

## Looking back at 55 years of the Rio Grande Chapter

2018 is our 55th anniversary. Throughout the year the *Sierran* be looking back at some of the events, issues, victories and struggles that shaped New Mexico and El Paso.



Volume 56, Issue 1

News of the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter: New Mexico and West Texas

January / February / March 2018

# United, we win

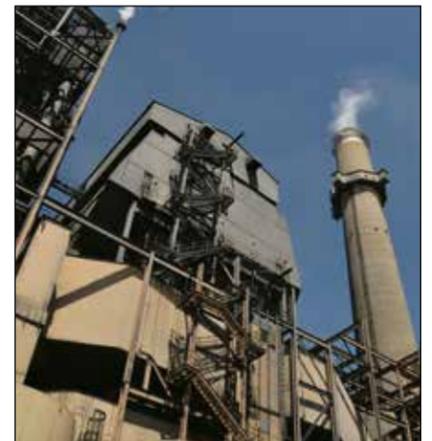
Public engagement — people showing up — won an astonishing series of victories just when all seemed lost in 2017. But there's no time to rest.



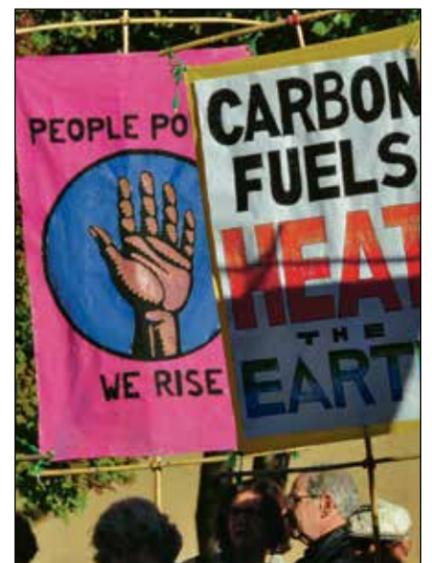
Marisel Nanasi/New Energy Economy



Eleanor Bravo/Food & Water Watch



PNM



David McGahey

**Above and top right:** Sandoval County residents indicate they oppose a weak oil and gas ordinance that lacked tribal input. It seemed sure to pass, but public opposition stopped it (Page 3). **Clockwise from right:** Two units at San Juan coal plant stopped polluting in December, and another N.M. utility is shooting for 48% renewable energy (Page 10); New Mexico withdrew plans to delete climate-change references from science texts after loud public outcry (Page 7); protections for El Paso's Castner Range became law (Page 5); a U.S. Fish and Wildlife plan is bad news for Mexican wolves; lobos need our help (Page 15).



Wolf Conservation Center



Mark Clune

### EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET



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## More inside:

### Executive Committee elections

Meet our recently elected group and chapter leaders. **Page 4**

### Endorsed candidates cruise to victory

In Albuquerque, Tim Keller takes over as mayor and Cynthia Borrego joins an increasingly pro-environment City Council. **Page 6**

### El Paso youth movement is 40

Volunteer leaders have been building youth appreciation for the outdoors for decades. **Page 11**

**More:** **Central N.M. Group:** Page 6. **Northern New Mexico Group:** Page 13. **Pajarito Group:** Page 14. **Hikes:** Pages 15-16

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**Lajla Ryen**

# Rio Grande Sierran publication information

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For extra copies, e-mail riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org.

**The opinions expressed in signed articles in the Rio Grande Sierran are the opinions of the writers and not necessarily those of the Sierra Club.**

Articles may be reprinted for nonprofit purposes, provided that credit is given to the author and the *Rio Grande Sierran*. (Please let us know if you reprint.)

## 2 Rio Grande Sierran

Products and services advertised in the *Rio Grande Sierran* are not necessarily endorsed by the Sierra Club.

Contributions — articles, photos, artwork, poems, letters to the editor, paid advertisements — are welcome. Send to the editor (see Page 2). Submissions by Rio Grande Chapter members will take precedence over others.

Articles chosen to be published are subject to editing.

Letters to the editor may be up to 500 words, are also subject to editing and are printed at the discretion of the editorial board.

The contributor's name and email address will be printed as a source of more information, unless the contributor

specifies otherwise. Submissions must be received by the 10th of the month prior to publication.

Editorial practices as developed and adopted by the Rio Grande Chapter will be used in production of the *Rio Grande Sierran*.

Contents of the Group pages are the responsibility of the editor for that Group and any policies that are in place from that Group.

**If you wish to opt out of the mailed copy of this newsletter and read it**

**online:** Contact Mona Blaber at monablaber@gmail.com. and tell her you want to be on the opt-out list.

## Volunteer

### opportunities

We're looking for outings leaders and other volunteers for our new Inspiring Connections Outdoors program that fosters appreciation of the outdoors in children.

Please contact Ray Greenwell at matrng@hofstra.edu if you're interested in helping out.

**Membership questions?** Call 415-977-5653 or e-mail membership.services@sierraclub.org

**January/February/March 2018**

**Sandoval County residents rallied, testified and spoke out for months against the Stoddard oil and gas ordinance. A December Rio Rancho Observer poll logged 588 votes opposing the ordinance and only 39 in favor.**

Photo by Miya King -Flaherty



# Lawmakers support Chaco coalition

By Miya King-Flaherty  
Public Lands fellow

The fight to protect Chaco Culture National Historical Park and the communities of Greater Chaco is becoming a priority for lawmakers both locally and nationally. On Dec. 19, the New Mexico Congressional Delegation released a letter to Bureau of Land Management State Director Aden Seidlitz that essentially calls for cancelling the March 8, 2018, lease sale until meaningful and thorough tribal consultation has occurred. This is a victory and thanks to our collective efforts, we are making progress.

Locally, preserving greater Chaco also has the attention of the New Mexico Legislature Indian Affairs Committee. On Oct. 5, the committee held a meeting at Ojo Encino Chapter House to hear about issues affecting communities in the Tri-Chapter area, which consists of Ojo Encino, Counselor and Torreon/Star Lake Chapters. These Navajo chapters are also within the Bureau of Land Management's Mancos Shale-Gallup Resource Management Plan Amendment area. The most pressing issue? Fracking and its widespread impacts.

The Bureau of Land Management was invited, but did not attend.

The Tri-Chapter leaders and representatives presented first and talked about the deteriorating condition of the rural, community roads, which are constantly used by heavy oil and gas trucks. These roads were built for residents to travel home and to work, for school buses transporting children and other community uses. They were never intended to withstand the heavy weight of trucks transporting fracking chemicals, produced water or sand for drilling operations.

This year, community members testified, road conditions were increasingly dangerous due to ramped up drilling activity. Some rural roads had ruts as deep as 1 foot, and earlier this year, school days were cancelled because the roads were impassable.

The committee also heard from Navajo community leader and former Torreon Chapter Council delegate Daniel Tso, Sierra Club and Health Impact Assessment volunteer Teresa Seamster, San Juan Health Equity Collaborative Coordinator and Hózhóog na' adá study coordinator Hazel James, and community member Mario Atencio. The presentations revealed a host of fracking impacts experienced by communities living in Greater Chaco.

State Sen. William Soules agreed that marginalized communities are disproportionately impacted by development. State Rep. Liz Thompson committed to fully supporting the needs of the community. And Sen. Benny Shendo made a motion for the committee to address road conditions.

# Sandoval people power

An industry-favored oil and gas measure had seemed a lock, but nearly unanimous citizen opposition did it in

Message from Miya King-Flaherty:

The surprise outcome of the Dec. 14 Sandoval County Commission meeting gives us hope that when we take action against public policies that are bad for our health, our communities, and our families, it truly matters.

All your calling, emailing, testimony and rallying made a difference. Our collective efforts made this possible. Thanks to Oil and Gas Accountability Project, Common Ground Rising, Pueblo Action Alliance, Diné-Pueblo Solidarity, the Red Nation, pueblo leadership, Food and Water Watch and every citizen who took action. Now the work begins to craft an ordinance that takes citizen voices into account.

By Eleanor Bravo  
Food and Water Watch  
Sandoval County resident

After multiple lengthy meetings and hundreds of debates and public comments, the Sandoval County Commission finally voted Dec. 14 to kill both the Stoddard and Heil oil and gas ordinances that would have given a blank check to the drilling industry.

With complete disregard for a \$62,000 "review" tasked to New Mexico Tech, Chairman Don Chapman insisted that this poorly written ordinance was better than no ordinance at all. His was the only "yes" vote as both ordinances failed 4-1.

Commissioner Kenneth Eichwald had always opposed the ordinance, and Commission James Holden-



Photo courtesy Nancy Singham

**Pueblo Action Alliance, Diné-Pueblo Solidarity and the Red Nation held a rally before the Dec. 14 commission meeting to protest the lack of tribal consultation from the county.**

Rhodes wrote a public letter this month saying the ordinance was being "force-fed" to constituents.

"It needs to be forcefully stated that any drilling in this area poses an extremely high risk for contamination of the drinking water aquifers," he wrote.

The Stoddard ordinance, or an amended version of it proposed by Commissioner Dave Heil, seemed to have the votes to pass — until the Dec. 14 meeting.

"When I first proposed these amendments, I was thinking I was helping solve a problem," Heil said at the meeting. "But since then I have done considerable learning about the aquifer and the Rio Grande rift, etc."

Heil had proposed splitting the county into two zones, with residents of more popu-

lated areas receiving notice of drilling applications and public hearings, while rural residents would be denied notice and hearings.

Hundreds of citizens testified on the dangers of living near drilling rigs, threats to groundwater, damage to infrastructure, inadequate emergency services and a host of other issues at every commission meeting. The biggest issue was and still is the total disregard for the sovereign nations that have been residents of Sandoval County from time immemorial. Native governments were not included in the drafting or consideration of any version of the ordinance. Chapman did meet with the governors of some of the Pueblos in a social setting and said he really enjoyed it and they should

## Take action

Sandoval County's Planning and Zoning Commission must now create a new oil and gas ordinance. Please contact [miya.king-flaherty@sierraclub.org](mailto:miya.king-flaherty@sierraclub.org) to get involved.

do it at least twice a year. This is hardly government-to-government interaction. Pueblo governors came to meetings and expressed their grave concerns on multiple occasions.

Sandoval County is not alone in dealing with fossil-fuel exploration. Communities all across the country are faced with protecting their homes, property values, public health and failing infrastructure.

Here in the desert Southwest, we are protecting our water. Without clean, fresh water, we will have no jobs to offer. There would be slim possibilities for economic development or job opportunities. No one would want to come here to live among drilling rigs.

All residents agree that all residents should have all of the protections, and the rural areas should never be sacrificed for the benefit of big business.

The Stoddard and Heil ordinances are gone, and the issue will be sent back to Planning & Zoning. This whole ordeal is an example of citizen action demanding that elected officials act in the best interest of their constituents.

# Celebrate the wins and keep going

As our Sierra Club Chapter turns middle aged — 55 years — our world is facing a man-sized toddler.

I have first-hand experience with toddlers. My little guy's wobbly steps cause spilled milk, toys strewn everywhere, tired nights, bumped heads, loud crying, demands of "mine!" — and then he smiles or laughs, causing sudden and spontaneous bouts of joy and overwhelming love.

My little guy's damage is harmless and is all for the cause of learning about the world at 17 months. But I can't help but feel that Mr. Trump has brought us the age of the grownup toddler whose damage can be permanent. I guess the rest of us have to be the attending parents, reducing the harm and taking joy in the victories we are working so hard to create together.

Let's start with a standing ovation



**Camilla Feibelman,**  
Rio Grande  
Chapter director

while also pursuing their dreams. Our deep hope is that we can work effectively with this new administration to truly connect Albuquerque families to their bosque and that we can help to develop a path toward a sustainable city that does its part in curbing global climate change.

