

Rio Grande Sierran

Volume 55, Issue 1

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

January/February/March 2017

The Environment Under Trump

Rays of hope

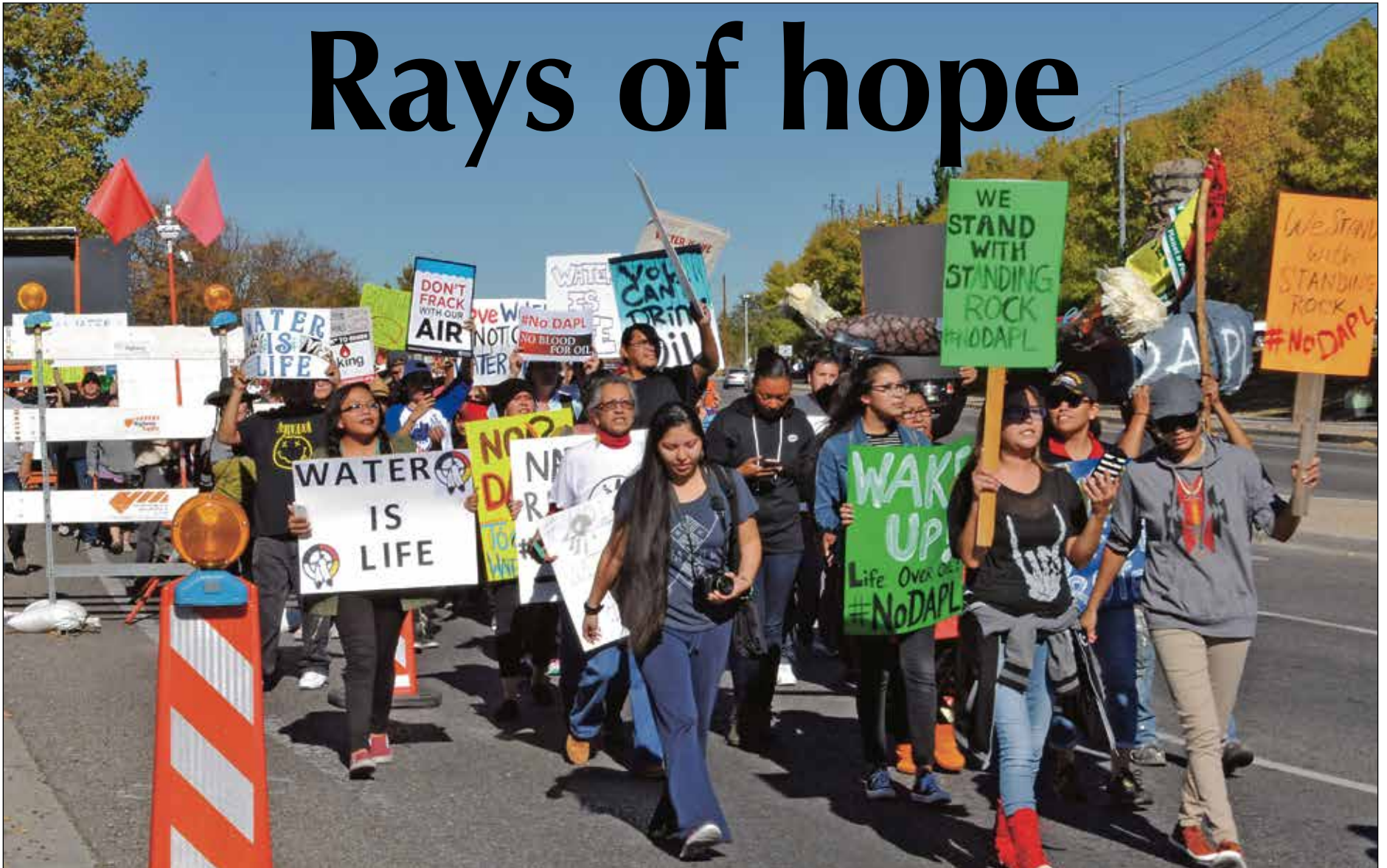


Photo of Albuquerque Standing Rock demonstration by Jim MacKenzie

Our climate, water, animals and land face unprecedented federal threats. But in New Mexico and El Paso, the elections created opportunities for real progress.

A newly green Legislature

What changes will we see as a pro-environment majority takes over New Mexico's House in the upcoming legislative session? **Page 5.**

Read about the many encouraging local election results and their implications for our children's future. **Page 8.**



Citizens speak up for Chaco

Tribal communities are packing public meetings to talk about oil and gas development in Northwest New Mexico's greater Chaco Canyon region. And citizens are taking their health into their own hands by training to test the air in communities impacted by drilling. **Page 3.**



How you can make a difference

If you're feeling distraught after the election, you don't need to feel helpless. Countless actions can make a positive impact on the world around us and on ourselves. Check out the "How you can make a difference" boxes throughout this issue. You're sure to find an action that suits you!



EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET



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More inside:

PNM files for another rate hike

But in good news, the utility withdrew its request to build a \$100 million natural-gas plant and pipeline. **Page 6**

El Paso's next generation of planet-savers

Americas High School students build wheelchair-accessible trails, count pollinators and campaign to save Castner Range. **Page 10**

Military outings program serves those who served

Program created by and for veterans makes its inaugural hike. **Page 11**

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If you’re not a member yet but like what you see, **join now for only \$15!** Go to **riograndesierraclub.org/join**.

You can make a difference

Volunteer opportunities — photographer: Are you great at composing shots, lighting, catching a moment?
We need folks who can photograph our events and people for sharing in newsletters, social media, etc. We’d also love to have someone give a workshop on taking good photos. Please contact riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org if you can occasionally volunteer your skills and/or your photographs.

Community members conducting air tests

By Miya King-Flaherty
Chapter Public Lands fellow
Air monitoring for a community health assessment that will inform BLM's plans for fracking is well under way. Thanks to community volunteers and other partners, the coalition is making progress toward a full Health Impact Assessment.

The assessment is an objective evaluation of the potential health impacts of hydraulic fracturing (fracking) in the Greater Chaco area. It will be used to provide recommendations to the Bureau of Land Management's Farmington Field Office as the agency updates its 2003 Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement to include the impacts of fracking.

The report will also be used to offer recommendations, proposed by impacted community members, to the Navajo Nation Council, Bureau of Indian Affairs and other relevant agencies before approval of new oil and gas drilling.



Juan Reynosa, center, of SouthWest Organizing Project trains community volunteers in northwest New Mexico to test for contaminants in the air.

