



# Rio Grande Sierran

## Shocking

As 196 nations came together to agree on an unprecedented climate accord with broad public support, New Mexico and El Paso enjoyed surprising environmental victories here at home.



Photo by Tom Solomon

**Climate advocates braved the snow and rain on Dec. 12 to march in support of a strong international agreement at the Paris climate conference. They were rewarded with a deal that day.**

With utilities nationwide conspiring to kill competition from residential solar and using New Mexico and El Paso as test cases, who would have guessed they would fail at every turn so far? **Page 10**



Jennifer Esperanza

Meanwhile, PNM's attempt to impose solar fees was rejected, and while its plan for retiring half of San Juan coal plant is a go, it must justify the other half's existence in 2018. And the utility faces an uphill fight to replace some San Juan coal with natural gas instead of renewables (**Page 7**). New threats loom, including applications for uranium and copper mines, but citizens are fighting back. More inside.



### INSIDE



#### More Game Commission debacles

The commission makes New Mexico the only state not to apply for millions in federal funding to study wildlife and prevent endangered-species listings. Another wolf decision is due in January. **Page 3.**

#### Rio Rancho targeted for fracking

Sandridge Exploration, a financially troubled oil company based in Oklahoma, wants to set up shop in Central New Mexico. **Page 6.**



#### Bill would protect Castner Range

U.S. Rep. Beto O'Rourke introduces federal legislation to permanently protect Texas's Castner Range, which is threatened by commercial development. **Page 9**



#### Rio Grande Chapter loses a friend

Jeff Potter, a leader in the Sierra Club Central New Mexico Group and Rio Grande Chapter, passed away at age 60 in December. **Page 5.**

#### Interior signs on to Gila River diversion

But the conditions placed on the diversion process by the Interior Department mean that if the process is followed honestly, it's highly unlikely the diversion will happen. **Page 9.**

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### EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET



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Page 1 banner photo by Lajla Ryen

Sierran publication information

The *Rio Grande Sierran* is published four times a year, in January, April, July and October, by the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club as a benefit for members living in New Mexico and West Texas.  
Rio Grande Chapter offices are at 142 Truman NE, Albuquerque, NM, 87108. 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.**  
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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 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.  
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Volunteers needed

**Northern New Mexico Group Volunteer Coordinator:** This important position seeks out, tracks, and monitors volunteers to help out with our many commitments and issues. Pat Carlton, 505-986-1596, carlton505@comcast.net  
**Tabling Coordinator:** Seek out tabling opportunities around Santa Fe for the Northern Group to distribute literature and sell merchandise, and coordinate tabling volunteers. Contact Teresa Seamster, tc.seamster@gmail.com.



# Federal law prevails on wolf release

By Mary Katherine Ray  
Chapter Wildlife chair

In January 2015, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published new protocols for Mexican wolf recovery that increases the size of the area south of I-40 in New Mexico and Texas where wolves can be released from captivity into the wild and where they will be allowed to roam.

In response, last September, Gov. Susana Martinez's Game Commission denied the Fish and Wildlife Service permission to import and release endangered Mexican wolves into the wild in New Mexico. It was a blatant attempt to obstruct wolf recovery. Scientists are alarmed at the decline in genetic diversity of the wild wolf population, which urgently needs bolstering from the captive one. Because there are so few Mexican wolves in the wild, they have become more in-bred over the years. It is difficult for wild wolves seeking mates to find one that is not closely related. As with any of us, inbreeding increases the risk of harmful genetic mutations and reduces the fitness of the population.

The sole reason given by the Game Commission to deny this permit was that the FWS has not produced a new recovery plan since the 1980s. Commissioners expressed fears that there was no endpoint at which lobos would be considered 'recovered' so they did not know how many wolves would finally be enough. The original plan uses 100 wolves in New Mexico and Arizona as an initial goal but not as representative of recovery. The lobo population, after decades, has just exceeded that. Previous attempts to update the wolf-recovery plan have been mysteriously abandoned, most recently when it was leaked that scientists believed that, to be viable, the lobo population should consist of around 750 individuals separated into three sub-populations with travel corridors between them. We now know more about what a viable wolf population will need than we did in the 1980s. The Fish and Wildlife Service says it will have an updated recovery plan by 2017. But wolves' survival would be harmed if the agency had to wait until then for more releases.

## US Fish and Wildlife to proceed anyway

Nevertheless, shortly after the Game Commission denied the Fish and Wildlife Service's wolf permit, the Department of Interior did the right thing and gave Fish and Wildlife the go-ahead to release more wolves into New Mexico anyway. The Endangered Species Act is a federal law, and federal laws take precedence over state and



Photo courtesy Art Rescues

**Hundreds attended the September Game Commission meeting to support U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's appeal to release Mexican wolves into the wild in New Mexico. The commission denied the appeal and in January will rule on an appeal from the private Ladder Ranch, which has a wolf-holding facility.**

### Take action

Game Commission meeting on Ladder Ranch wolf-holding permit:

**Where:** Santa Fe Community College, 6401 Richards Aven.

**When:** 9 a.m. Jan. 14. Rally to support wolves at 8 a.m.

local laws, according to the U.S. Constitution. The Fish and Wildlife Service is required to uphold the Endangered Species Act and to proceed with wolf recovery even absent the blessing of the state agency, New Mexico Game and Fish. The time and place for the release of new wolves has not been yet announced.

## Reconsidering Ladder Ranch wolf permit

The Game Commission previously also denied the Ladder Ranch permit to hold wolves and the Ladder Ranch is appealing the denial. In a strange legal arrangement, instead of going to a higher body, the Game Commission that made the original decision is also the arbiter of the appeal.

The Ladder Ranch, located in Sierra County near the Gila wolf-recovery area, is owned by Ted Turner. There are several other wolf facilities in New Mexico that can also import, breed and hold wolves, but they are not on private land. Their wolf permits have not been questioned or denied. The Commission is essentially singling out the Ladder Ranch for unequal treatment.

Mike Phillips of the Turner Endangered Species Fund testified for the Ladder Ranch permit appeal and firmly told commissioners that the Ladder Ranch facility has never cut corners when it comes to carrying out the protocols for captive wolves. Even a document request to New Mexico Game and Fish for any evidence or agency analysis of the Ladder Ranch operations turned up nothing that would allow anyone to conclude that the Ladder Ranch has mismanaged wolves.

In the end, Game commissioners decided not to decide and put off making the final decision until the January meeting in Santa Fe. It will be on Thursday, Jan. 14, at the Santa Fe Community College Board Room. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend to show support for wolves and convince the state Game Commission to start 2016 out on the right foot by returning permission to the Ladder Ranch to continue their work contributing to wolf recovery.

## Socorro County joins wolf obstruction

The Socorro County Commission passed a county ordinance in November that prohibits the release of wolves into the wild within the county. The Sevilleta Wildlife Refuge lies within the county and has a facility to hold wolves similar to that at the Ladder Ranch. The county also reaps an enormous benefit from wildlife tourism to Bosque del Apache. With vision, because

Continued on Page 4

# Game Commission nixes federal funding

*N.M. only state that will not submit a Wildlife Action Plan to USFWS for millions in funding*

By Teresa Seamster,  
Northern Group chair

The 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan took two years to develop and was prepared with the cooperation of many state partners, such as Natural Heritage New Mexico at UNM, Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at New Mexico State University, state Forestry and the Surface Water Bureau.

A simple request for a 10-year renewal of federal funding for the Wildlife Action Plan suddenly took on aspects of a showdown between Game commissioners and the Game and Fish Department when staff biologists presented the plan at the November commission meeting in Roswell.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife funding is offered to all 50 states plus U.S. territories to help state wildlife departments monitor and develop information on any native species that is declining in number or vulnerable to extinction. All 50 states have submitted their state-approved state wildlife action plans and will receive their 2016 funding from the U.S. Fish

and Wildlife Service, with one exception: New Mexico.

The commissioners criticized the plan for being too long and too difficult to understand. They criticized the section that outlined "threats to species," which they felt was "hostile" to oil development and agriculture, and said the three-tiered listing of at-risk species was "incomprehensible" (Tier 1 lists the most threatened animals, and Tier 2 and Tier 3 list species in the order they are most likely to become threatened over the next 10 years).

Commissioner Beth Ryan, an oil-and-gas "landsman," and attorney, was the most outspoken in her claims that the Wildlife Plan was a "regulatory document" that could be used to force oil companies and ranchers to do something they didn't want to do. The Game and Fish Department stated repeatedly that the plan can only be used for planning purposes and cannot compel any action, but that fell on deaf ears, and Ryan insisted she "did not agree."

Ryan further contended that New Mexico has too many species (455) on the list of "species of greatest conservation need" and it should be "about 10." The fact that New Mexico has some of the highest biodiversity in the United States and that similar states, such as Texas and California, list over 800

Continued on Page 4



# No time to stop and celebrate Paris

2015 was an active year, culminating in success in Paris to establish a worldwide framework for finally acting to stop climate change. In 2016, though, the Rio Grande Chapter will not have time to rest, as we will be



**David Coss,**  
**Rio Grande**  
**Chapter chair**

entering a critical political time in our state and our country. So I want to thank each Sierra Club member, volunteer and staff member for their work in the struggle

for a healthy environment and a just state and country.

Gov. Susana Martinez and national Republicans have chosen the politics of cynicism and fear as the way to govern our state and nation, but the Sierra Club has met them and won when it counts. The Martinez Administration cynically supports a boondoggle project to dam the Gila River, when they know it cannot meet any reasonable objectives and will cost more than \$1 billion. Our activists have done a great job educating the public and the Legislature and of standing up to the governor's agents, and



**New Mexico Copper Corp. is proposing to re-establish Copper Flat mine, shown here in 2002. Another company has applied to reactivate the uranium mine on Mount Taylor. Stories on Page 8.**

**the Department of Interior has now added a significant level of difficulty to the path of a Gila diversion. See Page 9.**

We'll be at the state Legislature with the message that the citizens of southwest New Mexico need jobs and clean air and water, not magical thinking and wedge issues. From dairies to copper mines to ill-advised diversion projects, the Sierra Club will continue to fight for New Mexico's water quality. **See Page 8 to learn about mining threats we're fending off.**

The Sierra Club and our allies will continue the fight to uphold

the federal Endangered Species Act and the critical reintroduction of more Mexican wolves to our public lands. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service knows the Sierra Club will have its back as it follows the requirements of the law and uses science instead of fear-mongering to manage the wildlife that belongs to all of us. We are grateful for the public support we have received as we fight to protect wildlife from killing contests, cruel traps and other forms of exploitation. **Read more about the Game Commission's latest reckless decisions on Page 3, and about trapping season on Page 11.**

New Mexicans love their public lands, and the Sierra Club will continue to fight for them in 2016. We expect this year more legislation to privatize public lands for the benefit of the few. New Mexicans don't want this, and we will be at every rally and hearing to fight for our heritage of public lands. **Find out more about the upcoming legislative session and how you can become more involved on Page 11.**

Finally, friends, we will continue efforts to adopt more renewable energy and move away from burning fossil fuels. The PNM settlement was not

all it should have been or could have been, but we will not stop until PNM fully transitions away from burning coal at San Juan Generating Station. And the decision over replacement power from the plant is not over: **PNM proposes to build a new natural-gas plant rather than investing in renewable energy. Our Beyond Coal campaign is intervening; see Page 7.**

With the success of the work in Paris, we will do our part to develop and protect the programs for citizens, businesses, and governments to address climate change. We have to.