In other important news for kids,

for another parent of young children. Newly elected Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller is the father to Jack and Maya, who are 2 and 4.

Mayor Keller shares in many of the challenges that young families face in trying to provide for their families

our pop-up coalition successfully helped to stop the Public Education Department's proposed removal of mentions of climate change, the age of the earth and evolution from the new science curriculum. The department heard from hundreds of New Mexicans and finally agreed to implement the full Next Generation science standards — without the anti-science edits — with the accompanying framework that will help teachers implement them. While we savour this victory there are also proposed changes to social studies end of year tests that remove mentions of Rosa Parks, Malcolm X and Roe v. Wade.

We continue to support the efforts of Global Warming Express, the kids after-school climate-action program and hope that you'll join us for a fundraiser in their honor on Jan. 27. These are kids 8-12 years old who are taking real

measurable action on curbing climate change. So as our chapter hits 55, it's time to start thinking like Grandma and Grandpa — what can I do to protect these kids' planet, to get them outside and to teach them to be active citizens?

Finally, we hope that you will join us in a year of celebration, looking back and learning. In our 55th year, we'll celebrate with Senators Heinrich and Udall at events in Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

We'll hold a special event for Sierra Club life members. Look out for special lunchtime events for monthly donors to the Club. And in each edition of this year's newsletters, we will tell stories of past victories, lessons learned, and interesting people who have defined our Chapter's work.

Thanks for helping us celebrate!

## Still working for Puerto Rico

By Camilla Feibelman

Rio Grande Chapter director

It's been more than three months since Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico, leaving almost the entire island without power.

While recovery is under way and conditions on the ground are slowly improving, hundreds of thousands of residents of the island still lack reliable electric power and some are still without access to safe drinking water.

To help address these issues, the Sierra Club is working closely with staff and volunteers in Puerto Rico to help bring a just and green recovery from the ravages of both Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

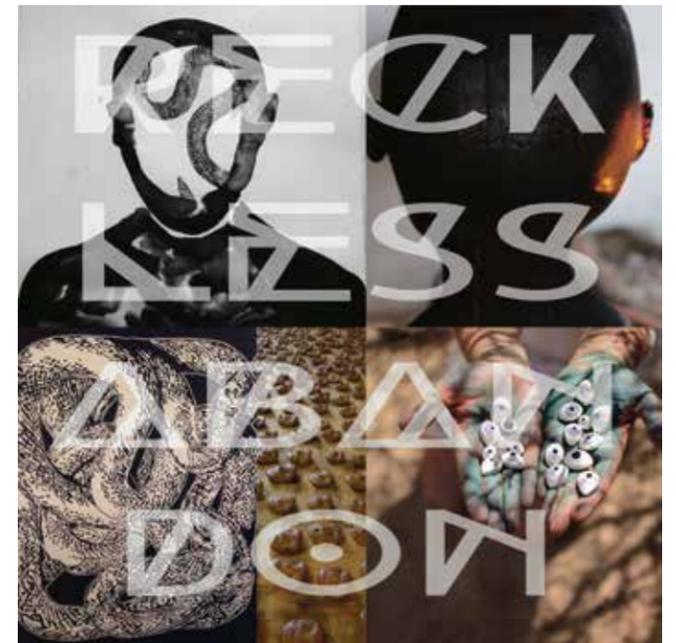
In addition to distributing hot food, solar lights and water filtration systems, our team gave grants to partner organizations doing first response on the ground, and is now doing grantmaking for long-term recovery.

Our national policy team is working for a just recovery package from Congress and is helping



**More than three months after Hurricane Maria, there is only about 66 percent power generation in Puerto Rico, and thousands still don't have access to clean water.**

develop a plan for a sustainable rebuild of the grid. There are lots of ways that you can help. Go here to donate: [bit.ly/mariarecovery](http://bit.ly/mariarecovery).



### Solo exhibition of visual and performance art by Thais Mather

Running through Feb. 18 at form & concept, 435 S. Guadalupe St. Santa Fe, NM, 87501

Mather will donate the proceeds of several artworks to the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter and other nonprofit organizations.

## Chapter members elect three Executive Committee members

The Sierra Club's 63 chapters hold yearly elections for their executive committees. This year, there were three spots on the Rio Grande Chapter's Executive Committee up for election.

We also hold elections for each of our regional groups. In the Rio Grande Chapter, our groups our Northern New Mexico, Pajarito, Central New Mexico, Southern New Mexico and El Paso.

In the chapter "ExCom" race, four candidates ran for three open seats. The highest vote-getters were current board members **Susan Martin** and **Ray Shortridge** and newcomer **Mary Hotvedt**, a cultural anthropologist who recently ran for state representative in the Silver City area. Welcome Mary!

In the Northern New



**Mary Hotvedt**



**Susan Martin**



**Ray Shortridge**

Mexico Group (which covers all of New Mexico north of Bernalillo County, except for the Los Alamos and Jemez areas), incumbents **Alice Cox**, **Patricia Cardona**, **Jim Klukkert** and **Shane Woolbright** were re-elected to four open seats.

In the Pajarito Group, which covers Los Alamos and the Jemez Springs area, **Howard Barnum** and **Iris Chung** were re-elected.

In the Central New Mexico Group, incumbents **Heather**

**Kline, Ray Shortridge** and **David Ther** were re-elected, while **Michael Marquez**, a UNM student intern with the chapter, and **Mark Rudd**, a well-known longtime activist, join group leadership.

In the Southern New Mexico Group, longtime volunteer leader **Cheryll Blevins** and **Kurt Anderson** were re-elected, while **Amanda Munro** and former N.M. Rep. **Nate Cote** will join the group ExCom.

Congratulations to all our continuing and new Executive Committee members!

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Northern NM Group  
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# Trump signs Castner protection

By Laurence Gibson  
El Paso Group chair

On Dec. 12, President Trump signed a provision to permanently protect Castner Range in El Paso's Franklin Mountains into law.

El Paso's U.S. Rep. Beto O'Rourke, who introduced the act, called it a monumental victory for those who have worked decades to preserve the "crown jewel of West Texas."

The provision is a big deal — it saves a huge piece of land from commercialization, giving El Paso a very visible green belt on its east side to be enjoyed by all. Hopefully, we'll be hiking there soon.

El Paso is divided by the nation's largest urban park, running along the west side of the Franklin Mountains, created by Sierrans and other hardworking environmentalists 40 years ago. The east side of the mountains is another story, with the Mountain Park residential area at the

north end and Government Hills on the south. In between lies the ugly Cemex quarry still eating away at our Franklins, and the 7,081-acre Castner Range sweeping from the heights all the way down to U.S. 54.

Really, this land had the ultimate in protection: a random sprinkling of unexploded ordnance left behind after the Army stopped target practice there. It was off limits to all.

Nevertheless, developers and chamber-of-commerce types drooled at the prospect of buying pieces of it to "grow El Paso." Several years ago funding was finally approved to study clearing the unexploded ordnance from this beautiful land that blooms with yellow poppies most every spring. Then finally the clearing operation began in early 2017, and with it the clamor for land sales along U.S. 54.

El Pasoans turned out by the thousands, overflowing meetings to show the Army we wanted to preserve the beautiful poppy fields

and roadless slopes leading up to the crest of the Franklins. We thought perhaps Obama would give us a National Monument designation in the waning months of his presidency. But word was the Department of Defense wanted to keep the land.

So last spring, Rep. O'Rourke cleverly inserted protection for the land into this year's National Defense Authorization Act. Naturally, the president signed it, no National Monument stigma to raise his ire. The provision prevents commercial enterprise, roads, use of vehicles and the construction of buildings on the land.

"Today's environmental win ensures Castner is preserved for all El Pasoans, Texans and Americans to enjoy," O'Rourke said, "Further, it preserves an important former military training facility — a reflection of El Paso's strong relationship to Fort Bliss and its longstanding military and veterans' community."



Photo by Mark Clune

**Thanks to U.S. Rep. Beto O'Rourke, a provision protecting the Castner Range, above, is now law. It prevents commercial enterprise, roads, vehicles and the construction of buildings on the mountain range.**

## N.M. monuments up in air after report finally published

By Howie Dash  
Southern New Mexico  
Group Chair

This past April, President Trump ordered a review of all national monuments over 100,000 acres created under the Antiquities Act from 1996 to present. This directly affected New Mexico's two new national monuments, Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks and Rio Grande del Norte.

During this summer's comment period, the Southern New Mexico Group joined a wide coalition of supporters in Southern New Mexico, the Doña Ana Coalition, to encourage public comment to keep the national monuments as is. We gathered signatures, placed door hangers to encourage comment and "bird-dogged" Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke during his visit to Las Cruces. The result is that over 98% of New Mexicans who sent comments to the Interior Department support keeping the current protections for our national monuments.

The Interior Department report was sent to President Trump in late August but was kept secret. A leak suggested the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks and Rio Grande del Norte would not have any boundary changes but would be subject to management changes. The Southern Group as well as the Doña Ana Coalition continued to press Secretary Zinke to release the



Photo by Eliza Kretzmann

**A report by Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke recommended changes to New Mexico's Organ Mountains Desert Peaks, above, and Rio Grande del Norte that could open the national monuments up to development.**

### Lawsuits have already been filed challenging the president's authority to reduce the boundaries of Grand Staircase Escalante and Bears Ears.

report and chided him for his secrecy.

On Dec. 4, President Trump visited Salt Lake City to issue a proclamation to reduce Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument by almost 50% and Bears Ears National Monument by almost 85%. The following day, Secretary Zinke issued his final report, which included recommendations for the

two New Mexico National Monuments that were similar to the preliminary report, namely no boundary changes but management changes.

The Zinke report recommended that ranching be protected and the monument along the Mexican Border be reviewed. However, both grazing and border security were already addressed in the origi-

nal Organ Mountains Desert Peaks proclamation.

The original proclamation stated "Laws, regulations, and policies followed by the BLM issuing and administering grazing permits or leases on lands under its jurisdiction shall continue to apply with regard to the lands in the monument, consistent with the protection of the objects above."

The border is also specifically protected by the proclamation's remarks.

Make no mistake, President Trump's attack on the two National Monuments in Utah is the first step in a right-wing effort to confiscate our public

lands for development, oil and gas exploration and mining, mainly to benefit large corporations rather than the will of the vast majority of Americans who want to protect and enjoy our wild public places.

New Mexico is not free from possible boundary reductions either. Despite the Interior Department's report, U.S. Rep. Steve Pearce, who represents the district containing Organ Mountains Desert Peaks, continues to press the president to reduce that monument to the footprint of a small portion of the Organ Mountains. As they say, "it's not over until it's over."

The president's authority under the Antiquities Act to reduce or eliminate monuments is highly questionable. While past presidents have adjusted boundaries, they have never been challenged in court. Lawsuits have already been filed to challenge the reductions to Grand Staircase Escalante and Bears Ears. The Southern N.M. Group and the Sierra Club support their effort in Utah and will continue to fight attacks on our public lands everywhere.

Across the country, people are not only recognizing more and more the value of public lands, they're organizing to protect these places permanently. The power of our grassroots teams and coalition building cannot be denied. With strength in numbers, this administration faces a long fight ahead in taking away the places we know and love.

# Club Albuquerque endorsees win



Photo by Camilla Feibelman

**Volunteers call fellow Sierra Club members to discuss the Rio Grande Chapter's endorsement of Tim Keller for Albuquerque mayor and Cynthia Borrego for City Council.**

By Richard Barish

Central New Mexico Political chair

Sierra Club-endorsed candidates Tim Keller, for Mayor, and Diane Gibson and Cynthia Borrego, for City Council, were all victorious in their respective Albuquerque election races.