Photo courtesy
Miya King-Flaherty

In October, Juan Reynosa of SouthWest Organizing Project trained community members to collect air samples at oil and gas sites. Reynosa demonstrated how to collect air samples using buckets developed by Global Community Monitoring that are used worldwide as a cost-effective way for communities to carry out their own air testing.

Community volunteers were also trained on using air-quality logs to track when certain smells and emissions are noticeable, and on completing a Chain of Custody form — forms that are necessary when sending samples to a laboratory. The volunteers practiced sampling after the training session at a well site where flaring was occurring within half

a mile of a resident's home. The sight of the flare reflected the grim reality that communities in the Greater Chaco area face flaring all morning and night. Among the five sites chosen as sampling locations is a spot near Lybrook Elementary School in Counselor. Delandira Butsie, who lives in an impacted area, carried out the air sampling, despite at times being confronted by oil and gas workers who tried to prohibit her from taking samples on public lands. All samples were analyzed by ALS Environmental Labs. Analysis on the samples was done by staff scientist Mark Chernaik of the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide. In a couple of samples, high levels of the volatile organic compound toluene were detected. Though the levels are not of a health or environmental significance, the data help set a baseline to compare future data.

Chaco comments flood in to BLM

By Miya King-Flaherty
Chapter Public Lands fellow
In October, the Interior Department announced that the Bureau of Land Management is reopening its public scoping process to update its out-of-date management plan for oil and gas development in northwest New Mexico.

The 2003 Resource Management Plan failed to analyze the impacts of oil and gas extraction from the Mancos-Gallup shale formation. The plan also lacked adequate tribal consultation, a thorough environmental review, and, having been written before new technologies made horizontal fracking more viable in the Mancos shale formation, lacks a comprehensive plan for addressing fracking in the Greater Chaco region.

The BLM is partnering with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to hold eight public scoping meetings in the Navajo Nation. These meetings provide opportunities for community members and the broader public to voice concerns and offer alternatives that they want incorporated into the management plan.

The BLM started the first meeting, on Nov. 10, on the wrong foot when Chapter President Duane "Chili" Yazzie, following chapter protocol, insisted that the agency allow community members to comment in an open discussion forum. The BLM abruptly shut the meeting down because that did not follow its process. Criticized for being disrespectful and culturally insensitive, the BLM changed its format to allow for public comments at later meetings and is planning on rescheduling the Shiprock meeting.

The latest meeting took place



Photo courtesy Miya King-Flaherty

A Navajo Nation Museum meeting room in Window Rock, Ariz., wasn't big enough to hold all the community members who attended on Dec. 2 to express concerns about fracking on tribal lands.

at Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock, Ariz., on Dec. 2. The meeting was so well-attended that entry into the meeting room was managed by allowing one person in as another went out. Several public comments referred to the water protectors at Standing Rock in North Dakota and the need to protect Chaco in the same way.

The meetings demonstrated overwhelming consensus that fracking in the region is having profound negative effects on the environment and surrounding communities. Residents commented on increased rates of cancer and asthma, noise and dust pollution, soil contamination impacting crops and medicinal plants, constant exposure to toxic fumes and the desecration of sacred sites.

The Sierra Club is part of the Chaco Coalition — groups, citizens and community leaders calling on the BLM to incorporate key alternatives in the amendment to its management

How you can make a difference

The BLM is approving drilling permits in the Chaco area despite admitting that its management plan is out of date because it doesn't address fracking. Please urge the agency to halt leasing until its amendment to the plan is complete. Write to BLM_NM_FFO_Comments@blm.gov. Need help? Contact miya.king-flaherty@sierraclub.org. As we saw with the halting of the Piñon Pipeline, public engagement works!

plan, including:

- an immediate moratorium on drilling, fracking and approval of new leases until the amendment is complete;
- tribal consultation at the state and local chapter level, not just the governmental level;
- a comprehensive health and social impact assessment and thorough analysis of cultural resources and sacred sites for affected communities; and
- alternatives for local economic development that don't depend on fossil fuels and offer a just transition to clean, renewable energy sources.

In spite of the current public process, the BLM is not slow-

ing down approval of new wells. Almost 370 wells encroach upon this sensitive landscape. The BLM continues to approve drilling permits through conducting individual environmental assessments citing "no significant impacts" and skirting the process. The BLM plans to lease an additional 843 acres in the area for oil and gas development at a January 2017 lease sale. In an effort to avoid public scrutiny, it is holding the lease sale online. The "multiple-use mandate" requires the BLM to balance uses of public lands for a variety of activities. Yet for decades BLM has prioritized oil and gas at the expense of all other

Piñon Pipeline: Another victory for people power

On Dec. 16, the BLM announced that Denver-based Saddle Butte LLC had withdrawn its application for a right of way for the Piñon Pipeline, which had threatened to quadruple oil drilling in the Chaco Canyon region.

Two years ago, Saddle Butte applied to build the 130-mile pipeline across federal, state and Navajo land, cutting between Chaco Culture National Historical Park and outlier Pueblo Pintado and coming within feet of thousand-year-old Puebloan ruins.

Thousands of you sent comments through the Sierra Club and our allies, and the BLM responded by slowing down the fast-track process the pipeline had been on. This is a huge victory for climate and the communities in the Greater Chaco region, and it wouldn't have happened without your help.

land uses and public health. The unprecedented inclusion of the BIA in the scoping process may help assure that indigenous interests, and community health and safety, are addressed.

Please submit a personal comment asking the BLM for a drilling and leasing moratorium until the amendment is complete. Comments can be sent to Mark Ames, BLM Farmington Field Office project manager, at BLM_NM_FFO_Comments@blm.gov.

For more information on how to help, please visit www.riograndesierraclub.org/stop-auctioning-off-chaco.

Look forward, inspired by the past

Usually when something bad happens, time soothes the bad feelings and my outlook improves. But I think we can all agree that every day is a little worse than the last with the Trump administration that is taking shape.

For the Environmental Protection Agency, he nominated Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt, a climate denier and one of the leads in the lawsuit against the Clean Power Plan. His pick for Secretary of State is the ExxonMobil CEO whose relationship to Russia will surely boost stalled efforts to drill the Arctic. For the Interior Department, he slated Montana Rep. Ryan Zinke, who has a 3% League of Conservation Voters rating.

