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.

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

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.

More

Chapter chair’s column: Page 4.
El Paso Group: Pages 9, 10.
Southern New Mexico Group: Page 11.
Legislature: Page 11.
Hikes, events: Pages 15 and 16

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.
Sierran publication information

T he 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 its members living in New Mexico and West Texas.

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

If you wish to opt out of receiving this newsletter and read it online: Contact Mona Blaber at mb@sierranet com, 505-310-2917.

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Page 1 banner photo by Laja Ryan

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Locate the QR code on the page above or scan the code with your smartphone to go to riograndesierraclub.org and subscribe to the chapter e-mail list. If you’re not a member yet but like what you see, join now for only $15! Go to riograndesierraclub.org/join on the Web.

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 Carlson, 505-986-1596, carlton505@comcast.net

The following offer current 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.
I wait until then for more releases. To be harmed if the agency had to and Wildlife Service says it will wolf population will need than know more about what a viable corridors between them. We now three sub-populations with travel 750 individuals separated into was leaked that scientists believed doned, most recently when it have been mysteriously aban- doned, 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 lobo popu- lation was initially set at 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 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 misman- aged wolves. In the end, Game commis- sioners 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 return- ing 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 Socorro County 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

Hundreds attended the September Game Commission meeting to support U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s appeal to release endangered 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.


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.

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

By Teresa Seamster, Northern Group chair T he 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan took two years to develop and was prepared with the coopera- tion 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 informa- tion on any native species that is declining in number or vulner- able 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 third-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 threat- ened 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 “regula- tory 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 the “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 biodi- versity in the United States and that similar states, such as Texas and California, list over 800

Continued on Page 4

Federal law prevails on wolf release

By Mary Katherine Ray Chapter Wildlife chair I n 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 endan- gered 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 divers- ity of the wild wolf population, which urgently needs better breeding 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 representa- tive of recovery. The lobo popu- lation, after decades, has just exceeded that. Previous attempts to update the wolf-recovery plan have been mysteriously aban- doned, most recently when it was leaked that scientists believed that, to be viable, the lobo popu- lation needs to be at least 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 local laws.
Get out to the bosque!

Saturday, Jan. 16: Bosque by Wheelchair — see the Sandhill Cranes at Los Poblanos Field. Open space will open to area 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, 505-343-0158.

Saturday, Feb. 6: Poetry in the Bosque: Winter is a good time to see postcardesque cupules cupped 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 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, mzim@sierraclub.org.

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.

Saturday, 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 Montaño Picnic Area and Trailhead on the Westside. 1:30-3 p.m. RSVP: Billy Meyer, william-meyer@yahoo.com.

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 rioriograndedesertsierraclub.org/donate or send donations to 1807 Second Street, Unit 45, Santa Fe, NM, 87505.
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.

By Richard Barish

Central New Mexico

Berry reenages on Bosque agreement

I

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 this agreement 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 crushed fine gravel 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.

Memories of Jeff from his friends

“Jeff was a Renaissance man, open to new ideas, passionate about 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 Gibbons

“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 talented. We’re all so 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 Jeffrey Potter) will be used as memorial awards for artistic excellence at juried art competitions in Jeff’s honor. Send contributions to Bank of Albuquerque, P.O. Box 26027, Albuquerque, NM 87125, or go to any Bank of Albuquerque branch. Deposit to Acct. 629159582.

Jeff Potter, 1955-2015

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.

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 fortune to have known Jeff from our days together as biology students at UNM. His passion for life was evident every day as he pursued and devoted his course work in both fine art 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 paint, 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!

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

By Richard Barish

Bosque Action chair

I

January/February/March 2016

Rio Grande Sierra

5
Methane key for climate

By Alex Renirie
Beyond Dirty Fuels organizing representative

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.

Camilla Feibelman

Dirty Energy

Rio Rancho targeted for drilling

By Benton Howell
Río Grande Chapter

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

Camilla Feibelman

What you can do

By Alex Renirie
Beyond Dirty Fuels organizing representative

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.

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, communities affected by methane emissions sources that existed before 2011.

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

Camilla Feibelman

January 2016
Trade coal for gas? No thanks, PNM

By Nellis Kennedy-Howard

Beyond Coal senior campaign representative

A

fter 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, natural gas 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 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).“Leaders of 196 major countries also committed to a cap-and-trade program humanity to curb climate change. China 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 small amount of solar power. We Do” and a Rio Grande Chapter representative

“This is the direction we want our state to head in: clean-energy jobs, less pollution and a livable 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 small amount of solar power. 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 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).”

By Nellis Kennedy-Howard Beyond Coal senior campaign representative

A

fter 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, natural gas 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). “Leaders of 196 major countries also committed to a cap-and-trade program humanity to curb climate change. China 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 small amount of solar power. We Do” and a Rio Grande Chapter representative

“This is the direction we want our state to head in: clean-energy jobs, less pollution and a livable 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 small amount of solar power. We Do” and a Rio Grande Chapter representative

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New uranium-mine threat

By Robert Tohe
Our Wild America New Mexico representative

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.

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 hatched 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 granted 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 mining 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 amigobraves.com and take_action/letter/27.