The mayoral race had eight candidates. Keller won convincingly in the first round of voting, but because he did not get more than 50% of the vote, a runoff was held on Nov. 14 between Keller and the second-place finisher, City Councilor Dan Lewis. Keller beat Lewis in a landslide with 62% of the vote.

Keller was the only mayoral candidate who was publicly financed, which meant that he had less money than several of the other candidates, but he based his run on a large cadre of volunteers to identify supporters and turn out the vote. The Sierra Club played a significant role in this effort by getting our members to the polls and recruiting volunteers

for the campaign.

Dozens of volunteers came to the Albuquerque Sierra Club headquarters every week to make hundreds of calls to other Albuquerque members and talk about our endorsed candidates.

Incumbent Diane Gibson had an easy victory in the first round of her race in the near northeast heights. Cynthia Borrego's race for Dan Lewis' former seat on the northwest side went to a runoff, where Borrego beat Susana Martinez loyalist Robert Aragon with 54% of the vote, flipping this seat from Republican to Democrat.

Albuquerque now has a very pro-environment mayor in Tim Keller and six Democratic city councilors out of nine.

It should be much easier over the next four years to protect the Bosque and other open space that Albuquerque residents cherish and to move Albuquerque along toward significant reductions in carbon emissions.

## Central New Mexico Group events

The Sierra Club Central New Mexico Group hosts First Friday Art on alternating months at our Albuquerque office, 2215 Lead Ave. SE. The February artist is Caroline Rempe, who will be showing nature-related acrylic paintings. The opening is Feb. 2, 6-8 p.m., and the show will hang through March. Thirty percent of sales support the Rio Grande Chapter's work.

The Central Group also hosts "Sierra Club and Root Beer" at the Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice, 202 Harvard Drive SE, every other month on the first Friday. Next one is 6:30 p.m. Jan. 5.

## Volunteer Wednesday

We have volunteers in our Albuquerque office on Wednesdays to do data input, make calls and help with other projects. If you can join us, contact [miya.king-flaherty@sierraclub.org](mailto:miya.king-flaherty@sierraclub.org).

## Donate; it's easy!

When you contribute to the Rio Grande Chapter, your entire donation stays here in New Mexico and West Texas to protect our air, land, water and wildlife. You can donate at [riograndesierrclub.org/donate](http://riograndesierrclub.org/donate), or send your check to:

Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter  
1807 Second Street, Unit 45  
Santa Fe, NM 87505.

Contributions, gifts and dues to the Sierra Club are not tax-deductible.

To stay updated on issues you read about in *The Sierran*, go to [riograndesierraclub.org](http://riograndesierraclub.org) and subscribe to the chapter e-mail list.

If you're not a member but like what you see, **join now for only \$15!** [riograndesierraclub.org/join](http://riograndesierraclub.org/join) or fill out the form on Page 11.



Terry Owen

**Sierra Club members John Link and Robert Reifel hike with Grays Peak in the background. The Colorado 14er was a fun, challenging and rewarding climb for participants in the chapter's Military Outdoors Program. The program is catered to veterans, but all are welcome.**

# Vets' outings flourish

By Terry Owen

Military Outdoors Program

The Sierra Club Military Outdoors Program met its objective of encouraging and enabling more military veterans and their families to get outside.

The program is designed as a way for active duty and former military to reconnect with each other and with the land that they fought to protect. New Mexico has a rich military tradition, as shown by the higher-than-average number of veterans at just under 10 percent, as compared to the rest of the U.S. at under 8 percent.

While the focus is on military veterans, everyone is welcome, and no matter their background, participants

consistently state that it's a way for them to enjoy nature in a safe and welcoming environment.

Active-duty military, veterans, their families and those who've never served in the military joined for a wide range of activities in 2017. This year's outings included climbing a 14er in Colorado, hiking to a local spring and resort dating from the 1900s, and tackling the tallest peak in New Mexico to honor those who've sacrificed their lives since 9/11.

By far the most popular outing was a history tour of downtown Albuquerque with more than 15 participants. A collaboration with the Albuquerque Historical Society, this easy and fun trek down Central Avenue provided

a fascinating look at the events that have shaped Albuquerque's architecture, policies and infrastructure.

2018 will be another fantastic year for all of us to get outside, get engaged with our environment and focus on the protection of our natural world. Planned outings include an introduction to snowshoeing and nordic skiing, a team effort with the Kirtland Air Force Base Outdoor Recreation program; an exploration of the Sandia Wilderness Area; a historical tour of Old Town; and several challenging hikes of 12,000- to 14,000-foot peaks.

We hope you'll join us! For more information, contact Terry Owen at 505-301-4349, or [teowen@q.com](mailto:teowen@q.com).

## Central New Mexico Executive Committee

Chair: Fred Houdek, [fhoudek@gmail.com](mailto:fhoudek@gmail.com), 630-809-4234.

Treasurer: David Ther, treasurer, [grelbik@gmail.com](mailto:grelbik@gmail.com), 505-867-6283

Secretary: Heather Kline, [heather9387@yahoo.com](mailto:heather9387@yahoo.com), 505-577-2798

Outings: Odile de La Beaujardiere, [odile@pitot.org](mailto:odile@pitot.org), 505.433.4692

Political chair: Richard Barish, [richard.barish@gmail.com](mailto:richard.barish@gmail.com)  
Ray Shortridge, [rshortridge@gmail.com](mailto:rshortridge@gmail.com)

Mark Rudd

Michael Marquez

## Call for volunteers

The Northern New Mexico Group needs you to help the current volunteers with distribution of the *Sierran* to coffee shops, libraries, etc., in the Santa Fe area. **If you have a few hours to spare once every three months and would like to help, please contact Volunteer Coordinator Pat Carlton at 505-988-1596 or [carlton505@comcast.net](mailto:carlton505@comcast.net). Thank you!**



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A fifth-grader makes a wind turbine as part of Global Warming Express's in-school program at Reginald Chavez Elementary in Albuquerque.

## Climate program reaching more kids

By Genie Stevens  
Global Warming Express

The partnership between Sierra Club and the Global Warming Express kids climate program is chugging along.

Following their successful appearance at the Public Education Department hearing (see article at right), the Global Warming Expressers got to work learning science and climate science in the following schools:

Santa Fe: Acequia Madre Elementary School, (and starting at El Camino Real Academy next semester)

Albuquerque: Cien Aguas International Charter School, Reginald Chavez Elementary (in-school and after-school programs), Kirtland Elementary, Montessori of the Rio Grande Charter School.

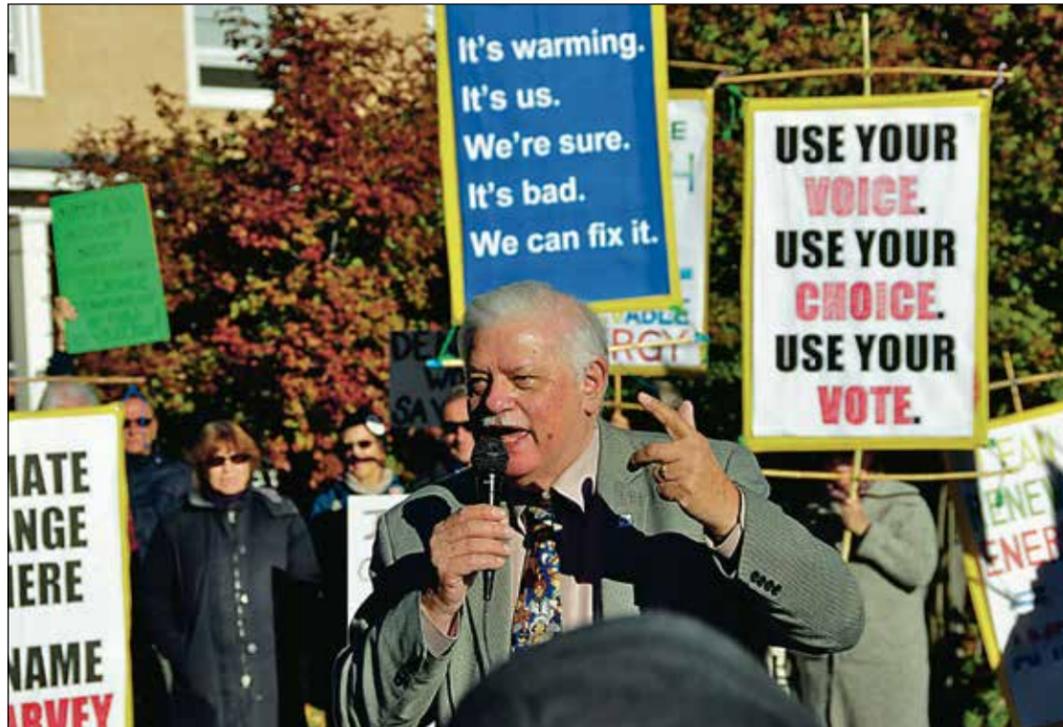
In Las Cruces, a program will begin at Central Elementary in January.

The science and sustainability portion of the program uses the Sunlight Series books by award-winning author/illustrator Molly Bang, who works with Penny Chisholm of MIT to provide accurate science information.

Next semester, students will move into public speaking, letter-writing and arts training, to be able to bring their messages and vision about the environment to their schools and communities.

On Feb 1, Environment Day at the New Mexico Legislature, GWE students will join the Sierra Club in giving speeches and performances and engaging with their representatives.

At Reginald Chavez Elementary in Albuquerque, Global Warming Express has been invited to run an after-school and an in-school program. Fifth-graders have been receiving the GWE program for an hour and a half each week as their science training.



Photos by David McGahey

Above and below: A broad coalition of education, faith, good-government and environmental groups rallied before the Oct. 16 hearing on the Public Education Department's edits to its proposed science curriculum.

# Outcry puts science back in science class

By Mona Blaber  
Chapter communications coordinator

Well, that didn't last long. In September, when the Public Education Department quietly released a proposal that removed climate change, evolution and the age of the Earth from an otherwise stellar science curriculum, they likely weren't expecting what came next.

Once word got out that the state's proposed science curriculum censored critical science knowledge, New Mexicans leaped into action.

The Rio Grande Chapter led a coalition of education, faith, good-government and other community groups working together to spread public awareness about the standards, which determine what is taught and tested in New Mexico public schools — including charter schools.

More than 700 Sierra Club supporters sent comments asking the department to adopt the full, unedited Next Generation Science Standards — which were developed by the National Academy of Sciences, National Science Teachers Association and American Association for the Advancement of Science.

"The New Mexico Science Teachers' Association and its members voted in 2013 to support adoption of the Next Generation Science Standards. They have continued to advocate on behalf of the NGSS, in full, as written," said Ellen Loehman,



New Mexico Science Teachers Association. "They do not accept the 'tinkered' version of standards proposed by the New Mexico Public Education Department."

The department held its only public hearing on Oct. 16. Here's how the *Albuquerque Journal* described it:

"Hundreds jammed into a crowded auditorium Monday and waited up to seven hours to urge state officials to abandon proposed science education standards during a chaotic public meeting interrupted at one point by a fire alarm."

Teachers, scientists, businesspeople, students, parents and many others spoke in opposition to the politicized edits. No one spoke in support.

"Faith leaders from Jewish, Muslim, Bahai, Buddhist, Indigenous, Christian and other faiths agree with science that humans are in part responsible for climate change," said Sister Joan Brown of Interfaith Power and Light. "We need to educate our children of all faith traditions with sound science, because they will be making ethical and moral decisions into the future."

Many participants left frus-

trated because they couldn't even get into the packed hearing room to give their comments.