The election of 2016 will be crucial for our environment. **See Page 10 for successes by our Southern New Mexico Group in the recent Las Cruces elections.** It will also be crucial in determining whether we will continue to be a tolerant and welcoming country based on equality for all under the law. The Sierra Club will continue to stand with working people, immigrants, Muslims and all who feel the sting of bigotry and discrimination.

Thank you so much for your membership and activism in the Sierra Club. Together we will make 2016 a great year for our environment, our state and our nation.

## Get out to the bosque!

**Saturday, Jan. 16: Bosque by Wheelchair** — see the Sandhill Cranes at Los Poblanos Fields. Open space will open area to cars. Trails are hard-packed clay.

Also to be seen are hawks, Canada geese, the occasional road runner, crows, perhaps a few song birds and coyotes. 10 a.m. Bring cameras and binoculars. Contact Colston Chandler, ccent@swcp.com, 505-343-9498.

**Saturday, Feb. 6: Poetry in the Bosque:** Winter is a good time to see porcupines curled up, high in leafless trees, and bald eagles perched across the river. We might even see some coyotes hunting in the snow or great horned owls beginning to nest. On this moderate 3-mile loop, we will experience the forest in winter, with some readings of winter poems to help us appreciate this this season.

Limit 12 people. 12-2 p.m. Meeting place to be decided depending on

where the owls nest. Dress for the weather. No dogs please. RSVP to M.J. Zimmerman, mjzim@hotmail.com.

**Saturday, Feb. 13: Bosque by Wheelchair:** Tingley Beach to the Viewing Platforms. Explore the wetland ponds and bird viewing shelters just West of Tingley Beach. 1:30-3 p.m. RSVP: Fred Houdek, fjhoudek@gmail.com.

**Sunday, Feb. 21: Bosque on the Westside** — Exploring Calabacillas Arroyo. Discover this magical part of the Bosque tucked away off Coors. See Yerba Mansa stands, fantastic cottonwoods, and more. 1:30 p.m. Contact: Richard Barish, richard.barish@gmail.com, 505-232-3013.

**Saturday, March 12: Bosque by Wheelchair:** Discover the wood carvings at Pueblo Montañño Picnic Area and Trailhead on the Westside. 1:30-3 p.m. RSVP: Billy Meyer, william-meyer4@yahoo.com.

### Game Commission, from Page 3

the county is so much more accessible to large populations centers than the Gila wolf-recovery area, wolf tourism could be an additional draw. But the Socorro county commissioners do not have vision, and now the county sheriff is tasked with enforcing this local ordinance to stop wolf releases.

Socorro County contains National Forest Land where wolves could be released according to new federal rules, but the Socorro County Commission expressed concern that ranchers should be compensated for livestock killed by wolves, apparently not realizing that that compensation is already available. Funding is now provided by the federal

government and administered by the USDA Farm Services Administration. There is money both to pay for confirmed livestock losses caused by wolves and to help ranchers adopt preventative measures.

However, just as the state Game Commission has learned with its permit denial, the county ordinance has a blatant conflict with the federal Endangered Species Act. The supremacy clause of the U.S. Constitution directs that federal law must prevail over state and other local laws. Given the questionable legality of this and similar ordinances in other counties, the passage of this ordinance is nothing more than political posturing and a disrespectful use of the legal system.

### Federal funding, from Page 3

species of concern made no impression.

The governor-appointed commissioners stated repeatedly they did not trust the federal government with comments like:

"I, like others here, can't trust the Fish and Wildlife Service, (and) also the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service." And, "I appreciate you put in the document that it is a planning tool and not regulatory, but I don't believe that the federal agencies look at it that way."

### What is the State Wildlife Action Plan?

- The State Wildlife and Tribal Grants Program is the only federal program with the explicit goal of preventing Endangered Species listings.

- These grants are available to states with an approved State Wildlife Action

Plan that identify "species of greatest conservation need" and voluntary measures to conserve them.

- State wildlife action plans are non-regulatory. They are intended to save taxpayer dollars by conserving fish and wildlife through proactive, voluntary measures before they become more costly (and controversial) to conserve as endangered species.

- Over the last 10 years, New Mexico has received almost \$14 million in State Wildlife Grants that have funded 55 projects — research, habitat acquisition, monitoring and restoration projects that benefit all species and would not have been funded otherwise.

In denying approval, the Game Commission has thrown away up to \$14 million for the conservation mission of the department over the next 10 years. Decisions like this lead to failure in protecting sensitive native species and another last place for New Mexico.

## Ways to support our chapter

Our local New Mexico and West Texas chapter of the Sierra Club receives only a small percentage of your membership dues. All the work you read about here is led by volunteers and staff that are supported mostly by your donations.

To donate, please go to [riograndesierraclub.org/donate](http://riograndesierraclub.org/donate) or send donations to 1807 Second Street, Unit 45, Santa Fe, NM, 87505.



# Berry reneges on Bosque agreement

By Richard Barish  
Bosque Action chair

In February, Albuquerque Mayor Richard Berry plowed a trail through the Bosque with no advance notice to anyone. A public outcry ensued.

As a result, in March, the City, the Sierra Club, and the Bosque Action Team negotiated procedures to allow adequate public input into future Bosque projects. The agreement was unconditional and not dependent on enactment into law, but City Councilors Isaac Benton and Ken Sanchez thought it would be a good idea to make the procedures legally binding.

The Resolution incorporating the procedures came up for a vote on Nov. 16. To everyone's surprise, the

Administration opposed the resolution. The resolution passed, was vetoed, and the veto was sustained, all, sadly, on party-line votes.

The City's opposition stemmed from the fact that it had decided, apparently in October, that it wanted to extend its trail from the I-40 bridge about a mile north to Campbell Road this winter. By the time the City made this decision, there was not a lot of time to comply with the agreed procedures and still get the work done before nesting season, when it would have to cease work in the Bosque. The City told us on Oct. 21 that it would comply with the procedures, but instead of making that effort, the City then decided to scrap the agreement.

The City has known about that agree-

ment since March. If it wanted to get work done this winter, it could have planned to allow adequate time to follow the agreed procedures. Moreover, there is no urgency to get this work done this winter. The City could instead begin construction as soon as nesting season is over at the end of summer.

The City will now allow almost no time for the public to comment on alternatives. **The City plans a public meeting on Jan. 7 at Los Duranes Community Center, 2920 Leopoldo Road NW, from 5:30 to 7 p.m.** It will present alternatives and take comments for one hour. It will then allow an eight-day comment period, until Jan. 15, in which comments will be fully considered. Comments can then be submitted until the end of the month,

but there is no guarantee that they will be considered at all.

Moreover, the City is only taking comments on one issue — the route of the trail. It is not taking comments on the width of the trail or the materials from which it will be constructed. The City has pre-determined that the trail will be a 6-foot-wide crusher fine trail, the same as the first section of the trail.

The Mayor is doing the barest shadow of a process. If you blink, you'll miss it. Nonetheless, we need to let the City know what we think! Please plan to attend the public meeting and to submit your comments. For information on the issues, or to get on our listserv to be kept up to date, contact Richard Barish, richard.barish@gmail.com or 505-232-3013.



Photo by Deborah Potter

**Jeff Potter, a Central New Mexico Group Executive Committee member and webmaster for the Rio Grande Chapter, died of brain cancer Dec. 3. His upbeat and kind presence will be missed by everyone he worked with.**

## Jeff Potter, 1955-2015

By Ray Powell  
Former State Land  
Commissioner

A life worth celebrating! Jeffrey William Potter, an active member and leader of our Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club, died on Dec. 3, 2015, from brain cancer.

Jeff was born in Los Alamos, on June 30, 1955. He graduated from Los Alamos High School, the University of New Mexico (B.A. fine art and B.S. biology) and the University of Georgia (M.S. Biochemistry). He retired from the UNM Cancer Center as a research scientist in 2006. Jeff was a talented artist and scientist, a leader in the fine-art community and the Alameda North Valley Association.

I had the great good fortune to have known Jeff from our days together as biology students at UNM. His passion



**Jeff's many passions included painting New Mexico vistas, like this one of La Bajada.**

for life was evident every day as he pursued and devoured his course work in both fine arts and biology.

He shared his enormous enthusiasm for New Mexico's natural world on field trips through the desert grasslands, the high mountains, and the rare and lush riparian oases.

Jeff would pull me out of my myopic fixation with botanical and animal taxonomy and help me appreciate and reflect upon the diverse, subtle and rich colors we

encountered. As we walked across the landscape looking at the soil types and underlying geology that supported the enormous diversity of life, he would stop and marvel at the texture and shadows of the leaves, tree trunks, and streambeds. He would take out his sketch pad and capture the unique beauty of an exposed tree root on the side of a dry arroyo.

Jeff's website, jeffpotterart.com, reflects his tremendous talent and love of the

natural world. Guests to his site are greeted with a warm "WELCOME — Join me in an artistic journey where I explore and create works in pastel, oil, watercolor and also block prints and monotypes. Subjects range from pastoral scenes to aerial views meant to highlight the vast space, form and light of the Desert Southwest. There's also a non-traditional side of me too. Enjoy your visit!"

Jeff hit the jackpot in finding his life partner, Deborah Ulinski Potter, a noted scientist and teacher. His joy in sharing stories about Deborah's many accomplishments and her passion for the well-being of animals was always inspiring and uplifting. Jeff also loved to talk about the canine members of his family, who he claimed were nothing short of geniuses. Thank you, Jeff, for enriching my life!

## Memories of Jeff from his friends

"Jeff was a Renaissance man, open to new ideas, passionate about art of all forms and our natural surroundings. He was a political activist, always willing to walk and talk to elect environmental champions. They often became his personal friends. He and I shared a love of our Australian Shepherds and his dogs adored doing agility for him. New Mexico has lost a treasure."