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. Residuals 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 economic, 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 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/DEIA/DEIA⚃/DEIA Scrolls/DEIAúdo/Copper_Flat_mine_eis.html. Public comments should be submitted to BLM by March 4 via email to BLM_NM_LCDO_Comm�nts@blm.gov. The Rio Grande Chapter will send an action alert for comments. Contact riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org to be added to the update list on mining issues.

Rio Grande Sierran

January/February/March 2016
Bill would protect Castner Range

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.

Feds OK Gila diversion, with conditions

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 important 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 independent decision that is best for the environment.

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

 Quarry keeps infringing on Franklins

By Jim Tolbert, El Paso Group

CEMEX 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 mountains, 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 and ask them to do an official survey immediately.

Watch for our action alert on this issue or go to elpasosierraclub.org.

El Paso Group distributing bags

Some claim that the official El Paso bag 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 reusable 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 reusable 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.

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.

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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 races

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 for 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. Hence 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 FMSR. The preservation of these lands will safeguard a 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. Phone: 915-3551-8352, or go to fronteralandalliance.org.
Nevada 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 to ask for updates on this topic. And thank you for contributing to some important victories so far!
Less environment on 2016 agenda

By Dan Lorimier
Chapter Lobbyist
OK, that’s 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.

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Cheryll Blevins
Glenn Landers
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Chair, Pollution,
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And New Mexico’s mining protections and limit 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 grasp 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 its committees 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!

Southern New Mexico Group’s endorsements 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 canvassings 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 Compa’s 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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How Do You Know if a Trap is Removal? If a trap is removed, evidence of infractions are hard as it is to leave a trap in the field, even 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 slammed closed very tightly and the springs are very strong. Please visit trapfreenn.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 800-432-4265 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@trapfreenn.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 trapfreenn.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. Talk to them! They represent you and ultimately hold the key to change.
**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 Abiquiu 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 Association and was signed by 94 organizations and individuals. The letter focused on four of 12 "focus areas" addressed by the Santa Fe Forest Reserve 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 activities 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 ramifications for the headwaters of the Jemez River, and traditional livelihoods of the Pecos River, Gallinas River and Jemez River, and traditional livelihoods of outdoor recreation, fishing, hunting and gathering forest products. The Forest Reserve Plan needs to protect streams, bedrocks, 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.

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**Conservation**

Chair: Tom Gorman

Public lands: Tom Gorman, Norma McCollan, Teresa Seamster

Water: John Buchser, 505-231-6645, buchser@comcast.net

Wildlife: Teresa Seamster

Solarize Santa Fe: Sandrine Gaillard, sandrine.gaillard@gmail.com

Energy Team: Shane Woolbright, 505-474-2870, mesonx@hotmail.com; Elliot Stern, 505-689-9488, sternwcs@comcast.net

Zero Waste: Open

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**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 June 30, 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.sierachub@gmail.com.
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, mud and debris, and rock slides. Trail tread was repaired or rebuilt, stone retaining walls were built and in some cases bridges 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 reopen 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.

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. 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.

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. 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.”

— Santa Fe Mayor Javier Gonzales

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 Matson 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.

Northern New Mexico
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 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 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 that you feel for knowing you were responsible for saving this land for all our grandchildren.

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 LDailyPost.com for announcements about the February/March presentations.

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.

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 Valles. The Volunteers spent months handling our 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 Luján) 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.

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.

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 santafaraptorcenter.org.

Photo courtesy Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance

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/go/ 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.

Where 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 or 505/662-4782 to volunteer or learn more.

Pajarito Group — Los Alamos and surrounding areas

January/February/March 2016

14 Rio Grande Sierran
Hikes and Events,

Yerba Mansa stands, fantastic cottonwoods, 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. 505-670-7653.

Saturday and/or Sunday, March 19/20: Strenuous snowshoe to Penitente Peak via Puerto Nambe, 14 miles, 3,200 feet. Larry Hughes, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com, 505-913-0589.

Saturday, 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.

A December 2014 Sierra Negra loop hike near Abiquiu.

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.
Leather 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.

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 highways 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 listing to confirm participation and details. Please see 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.riograndesierraclub.org with SUBSCRIBE RIO-NORTH-OUTINGS in the subject line.

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 Taylor! We will drive out the Columbus Highway past the East Porrillo Mountains into Porrillo Volcanic Field. Leaving at 1 p.m. will allow time for enjoying the archelogical site, sunset, and a campfire. At night we will lay out our tents and sleep under the Milky Way. Sunday we’ll head back to El Paso for breakfast. John Walton walton@ute.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. 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.


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 Chamaia 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.

Sunday, Feb. 7: Poetry in the Bosque: Winter is a good time for perusing poetry. Bring your own work or great horned owls begin- ning 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, mzmjn@hotmail.com.

Saturday, Feb. 13: Bosque by Wheelchair: Tingley Beach to the viewing platforms. Explore the wetlands pond and bird-viewing shelters just west of Tingley Beach. 1:30-3 p.m. RSVP: Fred Houdek, fjhoudek@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, royal.drews22@gmail.com, 505-699-8713.

Sunday Feb 21: Tent Rock — Exploring Calabacillas Arroyo. Discover this magical part of the Bosque tucked away off Coors. See Continued on Page 15

January-March hikes & events

January/February/March 2016

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.

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