But dozens of people being turned away from a packed hearing made a lot of noise in the press, and the next day, Education Secretary Christopher Ruszkowski announced that climate change would be added back to the standards, as would most of the other most controversial omissions.

Teachers warned that there were many other questionable edits that would be difficult to implement, but a few days later, the department said it would adopt the full Next Generation framework, with just six additional standards.

Regular people willing to take time out of their day to defend education and our children's future are responsible for this victory.

There was little time to savor victory, however, as a few days later, N.M. Rep. Andres Romero discovered that the state had removed Rosa Parks, Malcolm X and other key topics such as trust-busting from end-of-year social-studies tests (see article at right). Time to snap back into action!

## State strips Rosa Parks, Malcolm X from tests

By Lois Rudnick  
Interfaith Coalition for the Public Schools

First science, now history. In October, just as New Mexicans were celebrating the Public Education Department's reversal of its politicized edits to a new science curriculum, state Rep. Andres Romero found more alarming deletions — this time for history class.

Romero, a high-school teacher, and his colleagues noticed the department struck important topics from end-of-course testing in U.S. history.

New Mexico students won't be tested on monopolies being forced to dismantle during the early 20th century, the racial and ethnic conflict as people moved from farms to cities, or civil-rights leaders such as Rosa Parks and Malcolm X.

End-of-course exams account for 35 percent of teacher evaluations. Thus, while the department hasn't changed the standards per se, they provide little incentive to teachers to teach what is not on these state-mandated tests. As Education Secretary-designate Christopher Ruszkowski himself has noted, what doesn't get tested doesn't get taught.

On Nov. 14, I testified before the Legislative Education Study Committee about the deletions. I asked legislators: Can students become effective citizens without learning how a bill becomes a law; about the end of slavery as a result of the Industrial Revolution; about the U.S. dropping atomic bombs on Japan? These are just a few examples of what was a clearly ideological agenda behind the blacked-lined topics. Go to [www.ped.state.nm.us](http://www.ped.state.nm.us) to see the blueprints.

Hearing testimony also included outrage at the blacklining of topics such as nutrition, alcohol, healthy food choices, healthy versus unhealthy relationships and changes in puberty from the health course.

The Legislature has no direct power to influence the creation of blueprints or standards. But they do have the power of interrogation and public comment.

With continued pressure, Ruszkowski may feel forced to restore or eliminate the blueprints. Without intense public scrutiny and pressure — the kind that resulted in the restoration of the science standards — he won't.

Write to Ruszkowski at [c.ruszkowski@state.nm.us](mailto:c.ruszkowski@state.nm.us) — and please copy your legislators.

# Rio Grande Chapter Year in Review

## January

- Donald Trump takes office as U.S. president, bringing with him policymakers intent on destroying protections for clean air, water, habitat and wildlife.

- Sierra Club, San Juan Citizens Alliance, WildEarth Guardians, Navajo chapter presidents and residents rally at the Santa Fe Bureau of Land Management office to oppose the lease sale of 843 acres for oil and gas drilling in greater Chaco. In an unprecedented response to public outcry, the BLM applies conditions on leases regarding noise, light pollution and traffic safety, as well as unspecified mitigation conditions.

- A bill to outlaw coyote-killing contests passes the New Mexico Senate and reaches the House floor, where time runs out before Speaker Brian Egolf brings it to a vote. The bills to ban traps on public land stalls in committee.

- Wolf supporters outnumber detractors at hearings for the new Mexican Wolf Recovery Plan in both Truth or Consequences and Albuquerque. Public pressure results in some modifications of the plan.

## February

- Owners of the West's largest coal-fired power plant, Navajo Generating Station in northern Arizona, announce plans to retire it by 2019 because it is not cost-effective.

## March

- PNM announces that it may retire coal-fired San Juan Generating Station in 2022, when current contracts expire, because it will likely be more expensive for ratepayers to keep it operating.

- Xcel announces plans to build 1.2 gigawatts of wind capacity in New Mexico and Texas for Southwestern Public Service, which serves eastern New Mexico.

- Legislative session ends. Bills that would make solar energy more affordable and accessible and would increase renewable-energy requirements to 50% by 2030 die in committee. A bill banning wildlife trafficking and one that would have put renewable energy on state buildings passed both chambers but died on the governor's desk.

## April

- PNM announces it will likely abandon its stake in coal-fired Four Corners Power in 2031, 10 years early, because of cost concerns.

- EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt announces, as a tipoff to industry, that he will stay the EPA methane rule when it goes into effect in July. The 90-day

## 8 Rio Grande Sierran



Photo by Odile de LaBeaujardiere

**Bill Pentler of the city of Albuquerque talks to participants on a Sierra Club petroglyph excursion in Piedras Marcadas. The Rio Grande Chapter hosted more than 100 hikes and outings in 2017.**



Photo by Kristen Woods

**June: The chapter begins a Spanish-language outings program, led by Cecilia Chávez-Beltrán. Above, Excursiones a la Naturaleza de Nuevo Mexico participants admire wildlife at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge.**

stay would begin as soon as the rule was meant to go into effect and would allow the agency to do a more formal rollback and avoid industry having to comply with the rule.

- President Donald Trump orders an Interior Department review of 27 national monuments designated since 1996. Two New Mexico monuments, Organ Mountains Desert Peaks and Rio Grande del Norte, are on that list.

## May

- In a major victory for the climate, the Senate fails to reverse the BLM's methane-reduction standards through a Congressional Review Act vote; three Republicans join all Democrats in denying the move. If the vote had succeeded, the BLM would have been permanently barred from creating a substantively similar rule without an act of Congress.

- Santa Fe Water Sentinels begin to test Santa Fe River for contaminants.

- Sierra Club Southern New Mexico-endorsed candidates Kevin Bixby and Craig Fenske win seats on the Doña Ana Soil and Water Conservation District, making inroads on a politicized board that had promoted anti-conservation ideology far outside its scope.

## June

- Sandoval County publishes a draft oil and gas ordinance,

and it lays out different requirements for different parts of the county.

- EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt proposes a 90-day stay of the EPA's methane standards. Groups sue, arguing that the agency failed to follow proper administrative procedure. The agency also proposes a two-year stay that will include public comment and a hearing; Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke stays parts of the BLM methane rule for 90 days.

- Sierra Club-endorsed candidates Karen Dunning, Joaquín Baca and Derrick Lente win seats on the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District Board of Directors.

## July

- The DC Circuit court overturns the EPA's proposed 90 day stay of its methane standard and requires that the agency's rule go into effect; New Mexicans travel to DC to oppose the two-year stay of the EPA rule; Groups sue to stop the BLM's 90-day stay.

- Comment period ends for Interior Department review of national monuments. An independent review finds that a whopping 97 percent of respondents support keeping current protections for monuments.

- Rio Grande Chapter hits funding goal to help Global Warming Express kids group expand its after-school education program.

## August

- New Mexico Game Commission grudgingly approves the federal draft recovery plan for Mexican wolves in order to give themselves the opportunity to sue when the final plan is issued. Wildlife biologists oppose the plan because it is damaging to lobos' survival prospects, but Game commissioners criticize it for being too protective of wolves. N.M. Game Commission chair Paul Kienzle comment: "This problem started December 28, 1973, when Richard Nixon signed the Endangered Species Act."

- BLM notifies Navajo Nation president of the March 8, 2018 lease of 25 parcels in Greater Chaco. Some parcels are within the 10-mile buffer that protects Chaco Culture National Historical Park.

- A Sandoval County Planning and Zoning commissioner introduces an oil and gas ordinance that would allow one county employee to approve all drilling applications within 10 days, with no public notice or input.

## September

- The New Mexico Public Education Department proposes to implement Next Generation Science Standards, as science teachers had been urging, but to delete the curriculum's references to climate change and the age of the Earth, among other essential scientific knowledge.

- The All-Pueblo Council of Governors signs a resolution demanding that the BLM and BIA halt any further drilling or leasing on lands in New Mexico's Greater Chaco region.

## October

- The BLM proposes a one-year stay of its methane rule; Wyoming federal court strikes down the agency's 90-day stay.

- Public Education Department holds public hearing on proposal for edited science standards. Hundreds pack the hearing room; many are turned away. Some wait seven hours to give two-minute comment. No one supports



**November: Sierra Club joins faith leaders, scientists and parents to deliver thousands of comments opposing the BLM's year-long stay of its own methane-reduction standards.**

department's edits.

- Public Education

Department announces it will adopt the full, unedited framework of Next Generation Science Standards, with six New Mexico-specific additions instead of dozens.

## November

- The New Mexico Legislative Indian Affairs Committee hold a meeting at Ojo Encino Chapter House, in Greater Chaco, to hear about issues affecting communities in the Tri-Chapter area.

## December

- Interior Department report recommending management changes to New Mexico's Rio Grande del Norte and Organ Mountains Desert Peaks monuments is released (see Page 5).

- BLM finalizes its year-long stay of methane-reduction standards (see Page 12).

- PNM retires Units 2 and 3 at San Juan Generating Station a few days early because of mechanical problems. The retirements were part of a 2013 settlement with the state of New Mexico and EPA. PNM committed to no layoffs from the retirements.

- President Donald Trump signs Defense Authorization Act that, thanks to U.S. Rep. Beto O'Rourke, includes a provision to protect El Paso's Castner Range from commercial development (see Page 5).

- Coalition for Clean, Affordable Energy (of which the Rio Grande Chapter is a member) and other parties agree to support approval of 1.2 gigawatts of wind facilities in New Mexico and Texas in exchange for provisions encouraging local labor and contractors and ratepayer protections (see Page 10).

- The Sandoval County Commission plans to vote to publish and post weak oil and gas ordinances that are deeply unpopular with residents. After hours of citizen comments, at 1:10 a.m., the commission votes 4-1 to scrap both ordinances and orders the Planning and Zoning Commission to start over (see Page 3).

# 55 years of the Rio Grande Chapter

## Volunteer profile: John Buchser

John Buchser is the former Rio Grande Chapter chairman, and he remains Water Team chair.

**Question:** What is your position in the Rio Grande Chapter?

**John Buchser:** Water issues chair

**Q:** How long have you been active in the chapter?

**JB:** About 30 years

**Q:** What is your favorite memory of environmental activism, protection or participation?

**JB:** The women's march to the Roundhouse in Santa Fe, Jan. 21, 2017. The biggest protest march I have ever participated in. Friends came from out of town to join. It gave me hope we could overcome what was likely to be a horrible four years of Republicans turning the clock backwards on environmental protections, and setting a horrible example for the world.

**Q:** Why do you volunteer with Sierra Club?

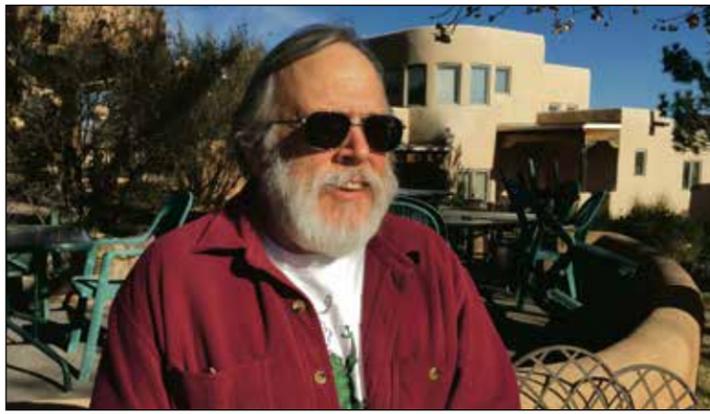
**JB:** To protect things I value and want to share — beautiful outdoor places, a planet that sustains us.