My only relief is that when I'm not looking at the computer, I'm looking at Rafael, my 5-month-old. His smiling and striving to develop rest my mind. He is adamant that he'll roll from his tummy to his back. My very face makes him smile, and just a little laugh causes him to

dissolve into sweet chuckles. I don't have to do much, just be there, and that makes me want to give him everything I have. He offers us a lesson: that we must keep at it. We must not shut off. It's easy to want to hide from the news and take refuge from the speculation. But now more than ever, we have to stand tall and fight. We have to organize for what is right, and we have to do it in new and innovative ways.

I think of U.S. Rep. John Lewis, who was the head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the '60s. He and his colleagues tried something that had never been done. They trained themselves in Gandhian nonviolence, put on their Sunday best and sat at Nashville lunch counters. They reacted peacefully to name-calling, spitting and beatings. The evening news was being broadcast in more homes throughout the country, and people were horrified that American citizens could be treated in such a way.

It was a long road, with bridges to cross, marches to walk and buses to ride, but eventually, with creativity, insistence and perseverance, they did overcome, winning those first fights for voting rights and desegregation. So now we must act in the great American tradition of persistent striving for the right and the good of all — for progress.



Photo courtesy Birmingham News

In the early '60s, John Lewis, above, now a U.S. congressman, led the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in a new approach: training themselves in Gandhian nonviolence, putting on their Sunday best and sitting at lunch counters.

Our little people learn to smile, laugh, roll, sit, stand, crawl and walk, sometimes seemingly against all odds. We too must pick ourselves up. Resist the instinct to place blame — the Russians or the FBI stole the election; we should have gone for Bernie; our base didn't do what it needed to; the Republicans have institutionalized voter disenfranchisement. Some of these things may be true, but the most important truth will be what we do from here.

Will we stand up? Will we get creative? Will we get strategic? Will we get trained?

Will we fight for the future of our kids and grandkids?

We are laying the groundwork to do just that. We've had incredible turnout at event after event. People are signing up in droves to volunteer. Donations of support are coming in.

Together, we move forward and continue in the long tradition of creating progress. Please join us. Bring your grandkids, your kids, your friends and your families.

Protectors in Standing Rock and New Mexico

By Camilla Feibelman

Every now and then something happens that sheds light on the bigger picture in a way that would be hard to otherwise achieve. The protests at Standing Rock are an example. Tens of thousands of people have joined Standing Rock Sioux tribal leaders to protest the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline under the Missouri River on Army Corps lands adjacent to the reservation that the tribe claims as theirs under treaty.

Even 1,000 miles away, the urgent issues in North Dakota are relevant in New Mexico, where expanded oil and gas operations are putting cultural heritage sites near Chaco Canyon and adjacent communities at risk (see Page 3).

More than 750 tribal representatives and community members gathered at the Army Corps of Engineers building in Albuquerque Nov. 15 in one of hundreds of Standing with Standing Rock protests across the nation. More than 400 people signed the Sierra Club's petition to halt oil and gas lease sales near Chaco Canyon.

Some of our own members have gone to Standing Rock in solidarity and to better understand the landscape. John Buchser, former Rio Grande Chapter chair and current Water Issues chair, and his wife Linda spent several days there and wrote the following letter to President Obama:

Dear President Obama,
On Nov. 20, my wife and I were camped on the Cannon Ball



Left: About 750 people gathered in Albuquerque to stand with the Standing Rock Sioux to stop the Dakota Access oil pipeline that endangers their water.

Photo by Tom Solomon

Below: Oceti Sakowin camp in November, with scars of military brushfire in background.

Photo by John Buchser



reservation. We had an unforgettable experience of military brutality against the water protectors. I am still in mourning for Sophia Wilansky, who may lose her arm, and Vanessa Dundon who — while responding to a cry for help at the Backwater Bridge — is losing sight in one eye due to the excessive military response that night to a peaceful protest.

I thank you for the small victory issued by the Army Corps of Engineers that temporarily denies the permit for the Dakota Access Pipeline to go under Lake Oahe one-half mile from the reservation, and within the area that rightfully the tribe should control under the

Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851.

In reading the Army Corps of Engineers' letter on the permit situation under Lake Oahe for the Dakota Access Pipeline, it appears that there is no assurance that a full environmental impact statement will be performed on the entire 1,200-mile route. Apparently, permitting for pipelines is routinely broken into small segments, thus bypassing the requirement of a full impact statement. I do not believe this was the intent of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

I am particularly troubled by Item 5 of the undated memoran-

dum signed by Jo-Ellen Darcy of the Army Corps of Engineers (presumably of Dec. 4). It states that "Because of security concerns and sensitivities, several documents supporting the Environmental Assessment were marked confidential and were withheld from the public or representatives and experts of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe." Consultation with the tribe should be a government-to-government consultation. The tribal government is within our nation, and risks to our nation, our land, and our people are also risks to the tribe. This is an inappropriate restraint on sharing of risk analysis.

Given President-elect Donald

Trump has promised to complete as many pipelines as the corporate entities here in the United States desire, it is up to you to take leadership in this matter. Please request a full EIS on the entire DAPL 1,200-mile route. There are many other crossings of tributaries of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers by the DAPL pipeline, and every single crossing presents a risk. The nearly one-per-day significant failure of pipelines in the United States is a threat to the drinking water of millions of citizens and an indictment of the technology involved.

I would also appreciate if you would ask for restraint by the state of North Dakota and Morton County Sheriff's department. The threats that have been issued, starting with the revocation of a permit for the Oceti Sakowin camp, eviction threats, followed by threats of withholding food, wood and supplies from the campers, is beyond belief. The nearest comparable level of threats and physical engagement by police forces on civil nonviolent protests is that of the 1965 Selma, Ala., voting-rights movement. I am in personal fear for our citizens, as President-elect Trump is showing disdain for women, people of color, and the laws of our great country.

I thank you for eight years of service to the country, and I wish us both success in protecting the rights of our country, our citizens, and the planet upon which we reside.

Sincerely,
John R. Buchser



With a much more environment-friendly Legislature in place in New Mexico, there’s new optimism for passing bills that increase renewable-energy requirements, ban trapping on public recreation lands and protect the state’s water resources. But will the governor sign them?

Groups challenge changes to water rules

By Rachel Conn
Amigos Bravos

The New Mexico Environment Department is in the process of revising statewide regulations that govern how the department protects our groundwater and surface water.

The Department has conducted two rounds of public comments on its proposed revisions and hosted public and stakeholder meetings and an online public listening session.

All comments, including those by Sierra Club, Amigos Bravos and Gila Resources Information Project and New Mexico Environmental Law Center are available online.

