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Society promotes public awareness of wildlife issues

By Rachel Cowan Reporter

Concern over environmental issues during the past decade has encouraged Texas A&M students to get involved in issues affecting wildlife through the Green Earth Society.

Founded two years ago at A&M, the society distributes literature and invites speakers to inform students about environmental concerns. It is affiliated with several national and international organizations, including the Greenpeace Society, Earth First, the Sierra Club and animal rights organizations.

The society deals with issues such as nuclear waste disposal and endangered species and promotes local environmental issues including storage of radioactive substances and improper disposal of toxic chemicals on campus — a concern of the society since its formation, says Gilbert Gonzalez, society president.

The society has helped set aside a

park in College Station to protect an endangered orchid species, indigenous to Brazos County, which has been found in only four counties nationwide.

"Right now, we mainly distribute literature and bring in speakers to get people interested in peace issues," Gonzalez, a senior psychology major, says. "We hope to get more actively involved in these issues instead of just educating people."

Several peace groups at A&M, including the Green Earth Society, sponsored a march last year to demonstrate their concern for human and environmental issues, he says.

"That day, people from different universities, like North Texas State, were here for a meeting," Gonzalez says. "They were surprised that a conservative school like A&M was having a march."

Well-known environmental groups, such as the Sierra Club and the Greenpeace Society, are becoming more aware of the A&M organization, he says.

Senator urged to help push FDA approval of anti-AIDS drug sale

AUSTIN (AP) — A spokesman for hundreds of AIDS victims in Texas has sought help on Capitol Hill to pressure the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to speed approval of the sale of ribavirin, a drug reportedly effective in treating the disease.

Troy Stokes of Austin said in a letter to Sen. Lloyd Bentsen, D-Texas, that "hundreds, perhaps thousands" of AIDS victims in Texas and California have for months been using ribavirin bought in Mexico on advice of their physicians.

But he said the Mexican connection — an informal arrangement with Mexican representatives of the drug's California manufacturer for bulk, discount purchases of ribavirin in Mexico — was cut in February because of pressure from Mexican authorities.

Stokes said the drug still is available in pharmacies in Mexico but no longer can be bought in large quantities or at a discount.

"In short," Stokes said in his letter to Bentsen, "what we have is hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Texans who took part in this wearisome arrangement because their doctor advised it. The doctors still advise the medication, but do not know where their patients can be supplied."

Ribavirin is an anti-viral drug that, after clinical trials at medical centers throughout the United States, was found in January to be effective in slowing the progression to AIDS with minimal side effects.

Stokes was the car-pool coordinator for a Houston group that made the bulk purchases in Matamoros, Mexico for about six months before the sales were stopped, he said.

The Houston group, in cooperation with manufacturer ICN Pharmaceuticals Inc., "facilitated the importation of enough ribavirin via Brownsville-Matamoros each month to medicate 1,000 patients for one month," Stokes told Bentsen. A San Francisco group of AIDS victims also arranged for ribavirin shipments from Mexico, Stokes said.

Bentsen's office passed Stokes' letter along to the FDA, which last week assigned two investigators from the agency's Austin and San Antonio offices to question Stokes about the bulk purchases.

Stokes said he signed an affidavit drawn by the investigators saying that he had no first-hand knowledge of the details of the arrangement between groups in Houston and San Francisco and ICN for the bulk discount purchases.

John Davis, with the San Antonio office of the FDA, said the investigation was initiated only to keep Bentsen's office informed.

"All drugs for AIDS have been given the fast track at FDA," Davis told the *Austin American-Statesman*.

A spokesman for the FDA says approval of ribavirin has been delayed due to inadequate documentation from the drug's manufacturer.

"We received their application in late January and wrote them for more information in early February," said Brad Stone with the public affairs division of the FDA.

"When we receive the material we will continue our review," Stone said. "It will be expedited. We're working to review any application for AIDS-related drugs as quickly as possible."

Howard Bragman, a spokesman for ICN Pharmaceuticals at its Costa Mesa, Calif., headquarters, said the firm would have no comment on the delay.

Officials say FDA failed to test food

AUSTIN (AP) — The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is coming under fire because of failure to test millions of tons of fruits and vegetables imported into the United States each year from Mexico and other countries for pesticide residues.

The FDA tests less than 1 percent of the fruit and vegetables that comes across U.S. borders, the *Austin American-Statesman* reported on Sunday, quoting from congressional studies and interviews with various officials.

FDA officials have four inspectors to cover the 1,200-plus miles of the Texas-Mexico border from Brownsville to El Paso. About half of their time is spent on other domestic duties, officials say.

General Accounting Office auditor Ron Hughes, who conducted a study of the FDA program to monitor pesticides in U.S.-produced foods, said the agency needs to devote more time and money to pesticide monitoring.

FDA officials in Washington are drafting a reply to the accounting office reports, but meanwhile maintain food brought into this country is safe.

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