**Q:** What are some of the major issues or victories during your tenure with the chapter?

**JB:** 1. We won a \$330 million settlement from PNM for lack of adequate pollution controls. Unfortunately, they ignored us until Gov. Richardson stepped in, and seemed to claim the victory as his own.

2. We won protection for new wilderness areas, and expansions of others.

3. We elected Martin Heinrich to the House, and then the Senate. Unlike Sen. Domenici, Heinrich understood protection of wild places. Heinrich started as wilderness chair for the chapter, then was elected to the Albuquerque City



Council.

**Q:** What's your favorite accomplishment?

**JB:** To continue to engage new people in leadership roles. There are so many important things to protect; it takes all of us to focus on some of the most important issues, and then work collaboratively with other groups to attain victories.

**Q:** What are your thoughts on 2017 and 2018?

**JB:** In 2017, President Trump has proved just how fragile our democracy is. I am proud of the politicians who are engaged for the protection of our resources. Ben Ray Luján has hung in there for many years, facing a hostile environment in the House, and yet he maintains a positive attitude. Our secretary of state, Maggie Toulouse Oliver, is protecting the rights of the voters.

In 2018, I'd like to see #45 replaced by #46. I'd like to re-take the house in DC, and elect a responsible governor in New Mexico. I'd like to see the Democrats work collaboratively, to not use all their energy in the primaries fighting each other. And I'd like to prevent New Mexico from becoming the used-nuclear-fuel-rod disposal area for the entire U.S.

**Q:** What's changed in the chapter from the time you joined to now?

**JB:** We have staff. When I became active, the only staff we had was a lobbyist, only for the duration of the session.

We are civil to each other, even when we have differing viewpoints. In the Northern Group, I think we always had civil discussions. However, at the chapter level, it was not that way in the past.

## 2005: Cleaner air in Four Corners

In December, San Juan Generating Station will retire half its coal-fired generation. The Four Corners area has already boasted greatly improved air-quality scores in recent years, resulting in large part from Sierra Club legal challenges in the early 2000s, including this one, with Grand Canyon Trust, resulting in PNM installing \$330 million worth of pollution reductions at San Juan and paying \$6.9 million in fines to the General Fund. From a March 10, 2005, press release:

Thousands of tons of air pollution, linked to serious health problems and haze, will no longer be dumped into Four Corners skies under an agreement reached between the Grand Canyon Trust, Sierra Club, and Public Service Company of New Mexico.

The agreement resolves a lawsuit brought against the San Juan power plant in 2002.

In 2003, San Juan spewed more than 14,500 tons of sulfur dioxide, 25,000 tons

of nitrogen oxide, and 750 pounds of highly toxic mercury into the region's air.

"The San Juan power plant has been dumping pollution into our air for years, which has put the health and well-being of me and my neighbors at risk. ... This agreement means we'll soon be breathing cleaner air and viewing clearer skies," said Verl Hopper of Aztec, N.M.

"This historic agreement will take more than 16,000 tons of pollution out of our air, which is the equivalent of removing half a million cars from New Mexico's roads," said Gov. Bill Richardson

The Grand Canyon Trust and Sierra Club filed suit in 2002, alleging that PNM was regularly violating its air-quality permit at San Juan. In 2004, Federal Judge Bruce Black rejected PNM's excuses. To avoid a second trial, PNM agreed in 2004 that it had violated the opacity limit at San Juan 42,008 times, and parties began negotiating a settlement.



Ken Hughes

**Acclaimed organizer Marshall Ganz held trainings for the Rio Grande Chapter and four other chapters in 2006. Ganz said the Sierra Club project turned into the framework for organizing the Obama campaign.**

## 2006: Building our organizing chops

*As we celebrate people power in this issue, effective organizing is key. The Rio Grande Chapter has grown from 8,000 members before the 2016 election to more than 10,000. Let's keep moving. From 2006:*

**By John Byrne Barry**

At a recent Leadership Development Project workshop, facilitator Marshall Ganz recalled Cesar Chávez's oft-cited "secret" to effective organizing: "First I talk to one person, and then another and then another." One participant offered how we do it today: "First I send one e-mail, then another and then another." Everyone laughed.

Does that laughter tell us anything about our organizing strategies today? That's one of the topics covered in recent workshops in California, New Mexico and Washington. About 120 Sierra Club leaders from the Cascade, Florida, Loma

Prieta, and Rio Grande chapters are taking part in the project, which focuses on developing relationships, using storytelling to engage new members, and motivating people to take action.

"We put relationship-building to use right away," says Ilse Bleck, group chair of the Rio Grande Chapter's Pajarito Group. "I've had three one-on-one meetings so far, two with new members, and I already recruited one new excom member."

Lisa Barbosa from the Loma Prieta Peak Climbing Section says, "I've learned more in a day and a half than I have in the past year."

"We can learn from failures as well as successes," says Ganz, an organizer in the United Farm Workers union under Chávez. "It's like learning to ride a bike—falling off is how you learn to keep your balance."

## 2005 & 2009: Spiffing up the Santa Fe River



**Above left: Former Santa Fe City Councilor Chris Calvert picks up trash during a Sierra Club Santa Fe River cleanup. At right, Carlos Cervantes paints a mural on the Closson Street footbridge on the Sierra Club's adopt-a-river segment of the Santa Fe River.** Photos by John Buchser



Photo courtesy Southwestern Public Service

**A deal supporting approval of a Southwestern Public Service 1,200-megawatt wind project would also encourage use of New Mexico contractors, vendors and workers. With the added wind energy, 48 percent of SPS's electricity would come from renewable energy by 2021.**

# N.M. utility to add local jobs, 1,200 MW of wind

By Chuck Noble

## Coalition for Clean, Affordable Energy

Some good news for 2018: Coalition for Clean, Affordable Energy and other intervenors in December negotiated an agreement with Southwestern Public Service supporting approval of a massive wind project that will bring at least \$57 million in spending to New Mexico contractors, vendors and workers.

All parties reached agreement in SPS's Public Regulation Commission case requesting approval of the Sagamore wind farm in eastern New Mexico and Hale wind farm in west Texas, totaling 1,200 megawatts.

This settlement supports commission approval of the wind project and provides procedures to assure that ratepayers will not be economically harmed if SPS's projections for ratepayer benefits do not turn out to be correct.

In addition, SPS, the state Attorney General's Office, Western Resource Advocates and CCAE are entering a separate agreement by which SPS (the utility that serves eastern New Mexico) agrees to use its best efforts to identify and employ New Mexico contractors, vendors and workmen for the Sagamore project.

This agreement provides for a monitor to develop a program to advertise for, identify and hire New Mexico contractors, vendors and businesses and to assure compliance by SPS. The utility will be allowed to seek recovery for the cost of the monitor, though non-signing parties can oppose recovery. SPS will also provide a \$25,000 sponsorship grant to Mesaland Junior College in Tucumcari to support its wind program.

SPS already provides about 21% of its electricity from renewables. With this addition, SPS will produce 48% of its energy in 2021 from renewable resources.

# PNM inching away from coal

By Mona Blaber

## Chapter communications coordinator

2017 brought a mixed bag of news for the transition of New Mexico's largest utility from coal to clean energy but included some momentous movement forward.

Four Corners residents will start breathing cleaner air soon, as PNM retired two of San Juan Generating Station's four coal-burning units in December.

PNM announced in March that it is likely to retire San Juan's remaining units early, in 2022, to benefit ratepayers. In April, it announced it would drop coal altogether in 2031 with an early exit from Four Corners Power Plant.

The Sierra Club is trying to lock in those timelines and move the utility toward an earlier exit from Four Corners.

After intense negotiations earlier

this year, Sierra Club decided to join several other parties to sign a settlement with PNM in its rate case because the settlement limited PNM's recovery of costs at the Four Corners coal plant, required PNM to study early closure of Four Corners in its next resource plan, and required PNM to propose an earlier depreciation date of 2031 for Four Corners (i.e. an end-of-life assumption).

Following hearings, the PRC hearing examiners issued a recommendation that proposed some changes to the settlement. On Dec. 20, the full commission accepted the recommendation with some modifications. Of particular note, the PRC determined that PNM acted imprudently when it extended its ownership agreement at the coal plant in March 2015. Even though the settlement removed some costs for Four Corners, the PRC found that it did not go far enough. While the order didn't

change the rate recovery for costs related to Four Corners beyond the hearing examiners' recommendation, the PRC modified the stipulation to make additional disallowances for Four Corners likely in a future proceeding. The parties now must decide before the end of the year whether to accept the modifications to the stipulation or go back to litigation.

There is still much work to do, but New Mexico is taking steps toward a coal-free future.

The new year brings a required PRC proceeding on whether PNM should close the San Juan plant. While PNM said it plans to retire San Juan, it could always change those plans, and we will keep you updated on how you can participate and move PNM away from coal while not leaving the community and workers who have contributed so much to the plant out in the cold.

# We love your nuclear waste. Send it here!

By John Buchser  
Water chair

Activists gathered in Roswell and Albuquerque to plan opposition to the proposed nuclear reactor fuel-rod dump near Hobbs.

The plan is to ship all the country's commercial irradiated fuel rods (also referred to as "spent" or "used" fuel rods even though they are millions of times more radioactive than before being "used") to a ground-level site for temporary storage — but no permanent solution is on the horizon. Holtec's claim is that their thin-walled casks can safely store used fuel rods for centuries, no permanent storage required!

An estimated 12,000 train loads of casks holding irradiated fuel rods will, at the government's own estimates, bring 10 major accidents over 20 years. Guess where the rail lines are? Next to low-income communities, those folks with the most to lose.

The arrival of a \$4 billion investment in the Urenco facility, in New Mexico on the Texas/New Mexico border near Eunice, NM, has brought dollar signs to the eyes of government officials. Now there are promises of more money but blatant lies about the danger of the waste that would come to our state.

Despite giving a lethal dose in minutes unshielded, proponents have claimed it is "benign." Once the highly radioactive fuel rods are sitting here in New Mexico, you can be sure the companies storing them will go belly-up and leave the taxpayer with the bill — forevermore. The title and liability for the waste would shift to the taxpayer if Holtec gets its way. The company plans to take some of the money collected for permanent isolation of the waste to use for this supposed "interim" storage.

There is no permanent place for the waste, most of which would come from nuclear power reactors in the eastern U.S. The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, the only deep geological repository in the country, is located in the midst of Karst formation — the same stuff that Carlsbad Caverns is located in and that in 2014



John Buchser

**Eileen Shaughnessy played at a December gathering for community members planning opposition to a waste dump for nuclear fuel rods near Hobbs.**

suffered fires, plutonium release and cost hundreds of millions of dollars to reopen in late 2017 with parts of the underground rooms permanently contaminated and not usable. The licensing process may be resumed for another proposed repository, Yucca Mountain, which is in a volcanic earthquake zone with connections to the water systems.

Estimates are that around Christmas, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission will declare "complete" the Holtec application for a supposedly interim site in Lea County. One hearing is likely to be held, in Hobbs, and there will be limited time for public comment and intervention.

As hurricanes continue to get more common and severe, New Mexico and West Texas are sure to get hammered at some point in the next few decades. All that runoff will head to the Pecos River, bringing along with it waste from any compromised casks. Our own Chernobyl. So much for good, clean groundwater.

Please contact your legislator to let them know you don't want the nation's nuclear waste. Battery technology to stabilize the grid, based on wind and solar technology, is here. Let's stop risking lives for energy. We'll keep you updated — please contact daniel.lorimier@sierraclub.org if you'd like to get involved in opposing the storage facility.