Conservation and community voices in New Mexico have identified several concerns with the proposed revisions, which include eliminating the five-year limit on water-quality variances.

Currently, polluters need a variance from groundwater-quality rules if they will contaminate groundwater above water-quality standards, and polluters must reapply for the variance every five years. Given the importance of granting a variance, only the 14-member Water Quality Control Commission can approve them, and the public is allowed to participate in these proceedings and provide comment. The Environment Department is proposing to allow facilities that pollute water to obtain variances for unlimited durations instead. And the department’s periodic review would not require a public process.

Conservation and community organizations are also concerned about proposals to expand the Environment Department’s power to change discharge permits and cleanup standards without a robust public process.

The department is also proposing some positive changes, including updating New Mexico’s groundwater standards to be consistent with EPA recommendations, which will result in stronger standards for many pollutants. In addition, the department is proposing to increase the permit fees that polluters pay. Currently permit fees only pay for about 8 percent of the discharge-permit program, meaning that taxpayers substantially subsidize the ability for industry to discharge waste into our water resources. To ensure that this permit fee increase is included in the department’s final proposal, the public must keep the pressure on Gov. Susana Martinez’s office.

The Department met with representatives from Amigos Bravos, Gila Resources Information Project, Sierra Club and New Mexico Environmental Law Center and committed to address some of these concerns in its next draft of revisions.

The proposed revisions can be viewed at www.env.nm.gov/gwb/. A new draft is expected to be released in January. Public hearings on the proposal are expected to be scheduled for April or May. To stay up to date on the process, write to riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org.

Cleaner state ahead

By Dan Lorimier
Rio Grande Chapter
conservation coordinator

There’s hope for legislation that boosts renewable energy, wildlife and air and water protections during this year’s New Mexico legislative session, thanks to the November elections.

With the New Mexico House of Representatives firmly back in Democratic control and Democrats strengthening their majority in the state Senate, legislative dynamics will shift.

Instead of the state Senate being the backstop for environmentally threatening legislation coming from a Republican-dominated House, Gov. Susana Martinez now becomes a backstop for bills that threaten her questionable economic agenda, within which she sees New Mexico’s environment as only an obstacle.

The Rio Grande Chapter’s Legislative Team and I will be asking for your support at the Roundhouse in the 60-day legislative session that runs from Jan. 17 until March 18. Some of the legislation we will be advocating for in 2017:

Positive legislation

- Strengthening our Renewable Energy Act to require investor-owned New Mexico utilities to provide 50% of their electricity from renewable energy by 2030 and 100% by 2050.

How you can make a difference

Our small state and citizen legislature allow everyone a strong voice in policy-making. We are hosting **citizen lobby trainings** where guest legislators discuss how you can effectively communicate with elected officials.

Las Cruces: 6-8 p.m. Jan. 4, Southwest Environmental Center, 275 North Main St., Las Cruces, N.M.

Albuquerque: 6-8 p.m. Jan. 11, St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, 431 Richmond Place, NE, Albuquerque

Santa Fe: 5-7 p.m. Jan. 19, Christus-St. Vincent Medical Dental Building Suite 201, 465 St. Michael’s Drive.

There will also be lobby trainings during the session at **Land, Water and Wildlife Day** on Feb. 8 and **Renewable Energy Day** on March 3. For more info, contact camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org.

Currently, the New Mexico standard ends in 2020 at 20%.

- A study to determine how much water it takes to support oil and gas development and production. How many barrels of water does it take to produce a barrel of oil?

- Requiring all-source requests for proposal when utilities want to add energy capacity, with an independent evaluator to review, so utilities can’t make foolish purchase decisions that benefit shareholders but cost consumers.

- Updating New Mexico’s Property-Assessed Clean Energy program so owners of federally mortgaged homes can install renewable-energy systems whose financing stays with the home rather than with the installing owner if and when the home is sold.

- Banning traps and poisons on public lands in New Mexico;

- Banning coyote-killing contests;
- Banning the importation of parts or products made from the world’s most endangered species.

When the next presidential administration takes office on Jan. 20, many environmentally protective policies will face reversals. These are going to have a powerfully negative environmental impact here, as common-sense regulations are abandoned in favor of a free-for-all approach to energy policy reflected in state legislation like these bills we have seen in recent years:

Destructive legislation

- Abandoning our renewable-energy requirements
- Attempting to seize public lands in New Mexico.
- Disallowing counties and municipalities the right to control the methods used and the areas zoned for oil and gas development and production. State rules would “preempt” local rules.

Even with a more environmentally sympathetic legislature, some of these attempts may gain a foothold with the changes in federal policies.

Meanwhile, we are preparing to face the challenges and opportunities of this legislative session by activating you, our members, with several two-hour citizen lobby training sessions where guest legislators help us understand the best practices for challenging, supporting and influencing our senators and representatives. These training events are scheduled for Las Cruces on Jan. 4, Albuquerque on Jan. 11 and Santa Fe on Jan. 19.

But wait! We, and state Sen. William Soules, are also sponsoring the Land, Water and Wildlife Day at the Legislature on Wednesday, Feb. 8! This is a great day to visit the Roundhouse, explore more than 20 organizations’ accomplishments and plans, lobby your legislators and participate in an outdoor rally for the Mexican gray wolf. We will also offer lobby trainings that day as well as on March 3, Renewable Energy Day.

Every New Mexican, especially when compared to high-population states’ citizens, has a powerful voice at our Legislature. Your legislators want to know you and what you think. Help New Mexico protect itself from the worst changes in federal policy by participating in these empowering events!

PNM files for new rate hike

By Mona Blaber
Communications coordinator

For the second time in a year, New Mexico's largest electric utility wants to raise rates.

On Dec. 6, Public Service Company of New Mexico filed for a \$99 million rate hike, an overall increase of 14.3%, with a 15.8% hike to residential ratepayers. If the state Public Regulation Commission allows the full increase, PNM is willing to recover the rates through a two-part increase: A \$50 million rate increase effective Jan 1, 2018, and a \$9.2 million increase on Jan 1, 2019. If it doesn't get the whole increase, PNM wants the hike all at once.

The average residential bill (563 kilowatt-hours per month) under the proposal would increase by \$5.82 in 2018 and another \$4.69 in 2019.

The residential-customer charge would increase from \$7 to \$13.77 a month, a 97% increase on every bill. This charge was just increased from \$5 to \$7 in the PNM rate case decided in September. The higher base charge reduces incentives for customers to use less energy, punishing low-income and energy-efficient customers with higher rates no matter how little electricity they use.

