

TEN WAYS TO GET YOUR FRIENDS TO THE POLLS page 6

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Matthew Aresco Tallahassee, Florida
Turtle biologist and founder of the Lake Jackson Ecopassage Alliance, age 40

He Brakes for Turtles

Four years ago, I was driving near my home and noticed a bunch of dead turtles on the highway by Lake Jackson. I realized there was a big problem. More than 22,000 vehicles a day travel on U.S. Highway 27, which bisects the lake. It was a dry season and the lake was drawing down. The turtles were being killed as they tried to cross the highway from one part of the lake to the other, where there was more water.

"I picked up all the dead turtles, took photos, and sent a letter—with pictures—to the Florida Department of Transportation. For the next 40 days, I went out every day looking for turtles so I could move them safely. As I waited, another 340 turtles were killed. Finally, the DOT came out with me and said, 'Yeah, turtles are getting killed here, but doing something about it would take years of planning.'

"I came up with a temporary solution: a fence to keep turtles from going into the road and to direct them into a culvert. Finally DOT gave me the fencing. One day they came out with their truck, dumped

22 rolls off the back, and drove away!

"I put up nearly 2,200 feet of fence by myself. It took five days and got immediate results. The first year I collected about 4,800 turtles at the fence and moved them across the road—Florida cooters, yellow-bellied sliders, common musk turtles, and Florida soft-shell turtles mostly.

"I formed a nonprofit group called the Lake Jackson Ecopassage Alliance in 2002. I wanted to make it more of a community-based effort rather than a one-man crusade. We generated hundreds of letters to DOT and the county, and got \$100,000 allocated to see what it would take to design a permanent wildlife crossing under the highway so turtles, alligators, snakes, and frogs could safely cross.

"I still monitor the fences, but I'm also working closely with the people doing the study. I've given them all my data.

"I've loved turtles since I was six or seven. They are fascinating animals, partly because they're so long-lived. I give them a different kind of respect."

—interview by Marilyn Berlin Snell



AVOIDING ROADS TO RUIN: About one-third of U.S. turtle species are reaching dangerously low numbers, and scientists believe their decline is caused in part by increasing traffic. Wildlife overpasses and underpasses can reduce roadkill while guarding against habitat loss and fragmentation.

▶ **ON THE WEB** Check out www.lakejacksonturtles.org.

6. Learn from experience. In 1973, OPEC's embargo reminded us not to rely on imported oil. In 1979, the Ayatollah Khomeini warned us again. In 1999, it was Saddam Hussein. In 2003, we went to war in Iraq, and we're still getting 63 percent of our oil from abroad. Vote for a candidate who believes in new energy technologies, efficiency, and renewables.

7. Ruin a campaign consultant's day. The real aim of those distracting, misleading, and negative political ads is not to make you vote for someone, but to make you so disgusted with politics that you'll stay home altogether. Spoil their cynical scheme by voting on the issues that matter.

8. Feel like a fat cat. The politicians and parties are probably going to spend \$2 billion on this year's election, with most of the money aimed at about 5 million swing voters. That adds up to \$400 a vote. So if you get five friends who wouldn't otherwise have voted to the polls, you're contributing the equivalent of \$2,000—the max even a fat cat can give to a federal candidate.

9. If someone is trying to steal your vote, it must be valuable. In Florida, efforts are again being made to suppress the African-American vote, and many states are using unreliable electronic voting machines. Refuse to be intimidated, and if your voting machines don't keep a paper trail, vote by paper absentee ballot.

10. Friends stick together. For more than a hundred years, Sierra Club members have been fighting for John Muir's mountains, the Great Lakes, and the eastern forests; for grizzlies, wolves, and desert tortoises; for clean air and water. This year, everything we've struggled for over the past century is at stake. You can save it with your vote. ■

CARL POPE is the Sierra Club's executive director. He is the author, with Sierra senior editor Paul Rauber, of *Strategic Ignorance: Why the Bush Administration Is Recklessly Destroying a Century of Environmental Progress*. E-mail carl.pope@sierraclub.org.