# Getting kids outdoors for 40 years

By Laurence Gibson  
El Paso Group chair

The El Paso Group has a not-so-secret history of working to introduce youngsters to the great outdoors. The background here is that El Paso is a city where many fight an ongoing battle to eat and sleep indoors in a warm house with a soft warm bed. People do love parks here, mostly city parks, with their playgrounds, green grass, water fountains, and restrooms. Our great El Paso Zoo is also a popular destination. So why would anyone who could afford such creature comforts venture outside of the city, outside of El Paso?

Enter ICO, originally Inner-City Outings, recently renamed Inspiring Connections Outdoors, a sort of stand-alone arm of the National Sierra Club with its own administration, money and volunteer force.

The El Paso Group founded its ICO back in the '70s, and over 40 years later, it is the only ICO in the Rio Grande Chapter. Early Group leaders were not always complimentary



Neysa Hardin

**On Dec. 15, Sierra Student Coalition students from Americas High School hiked through the Rio Bosque Wetlands Park in El Paso.**

about the ICO. Nevertheless, a group of selfless volunteers, many of them school teachers, realized that many students were uncomfortable, even afraid of the outdoors, with its desert terrain, forests, wild animals and lack of sanitation facilities. They also realized that those youngsters would grow up to be city leaders and environmental caretakers. It was some 40 years ago that Jefferson High School English teacher Jeanne French began taking her students on hikes, camping with them, showing them the values of

clean air, clean water, and noise-free environments. Her lessons in nature gave so many a leg up onto the world stage, some to MIT (El Paso is a favorite recruiting ground), one all the way to Everest.

Following Jeanne's death, present leader Richard Rheder picked up the reins he holds today. With its warehouse of canoes, mountain bikes, tents, backpacks and leaders, ICO partners with Girl Scout troops, Boy Scouts, school groups, virtually any nonprofit need- ing expertise in the outdoors.

## El Paso Executive Committee

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Oldtime Sierrans like Ted Mertig and Rick Lane working with Scout leader Gloria Santellano and her husband are now "making a difference" in young people's lives through ICO. Their most recent outing was the annual Christmas Tree cutting in the Lincoln National Forest near Cloudcroft, where kids bring home their very own tree to the family.

New kid on the block in the El Paso Group is its Sierra Student Coalition at Americas High School, led by Sierran Neysa Hardin. This is the Rio Grande Chapter's second SSC group, coming years after the St. John's College group folded. Hardin has forged partnerships with Chamizal National

Memorial, Hueco Tanks State Park, Franklin Mountains State Park and Guadalupe Mountains National Park. Rangers at these parks instruct students in many areas while they build trails, learn park biology, geology, history and breathe clean air.

The El Paso Group is excited to see this happening and furnishes as much support as possible to Executive Committee member Hardin. Last May, the group helped fund buses for a trip to the Gila Cliff Dwellings deep in the heart of the Gila National Forest.

Congratulations and a big thank-you to all our youth leaders. Let's keep up the good work in 2018!

# Joining forces against the wall

By Kevin Bixby  
Southwest Environmental Center,  
Las Cruces

Run a wildlife advocacy organization. It is a no-brainer for us to oppose the border wall because of the devastating impacts it will have on thousands of wildlife species that occupy the Mexico-U.S border region.

Wild animals need to move freely across the landscape to find the resources they need to survive. The border wall will block the passage of most animals, including creatures as small as snakes and toads, and even low-flying birds.

The wall by itself could drive some wildlife, like the Sonoran pronghorn, to extinction in the near future. For most species, however, the wall will add to a general decline in the abundance and distribution of wildlife occurring worldwide, a process some scientists call "biological annihilation." It will prevent southern species such as jaguars and ocelots from reoccupying their historic ranges in the U.S. It will prevent genetic exchange between reintroduced populations of Mexican wolves in the U.S. and Mexico.

Wildlife advocates have plenty of reasons to oppose the border wall, but none are sufficient to win. We learned that the hard way, when most of the 700 miles of existing barriers were installed under the George W. Bush administration, over the objections of conservation groups.

That is one reason the Southwest Environmental Center joined forces earlier this year with the American Civil Liberties Union and New Mexico

## Southern N.M. Group

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CAFe (NM Comunidades en Acción y de Fe, a faith-based social-justice group) in opposing not just the wall, but the entire Trump border "militarization" agenda, including the hiring of additional border patrol and ICE agents, and building more immigration-detention facilities. Our message is "no boots, no beds, no walls."

Our coalition met with Sen. Martin Heinrich. We held a "No Wall Town Hall" event in Sunland Park. Most recently, we organized (along with the Rio Grande Sierra Club and other groups) events in Albuquerque, including a panel discussion, teach-in, and the delivery of nearly 4,000 petition signatures to Sens. Heinrich and Tom Udall. More events are planned.

Some supporters have questioned our foray into "non-conservation" and "social justice" issues. My answer is:

**The strength of our coalition is based on a fundamental understanding that it is a false victory to trade one injustice for another.**

The alliance makes sense, strategically and fundamentally. We can't win this issue alone. Strategically, we need all the allies we can get.

But it's more than that. The way I see it, we're all fighting the same underlying enemy: a powerful system that devalues anything that doesn't produce profits for shareholders, whether it is wildlife, public lands, poor people or undocumented immigrants. When we stay in our silos, focused only on our own issues, we lose.

The strength of our border coalition is based on a fundamental understanding that it is a false victory to trade one injustice for another. We are united in our determination to oppose a broader border militarization agenda that threatens our wildlife and border communities. Together we are more powerful.

For more info and to support SWEC's fight against the border wall, go to [wildmesquite.org](http://wildmesquite.org).

## With your help we can clean up our water

Sierra Club Water Sentinels are the first line of defense of America's waters. We live on the water planet. However, water is a finite resource with only about 1% of the world's water actually being available for human consumption. Water pollution & over-use are threatening both the quality & quantity of our water resources at an alarming rate.

**Keep our water safe. Join Sierra Club.**

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Contributions, gifts & dues to Sierra Club are tax deductible; they support our effective, citizen based advocacy & lobbying efforts. Your dues include \$7.50 for a subscription to SIERRA magazine & \$1.00 for your Chapter newsletter.

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# BLM pauses methane safeguards

By Camilla Feibelman  
Chapter director

The bad news is that the Trump Administration continues its attempts to dismantle environmental protections at every turn. The good news is that, with your help, we are slowing their efforts.

On Dec. 8, the Trump Administration's Bureau of Land Management finalized a one-year delay of a rule that would plug oil and methane leaks from oil and gas operations. The agency said the rule "may be rescinded or significantly revised in the near future."

This rule applies to oil and gas operations on public lands — meaning industry is wasting a natural resource that belongs to all of us while risking our health, climate and state economy. Despite courts blocking the BLM's earlier stay, and despite failing to revoke the rule in Congress, the BLM intends to gut it anyway.

The news of the stay came just as one of our partner groups, Environmental Defense Fund, released analysis showing that New Mexico oil and gas operations leaked, vented or flared 570,000 tons of methane each year (much of it extracted from our public lands), enough to meet the annual heating and cooking needs of every home in the state. The report estimated between \$182 million and \$244 million worth of natural gas is wasted each year, causing taxpayers to lose out on as much as \$27 million in tax and royalty revenues annually.

Meanwhile, the EPA is also seeking to delay the implementation of its rule that applied to all new oil and gas production on both public and private lands (the BLM rule applies to both existing and new facilities — but only on public land). The agency issued an addendum to its proposed stay in which it slashed the calculation for what is called the "social cost of methane." The Obama Administration calculated the 2020 social cost at \$1,400 per metric ton (compared to \$50 for carbon). The Trump Administration has reduced the social cost of methane by a factor of 25, to \$55 per metric ton.

The change is another cynical attempt to downplay the damages caused by climate change. The agency originally calculated the social cost of methane and carbon based on their global impacts. Under the Trump Administration, the calculation was changed to measure only the effects in the U.S.

In the meantime, our coalition continues to explore options for keeping industry from wasting gas and putting our health at risk. One option is to follow Colorado's example and establish state rules. Under Colorado Gov. Hickenlooper's leadership, environmental and industry groups came together to establish methane-reduction rules that were just strengthened in November. Ideally, whoever becomes New Mexico governor in January 2019 will provide leadership on these issues — in fact, gubernatorial candidate Michelle Lujan Grisham announced her intention to issue a state methane rule if she were elected. Candidate Jeff Apodaca has also talked about solutions for reducing methane.

A last resort is the voluntary efforts of industry. In the Obama Administration, the EPA's voluntary methane-reduction program had oil and gas producers sign up and now, just days before the BLM stay was finalized, the American Petroleum Association came out with its own voluntary program that doesn't meet even the minimum standards we'd hope to see. On the other hand, XTO, the parent group of Exxon, has agreed to comply with both the EPA and BLM methane rules in its thousands of acres of holdings in Southeast New Mexico, so while this is a company that has sowed mistrust by covering up its own scientists' findings on the catastrophic consequences of climate change, this is one step in the right direction.

Recent news reports have highlighted oil and gas companies' failure to self-report on their holdings for tax purposes in New Mexico, depriving counties of considerable income. It's more evidence of the risks of allowing industries to self-regulate.



Photo by Art Rescues

Citizens wait to testify for pro-environment legislation at a New Mexico Legislature committee hearing in 2017.

## NM Legislature: positive prospects for short session

By Dan Lorimier  
Rio Grande Chapter lobbyist

Fewer environmental bills are on tap for the New Mexico legislative session that starts Jan. 16, but there should still be room for promising energy legislation.

The Legislature holds shorter, 30-day budget-focused sessions on even years that are restricted to legislation that has an impact on the state budget and bills the governor puts on her call. That leaves less room for some of the legislation focusing on wildlife and land protections that Sierra Club members and our allied groups usually support, but several promising energy bills are likely to need your activism.

The state's coffers have a few more coins clinking around in them than in the past several years, in part resulting from increased oil and gas activity. That means lawmakers will be more willing to consider legislation like the expired tax credits for residents and small businesses who install solar rooftops.

Last year, Sen. Jeff Steinborn sponsored a bill that would allow for the state to save money by installing solar on state buildings. It passed both houses but stopped on Gov. Susana Martinez's desk. We are likely to see that legislation again.

There also may be an effort to pass a tax credit for energy storage, which is key to making a full transition from climate-damaging fossil fuels to clean energy.

We will also advocate for some of the extra funds to go toward much-needed inspection and enforcement functions of the Environment Department and Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources.

During the last few months of 2017, the Legislative Finance



Photo by Camilla Feibelman

Members of the kids' climate-action program Global Warming Express speak at Renewable Energy Day at the Roundhouse in 2015.

### Take action

#### Citizen lobbying trainings

will be held in Farmington and Counselor on Jan. 10 and in Santa Fe on Jan. 17 at the Southside Library. Contact [dianeabqnm@gmail.com](mailto:dianeabqnm@gmail.com) for details.

**Environment Day at the Legislature:** Join us and dozens of other pro-environment groups to lobby, learn and celebrate.

Committee and other interim legislative committees have heard and discussed budget requests from the various state agencies. Taken together, these agency budget requests, after negotiation and compromise, are the beginning of the state budget. At least that is how it's supposed to work.

During 30-day sessions the Sierra Club often defends budget requests from state agencies we rely on to keep contaminants out of our air and drinking water.

The New Mexico Environment Department and the Energy Minerals and Natural Resources Department are both organizationally

dissipated after several years of budget reductions, and their budgets, at least for oversight and enforcement, will need our support.

Because the legislative process is so ponderous, it's difficult to pass a proactive bill through both the House and the Senate during a short session.

Adding to the complexities of budget sessions are the upcoming elections, which will include the entire state House as well as the governor. Senators aren't up until 2020. Representatives, however, will see themselves under a pre-election magnifying glass.

New Mexico has the nation's last "citizen" (unpaid) legislature. With around 2 million residents, every New Mexican can have a real impact on what our legislature can accomplish.

