attend the conference by awarding scholarships for travel and lodging. The conference was organized by the Corporate Campaign Working Group, which was assembled for the purpose of initiating an infrastructure to support and train corporate campaigners.

Campaign ExxonMobil and the SEED Coalition initiated the Working Group and were this year's host organization for the conference. ◇AT

Big Bend

Continued from page 1

BART would require plants built between 1962 and 1977 to substantially reduce sulfur dioxide and other pollutants and would bring cleaner, clearer air to national parks and wilderness areas like Big Bend. In addition, it would remove millions of tons of pollution from the air breathed by tens of millions of Americans each day. In May, EPA announced it would move forward with a plan that would cut air pollutants such as sulfur dioxide, smog and

dangerous “fine particle” pollution from the oldest and dirtiest coal-burning power plants.

At the hearings, the coalition members urged the Bush administration not to back away from strong BART rules, and they believe that their testimony was extremely productive. EPA responded positively and listened carefully to all presentations. The Agency's request for full written documentation of testimony provided by the Texas delegation was a positive sign that the information was deemed significant. ◇LG

Yes! I want to join SEED Coalition's Activist Network!

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-mail _____

Please send me e-mail updates about Texas energy and air quality issues.

Please contact me only when there is a new action for me to take.

***I also want to contribute to SEED's campaign for a clean future for Texas.
Enclosed please find my tax deductible contribution of:***

\$15 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$250 _____ (other)



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