— Susan Martin

"What a gentleman ... in the true sense of the word. Never a disparaging word, always relaxed, unhurried and comfortable. I want to be like that!"

— Laurence Gibson

"An amazing artist and fine fellow. He always had a smile on his face, even after his diagnosis."

— John Buchser

"A gentle, caring and talented person with a beautiful vision of this land."

— Teresa Seamster

"Jeff enabled us to do so many more things by giving his time as webmaster. But with his polite, upbeat personality, he built great relationships. His engagement with elected officials played a pivotal role in saving our state's Mining Act from being gutted in the last legislative session. That was long after he was diagnosed, but he stayed involved in all his passions — art, agility with his dogs, traveling with his wife, and activism to save the beauty in our world for future generations — throughout his illness. He was so wonderful and kind. We're all much better off for his presence here."

— Mona Blaber

*Gifts to the Jeffrey Potter Contribution Account at the Bank of Albuquerque (in the name of Deborah Potter) will be used as memorial awards for artistic excellence at juried art competitions in Jeff's honor. Send contributions to Bank of Albuquerque, Attn: Bank by Mail, P.O. Box 26027, Albuquerque, NM, 87125, or go to any Bank of Albuquerque branch. Deposit to Acct. \*\*\*\*\*5582.*



# Rio Rancho targeted for drilling

By Benton Howell  
Rio Grande Chapter

When an energy company comes to town and asks for quick response to its requests to drill a fracking well within a water-conservation area, and about 2 miles from a residential community, it already has some issues to overcome. But when it asks for a waiver from following the process that the county ordinance has in place to regulate such proposals, things can get unpleasant fast.

This is what happened in Sandoval County in New Mexico on Dec. 10. The planning and zoning commission (P&Z) had a new proposal by SandRidge Exploration and Production to amend the county zoning map so a fracking well could be drilled to a 10,500-foot depth.

The planning director approved the waiver, and thus citizens were not able to engage in a pre-approval hearing where they could have learned what was actually being proposed. The P&Z wisely moved the meeting to a large atrium. About 60 residents, most of whom had learned about it by reading an item in the local paper the day before, showed up.

First, the representatives of Sandridge were questioned by commission members. Some of the questions tried to differentiate between the exploratory phase, which was the first step to be approved, and the second step, the production phase. Water usage was a big issue. It turns out that SandRidge would need 840,000 gallons of water. Thousands of gallons of chemicals would be used in this drilling activity. The water that came out of the well would be transported by truck to Cuba, N.M., for disposal.

Twenty-three attendees were able to give two-minute comments. The tone of the comments was one of dismay and anger that the county government was willing to endanger their neighborhoods and moreover trying to move things along quickly without allowing the citizens affected to know what was about to be passed.

One issue of particular concern was that Sandridge was actually financially unstable and this could pose future problems if problems arise — as in accidental spills. Sandridge only had to guarantee that it could plug the well. Another issue was that up to four wells could actually be drilled on one 40-acre zone.

Some of the comments stressed that the county should not allow the process to reach completion without having comprehensive ordinances in place, and to allow all participants to review the evidence that this was going to be safe for the community. Several speakers asked for a temporary moratorium to allow proper time for updating the ordinances and to make sure that the proposed actions were completely understood. **There is a continuation of this meeting planned for Jan. 28. Watch your email for more information, and write to [riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org) to get on the email list for updates on this issue.**

6 Rio Grande Sierran



Camilla Feibelman

**The crowd at the Albuquerque forum on the EPA's proposed rules to reduce methane emissions was firmly in favor of stronger rules to cut the dangerous greenhouse gas's pollution.**

## Methane key for climate

By Alex Renirie  
Beyond Dirty Fuels organizing representative

As the world emerges from Paris with a too-long-awaited climate deal, it's easy to get swept up in charged debate about whether to be hopeful or cynical. There are endless arguments for both, as we watch world leaders finally reach agreement while any politically feasible action seems underwhelming, at best, compared to the omnipotent threat of climate change.

Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune explains that the level of international coordination in Paris was an unprecedented and even miraculous feat that will limit projected global temperature rise to 2 degrees celsius (meaning a total rise of 3.5 degrees Fahrenheit) if all countries fulfill their commitments. AND, the outcome of this agreement alone would be an indisputably uninhabitable climate. Holding both truths at once, there seems to be only one reasonable path: get to work cutting emissions now.

A cornerstone of President Barack Obama's promise to the world was a commitment to cut methane, a greenhouse gas 86 times more powerful than CO2 on a 20-year timescale (the only timescale that really matters when we're talking about impending climate chaos) and the culprit of the infamous New Mexico methane hot spot above the Four Corners region.

In August, the EPA proposed its first standards to regulate methane emissions from the oil and gas industry, garnering strong support from attendees at public hearings across the country in September.

Throughout the public-comment period for these rules, more than 200 New Mexicans in Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Farmington attended community forums illuminating the dangers of fracking expansion in our state and how national regulations could help curb the impacts on both our health and climate.



Camilla Feibelman

**The Sierra Club's Robert Tohe talks about the negative effects of methane on Four Corners communities at a November forum in Farmington.**

### What you can do

Because New Mexico is a major oil- and gas-producing state, our voices matter to decision-makers in our nation's capital. To get involved in the campaign to make our voices heard, email Alex at [alex.renirie@sierraclub.org](mailto:alex.renirie@sierraclub.org).

More than 27,000 New Mexicans submitted comments in support of the rule, joining more than 850,000 citizens across the country and setting a high bar relative to other oil- and gas-producing states.

Because methane is emitted alongside volatile organic compounds that cause cancer and respiratory disease, community groups, public-health professionals, and impacted communities alike strongly support measures to decrease toxic methane pollution.

But the proposed regulations don't go nearly far enough — whereas Obama's international climate package assumes regulation of methane emissions across the board, the current proposal only covers those from newly built or modified oil and gas infrastructure. As much as 90 percent of total methane emissions

in 2018, however, will come from emissions sources that existed before 2011.

And this is where we come in. Because New Mexico is a major oil- and gas-producing state, our voices matter to decision-makers in our nation's capital. To secure strong existing source regulations from the EPA, we must be loud. We must make it clear that New Mexicans won't tolerate toxic pollution in our communities and want to be on the forefront of curbing global warming.

This spring, the Sierra Club, along with a diverse coalition of partners, will escalate pressure on those decision-makers via a multifaceted advocacy campaign — and we need your help to plan the events, make the calls, and grow the drumbeat for this critical next step of climate action.

Of course regulations will never make fracking safe, and we must continue to vigilantly oppose fossil-fuel extraction at every juncture. But if we are to get serious about climate, we must fight on all fronts. And right now we have the power and momentum to demand standards that will immediately reduce emissions and improve New Mexicans' quality of life. So let's get to work.

January/February/March 2016



# Trade coal for gas? No thanks, PNM

By Nellis Kennedy-Howard  
Beyond Coal senior  
campaign representative

PNM recently applied for permission from the Public Regulation Commission (PRC) to replace a portion of the power from two units of San Juan Generating Station with a new natural-gas plant, without even considering renewable alternatives.

Given that strong majorities of New Mexicans support clean energy over fossil fuels, PNM is clearly out of step with the priorities of their ratepayers.

That's why the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign recently intervened in PNM's request to the PRC — to advo-

## Take Action

**Not all replacement power for PNM's retirement of two of San Juan coal plant's four units has been decided.** While the Public Regulation Commission approved nuclear and some solar to replace part of the lost capacity, PNM still must get approval to build the inefficient natural-gas plant it proposes. The Sierra Club is intervening at the PRC to get renewable energy instead. Contact [riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org) to get on the list for updates on this issue.

cate for the interests of ratepayers and protect our climate.

Earlier this year, PNM issued a request for proposals for this project. But they limited the proposals only to natural gas.

All across the Southwest, wind and solar projects are producing energy more affordably than coal or natural gas. PNM failed

to explore those options when it issued its request for proposals for this new plant. The energy market has changed significantly in recent years, with renewable energy becoming cost-competitive with or even more affordable than fossil fuels. It's time for PNM to catch up with the changing times and the needs of

its ratepayers.

Utilities like Xcel, which owns Southwestern Public Service Co. here in New Mexico, are developing clean-energy projects like the Infinity Wind Resources Roosevelt wind farm that provides power at a third of the cost of burning coal at San Juan Generating Station.

This is the direction we want our state to head in: clean-energy jobs, less pollution, more affordable energy and a liveable climate for our children and grandchildren.

San Juan Generating Station is under pressure from a variety of forces, and it will be very challenging for it to operate past 2022. Why build a whole new gas plant to replace just a

portion of the capacity that will ultimately be lost when San Juan stops burning coal altogether?

Instead, PNM should plan ahead and develop a long-term vision that recognizes the reality of the rapidly changing American energy market.

PNM should seize this opportunity to transition directly from coal to clean energy by replacing San Juan's capacity with large-scale wind or solar. We shouldn't slow our progress by moving from a very dirty fuel to a slightly less dirty fuel.

Now is the time to make a plan to transition away from coal-burning at San Juan in 2022, and to replace all of that capacity with job-creating clean energy sources.

# PRC approves PNM plan for San Juan

By Mona Blaber  
Chapter communications director

After two years of hearings, negotiations and wrangling, the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission on Dec. 16 approved the application by PNM to close two of the four coal-burning units at San Juan Generating Station near Farmington and replace the lost capacity with more coal power from a remaining unit, nuclear power and a small amount of solar power.

PNM also plans to replace a portion of the power with natural gas, but that facility was not part of this case and still must be approved (see article at top of page).

While the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter is a member of the Coalition for Clean, Affordable Energy, which signed on to the agreement ultimately approved by the commission, the chapter is not represented by the coalition in PRC cases and were not intervenors.

The approved deal is a considerable improvement over PNM's original proposal, which was signed onto by the attorney general and several other parties. Concessions the Coalition for Clean, Affordable Energy and others won by signing on include a required review process in 2018 over whether the remaining units of the plant should continue operating after 2022.

But while the 2018 review is significant and PNM will also be required to buy renewable-energy certificates, the agreement did not win any new renewable energy as replacement for the retired coal power, and PNM was allowed to take on 197 megawatts of coal power in the remaining units of the plant to absorb leftover capacity from departing owners.

Commissioner Valerie Espinoza cast the lone dissenting vote, citing the lost opportunity to replace polluting coal with renewable energy as well as increased risk and cost to ratepayers.