Again this year, the Rio Grande Chapter, along with partner organizations, is offering workshops to train citizens on how to lobby your legislators. We held trainings in Las Cruces, Albuquerque and Deming, and more are scheduled for Santa Fe on Jan. 17 and Farmington and Counselor on Jan. 10. Contact Diane Reese at [dianeabqnm@gmail.com](mailto:dianeabqnm@gmail.com) for details.

# Weatherization starts in Chaco

**Teresa Seamster, Counselor Health Impact Assessment Committee**

A small group of donors from Santa Fe has contributed \$20,000 to the Navajo Nation Tri-Chapter communities of Counselor, Torreon-Star Lake and Ojo Encino to assist in a home-weatherization program this winter.

This project grew out of a home-solarization proposal, suggested by the Counselor Health Assessment Committee and submitted by Ojo Encino Chapter to Cornerstones Community Partnerships this fall, for retrofitting more than 120

thermal solar panels that were donated previously to the chapter.

The proposal was dropped after potential problems with the used panels were spotted. Attention turned to immediate winter home-heating needs in the area, and chapter leaders were asked how they would allocate private donated funds.

It was decided the chapters would split any donation three ways. Each chapter will list out the households/families and supplies needed for each home project and will assign their construction workers to install the needed items.

Each chapter will pass a support resolu-

tion at their December meeting, and the chapters requested instead of receiving the money directly that the purchased materials are delivered to each chapter.

The weatherization work will start in January.

The chapters will then provide a report of the number of households weatherized and types of weatherization done at the project's conclusion.

The focus for now is on weatherization. However, funding for some solar pilot projects will be available next year for chapter houses and residences to install solar PV.

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# Carson jeopardizes rivers

## National forest's draft removes many rivers from protected list

**Teresa Seamster  
Chair, Northern New Mexico Group**

More than 100 free-flowing rivers in northern New Mexico's Carson National Forest are listed as Wild and Scenic. Criteria announced in a recently released Carson draft on river eligibility now threatens these vital waters with delisting to recreational or non-protected status.

The Carson's draft evaluation includes 61 river segments that were previously found eligible for designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, but that the Carson now considers non-eligible.

Carson National Forest coalition members, including our group and chapter, are concerned that the Carson has improperly removed many of these rivers from the eligibility list. Specifically, the Carson used an impermissibly narrow criteria, "Outstandingly Remarkable Value," for at least one value (recreation), and used an inappropriately large region, the entire Four Corners region, for comparison for several key values.

In a simple example: the former wild-river segments of Yerba, Gavilan and Long Canyons have all been deemed ineligible because the outstanding hiking, camping and opportunities for solitude, formerly included as eligible criteria, have been removed from the Carson's current list of outstanding values.

After hiking these streams that flow into the Rio Hondo, commenters from Amigos Bravos, New Mexico Wildlife Federation and Sierra Club all agreed:

"The hikes along Yerba, Gavilan and Long Canyons provide some of the most spectacular scenic views in the



Photo courtesy Teresa Seamster

**Columbine River is beautiful and free-flowing but is now designated a "recreational" river due to its popular streamside campground and trailhead areas.**

area, and many hikers choose these hikes specifically because they occur along the river. People all over Taos County hike along these canyons in the fall for the views of golden aspen and peaks tinged with the first dusting of autumn snows. These three rivers provide outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, and riparian values. Ironically, while these rivers fall within Wilderness, which by definition is an area recognized by Congress for its solitude, all of these rivers fail to meet the "recreational value" as defined by the Carson to include "exceptional solitude."

The traditional recreational uses of hiking, camping and hunting, which have been omitted by the Carson as recreational values, are not only the predominate recreational uses in northern New Mexico, but are also considered a way of life within local communities and are critical to attracting visitors and boosting the local and state economy.

The Carson's new eligibility requirements places ultimate

### Join the team

Join the Rio Grande Chapter's Zero Waste Team to promote reducing, reusing, recycling and composting. To join or learn more, contact Joe Eigner at joseigner@gmail.com.

value on outstanding fishing, seasonal kayaking or rafting, and exceptional wildlife viewing and/or solitude. By comparison, the original designation handbook includes a much more open-ended list of recreational opportunities: "River-related recreational opportunities include, but are not limited to, sightseeing, interpretation, wildlife observation, camping, photography, hiking, fishing, hunting, and boating."

For more information, please contact Teresa Seamster at tc.seamster@gmail.com, or check our Carson National Forest Wild and Scenic Rivers Eligibility Comments at riograndesierraclub.org.

### Call for volunteers

The Northern New Mexico Group needs you to help the current volunteers with distribution of the Sierran to coffee shops, libraries, etc., in the area. **If you have a few hours to spare once every three months and would like to help, please contact Volunteer Coordinator Pat Carlton at 505-988-1596 or carlton505@comcast.net.** Thank you!

### Meetings

**Northern New Mexico Group Executive Committee meetings** are the first Tuesday of the month at 7 p.m., at our office at 1807 Second St., Suite 45, in Santa Fe.

**The Northern New Mexico Group Conservation Committee** resumes its monthly meetings at 7 p.m. every third Tuesday of the month. Conservation Committee meetings are also held at the Sierra Club Santa Fe office, 1807 Second St., Suite 45.

# Looking back and forward at Caldera

By Tom Ribe  
Caldera Action

Right in the center of northern New Mexico lie the round Jemez Mountains, with a giant sleeping volcano at their core. Today the floor of the collapsed volcano is the Valles Caldera National Preserve, managed by the National Park Service since 2015. Jody Benson wrote about this new preserve in the fall Rio Grande Sierran. I offer updates and a few details to help readers protect the preserve.

Some quick background, lest anyone thinks getting the Valles Caldera to its current state was easy or quick: Before the 1860s, the area was used by a large number of native peoples from all over the region. It continues to be sacred to various tribes today. The Valles Caldera used to be called the Baca Ranch, and it was private land from the mid-1800s until 2000. As private land, it was grazed to dust by sheep in the 1930s and logged so that few stands of old-growth forest remain. Enter citizen activists in 1999 when the Dunnigans, the last private owners, said they would be willing to sell this vast and interesting place. Led by Barbara Johnson and Dorothy Hoard, among others, activists prevailed on our Congressional delegation to buy the property for the American people in 2000.

Yet things are never simple, and the late U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici resisted public ownership, saying New Mexico had too much public land already. He consented to federal purchase only if libertarian ideals were applied to its management, ideas that many on the right hoped would spread and ease other public lands toward privatization. Thus was born the VCNP Trust, which was charged with making as much money as it could from the land as an “experiment.” Fortunately U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman insisted the preserve managers follow most federal environmental-protection laws, a requirement that protected the Valles Caldera and led to some positive outcomes.

Complying with the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act, among other laws, led the VCNP managers to develop the most detailed and extensive scientific research and science-based management program of any public land area with the exception of a couple of large national parks. The science at the preserve constrained commercial uses as managers found out exactly how much grass or timber or wildlife species were present on the preserve. Researchers have flocked to the preserve to study many aspects of the natural world, and their most poignant findings have been a clear reading of global warming in the southern Rocky Mountains.

Though the science program under the Trust was great, most other aspects of the Trust management experiment were problematic, despite the best efforts of an excellent staff.

For eight years, numerous activists attended public meetings, wrote to Congress, consulted with locals, flew to Washington to meet with our



Photo courtesy National Park Service

Valles Caldera, above, was transferred to National Park Service management in 2015 after years of grassroots citizen efforts.

## Meetings and Events

The Pajarito Group is partnering with PEEC, 2600 Canyon Road, for our Sierra Club Presentations.

**7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 6: Justin Stevenson presents “North American Bats and White-Nose Syndrome.”** Join Justin Stevenson, cofounder of R.D. Wildlife Management and Fightwtns, for a celebration of North American bats — their life history, behavior, and biology. View footage of New Mexican bat species and learn about conservation risks including white-nose syndrome. Several native species will be on hand to provide a unique opportunity to see these beautiful and amazing mammals up-close and in person.

**7 p.m. March 6: Jean Dewart presents “A Hike on the Pacific Crest Trail.”**

On Aug. 3, after six months training with multiple experimental loads and footwear, after pouring over route maps, planning resupply positions, and organizing support, Jean Dewart set off on the Pacific Crest Trail. Her goal was to hike 235 miles, from Ashland to Cascade Locks, Ore. Jean will share how to prepare for such a hike—from gear, food, maps, and apps, to the essential training.

delegation. The most active groups were Caldera Action, the New Mexico Wildlife Federation and some Sierra Club members. When Sen. Jeff Bingaman retired, Martin Heinrich won his seat and Sen. Heinrich worked to move the Valles Caldera to the National Park Service in order to provide quality, professional management on behalf of all Americans (including tribes).

The National Park Service understands the public is impatient, having gone through restricted access under the Trust, multiple Trust planning processes, many public meetings and endless comment periods with the Trust. Rather than begin the planning process from scratch, the National Park Service took the body of public comments from 15 years of trust management and is putting together management plans for the Preserve that are undergoing final touches now. The management plans which will be released through the National Environmental Policy Act will be open to public input.

The Park Service plans a two-phase management plan for our preserve, one for the “front country” that involves the Valle Grande area and another for the “back country,” which focuses on everywhere else. The front-country planning looks at the cabin district, where buildings left from private ranch days offer public-use opportunities and various trailheads that could serve day-use visitors. In 2018, the NPS will release two EA documents — one regarding the

construction of an electric van garage and facilities maintenance shop, and one for four parking areas and associated vault toilets in from the South Mountain trailhead to the west and a little past the horse barn to the east.

Beyond these immediate access improvements, the NPS plans to improve the water system for the cabin district, move the visitor center to the cabin area, put in a solar system to replace the dangerous power line that feeds power to the preserve now, open new facilities for horse riders, provide housing for seasonal staff and improve the entrance area. Eventually a new administrative building may be built and more signage and new trails will be opened.

Superintendent Jorge Silva-Bañuelos wants to move as quickly as public agreement and budgets allow to improve the public experience of the VCNP. He feels the current preserve facilities are too rough, so the preserve currently is not charging fees.

Meanwhile climate change is increasing the severity and frequency of wildfires in the high Jemez Mountains, as we saw with the Cerro Grande and Las Conchas fires. The NPS has been doing prescribed fires in the southwest part of the Preserve and in grasslands and will continue to reintroduce fire that mimics historic and prehistoric lightning fires throughout the Preserve for years to come. Limited mechanical thinning on South Mountain and elsewhere will supplement the fire-management program.

## Pajarito Group Directory

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### Executive Committee

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**Correction to “Setting up a National Park from scratch”:** The statement that road costs “represent a significant chunk of the \$7 trillion in deferred maintenance throughout the Park System,” is incorrect. The NPS maintenance backlog is \$12 billion.

We the people who own the Valles Caldera National Preserve and entrust its care to our National Park Service can be assured that careful planning, public input and improvements to our preserve are happening. In the meantime, come up and hike and ski on the preserve through the winter, free of charge.

January/February/March 2018

# Final plan leaves wolves in trouble

By Mary Katherine Ray  
Wildlife chair

Under court order, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released its final version of the long-awaited Mexican Wolf Recovery Plan in late November.

The Service received more than 100,000 comments about the draft, 99% of which were in support of wolf recovery (some of which were yours — thank you!).

Many of those comments were concerned with the low number of wolves allowed in the plan and the declining genetic diversity of the wild population.

Unfortunately, the final plan does not significantly address those concerns. It raises the upper limit of the population allowed in Mexico from 180 to 200 wolves but left the cap on the U.S. population at 320. Bear in mind that no endangered species has ever had an upper limit put on its numbers, and it means that from now until forever, no more than that number will be allowed to live in the wild in the U.S.