PNM is also reducing the differential in rates between low-use and high-use customers. Currently, low-use



Photo courtesy San Juan Citizens Alliance

PNM proposes to charge customers for pollution controls at Four Corners coal plant, above. But the utility didn't run a cost analysis on renewing its ownership stake in Four Corners when its contract expired. El Paso Electric, which also serves New Mexico, crunched the numbers and dropped its stake.

customers pay 7.6 cents per kWh and high-use customers pay 14.7 cents per kWh (summer months). PNM would raise the kWh charge for low-use customers to 8.3 cents per kWh, and lower the kWh charge to high-use customers (usage over 900 kWh per month) to 13.9 cents per kWh.

As a result, high-use custom-

ers would actually see a rate reduction to their kWh charge in the peak summer months, while low-use customers (less than 450 kWh per month) would see a 24% increase.

PNM is predicting a continued decline in energy sales, attributed to energy efficiency, and increased residential solar, but it says demand is not decreasing. Likely due

to air-conditioning, the utility reports higher on-peak usage during summer days. PNM says it must continue to construct power plants (or purchase power) to meet demand during peak periods, but the costs are spread across fewer kWh sales, so the cost per kWh goes up. Of course, keeping demand high keeps capital investment high, which is in PNM's interest because it can add capital costs to rates and earn a rate of return. So PNM does little to invest in demand-reduction programs, which could be a cost-effective way to reduce demand but wouldn't help PNM investors.

The proposed increase would pay for pollution controls at the remaining two units at coal-fired San Juan Generating Station and for nuclear power as replacement for the two San Juan units to be retired in 2017.

PNM also proposes to add the cost of new pollution controls at Four Corners coal plant to rates. Part of September's rate increase was for a renewed coal contract at the plant. The Coalition for Clean, Affordable Energy, to which Sierra Club belongs, argued in that case that PNM didn't prove that renewing its ownership in Four Corners was prudent or in the best interest of ratepayers. The commission did not take up that argument, but it is again relevant to consumer interests in this case.

PNM drops gas-plant request

By Mona Blaber

In October, Public Service Company of New Mexico withdrew its application to build a \$100 million natural-gas plant, good news for ratepayers and those who don't want increased dependence on climate-damaging energy.

Last year, PNM filed at the Public Regulation Commission for a 187-megawatt natural-gas plant as part of a deal with Gov. Susana Martinez's administration to retire two units at coal-fired San Juan Generating Station.

The utility withdrew that request because it couldn't show it needed the added power, and a PRC hearing examiner wrote that evidence showed that the power would be more cost-effectively procured through solar facilities.

This spring, PNM filed the current request — for a smaller, 80-megawatt gas plant and pipeline. Sierra Club allies New Energy Economy testified that PNM's own numbers didn't justify the added capacity. And once again, PNM admitted in October it did not need more capacity, dropping the request.

Other utility issues: Several cases that determine how much renewable energy New Mexico's utilities add will be heard this year, and public input is critical. See below for how you can participate.

Model shows path to 100% renewables

By Robb Thomson, Karl Braithwaite and Mark Williams
Chapter energy volunteers

We will demonstrate in this article that PNM can retire the remaining coal production at San Juan Generating Station and replace it with renewable energy complemented (for the most part) by gas producers the utility already has online.

In December 2015, the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission accepted PNM's negotiated proposal to close down about half of PNM's generation of electricity at San Juan to comply with an EPA rule that coal generation of electricity in the West was interfering with visibility at Grand Canyon and other national parks.

As part of the ruling, the commission required that PNM present it with a plan for the future of the remaining coal generation of electricity at San Juan in 2018. To prepare this plan, the PRC advised PNM to use its current Integrated Resource Planning process to model the details of various options for the future of San Juan Generating Station. Sierra Club members can be active in helping make the important decisions being considered for further coal-based electricity production in New Mexico.

To this end, a group of volunteers on the Rio Grande Chapter's Energy Action Team created a simplified model of electricity production in New Mexico in which shut-

The simplified model shows that PNM can use existing gas resources to offset retiring the remaining units of the aging San Juan Generating Station.

ting down San Juan is the first phase of a transition to a system with zero greenhouse-gas emissions. We use current PNM gas facilities to back up the inherent fluctuations in renewables to meet demand at any given time. We find that existing gas plants are nearly adequate for the job. We assume that, in a future system when large-scale storage is available, overproduction will be stored for subsequent use. But storage is not necessary to replace the electricity at San Juan in the interim model.

We thank PNM for sharing hourly data for demand, and wind and solar energy generation from current facilities for the year 2015, from which we explore various levels of new production of wind- and solar-produced electricity by scaling up the renewable behavior for 2015. We assume that when the renewable resource is inadequate to meet demand, a current gas generator (storage in the future) would be turned on to meet the actual demand and track overproduction by renewable generation.

We vary the ratio of wind to solar generation to see what amounts would best match variations in consumer demand and found an optimum at about one-third solar. Then we vary the amount of total renewables to find the point where total renewable overproduction for the year balances the total gas use, and call that the optimum operating point for the utility. This is because, ultimately, when storage replaces gas, this defines the operating point for the utility, because storage capacity exactly matches renewable underproduction.

In summer, the overall net demand is higher than the net production. In the future this seasonal difference becomes an issue to be dealt with either by the availability of lower-cost long-term storage or other means.

While changing capacity factors and incoming data vary the ideal amount of renewables and therefore the price, a very rough estimate for the system envisioned shows that ramping up solar and wind to replace coal-fired energy is cost-effective.

We believe the simplified model we have developed shows that PNM can make use of existing gas resources to offset shutting down the remaining parts of San Juan Generating Station, and that this makes sense as a transition to an ultimate fully renewable system with storage backup.

You can make a difference

- New Mexico's Public Regulation Commission is one of the nation's most powerful state regulatory bodies, with a big impact on energy sources and climate. For updates on how you can participate, **sign up for our energy action alerts at riograndesierraclub.org/climate** (signup is at bottom of page). You'll also receive updates on climate-related bills at the upcoming legislative session.
- Part of your PNM bill is dedicated to energy efficiency, the cheapest way to transition from dirty energy. Take advantage of **PNM's energy-efficiency programs with PNM's home energy checkup:** www.pnm.com/checkup. The cost includes CFLs, new showerheads, power-strips and a programmable thermostat.