"Leaders of 196 major countries also want to see reduced emissions. There are increasing issues related to the Clean Air Act and renewable deployment of new technologies. I don't want to be voting on the wrong side of history," Espinoza said.



**Despite inclement weather, marchers showed up in force on Dec. 12 in Santa Fe to support a strong Paris climate agreement and local action to protect our climate.**

Photo courtesy  
Tom Solomon

## Turning the tide in Paris and New Mexico

By Camilla Feibelman  
Chapter director

If you are reading this newsletter, you were probably as worried about the outcomes of the climate negotiations in Paris as I was. With so many previous failures it was hard to see why there would be any difference this time. Yet the good news had been trickling in all year. The Pope and dozens of other global religious leaders called on humanity to curb climate change. China committed to a cap-and-trade program that goes beyond what it had promised just months before. And President Obama promised to cut greenhouse emissions with methane rules and the Clean Power Plan. Every country came to the table with commitments in hand.

Aaron Daniel Taylor, the producer of the documentary "We Know Not What We Do" and a Rio Grande Chapter volunteer, traveled to Paris from Rio Rancho. He joined evangelical activists motivated to protect the world's poor.

He wrote, "The fact that evangelical leaders are demonstrating their concern for how climate change impacts the poor is very good news. Perhaps the efforts this week of myself and the rest of our group bearing witness to the relevance of the COP 21 negotiations can serve as a sign that the tide is turning."

On Dec. 12, in the hair's breadth between the call for objections and the gavel falling, no voice of descent sounded, and the world had an agreement that puts us on a path to change. Yes, the word "shall" was in too many places made "should," but it was so much better than "not at all."

Santa Fe resident Jim Gollin was also in Paris and wrote, "It is hard to be exuberant about a plan for slower catastrophe. But the optimists are cheered that this is by far the best step ever taken by our species to redirect our economies towards sustainability. The meetings are long, the speeches droning, but perhaps this is the sound of humankind learning

to steer its own destiny."

Back in New Mexico, for the second year, a broad coalition of groups organized climate marches in Albuquerque and Santa Fe. This year the marches coincided with the Paris talks, and despite the cold and, in Santa Fe, rain and snow, turned out in great numbers. In Albuquerque at the Nob Hill Holiday Stroll, participants sang Clean Climate Carols along Central Ave. Strollers were so impressed by the carols that several hundred people signed our petition for 100% renewable energy by 2035. In Santa Fe participants gathered at the Plaza and huddled together under the band pit. Española corridista musician David Garcia led the group in climate carols that you can see at [riograndesierraclub.org](http://riograndesierraclub.org). Then we brought the message of 100% renewable energy to Santa Fe shoppers along the streets near the Plaza, while in Paris the world was finally headed in the right direction — not fast enough, but at least on its way.





Photo by Theresa Pasqual/National Trust for Historic Preservation

A run was held in 2008 to raise awareness about Western New Mexico's Mount Taylor, considered sacred by many tribes and pueblos. Rio Grande Resource Corp. is applying to return the uranium mine on Mount Taylor to active status.

# New uranium-mine threat

By Robert Tohe  
Our Wild America New Mexico representative

A Dec. 4 public hearing by the New Mexico Mining and Minerals Division regarding Rio Grande Resources Corp.'s application to move Mount Taylor uranium mine from "standby" to "active" status raised many unanswered questions.

The underground mine, formerly owned by Chevron, produced uranium ore from 1979 to 1982 and from 1985 to 1989 before being shut down in January 1990 because of the depressed uranium market. General Atomics Corp., of which Rio Grande Resources is a subsidiary, bought it in 1991.

The mine has been inactive and polluting the

surrounding environment for the last 25 years. It has been on "standby" status for the last 15 years. The law doesn't require mines to remediate while on standby status, and the mine's standby renewals have run out, so the application for active status may just be another way to avoid cleanup.

The proposed life of the mine is 19 years. However, uranium as a commodity is susceptible to the boom-and-bust cycle of prices. Proponents for a return to the glory days of uranium mining have always hitched their economic strategy to uranium industries' needs, ignoring important critical components for a more diversified Cibola County economic base.

Paul Robinson, research director at Southwest Research and Information

Center, testified at the hearing that in order for Mount Taylor mine to be economically viable, the price of uranium needs to reach \$65 a pound. The price has remained at \$50 a pound since 2012.

Joe Lister, Mount Taylor Mine manager, stated in an application in 1994 that Mount Taylor would be mining by 2010. This is the company's third application. Yet the company has not mined a pound of uranium during its 26 years.

Anne Rogers Berkeley, attorney for the Pueblo of Acoma, asked Lister about water rights. Lister said the Office of State Engineer grandfathered water rights for Rio Grande Resources. The company has no current water right permit with OSE. If RGRC has no current water right permit, RGRC have beneficial,

surplus water use, more than the company can use.

Susan Gordon of the Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment aired concerns about the spread of contamination from radioactive and toxic waste rock stockpiled at the mine site and from groundwater mixing in the open mine shaft during prolonged standby periods.

Gordon estimated that 75 people attended the Dec. 4 hearing in Grants, including many from the Navajo Nation and nearby pueblos, and most of those in attendance opposed reactivation.

**Please send a comment opposing reactivation of the Mount Taylor uranium mine to the Mining and Minerals Division at fernando.martinez@state.nm.us before Jan. 4, or go to amigosbraves/take\_action/letter/27.**

# Flynn lobbies for industry-written rule

By Allyson Siwik  
Gila Resources Information Project and Chapter Water Committee

There is no limit to how far global mining giant Freeport-McMoRan will go to get its way and legally pollute New Mexico's groundwater. And the Martinez administration has proved that it is more than willing to help by targeting state officials, including Attorney General Hector Balderas, who are trying to protect New Mexico's water supplies.

New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ryan Flynn (a former attorney with Modrall Sperling law firm, which represents Freeport-McMoRan) was recently in Grant

County lobbying locals to put pressure on Attorney General Balderas to drop his appeal of the Copper Rule.

This industry-written rule allows copper-mining companies to pollute groundwater underneath mine sites in violation of the state's Water Quality Act, and it was Flynn who pushed through the polluter-friendly rule over the objections of his own technical staff.

As many of you who attended the public-input meetings in Grant County know, local opponents of the Copper Rule outnumbered supporters by 10 to 1, and the support came from Freeport's own employees, contractors, and grantees.

Earlier this year, the Court of Appeals upheld the adoption of the

rule. Attorney General Balderas, along with clean-water groups (Gila Resources Information Project and Amigos Bravos, represented by New Mexico Environmental Law Center) and former state Groundwater Bureau Chief Bill Olson filed petitions with the New Mexico Supreme Court to request a review of the rule. In July, the Supreme Court granted the petitions filed by all parties and ordered a review of all issues raised.

The Supreme Court's decision could come some time in 2016.

**To thank Attorney General Hector Balderas for opposing the Copper Rule and urge him to continue to defend our state's Water Quality Act, please go to: riograndesierraclub.org/copper-rule.**

# Comment on reactivating Copper Flat due March 4

By Allyson Siwik, Gila Resources Information Project and Chapter Water Committee

The Bureau of Land Management in November issued a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Copper Flat copper mine in Hillsboro, Sierra County, N.M. The agency has extended the public comment period by 45 days and requests comments by March 4.

The New Mexico Copper Corporation proposes re-establishing a poly-metallic mine and processing facility near Hillsboro. The operation would produce copper concentrate with gold and silver, as well as molybdenum concentrate. Quintana Mineral Corp. operated the mine for three and a half months in 1982.

The 2,190-acre project would use BLM-managed public land and private property. It consists of an open-pit mine, flotation mill, tailings-storage facility, disposal areas for waste rock, ore stockpiles and other ancillary facilities. The preferred alternative will process 30,000 tons of material per day, and the mine is expected to have a 12-year mine life.

BLM held two public meetings in December in Hillsboro and Truth or Consequences to answer questions about the proposal and accept public comment. Residents from Hillsboro, located about 5 miles from the mine site, attended the public meeting. Many made oral comments and were uniformly opposed to the mine proposal.

Community concerns ranged from impairment of water quality and quantity to negative impacts on tourism and the economy, increased traffic, and impacts to wildlife.

Water use under the proposed alternative is estimated to be 22,000 acre-feet per year, with a portion of water use coming from recycled water from the tailings-storage facility. The State Engineer has approved water rights for the company for 888 acre-feet per year, calling into question the viability of the project. Moreover, withdrawals from the company's wells are anticipated to cause depletions from Caballo Lake and the Rio Grande. A pit lake is expected to gradually form in the open pit once mining ceases. Since the geochemistry work is not completed yet, it is unknown if that pit lake will be acidic, requiring treatment in perpetuity. Up to 19 trucks per day would use Highway 152, the main roadway from Interstate 25 to the Gila National Forest and Silver City, potentially causing traffic problems.

To review the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, visit [www.blm.gov/nm/st/en/fo/Las\\_Cruces\\_District\\_Office/LCDO\\_NEPA/copper\\_flat\\_mine\\_eis.html](http://www.blm.gov/nm/st/en/fo/Las_Cruces_District_Office/LCDO_NEPA/copper_flat_mine_eis.html). Public comments should be submitted to BLM by March 4 via email to [BLM\\_NM\\_LCDO\\_Comments@blm.gov](mailto:BLM_NM_LCDO_Comments@blm.gov).

The Rio Grande Chapter will send an action alert for comments. Contact [riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org) to be added to the update list on mining issues.

January/February/March 2016



# Feds OK Gila diversion, with conditions

**Allyson Siwik, Gila Resources Information Project and Chapter Water Committee**

**O**n Nov. 23, the U.S. Department of the Interior signed off on the New Mexico Unit Agreement, triggering the next phase of environmental and financial feasibility assessment of the Gila River diversion project under the National Environmental Policy Act.

The Department of Interior insisted on “Supplemental Terms” being added to the agreement to clarify for the New Mexico CAP Entity, the local group now at the helm of planning the diversion project, what it was getting into by moving forward with a diversion. The supplemental terms will increase accountability and hopefully lead to a robust environmental analysis of the proposed diversion. The impor-

**If the compliance process is honest and rigorous, it’s highly unlikely that a diversion will be built.**

tant gains: financial feasibility and accountability; projects must be designed according to federal standards; less money may be available for diversion; and the full range of environmental compliance is necessary. Finally, the Secretary of the Interior can make an indepen-

dent decision that is best for the environment. If the environmental-compliance process is honest and rigorous, it’s highly unlikely that a diversion would be built due to huge costs, technical infeasibility, and damage to the river and the seven endangered

species that depend on it. The New Mexico CAP Entity is working to define a “proposed action,” as well as to evaluate how a billion-dollar diversion project can be financed. It is expected that National Environmental Policy Act scoping will begin sometime in mid-2016. Under the Arizona Water Settlements Act, a Record of Decision is required by the end of 2019.