Biologists have previously found that more than double that number would be needed to ensure a sustainable wild population, and that they would need to roam a larger area that includes the Grand Canyon and Northern New Mexico north



Photo courtesy Wolf Conservation Center

**To boost the genes of wild lobos, the Fish and Wildlife Service plans to rely entirely on cross-fostering captive pups like this one into the litters of wild wolves. Such cross-fostering is extremely difficult to carry out successfully.**

**No endangered species has ever had an upper limit put on its numbers. Under the Fish & Wildlife plan, no more than 320 Mexican wolves will be allowed to live in the wild in the U.S.**

of I-40. The final plan does not allow wolves in the U.S. to roam north of the present Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area of Southern Arizona and New Mexico.

The final plan also relies heav-

ily on a nascent population in Mexico to contribute to recovery, despite the Endangered Species Act having no authority outside of the U.S. and no connection between the U.S. population and that in Mexico.

population. But the Service is not intending that any wolf families that include adults be placed into the wild next year. Instead it is relying entirely on the cross-fostering of 12 captive-born wolf pups with important genes into six wild litters in the hope that the wild parents will accept the pups and raise them as their own. Cross-fostering of unrelated pups has been shown to be possible, but the logistics can be daunting. The pups of both the wild and captive litters can be no older than 14 days, and both litters have to have been whelped fewer than 10 days apart. If captive wolf families were released in whole, wolves of breeding age would be added to the wild immediately. Pups take two years to reach the point where their genes can begin to enter the wild population. Nonetheless, this plan, if realized, would represent a significant addition to the wild population.

Will the states of Arizona and New Mexico "cooperate" with this release proposal? Will the timing work? We will find out in the coming months. Meanwhile, a host of conservation groups have filed notices of intent to sue over the inadequacies of the final recovery plan.

For more information or to get involved, contact Mary Katherine Ray at [mkrscrim@gmail.com](mailto:mkrscrim@gmail.com).

## Hikes and Events, continued from Page 16

through to Aguirre Springs, otherwise we will return to start. Baylor Pass provides the only hiking route that traverses the Organ Mountains. The pass is between Rabbit Ears to the south and Baylor Peak to the north. Hike will be approximately seven miles and 1,600 feet of vertical elevation gain. Call Howie Dash for meeting time and place: 575-652-7550 or [howiedash@aol.com](mailto:howiedash@aol.com).

**Saturday, March 10: Moderate cross-country ski outing**, about 4-5 miles, location depending on conditions. Alan Shapiro, [nm5s@yahoo.com](mailto:nm5s@yahoo.com).

**Saturday, March 17: Strenuous snowshoe outing** to Penitente Peak, 13 miles and 3,100 feet elevation gain. Two or three dogs OK. Larry, [lorenz.hughes@gmail.com](mailto:lorenz.hughes@gmail.com) 505-983-8296.

**Sunday, March 18: Moderate hike to Tor and the Blowhole** in the Caja Del Rio. About 6 miles, 1,000-foot elevation gain, some on-trail, some off-trail. Limit of eight hikers. High-clearance vehicles needed; wet roads cancel hike. Daisy Levine, [tiadora1@gmail.com](mailto:tiadora1@gmail.com).

**Saturday, March 24: Cienega Trail hike** sponsored by the Sierra Club Military Outdoors Program. Everyone is welcome. Moderate difficulty, with 1,800 feet of elevation gain and 4.5 miles round trip in approximately 5 hours. Meet at the Sandia Crest trail-head. Proceed to where you can admire views and enjoy the serenity of the Cibola Wilderness area. Contact Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, [teowen@q.com](mailto:teowen@q.com)

### For the latest outings updates

To find out about new hikes or updates to existing events:

Northern New Mexico outings Meetup site: [www.meetup.com/Santa-Fe-Sierra-Club-Outings/](http://www.meetup.com/Santa-Fe-Sierra-Club-Outings/).

Albuquerque Meetup site: [www.meetup.com/Sierra-Club-Rio-Grande-Chapter/](http://www.meetup.com/Sierra-Club-Rio-Grande-Chapter/).

To get weekly emails, send an email to [Listserv@lists.sierraclub.org](mailto:Listserv@lists.sierraclub.org) with any subject and a message that says SUBSCRIBE RIO-NORTH-OUTINGS.

by March 22 to RSVP and obtain details as well as the recommended gear list.

**Sunday, March 25: Moderate (about 3.5 miles) hike going south on Faulty trail.** Start from Cole-spring trail-head on NM route 299, east of Cañoncito. We will leave transportation at the other end: the "Canyon Estate Tijeras Subdivision." Meet 12:30 p.m. at the Smiths Parking lot at the intersection of Central and Tramway. End with optional potluck at Odile and Jim's house. Contact Odile by March 24, h: 505-433-4692, or c: 505-933-1630, [Odile@pitot.org](mailto:Odile@pitot.org). Please specify: (1) cell-phone number; (2) if coming to the potluck; and (3) where you can meet the group. Three dogs on leash OK.



Photo by Thomas Seamster

### Please be careful out there

A reminder for hikers: Beware of traps on our public lands this winter. Bobcats like this one are prized by trappers for the monetary value of their pelts.

Leghold traps and snares may be legally placed as little as 25 yards from a road or trail on National Forest, BLM and state trust lands from Nov. 1 to March 15.

Traps may be baited with odor lures that are attractive to companion dogs. To learn more about the trapping regulations, how to release a dog from a trap, report a trap incident and about how we are working to end trapping, please visit our coalition website: [www.trapfreenm.org](http://www.trapfreenm.org).

# January-March hikes & events

## January

**Saturday, Jan. 6: Moderate hike to Buckman Mesa and Otowi Peak**, 5 miles with 1,100 feet of elevation gain. Alan Shapiro, nm5s@yahoo.comSunday.

**Saturday, Jan. 13: Moderate/strenuous snowshoe outing** to La Vega, 9 miles and 1,300 feet elevation gain. Two or three dogs OK. Larry, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com 505-983-8296.

**Saturday, Jan. 13: Introductory snowshoe** hike with the Sierra Club Military Outdoors Program and Kirtland Air Force Base Outdoor Recreation teaming up. All are welcome to join. Techniques to help safely traverse an alpine environment will be covered, while exploring the beautiful Sandia Mountains. Two-hour easy outing (approximately 2.25 miles round trip with 150 feet of elevation gain) starts at the Sandia Crest parking lot and proceeds along the crest trail with several stops to enjoy stunning views. Meet at the upper Sandia Crest parking lot near the antennas (located at the terminus of NM Route 536, "Sandia Crest Scenic Highway"). Contact Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, teowen@q.com by Jan. 10 to RSVP and obtain details and the recommended gear list.

**Sunday, Jan. 14: moderate 8.4 miles White Mesa Loop.** Meet 9:30 a.m. at the intersection of Paseo del Norte and I-25, on the North side of the Target Parking lot. Two dogs on leash OK. End with optional potluck at Odile and Jim's house. Contact Odile by Jan 13, h: 505-433-4692, or c: 505-933-1630, Odile@pitot.org. Please specify: (1) cell-phone number; (2) if coming to the potluck; and (3) where you can meet the group.

## February

**Saturday, Feb. 3: strenuous snowshoe outing to Deception Peak**, 6 miles and 2500-foot elevation gain. Two or three dogs OK. Contact Larry at lorenz.hughes@gmail.com 505-983-8296.

**Saturday, Feb. 3: Easy hike to the Tesuque Creek** along the Burn trail, 3 miles. Alan Shapiro, nm5s@yahoo.com.

**Sunday, Feb. 4: (Superbowl). Easy morning hike** up the close by Sun Mountain, just 2 miles, but with 730 feet of elevation to gain. Alan Shapiro, nm5s@yahoo.com.

**Sunday, Feb. 4: Easy loop on the north side of NM 333.** Meet at 10 a.m. at the Juan Tabo trail head of NM 333, or at 9:45 a.m. on the south side of the Albertsons parking



Photo by Ann Maes

**Hikers enjoy the view on a moderate-difficulty outing to Kitchen Mesa and Box Canyon in October. All Sierra Club outings are free and open to the public. Difficulty rating is listed on each.**

lot on Academy Road close to the intersection of Tramway Boulevard and Academy roads. End with optional potluck at Odile and Jim's house. Contact Odile by Feb. 3, h: 505-433-4692, or cell: 505-933-1630, Odile@pitot.org. Please specify: (1) cell-phone number; (2) if coming to the potluck; and (3) where you can meet the group.

**Saturday, Feb. 10: Introductory cross-country ski outing**, with The Sierra Club Military Outdoors Program and Kirtland Air Force Base Outdoor Recreation teaming up. All are welcome to join. Techniques to help safely traverse in an alpine environment and new skills will be presented in a welcoming and fun environment. Two-hour long easy outing (approximately 2.5 miles round trip with 150 feet of elevation gain) starts at the Ellis trailhead parking lot and proceeds to the crest trail with several stops to enjoy views all the way to the continental divide. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at the Ellis Trailhead parking lot located on NM



Tom Chymbor

**Tom Chymbor took this shot at a rarely visited vantage point in the badlands south of Abiquiú in December.**

Route 536 (Sandia Crest Scenic Highway). Contact Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, teowen@q.com by Feb. 7 to RSVP, and obtain details as well as the recommended gear list.

**Sunday, Feb. 11: Easy 3-mile hike** to Deer Trap Mesa in Los Alamos. Alan Shapiro, nm5s@yahoo.com.

**Saturday, Feb. 17: Moderate cross-country ski outing**, about 4-5 miles, location depending on conditions. Alan Shapiro, nm5s@yahoo.com.

**Sunday, Feb. 18: Easy walk in bosque.** View the late-winter state of the Army Corps of Engineers restoration in the Bosque at end of Valley High SW, on east side of river.

## About these hikes

**Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter outings are free and open to the public.** Level of difficulty is listed in hike descriptions. All mileages are round-trip. Participants must sign a liability waiver. Bring water, lunch, sturdy hiking boots or shoes and clothing suitable for the weather. Leader reserves right to turn away anyone whose experience or equipment appears unsuitable. Leader may alter destination or cancel trip due to weather, conditions, or insufficient number of participants. Unaccompanied minors need written permission from a parent or guardian. Ask leader for form. Dogs permitted only if noted in write-up.

**Always contact leader before the outing to confirm participation and details.** Please see [riograndesierraclub.org/outings](http://riograndesierraclub.org/outings) for up-to-date hike information.

Our **weekly outings e-mail**, Sierra Trail Mix, provides outings updates plus useful outdoor information such as trail conditions. Send an email to [Listserv@lists.sierraclub.org](mailto:Listserv@lists.sierraclub.org) with any subject and a message that says SUBSCRIBE RIO-NORTH-OUTINGS.

Meet at 8:30 am at west end of Valley High SW, where it meets the acequia. Easy walk of about 1-1.5 hours. See successful restoration work and its impact on plants and wildlife. Call Mark Rudd at 505-270-5449 or email [markrudd.com](mailto:markrudd.com) for info.

**Saturday, Feb. 24: Strenuous snowshoe outing** to Spirit Lake, 12 miles and 2,200-foot elevation gain. Two or three dogs OK. Larry, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com 505 983 8296

**Sunday, Feb. 25: Moderate cross-country ski outing**, about 4-5 miles, location depending on conditions. Alan Shapiro, nm5s@yahoo.com.

## March

**Sunday, March 4: Tour the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument**, Baylor Pass. We will hike the Baylor Canyon Trail from Baylor Canyon Road to Baylor Pass. If opportunity allows, we will hike

Continued on Page 15