The Environment under Trump

Conference lesson: Stop crying, get to work

Denise Fort
Chapter Energy Chair

I was fortunate to attend the COP-22 in Marrakech, Morocco, as part of the Sierra Club delegation.

COP-22 is an official United Nations meeting about climate. COP-21 was the big event, where the Paris Accords were finally hammered out, giving each nation the opportunity to set its own contribution to reducing climate damage.

Just before COP-22, enough nations ratified the Paris Accords for it to go into effect. With ratification a host of questions about implementation needed to be addressed, and new issues will arise. So there will be continuing meetings as we try to get meaningful action on climate. From our perspective, the most important step is international action to reduce projected warming to 1.5 C.

Club staff and volunteers are active participants in international organizations drawn from civil society, and the civil-society tent was the site of an intense, fast-paced set of news conferences, caucuses, conversations, and communications with the official participants. I decided to follow agricultural issues, and found the many perspectives fascinating. In short, to paraphrase our state’s informal slogan, “solutions that work in the developed world are not likely to work elsewhere.”

As an example, the EU’s desire to move to biofuels threatens arable land, rainforests, and other valuable resources in Africa. In another example, there’s widespread understanding in the environmental community that animal agriculture (meat and dairy) is unsustainable because of the land, water, and forage required

and the greenhouse gases associated with them. Nonetheless, a few of the international aid organizations seemed reluctant to criticize animal agriculture. Their reluctance made sense when one realizes that small-scale animal agriculture in a developing nation bears little resemblance to the industrial-scale dairies we have in New Mexico, so it was a reminder to speak carefully about climate impacts associated with meat and dairy production.

Being in Marrakech during the U.S. elections gave rise to a maelstrom of emotions. Word went out to “hug an American,” and the tears were free-flowing. It’s hard to know how damaging the Trump administration will be to climate measures. One impressive step occurred after the U.S. elections, when the “Most Vulnerable Nations” committed to move quickly to renewables despite the likely

abdication of the U.S. in its pledge to help developing countries with adaptation and mitigation. The business sector also was well represented. From a business perspective it makes sense to grow investments in sustainable activities rather than the outdated fossil-fuel sector.

I met activists from China, the Philippines, Brazil and other nations who have advanced climate work despite threats to their lives. Perhaps the complaining about the election sounded like whining to them; their courage was a necessary reminder that we have no excuse for backing off now. We in New Mexico can do an enormous amount locally, from transitioning utilities off coal and gas to reducing methane from oil and gas development to facilitating a switch to electric vehicles. We will “cowboy up” and do what needs to be done.

Climate-saving rules at risk

By Camilla Feibelman
Rio Grande Chapter director

A riddle: What is invisible and odorless and does more harm than carbon dioxide? If you’ve been paying attention to the Rio Grande Chapter’s work over the last year, you know the answer.

Methane is the primary component of natural gas and is unfortunately accidentally leaked and intentionally vented and flared by the oil and gas industry during extraction, gathering, storage and distribution.

In addition to being a devastating greenhouse gas, wasted methane, extracted on our public lands, represents a huge loss of royalties to our state. In fact, over a five-year period New Mexico lost out on \$50 million of revenue due to natural-gas waste on public lands. Those revenues could have gone to support public education, infrastructure projects such as roads and bridges or conservation efforts.

Although some states, most notably Colorado, have created state rules to deal with this issue, most, including New Mexico, have not. The consequences are real and serious. Methane is 86 times more potent than CO2 over a 20-year period, but as I’ll discuss, is fairly easy to capture. Volatile organic compounds known as VOCs are emitted from oil and gas operations along with the methane, forming smog and contributing to serious health problems, leading to lost days at school and work.

Two federal agencies, the Environmental Protection Agency and Bureau of Land



Photo courtesy San Juan Citizens Alliance

The BLM in November finalized rules that would limit waste of methane, a greenhouse gas much more powerful than carbon dioxide, from oil and gas operations.

How you can make a difference

Draft a letter to President-elect Trump reminding him of his commitment to curb government waste. Call on him to preserve EPA and BLM methane rules that would protect health, reduce waste, and increase federal and state royalty income. We’re collecting letters at the Sierra Club office, 2215 Lead Ave. SE, Albuquerque. For more info, write to camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org.

Management, proposed safeguards requiring oil and gas operators to detect leaks and repair them, in addition to other measures that would curb these emissions.

But as with much of the progress we’ve made for the environment over the last eight years, these rules are at risk under the incoming Donald Trump administration.

On Nov. 15, the BLM finalized its rule to cut methane waste, updating 30-year-old regulations by taking action to reduce venting (intentional releases of gas into the atmosphere), flaring (burning off gas that is a byproduct of extrac-

tion), and leaks from existing and future oil and gas projects on our public and tribal lands.

The BLM rule is built on the strong action taken by the EPA earlier this year regulating new sources of methane pollution from oil and gas facilities. The BLM rule is at risk from the Congressional Review Act, which allows the U.S. Congress to repeal any rule finalized after late May or early June, depending on how the timing is calculated, with a simple majority vote in both houses and a signature from the president. There is hope that the EPA rule was finalized in time to

avoid such a repeal.

If Congress decides not to spend its time on Congressional Review Act fights, the administration must spend considerable time and effort if it wants to rescind finalized rules. And while the new EPA leadership could try to weaken enforcement, internal checks such as ethics rules and career staff who know they must follow the law can make it difficult to do so — as can lawsuits if the agency refuses to enforce.

Industry claims that any regulation hurts business, but a study of implementation of the rule in Colorado showed it came at low cost for operators and brought in millions per well over the years. In New Mexico, about \$101 million worth of natural gas is wasted each year, or enough energy to heat 530,000 homes.

These are common-sense safeguards, and we will be vigilant in determining the best ways to preserve them.



Explore, enjoy and protect the planet



With your help we can protect the wolf

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

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Special Offer	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 15	N/A
Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 39	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 49
Supporting	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 75	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 100
Contributing	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 150	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 175
Life	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 1000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 1250
Senior	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 25	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 35
Student	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 25	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 35
Limited Income	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 25	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 35

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The Environment Under Trump

Locally, the environment won

By Mona Blaber
Chapter communications
coordinator

Many of us are feeling gutted after Nov. 8's presidential result.

The Sierra Club is preparing for a long, difficult battle ahead.

But locally, the elections bring real rays of hope, even in the face of the presidential result.

In the biggest shift, New Mexicans elected a solid pro-environment majority in both the state House and Senate.

- With this Legislature, we can pass a Renewable Energy Act that requires 50% renewable energy by 2030 and 100% by 2050.