**The Castner Range in El Paso is in nearly pristine condition thanks to the stewardship of the U.S. Army, but commercial development is a constant threat. U.S. Rep. Beto O’Rourke has introduced legislation to permanently protect it.**

## Bill would protect Castner Range

**Janae’ Reneaud Field Frontera Land Alliance**

**O**n Dec. 16, Congressman Beto O’Rourke introduced the Castner Range National Monument Act.

This bill would protect Castner Range in perpetuity by making it a national monument. Castner Range is a 7,081-acre mountain range surrounded by the Franklin Mountains State Park in Northeast El Paso, and the Sierra Club El Paso Group is part of a coalition working to protect.

### Overview

Castner Range occupies 11 square miles on the eastern slopes of the Franklin Mountains in El Paso, Texas. The range is in nearly pristine condition today, thanks to the stewardship of the U.S. Army that owns the land, and to the potential for unexploded ordnance. Commercial development of Castner is a constant threat to this natural treasure.

### Castner Range treasures

In the spring, the range’s lower slopes explode with color when wild Mexican gold poppies carpet the rugged desert terrain. Castner Range provides the greatest concentration of natural springs in the Franklin Mountains, which themselves are geologically complex and visually striking. Floods from summer storms

are naturally channeled by Castner’s canyons and alluvial fans. Unique plant and animal habitats characterize Castner Range, along with spectacular scenery and rich cultural features.

### History

From 1926 until 1966, this land was used by Fort Bliss for field and air-defense artillery. Unexploded ordnance may have accumulated on the surface of the ground or be buried in the soil, and that is why Castner Range is closed to public entry. The Army is conducting the Military Munitions Response Program to determine the highest and best use for Castner Range. In 1979 the state of Texas created the Franklin Mountains State Park and stated that the park could accept any portions of Castner Range that became available and were cleared of ordnance. Since at least 1979, community groups have advocated the permanent conservation of the property.

### Why you should invest in Castner Range

Investing in the conservation of Castner Range is also an investment in clean water, air and energy, all natural resources we rely on for our quality of life. Conserving Castner Range will preserve the fragile lands at the urban fringe around the FMSP. The preservation of these lands will safeguard a

### El Paso Group Executive Committee

[elpasosierraclub.org](http://elpasosierraclub.org)

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network of natural areas that enhance our community’s unique character, culture and sense of place. The goal is to establish Castner Range as a national monument so it will be protected in perpetuity. Act now. Make Castner Range a National Monument! To submit a letter of support and for questions, contact: The Frontera Land Alliance, 3800 N. Mesa St., Suite A2-258. El Paso, Texas, 79902. E-mail: [Janae@Fronteralandalliance.org](mailto:Janae@Fronteralandalliance.org). Phone: 915-3551-8352, or go to [fronteralandalliance.org](http://fronteralandalliance.org).

## Quarry keeps infringing on Franklins

**By Jim Tolbert, El Paso Group**

**C**EMEX continues to carve out ever greater portions of our beautiful Franklin Mountains at the corporation’s McKelligon Canyon Quarry. Not only is CEMEX’s quarrying doing irreparable damage to the mountain, but its operations continue to compromise the respiratory health of people living in nearby neighborhoods.

Sadly, the red rhyolite and limestones that they quarry are overused in El Paso landscapes, roadways and medians. Texas Parks and Wildlife Attorney Laura Russell has admitted that the agency does not have a boundary survey between the Franklin Mountains State Park and the quarry. That boundary is merely described in the 1987 deed by sections included in the park.

Dr. Cesar Mendez, superintendent of Franklin Mountains State Park, has said the park does not know how close the CEMEX quarry may be to the park’s boundary or whether CEMEX may have already encroached. An official survey and monuments on the ground are needed. Please contact Carter Smith, Texas Parks and Wildlife executive director at Carter. [Smith@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:Smith@tpwd.texas.gov) and Mendez at [Cesar.Mendez@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:Cesar.Mendez@tpwd.texas.gov) and ask them to do an official survey immediately. Watch for our action alert on this issue or go to [elpasosierraclub.org](http://elpasosierraclub.org).

## El Paso Group distributing bags

Some claim that the official El Paso flag is the plastic grocery bag. When the wind blows, it adorns ocotillos and hangs in trees. Several years ago an effort to ban the bags did not make it past a City Council committee. The excuse was that too many El Pasoans can’t afford the bags. Now the Sierra Club El Paso Group plans to hand out 500 large reuseable shopping bags to shoppers primarily in lower-income areas. The group hopes the idea will catch on with other organizations that want to promote use of reuseable bags. Any group that wants to participate can get in touch with El Paso Group Vice Chair Jim Tolbert at 915-525-7364 or [diegotolbert@gmail.com](mailto:diegotolbert@gmail.com).



# Solar Energy 2, Utilities 0

## PRC rejects separate rate class for solar users

By Mona Blaber  
Chapter communications coordinator

New Mexico seems to be a test case for the utility industry's coordinated nationwide effort to kill residential solar, and you just helped win another round for solar.

One of the most recent anti-solar schemes was in Southern New Mexico, where El Paso Electric has attempted to become the first utility in the nation to put solar customers into a separate rate category — where they can be charged much higher rates than other customers.

Many of you attended Public Regulation Commissioner Sandy Jones' public hearings about EPE's rate case in Las Cruces, Anthony and Hatch, and many more wrote to or met with Commissioner Jones asking him to oppose this unfair proposal. And guess what? It worked.

The Public Regulation Commission on Oct. 28 voted 3-2 to eliminate the separate solar rate class from EPE's case. Commissioners Jones, Valerie Espinoza and Karen Montoya found that EPE's proposal violated several commission rules and its objective to "encourage the use of small-scale customer-owned renewable or alternative energy resources."

EPE will likely attempt other ways to punish solar customers in the future, but not in this rate case.

Earlier this year, PNM proposed a monthly fee averaging upwards of \$20 for new solar users in other parts of New Mexico.

PNM's plan was also rejected by the commission, and after the public outcry it faced regarding the fee, PNM dropped it when it reintroduced its rate case. However, the current case disguises anti-solar schemes in more complex ways that also penalize low-income and efficient households. Please watch your email; we'll be asking you to contact the PRC regarding these latest tactics.

New Mexico's Public Regulation Commission is one of the most powerful utility-regulating bodies in the nation, and your engagement and activism there make a real difference to our climate. A similar case is still pending in El Paso (see story at right), and **your voice is needed in PNM's current rate case. Contact [riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org) to ask for updates on this topic.** And thank you for contributing to some important victories so far!



Photo courtesy Sen. José Rodríguez

**Solar advocates surround State Sen. José Rodríguez at his November announcement opposing El Paso Electric's proposal to raise solar users' rates twice as much as regular ratepayers. The press conference was held at a home with one solar panel, which the homeowners said lowers their electricity rate considerably.**

## El Paso Council votes down EPE rate hike

By Jim Tolbert  
El Paso Group, Rio Grande Chapter

El Paso Electric Co. must now look toward the Public Utility Commission of Texas to save their rate-hike proposal in El Paso, which includes putting rooftop solar customers into a special rate class while raising their rates by nearly 25 percent.

On Dec. 8, the El Paso City Council voted unanimously to oppose the proposed rate increases and the "attack" on solar homeowners.

The Sierra Club El Paso Group has supported Eco El Paso, a coalition of citizens, solar businesses and community groups, financially in its effort to intervene against El Paso Electric both at City Council and now, most probably, in front of the PUCT.

Jefferies, a stock analysis group, predicted that EPE's game plan all along has been to take the matter before the Utility Commission. Jefferies reported: "[T]he company will take the long road to Austin for a litigated decision."

However, EPE's longer-range game plan may be more contemptible. In an interview with outgoing El Paso Electric CEO Tom Shockley, the *El Paso Times* revealed that he had been an officer of a company in the



**Many El Pasoans are joining in opposing El Paso Electric's proposal, which would also put solar customers into a separate rate class.**

Photo courtesy Shelby Ruff

### Take action

We won the first round against El Paso Electric's unfair rate structures, but the most important decision is still to come. Please ask the Texas PUC to reject EPE's proposal: Public Utility Commission of Texas, Attn: Filing Clerk, Rate Case #44941, 1701 N. Congress Ave., Austin, TX, 78711-3326.

Contact [riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org) to get updates on this issue, or go to [ecoelpaso.org](http://ecoelpaso.org) to donate or volunteer.

1990s that tried to take over El Paso Electric. Although that attempt failed, the *Times* reports that "Shockley said El Paso Electric may be courted by larger utility companies in the future."

The implications of his statement are shocking. It seems that El Paso (and New Mexico) ratepayers are footing the bill for large infrastructure projects and exorbitant rates attractive to shareholders in order to make EPE a more viable and lucrative takeover target. Solar

energy is a growing industry in El Paso, with nearly 300 customers added since August alone, bringing the number of households with rooftop power generation to nearly 800. Some builders have begun to add solar panels as standard equipment on new affordable housing, reducing a homeowner's electric bill and reducing power load on the grid at peak times, when electricity is most expensive. It also supports high-paying jobs. But EPE's proposal

would be chilling to solar businesses.

State Sen. José Rodríguez announced his opposition to EPE's proposal in November. He issued a statement responding to the City Council decision:

"The City Council did the right thing in deciding to contest El Paso Electric's rate proposal, which would raise rates for all residential customers by about 10 percent, and at least double that for customers with rooftop solar. This is particularly troubling because residential solar installation is rapidly growing in El Paso, providing relief to the grid and well-paying building-trades jobs for community members. I look forward to the City vigorously advocating for all El Paso Electric customers as the rate case progresses."

The PUCT hearing is set for early 2016.



# Less environment on 2016 agenda

By Dan Lorimier  
Chapter Lobbyist

OK, the 2015 New Mexico “long,” 60-day Legislative Session was no fun for the environmental community.

The state House of Representatives was and is controlled by a Republican majority that marched and voted in lock-step. The House Agriculture Water Resources and Wildlife Committee, chaired by Roswell Rep. Candy Ezzell, and the Energy, Environment and Natural Resources Committee, chaired by Farmington Rep. Jim Strickler, killed every proactive environment- and energy-related bill brought before them, including those outlawing coyote-killing contests and authorizing shared renewable-energy facility operations

(community solar). Meanwhile, the House passed outrageous legislation to abandon our Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards (RPS), gut New Mexico’s mining protections and limit public access to waterways.

Fortunately, the Senate Democrats still hold a tenuous grip on what they will allow to pass. Because of the tireless oversight of Senate Majority Leader Michael Sanchez, the truly onerous Republican proposals that passed the House were stopped short on the Senate floor and in committees such as Sen. Peter Wirth’s Conservation Committee.

Now, here we are looking at the Legislature’s 2016 “short” 30-day session, which begins at noon Jan. 19. Bills introduced in the short session must either have a direct budget impact or be

identified as of interest by the governor on her “call list.” The task of passing a bill is exacerbated by having only half the time to move it through the long process in both houses.

Our focus will be on passing pro-renewables legislation that failed either in committee or were vetoed by the governor in 2015 — including extending the expiring tax credits for residents and small businesses who install solar on their rooftops. We look forward to full participation in the Chapter’s Wildlands, Water and Wildlife Day on Feb. 11 and Renewable Energy Day on Jan. 29. Our “lobby corps” will play a huge role in our work at the Roundhouse in 2016. You can be part of it. If you’re new to this process, attend one of our lobby trainings (see box). See you there!

## Lobbying workshops

Join our Grassroots Lobby Trainings to learn how the Legislature works and how to communicate effectively:

**Las Cruces:** 6-8:30 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 6. Southwest Environmental Center, 275 N. Downtown Mall, 88001.

**Albuquerque:** 6-8:30 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 13, St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, 431 Richmond Place NE.

**Santa Fe:** 6-8:30 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 20, Christus St Vincent Medical Dental Building 2nd Floor, Suite #201, 465 St. Michael’s Drive, Santa Fe.

## Southern N.M. Group’s endorsees win in Las Cruces

In November’s Las Cruces municipal election, Sierra Club-endorsed candidate Mayor Ken Miyagishima won re-election over Miguel Silva and Gina Ortega with 51% of the vote.

Sierra Club members were active canvassers for the mayor’s campaign. Both door-to-door and phone canvassing helped Ken win his third term as mayor for one of the most progressive cities in the state.

Southern New Mexico Group members Christine and Kennan Newton attended the mayor’s Election Night party at Los Compas restaurant.

In more good news, progressive candidates Greg Smith, Kasandra Gandara and Jack Eakman won city council seats with some of the closest election results seen in some time (Kasandra won by 18 votes and Jack won by 11 votes).

The Las Cruces elections garnered national attention due to an influx of out-of-state Tea Party money supporting conservative candidates and a smear campaign against the mayor, but they did not succeed.

## Southern New Mexico Group Executive Committee

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Art Rescues

**Noodles was caught in a trap on Thanksgiving Day near the Caja del Rio. Luckily, her people were able to remove the trap quickly. Her ear was torn in the struggle to free herself.**

## Trapping season is here — take care

By Mary Katherine Ray  
Rio Grande Chapter Wildlife Chair

Trapping season officially opened on Nov. 1, but trappers usually are most active from December through February. That is when animal pelts are the thickest and most lucrative for sale. And it is when hikers are most likely to encounter traps while recreating on public land. Already we have had reports of traps near Santa Fe, Jemez and Las Cruces. At least three dogs have been caught. Traps need only be 25 yards from roads and trails — not more than a few bounds for a dog. Unofficial trails and user-created roads don’t count.

Legally, only the trap owner may interfere with his or her own trap, including any animal that is captured. However, hikers are allowed to rescue their dogs. This can be difficult, as traps slam closed very tightly and the springs are very strong. Please visit trapfreenm.org to see how to open a trap.

If a dog is caught, the more quickly the trap can be removed, the better.

Even so, injuries like broken teeth from biting at the trap and dislocations from the struggle can happen in the blink of an eye. Try to cover dogs with a jacket, because they often will bite at everything including their rescuers in the frantic pain of the moment, and a cover can be calming and protective.

If you find a trap, please report it to New Mexico Game and Fish and ask that a warden check its legality. As hard as it is to leave a trap in the field, if removed, evidence of infractions are lost. Traps must also be marked with the trapper’s ID, and compliance with other rules should be checked. You can call 800-432-4263 at Game and Fish for assistance. Also, please let us know if you have encountered a trap. New Mexico Game and Fish does not know where traps are being set or how many. They do not keep records of instances where dogs or other non-target wildlife are trapped. You may send your story to info@trapfreenm.org. TrapFree New Mexico is a group effort to stop trapping that

includes our Sierra Club chapter.

The coming session at the Legislature is only 30 days and limited to budget issues or the governor’s call, so a bill to rectify trapping cannot come until January of 2017.

What else can be done in the meantime? After signing the TrapFree NM petition at trapfreenm.org, be sure you are registered to vote. Voting is the single most important act you can take for wildlife and wild places next year. If you are not registered, contact your county clerk’s office. Please do it now! The primary election in New Mexico is June 2016. Every seat in the state Legislature is up for grabs. The election is next November. Find out what legislative district you are in, who is running, and their stances on trapping.

Current legislator contact info is here: [www.nmlegis.gov/lcs/legislator\\_search.aspx](http://www.nmlegis.gov/lcs/legislator_search.aspx). Talk to them! They represent you and also ultimately hold the key to change.



The BLM's decision to lease land for horizontal drilling and fracking in Santa Fe National Forest will have far-reaching ramifications for the headwaters of the Jemez River, right, and others.

Photo by John Phelan



# National Forest gets earful

By Teresa Seamster  
Northern New Mexico Group chair

For the past year, legal efforts and public comments have failed to halt leases to develop Mancos Shale oil on 13 parcels covering 20,000 acres of the Santa Fe National Forest north and east of Cuba, N.M.

The Bureau of Land Management has granted drilling permits for two wells near Lake Abiquiú, and fears of water contamination and other toxic releases are growing locally.

A recent comment letter to the Santa Fe National Forest was prepared for the Greater Chaco Coalition by Teresa Seamster of the Rio Grande Chapter and Mike Eisenfeld of the San Juan Citizens Alliance and was signed by 94 organizations and individuals. The letter focused on four of 12 “focus areas” addressed by the Santa Fe Forest Revision Plan: Importance of Tribal Lands, Resilient Habitats, Wildlife and Oil Leasing Impacts.

Highlighted among the concerns is that Santa Fe National Forest manages one of the largest collections of heritage resources in the United States. This is a legacy of cultural sites and landscapes central to the history of the Native people and multicultural population currently living in the area. These sites are threatened by human activi-

ties including vandalism, destruction by extractive industries and by rising temperatures, wildfires and flood events.

Three devastating wildfires, starting with the Cerro Grande Fire in 2000, almost ended the cultural-preservation program in the SFNF. The damage was so severe that the forest office proposed disbanding it until it was suggested that experienced stewards organize themselves into groups to train and manage volunteers as site inspectors and monitors and the forest provide the oversight. The result was the Site Steward Council that monitors cultural sites in the 1.6 million acres of the forest.

But the threats to physical sites are better documented than the threats to unmarked sacred ceremonial sites as well as high places deemed holy by today’s descendants of Native people. More collaboration is needed between forest planners and tribal land and water managers to protect ancient landscapes as well as monitor resources such as wildlife and water that move across forest boundaries.

The decision to lease land for horizontal drilling and fracking will have far-reaching consequences for the headwaters of the Pecos River, Gallinas River and Jemez River, and traditional livelihoods of outdoor recreation, fishing, hunting and gathering forest products. The Forest Revision Plan needs to protect streambeds, arroyos and floodplains from oil and

gas pipelines that are often placed in these areas and then exposed to ruptures, leaks and contamination.

Many lakes and streams provide some of the state’s top-quality habitat for trout and native fish species of greatest value to anglers and subsistence fishermen. Local economies depend on wilderness trekking, pack trips, whitewater rafting on the Rio Grande and Rio Chama, hunting in the forest and exploring 1,000 miles of trails in four unique wildernesses: the Pecos, San Pedro Peaks, Dome and Chama.

Forest-wide monitoring and mitigation for damaged streams and prime wildlife habitat needs to be a Forest Service priority under the Revision Plan.

For the signatories from the Greater Chaco Coalition, the greatest concern continues to be the development of gas and oil in an area that has been free of this industry.

The Forest Service has the authority to deny the surface leases to the Bureau of Land Management, which holds the subsurface mineral rights. It also has the authority and mandate to protect the land, water and wildlife of the forest. The deadline for comments on the preliminary Assessment of the Revision Plan was Dec. 10.

Further public comment periods will be scheduled in 2016 during this important two-year planning process.

# Tax credits’ future in question: Go solar now

By Sandrine Gaillard  
Northern N.M. Group

Although some celebrated the fact that 191 nations got together to discuss and create the Paris Climate Agreement, I felt that it is too little, due to its non-binding nature. What really resonated with me, though, was the fact that “the conference of the parties recognizes the need to strengthen knowledge, technologies, practices and efforts of local communities and indigenous peoples related to

addressing and responding to climate change.”

That means that now, and more than ever, it is our role as individuals and communities to continue to push for renewable-energy solutions, as governments have made it clear that change will have to come from the bottom up.

On that note, I am happy to say that solar panels will be up and running on my roof in early 2016. Although I signed the contract in November, I will only be able to take

advantage of the tax credits for the tax year 2016, because the system has to be producing electricity before you can claim your credits (10% from New Mexico plus 30% federal, no gross-receipt tax), which make it possible for a much larger population to go solar. It usually takes about three months from start to finish, but it could take six months or longer!

The 30 percent federal investment tax credit for solar has now been extended until

the end of 2019, and it will then ramp down from 30% to 10% to stay at 10% after 2022. It is still unknown if New Mexico will extend its 10% tax credit, so please don’t wait! Get your solar panels up and running before Dec. 31, 2016, to be assured of getting 40% off the price of your system.

I will be happy to provide help and information to anyone who contacts me at sandrine.sierraclub@gmail.com.

## Northern New Mexico Group Contacts

### Executive Committee

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# Volunteers drive Bandelier restoration

By Kevin Stillman  
Bandelier National Monument

As a result of the Conchas fire in the summer of 2011 and subsequent flooding in Bandelier National Monument, the trail system experienced severe damage.

The Monument's trail work leader, Kevin Stillman, has been working on rebuilding and maintaining the trail system with the help of National Park Service trail crews, Rocky Mountain Youth Corps crews and the Bandelier Trail Volunteers, which is a group consisting of Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter members and other local volunteers.

Over the course of the summer, the crews have worked on more than 16 miles of trails. The work consisted of clearing the trail corridor of brush, fallen trees, flood debris, and rock slides. Trail tread was repaired or rebuilt, stone retaining walls were built and in some cases reroutes were needed to connect missing trail segments.