- With this Legislature, we can ban cruel trapping on public lands.

- With this Legislature, we can outlaw coyote-killing contests.

Getting these bills past Gov. Susana Martinez's veto pen will be challenging. But in 2018, we will elect a new governor, and all New Mexico citizens will have better access to voting with Maggie Toulouse Oliver as secretary of state.

How did New Mexico buck the national trend? It was people like you being engaged in the process, voting and volunteering. Dozens of Rio Grande Chapter volunteers knocked on more than 3,000 doors in key swing districts that decided the balance of the state House. Two thirds of the candidates the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter endorsed came out winners.

With a hostile U.S. House and gridlocked Senate for the past six years, much of America's environmental progress has come at the state and local level anyway, including significant climate progress. Can New Mexico be a light of hope? Here's a rundown of New Mexico and El Paso election results and their implications:

New Mexico House

Under Republican control since 2014, the state House passed bills to revoke renewable-energy requirements and weaken groundwater protections. Environmental advocates were forced to play defense and try to stop negative legislation in the friendlier state Senate. But in November, Rio Grande Chapter-endorsed candidates unseated five Republicans with miserable environmental voting records. They regained the majority, and now Rep. Brian Egolf, an environmental leader, enters the January legislative session as speaker of the House.

In Southern New Mexico, former Las Cruces City



Sierra Club volunteers head out to canvass for legislative candidate Ane Romero in October. Romero lost to an incumbent, but pro-environment lawmakers regained a majority in the House.



Joanne Ferrary

On her third try, Ferrary won the seat she lost by 8 votes in 2012.



Bill Tallman

Tallman knocked on thousands of doors to notch an upset victory.



Liz Stefanics

Stefanics brings a conservation approach to a swing district.



Liz Thomson

Former state representative Thomson won back the seat she lost in 2014.



Nathan Small

Small unseated wolf-hating Rep. Andy Nuñez.



Jeff Steinborn

Steinborn beat an incumbent with a 0% environment record.

Councilor Nathan Small unseated state Rep. Andy Nuñez, who had sponsored legislation calling on the governor to denounce the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program, saying his ideal number of wolves in New Mexico was "zero."

Small was instrumental in the designation of the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument.

After losses in 2012 and 2014, Joanne Ferrary came through on her third attempt for the Las Cruces-area District 37 state House seat.

Rodolpho Martinez took back the Silver City-area seat he lost in 2014 to John Zimmerman, who sponsored a bill in 2015 to strip all state protections from cougars.

In Albuquerque, Liz Thomson, who compiled a strong environmental record in her 2012-2014 term in the House, recaptured the seat she lost in 2014.

Daymon Ely, a former Sandoval County commissioner who recently testified for a moratorium on oil and gas drilling there, also unseated an incumbent.

New Mexico Senate

In the Senate, environmental votes aren't strictly partisan. A coalition of Republicans and anti-environment Democrats

allowed polluters and industry interests a disproportionately large voice. However, the ranks of anti-environment senators have slimmed.

Santa Fe County Commissioner Liz Stefanics emerged victorious from a tough race, taking a seat that was long held by a powerful obstructionist. Her election smooths the road considerably for clean-water and climate legislation.

Environmental champion Jeff Steinborn left his House seat to challenge Lee Cotter, who has an astonishing 0% environmental voting record. Steinborn's win literally takes this seat from 0 to 100.

William Tallman knocked on thousands of doors in his successful upset bid to gain another Senate seat for Sierra Club-endorsed candidates.

Sadly, the Senate lost Majority Leader Michael

Sanchez, who fell victim to an onslaught of deceitful attack ads. But Sanchez's successor as majority leader will be Peter Wirth, whose environmental voting record is excellent.

Public Regulation Commission

The PRC shapes climate action in New Mexico, implementing our renewable-energy law and governing new sources of energy for utilities. Soon, it will decide the future of coal-fired San Juan Generating Station.

New Mexicans concerned about our climate can celebrate the re-election of Valerie Espinoza to the PRC seat in Northern New Mexico. Espinoza, who was unopposed, has been outspoken for consumer rights and the urgent need to transition away from expensive, dangerous fuel sources.

Cynthia Hall's election in the

Albuquerque-area PRC seat is another victory for a safer climate and affordable rates. As a former PRC attorney, Hall will bring knowledge, experience, ethics and a strong commitment to cleaner, more responsible energy sources.

Santa Fe County

Ed Moreno and Anna Hamilton won uncontested elections and will bring integrity and fairness to the county commission.

Sandoval County

One local result that will make protecting our resources more difficult was the defeat of Sandoval County Commissioner Nora Scherzinger, who advocated for a moratorium on oil and gas drilling while the county develops ordinances to address drilling impacts. Citizens can still successfully advocate there as they have in the past year.

Grant County

Alicia Edwards and Harry Browne, two of the Rio Grande Chapter's three endorsed candidates, won on Nov. 8. Both Browne and Edwards hope to protect the Gila River from a billion-dollar diversion plan that experts have called infeasible and that the county has previously supported.

Secretary of State

Voter suppression has played an insidious role in recent elections across the county. Our endorsee, Maggie Toulouse Oliver, will champion ethics and better access to voting as New Mexico's head elections official.

El Paso

Endorsed congressional candidate Beto O'Rourke won his El Paso-area seat in the U.S. Congress in a rout. O'Rourke has said he may be considering a run for Ted Cruz's U.S. Senate seat in 2018.

Sierra Club-endorsed Pete Gallego lost the other congressional seat that represents part of El Paso by just 1 point.

In May, Jim Tolbert, the wonderful former vice chair of our Sierra Club El Paso Group, won an overwhelming victory in a special City Council election.

Yes, it is a tragedy that a climate denier was elected president. We're heading toward a cliff and need to slam on the brakes, and we put someone in the driver's seat who wants to speed up. But New Mexico and other states, cities and counties can throw nails on the road. States representing a large portion of the U.S. economy are acting on their own.

Tragedies can be overcome. We must work hard and be smart. We can do it. Are you in?

How you can make a difference

Contact your state legislators, arrange to meet with them, and tell them what you care about. It makes a difference.

Attend a citizen lobby training in Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Las Cruces, or at the Roundhouse; see Page 5 for details.

The Rio Grande Chapter is holding **volunteer meetings**. Write to riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org to find out about the next meeting near you.

Join our legislative update and action list: Write to riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org.