Many miles of the backcountry trails were repaired. The Boundary Peak trail, the Mid-Alamo trail and several miles of the Frijoles Canyon trail were fixed. The Frijoles Rim trail was reopened after a big washout was fixed.

In 2016, the work will continue, starting when weather permits in the spring and continuing into the fall. The focus will be on the Frijoles Canyon trail, the Turkey Springs trail, the Burro trail, the Frijoles Rim trail and the Mid Alamo trail.

Before



After



Photos by Tom Chymbor

**Bandelier National Monument trail-work leader Kevin Stillman has been rebuilding and maintaining the trail system with the help of National Park Service crews, Rocky Mountain Youth Corps crews and the Bandelier Trail Volunteers, a group of Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter members and other local volunteers.**

The trail system in Bandelier is open and available to hikers, with some trails being in better shape than others. From the loop trail near the

Visitor Center to the 70 miles of backcountry trails, Bandelier National Monument is a wonderful place to hike and experience. A map of the

Monument's trail conditions can be found at [nps.gov/band/planyourvisit/backpacking.htm](http://nps.gov/band/planyourvisit/backpacking.htm). Volunteers to assist in trail maintenance are always

appreciated. If you would like to be a part of the Bandelier trail volunteers, contact Kevin Stillman at [kevin\\_stillman@nps.gov](mailto:kevin_stillman@nps.gov).

## Mayor Gonzales signs climate pact

On Oct. 26, Rio Grande Chapter Sierra Club leaders, including former Mayor and now Chapter Chair David Coss, and other community members gathered to celebrate Santa Fe Mayor Javier Gonzales signing on to the Compact of Mayors.

"The compact, which represents the world's largest cooperative effort among mayors to reduce climate pollution and prepare for climate impacts, is a real commitment for Santa Fe to address climate disruption," said Denise Fort, Rio Grande Chapter Energy chair and University of New Mexico Law School research professor.

"This is a first step in cities taking real action to prevent the worst consequences of climate disruption."



**"With more renewable energy, community solar, improved public transit and biking options, Santa Fe can show that protecting our children from climate change can also revitalize and build our economy."**

— Santa Fe Mayor Javier Gonzales

tion. We are encouraging mayors around the state to join the compact as part of our efforts to push New Mexico cities to increase energy efficiency, convert facilities to renewable energy, advocate for community solar and improve public transit," Fort said.

By signing on, Gonzales is committing to conduct an inventory of current impacts

and initiatives around climate change, create reduction targets, establish benchmark measurements and establish an action plan around its goals. Gonzales also signed a letter to President Obama urging strong action at the U.N. Conference on Climate Change in Paris. "The Paris Climate Conference was critical to the world's biggest nations

taking steps to address the climate crisis, but it is at the local level where most of the progress can be made right now," Fort said. "With more renewable energy, community solar, improved public transit and biking options, Santa Fe can show that protecting our children from climate change can also revitalize and build our economy." "Mayor Gonzales has called climate change 'the single most important challenge we will ever face.' He's right, and we look forward to helping get policies adopted to move Santa Fe toward a carbon-neutral future," Fort said. The chapter will urge other New Mexico mayors to sign on to the compact in the coming months.

## Holiday time with Northern N.M. Group

By Teresa Seamster  
Northern New Mexico Group chair

Northern Group party-goers turned out on a chilly December evening to come to the end-of-the-year buffet and to hear a talk by Dr. Hannah Mattson of UNM on ancient Chaco and the finding of an enormous turquoise tribute paid to holy individuals found in Pueblo Bonito 12 centuries ago. Along with the talk were appreciated comments by Chapter Chair David Coss on New Mexico as a wonderful place to "grow up young" and tips from Northern Political Chair Susan Martin on making every voice heard in our electoral system. The Hilton provided an excellent food table, and several local candidates running for office in 2016 took time to shake hands and introduce themselves individually to the 70 attendees.



# Progress on carbon, Valles Caldera

By Jody Benson  
Pajarito Group Newsletter  
editor

## Resolution on endangered species

Los Alamos County Council almost joined Doña Ana and Santa Fe counties in approving a resolution requiring the state and Congress to fully fund the Endangered Species Act.

White Rock resident Donald Jones introduced the citizens' petition at the Council meeting on Nov. 17. It reads, "The County fully supports the Endangered Species Act and strongly encourages Congress to continue full funding and enforcement without interfering with science-based decisions about the level of endangerment or protection of individual species."

We say "almost joined" because, as often happens with the County Council in issues regarding environmental protections, the County kicked the issue into the future, sending it back to staff, with Susan O'Leary (D) recommending that the Los Alamos resolution be modeled after the one passed in Doña Ana. (Please see [www.wildmesquite.org/files/dona\\_ana\\_esa\\_resolution\\_0.pdf](http://www.wildmesquite.org/files/dona_ana_esa_resolution_0.pdf) for that resolution.)

Pajarito Group Chair Mark Jones reminded the Council that this is a moral issue. "Are we going to give to our grandchildren the kind of world we grew up in or are we not?" Jones said. "The Endangered Species Act is just one, but one very good tool for making us look at what we're doing and take mitigating action, if necessary, to help with some of the unintended consequences of our normal life. And we need that type of act to keep us from just accidentally destroying the world that our grandchildren are going to live in."

The vote was 5-1, with the usual dissenting voice being Realtor James Chrobocinski, the first-year Republican councilor who has succeeded in leading his fellow councilors into derailing or deferring every effort to protect the local environment.

Neither Councilors Rick Reiss (R) nor Steve Girrens (R) wanted to spend money on a study, and Reiss stated



Photo courtesy Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance

**Interior Secretary Sally Jewell, left, attended the transfer of Valles Caldera to the U.S. Park Service on Oct. 10 with Pajarito Group Executive Committee member Nona Girardi, right.**

## Meetings

Our open meetings are on the first Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m. in UNMLA, Building 200, Room 203.

**There is no Informational Meeting in January.** Please watch your emails and the LA Monitor and LADailyPost.com for announcements about the February/March presentations.

that he drew the line on the ESA language requiring halting and reversing the trend toward extinction no matter what the cost. He said that could mean even at the cost of human life.

Girrens said he didn't want to send a message to Congress that endorses Congress fully funding any special interest.

To read *Los Alamos Monitor* reporter Arin McKenna's excellent coverage of the meeting, please go to:

[www.lamonitor.com/content/council-considers-resolution-about-esa](http://www.lamonitor.com/content/council-considers-resolution-about-esa)

## Valles Caldera National Park Preserve — finally!

Congratulations on your victory. In 1980, Pat Dunnigan — who had protected the 89,000 acres of the Valles Caldera Baca location from development and even offered to sell it cheap to the Park Service in the late 1970s (blocked by Congress) — died.



Photo by Iris Chung

**What better birthday present for a Sierran than to support, then release, a raptor rehabilitated at the Raptor Center? Michael Di Rosa celebrated his birthday by releasing this 7-month-old great horned owl into the golden Pueblo Canyon in Los Alamos this fall. For information about how you can support a raptor or attend a release, check The Raptor Center of Santa Fe at [santaferaptorcenter.org](http://santaferaptorcenter.org).**

His sons held onto the Baca for almost two decades, but in 1998 they met with the ranch investors to discuss building a ski resort with home sites, stores, and a racetrack.

Local Sierran Jennifer Johnson was paying attention. She organized the volunteer effort to lobby our senators and representatives to save the Valle Grande. These volunteers spent months handing out postcards at every pullout in the Caldera and ensured that Congress received them. It was out of this effort that the Pajarito Group was born.

In 2000, U.S. Sens. Pete Domenici and Jeff Bingaman led the acquisition, and,

supported by President Bill Clinton, convinced the U.S. Congress to purchase the Caldera. The Caldera was saved from development; however, the for-profit status precluded public access. The Pajarito Group joined other organizations to continue to lobby for access by the taxpayers, who actually paid for the land.

On Oct. 10, 2015, after 17 years of your grassroots efforts, after the failed for-profit model with little public access, our national delegation (Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich and Rep. Ben Ray Lujan) succeeded in moving the Valles Caldera into the status of National Park Preserve. It is the 19th parcel of

public land designated as Park Preserve status. This means that you can hike, bike, ski, ride your horse, camp, fish, hunt, and take tours to access much of the 89,000 acres. After all your patient years of letter writing, lobbying, attending meetings, sending comments — finally, you win.

On Oct. 10, the U.S. Park Service held its transfer ceremony. The Pajarito Group and the Northern New Mexico Group were among the representatives who were both supporting the event and being honored by it.

When you stand on the rim and gaze across the vista of your land, enjoy that swell of pride that you feel for knowing you were responsible for saving this land for all our grandchildren.

## Carbon-neutral Los Alamos 2040

We refuse to do it on the national level, but with your help, we can certainly begin right here in Los Alamos. Support the local attempts to mitigate climate change. The Los Alamos Forum will have a series of Forum questions about whether the community wants to continue its already substantial investment in renewable resources as well as mitigation efforts (bike paths, free Atomic City Transit, recycling, gray-water use, hydro power...). Go to [www.losalamosnm.us/gov/Pages/PublicCommentForum.aspx](http://www.losalamosnm.us/gov/Pages/PublicCommentForum.aspx) and set up your account.

## Leadership R Us (and that includes U)

Many of the Pajarito Group leadership are emigrating or retiring. The Pajarito Group has many projects including: Limiting single-use shopping bags; supporting Los Alamos County's 2040 carbon-neutral initiative, including persuading Los Alamos to join the UN-sponsored Mayors' Compact to locally deal with climate change; leading hikes; and following local environmental issues.

What are you excited about? The leaders decide direction. Become a part of our busy and dynamic team. Change happens when we take action.

Contact Jody Benson at [echidanaejb@gmail.com](mailto:echidanaejb@gmail.com) or 505/662-4782 to volunteer or learn more.

## Pajarito Group Contact Information

[riograndesierraclub.org/pajarito](http://riograndesierraclub.org/pajarito)

### Executive Committee

Chair/Secretary: Jody Benson, [echidanaejb@gmail.com](mailto:echidanaejb@gmail.com), 505/662-4782  
Howard Barnum, [hnbarnum@aol.com](mailto:hnbarnum@aol.com)  
Iris Chung, [itlchung@hotmail.com](mailto:itlchung@hotmail.com)

Michael DiRosa, [mddbbm@gmail.com](mailto:mddbbm@gmail.com), 505/663-0648

Nona Girardi, [nonamg@aol.com](mailto:nonamg@aol.com)

### Committee Chairs

Treasurer: Mark Jones, [jonesmm1@comcast.net](mailto:jonesmm1@comcast.net), 505/662-9443

Conservation; Outings, Leadership Training: Michael DiRosa, [mddbbm@gmail.com](mailto:mddbbm@gmail.com), 505-663-0648

Global Warming: Charles Keller, [alfonso@cybermesa.com](mailto:alfonso@cybermesa.com), 505-662-7915

Mining: David Torney, [dtorney@valornet.com](mailto:dtorney@valornet.com), 575-829-3433

Newsletter, Publicity, Sprawl, Transportation, Wildlife: Jody Benson, [echidanaejb@gmail.com](mailto:echidanaejb@gmail.com), 505-662-4782  
Open Spaces, Caldera Issues: Howard Barnum, [hnbarnum@aol.com](mailto:hnbarnum@aol.com)  
Water Issues: Barbara Calef, [bcaleg@yahoo.com](mailto:bcaleg@yahoo.com), 505/662-3825





Aku Oppenheimer

A December 2014 Sierra Negra loop hike near Abiquiú.

Hikes and Events, continued from Page 16

Yerba Mansa stands, fantastic cotton-woods, and more. 1:30 p.m. Contact: Richard Barish, richard.barish@gmail.com, 505-232-3013.

**Sunday, February 21: Tour the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument,** Baylor Pass. We will hike the Baylor Canyon Trail from Baylor Canyon Road to Baylor Pass and return. 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 7 miles roundtrip and 1,600 feet of elevation gain. Call Howie Dash for meeting time and place. 575-652-7550 or howiedash@aol.com.

**Saturday, Feb. 20: Moderate cross-country ski:** location to be determined, 4-8 miles, Alan Shapiro, 505-424-9242, nm5s@yahoo.com.

**Saturday, Feb. 27:** Easy snowshoe; 2 miles on the Winsor Trail from Norski trail to the SF Ski Basin and back (10:30-2:20), we will take the bus up and back, use our fare token towards lunch at the SF Ski Basin. Alan Shapiro, 505-424-9242, nm5s@yahoo.com.

**Saturday March 12: Strenuous/difficult loop in the Sandia** (up by Embudo, down by Embudito Trails). Meet at carpool location at 9 a.m. or at the trail head at 9:30. To register, call 505-433-4692 and email Odile@pitot.org by Friday, Feb. 12. Provide your home and cell-phone numbers as well as where you prefer to meet.

**Saturday, March 12: Bosque by Wheelchair:** Discover the wood carvings at Pueblo Montañó picnic area and trailhead on the west side. 1:30-3 p.m. RSVP: Billy Meyer, williammeyer4@yahoo.com.

**Saturday, March 12: Moderate cross-country ski:** location to be determined, 4-8 miles, Alan Shapiro, 505-424-9242,

nm5s@yahoo.com.  
**Sunday, March 13:** Tour Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument, Valles and Broad Canyon. Explore Valles and Broad Canyon Riparian Corridor in the Desert Peaks section of National Monument. Towering cliffs, wildlife and rare rock art along the way. 6-7 miles roundtrip with little elevation gain. Call Paul Pierce for meeting time and place. 505-670-7653.

**Saturday and/or Sunday, March 19/20:** Strenuous snowshoe in Taos or Santa Fe, possibly 3 dogs. Hotel-room block

available. Tobin Oruch, (505) 690-6253, tobin.oruch@yahoo.com.  
**Saturday, March 19: Solstice winter/spring camp** or yurt, Royal Drews, royaldrews22@gmail.com, 505-699-8713.

**Sunday, March 20: Moderate cross-country ski:** location to be determined, 4-8 miles, Alan Shapiro, 505-424-9242, nm5s@yahoo.com.


**Saturday, March 26: Strenuous snowshoe to Penitente Peak** via Puerto Nambe, 14 miles, 3,200 feet. Larry Hughes, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com, 505-913-0589.

**Sunday, March 27: Moderate hike to Tor and Blowhole,** in the Caja del Rio,


offtrail, 7 miles, 900 feet. Wet roads will cancel hike, and high-clearance vehicles needed. If you have one and are willing to drive, please let leader know when you sign up. Daisy Levine 466-8338.

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Get into outings

Our Northern New Mexico Group’s 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 with any subject and a message that says SUBSCRIBE RIO-NORTH-OUTINGS.





Robert Reifel

**Latir Peak Wilderness in October. The Rio Grande Chapter hosts hikes of every ability level, and all hikes are labeled easy, moderate or strenuous. As always, our outings are free and open to the public.**

# January-March hikes & events

**Saturday, Jan. 2:** Moderate cross-country ski: location to be determined, 4-8 miles, Alan Shapiro, 505-424-9242, nm5s@yahoo.com.

**Saturday and/or Sunday, Jan. 2/3: Strenuous snowshoe in Taos or Santa Fe,** possibly 3 dogs. Hotel-room block available. Tobin Oruch, (505) 690-6253, tobin.oruch@yahoo.com.

**Wednesday, Jan. 6: Grassroots Lobby Training** — learn how the Legislature works and how to communicate effectively. 6-8:30 p.m. Southwest Environmental Center, 275 N. Downtown Mall, Las Cruces. RSVP to DianeAbqNM@gmail.com, with name, telephone, email and city.

**Saturday, Jan. 9: Moderate/Strenuous snowshoe to La Vega,** 9 miles, 1,300 feet, 2 or 3 dogs OK, Larry Hughes, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com 505 913 0589.

**Saturday-Sunday, Jan. 9-10: Easy Skywatchers Car Camp** Enjoy a moon-free night with the dark desert sky at Mount Riley! We will drive out the Columbus Highway past the East Potrillo Mountains into Potrillo Volcanic Field. Leaving at 1 p.m. will allow time for enjoying the archeological site, sunset, and a campfire. At night we will lay out our tarps and sleep under the Milky Way. Sunday we'll head back to El Paso for breakfast. John Walton walton@utep.edu. 915-539-5797

**Sunday, Jan. 10: Moderate/Strenuous hike near Medanales** No dogs. Aku, 505-577-2594

**Wednesday, Jan. 13: Grassroots Lobby Training.** Learn how to communicate effectively at the Legislature. 6-8:30 p.m. St. Mark's Episcopal Church, 431 Richmond Place NE, Albuquerque. RSVP to DianeAbqNM@gmail.com, with name, phone, email and city.

**Saturday and/or Sunday, Jan. 16y: Strenuous snowshoe in Taos or Santa Fe,** possibly

**16 Rio Grande Sierran**



Photo by Robert Reifel

**Leader Tobin Oruch reports on this November Hawkwatch Loop outing: “Eight bipeds enjoyed nature and the company of others. The weather was great, only a little cold and breezy on the very crest of the Sandias, and the views were spectacular.” Above: Two hikers ascend South Peak.**

3 dogs. Hotel room block available. Tobin Oruch, (505) 690-6253.

**Saturday, Jan. 16: Bosque by Wheelchair.** See the sandhill cranes at Los Poblanos Fields. Open space will open area to cars. Trails are hard-packed clay. Also to be seen are hawks, Canada geese, the occasional road runner, crows, perhaps a few songbirds and coyotes. 10 a.m. Bring cameras and binoculars. Contact Colston Chandler, ccent@swcp.com, 505.343.9498.

**Wednesday, Jan. 20: Grassroots Lobby Training.** Learn how the Legislature works and how to communicate effectively. 6-8:30 p.m. Christus St Vincent Medical Dental Building 2nd Floor, Suite #201, 465 St. Michael's Drive, Santa Fe. RSVP to DianeAbqNM@gmail.com, with name, phone, email and city.

**Saturday, Jan. 23: Moderate cross-country ski:** location to be determined, 4-8 miles, Alan Shapiro, 505-424-9242, nm5s@yahoo.com.

**Sunday, Jan. 24: Strenuous hike near Medanales.** No dogs.

Aku, 505-577-2594.

**Saturday, Jan. 30: Wilderness first-aid training** in Santa Fe at The Commons. contact Alan Shapiro, 505-424-9242, nm5s@yahoo.com.

**Sunday, Jan. 31: Moderate-plus loop hike or snowshoe,** beginning and ending on Chamisa Trail, Aku, 505-577-2594.

**Saturday, Feb. 6 Moderate cross-country ski:** location to be determined, 4-8 miles, Alan Shapiro, 505-424-9242, nm5s@yahoo.com.

**Saturday, Feb. 6, or Sunday: Strenuous snowshoe in Taos or Santa Fe,** possibly 3 dogs. Hotel room block available. Tobin Oruch, (505) 690-6253.

**Saturday, Feb. 6: Poetry in the Bosque:** Winter is a good time to see porcupines curled up, high in leafless trees, and bald eagles perched across the river. We might even see some coyotes hunting in the snow or great horned owls beginning to nest. On this moderate 3-mile loop, we will experience the forest in winter, with some readings of winter poems to

help us enter this season. Limit 12 people. 12-2 p.m. Meeting place: to be decided depending on where the owls nest. Dress for the weather. No dogs please. RSVP to M.J. Zimmerman, mjzim@hotmail.com.

**Saturday, Feb. 13: Bosque by Wheelchair:** Tingley Beach to the viewing platforms. Explore the wetland ponds and bird-viewing shelters just west of Tingley Beach. 1:30-3 p.m. RSVP: Fred Houdek, fhoudek@gmail.com.

**Saturday, Feb. 13: Moderate/strenuous snowshoe to Spirit Lake,** 13 miles, 2,100 feet, Larry Hughes, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com, 505 913 0589.

**Sunday, Feb. 14: Moderate hike to Kitchen Mesa,** Royal Drews,royaldrews22@gmail.com,505-699-8713.

**Sunday Feb 14: Tent Rock National Monument.** Leave Albuquerque (car pool) at 9 a.m. or meet at the Tent Rock Parking lot at 10:30 a.m. This is an easy trail going through a canyon very narrow at places; but there are several places where we will have to climb on rocks, and the last part going up

## What you need to know

**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, unfavorable conditions, or insufficient number of participants. Unaccompanied minors need written permission from a parent or guardian. Ask leader for form. Dogs permitted only if so noted in write-up.

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

**To receive the weekly e-mail** with updated outings info, 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.

the top of the canyon is fairly steep. Going down can also be tricky for some. To register, call 505-433-4692 and email [Odile@pitot.org](mailto:Odile@pitot.org) by Friday Feb 12. Provide your home and cell phone numbers as well as where you prefer to meet.

**Sunday, Feb. 21: Bosque on the Westside** — Exploring Calabacillas Arroyo. Discover this magical part of the Bosque tucked away off Coors. See

Continued on Page 15