Rio Grande Chapter Year in Review

January

- El Paso Group begins distributing reusable bags in low-income El Paso neighborhoods to promote reduced use of single-use plastic bags.

February



- Sandridge LLC withdraws its application for a natural-gas exploratory well near Rio Rancho city limits after thousands of Sandoval County citizens and conservation groups spoke up in opposition. The withdrawal is a victory of citizen engagement but raises the issue that the county, which new technologies have made more viable for drilling, has almost no ordinances to protect against negative impacts of drilling. The county is now developing such ordinances, and Sandoval citizens must stay involved. Write to riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org to join our action listserv and get updates.

- The Game Commission agrees to let the Ladder Ranch house endangered Mexican wolves again as long as they are intended for release only into Mexico (the commission denied the ranch's permit renewal for holding wolves in 2015). In February, a family of wolves was transferred to the facility, where the female gave birth to six more pups. All 11 wolves were released together into old Mexico on Dec. 1.

- New Mexico's 30-day legislative session ends with few environment-related bills, good or bad, considered. With a severe budget crisis, renewal of tax credits for residential solar installations and utility-scale renewable-energy production and facilities failed. But thin state coffers also doomed bills offering oil and gas tax breaks.

March

- Rio Grande Chapter honors former chapter Chair John Buchser, Political Chair Susan Martin and Public Lands Chair Norma McCallan for their combined decades of contributions to environmental protection in New Mexico.

April

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service cross-fosters a pair of pups from a captive wolf mother to a wild pack's den, adding much-needed genetic diversity to the dwindling population of 97 Mexican gray wolves in the wild.

- Truth or Consequences City Council rescinds support for the Copper Flat mine based on challenges to the



Bureau of Land Management's draft Environmental Impact Statement after more than 600 Sierra Club supporters sent comments with concerns about the mine's water use and likely water contamination.

- PNM files with the Public Regulation Commission to build an 80-megawatt natural-gas plant at the San Juan site after withdrawing an application for a 187-megawatt plant in 2015.

May

- EPA finalizes rule requiring oil and gas producers to reduce methane leaks at new and modified drilling sites. New Mexicans sent more than 27,000 comments in favor of the rule through Sierra Club and our allies. Methane is 86 times more potent as a climate-change gas than carbon dioxide but disperses from the atmosphere much more quickly, so reducing waste can be a powerful way to stave off climate disruption.

- First community meeting on Health Impact Assessment at Counselor Chapter in Navajo Nation is a first step for a community health report on the impacts of oil and gas.

- The state of New Mexico sues to stop the federal government from releasing endangered Mexican gray wolves in the wild in New Mexico. A federal district judge stays additional wolf releases.

- Jim Tolbert, a member of our chapter's El Paso Group Executive Committee, wins El Paso City Council special election with a majority of the vote despite an eight-way race.

June

- Santa Fe Living Treasure and bedrock Rio Grande Chapter leader Norma McCallan



passes away on June 27 at age 83. To learn more about Norma's enormous contributions to the Sierra Club and New Mexico, please go to riograndesierraclub.org/

How you can make a difference

Join our dairy-monitoring team studying permits and visual data to determine if industrial dairies are committing groundwater violations. Contact daniel.lorimier@sierraclub.org, 575-740-2927.

Our Water Sentinels team is testing for possible contamination by dairy operations on the Pecos River. To start a water-monitoring project, please contact Eric Patterson at ceepatt@gmail.com.

norma-mccallan.

- Nine of 12 candidates endorsed by Rio Grande Chapter win their primary races.

- The Bureau of Land Management postpones a planned lease of three Chaco Canyon-area parcels intended for oil and gas development until January.

- Conservation groups release oil and gas "threat map" (www.oilandgasthreatmap.com/threat-map/new-mexico/) to document which homes, schools, and medical facilities are located within a half-mile "threat radius" of oil and gas facilities.

- Center for American Progress report shows that the San Juan Basin ranked No. 1 in the nation for methane pollution per well in 2014.

- Rio Grande Chapter volunteers begin monitoring quarterly reports from 13 dairies that have committed groundwater-contamination violations.

- Eric Patterson, who leads our Taos Water Sentinels water-testing program, wins national Sierra Club's Special Service award.

July

- Taos Water Sentinels travel to southeastern New Mexico to monitor water quality on the Pecos River.

- Northern New Mexico Group releases updated eighth edition of its popular hiking guide, *Day Hikes in the Santa Fe Area*. Copies are available at

Santa Fe REI and community bookstores.

- In a surprise move, El Paso Electric drops a proposed \$11 monthly fee on El Paso solar owners and abandons its attempt to put customers with residential solar into a separate rate class. The victory came after a year of efforts by Eco El Paso, a coalition of citizens and community groups that includes Sierra Club El Paso Group. The utility is expected to try similar proposals in its next rate case, however.

August

- BLM proposes to offer 843 acres in the greater Chaco area for lease for oil and gas development in its January lease sale.

- NASA study identifies 250 sources in the San Juan Basin that significantly contribute to the large methane cloud hanging over the region. Just 10 percent of these sources are

responsible for more than half of all methane emissions.

- Ryan Flynn, the force behind the industry-written



Copper-Mining Rule that clean-water groups are appealing, resigns as secretary of the New Mexico Environment Department.

September

- New Mexico Oil and Gas Association announces its new executive director: Former Environment Secretary Ryan Flynn.

- Albuquerque passes initiative requiring 25% of electricity at the city's facilities to come from solar energy by 2025.

- In a divided vote, New Mexico Public Regulation Commission approves about half the 14% rate hike requested by PNM. The commission chopped PNM's proposed increase in base fees from \$8 to \$2, and the company didn't get to charge customers for unnecessary coal-plant equipment. But PNM does get to make customers pay for coal and nuclear power it procured

without prior approval, though it got a lot less than it asked for.

October

- A federal judge orders the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop an updated Mexican-wolf recovery plan by the end of 2017. If the new Congress removes Endangered Species protections from wolves, it isn't clear if that order will still apply.

- PNM withdraws application for an 80-megawatt natural-gas plant and pipeline after acknowledging it doesn't need the power.

- The BLM and BIA reopen the public scoping period to update a 2003 Resource Management Plan to analyze the impacts of fracking on the environment and surrounding communities.

November



- After a delay of more than a year, New Mexico Game Commission approves a modified State Wildlife Action Plan to qualify for millions in federal funding for non-game species. The commission weakened the language and removed all insects and a host of other species from consideration at the behest of oil and gas interests. It still covers 235 species, including river otters, jaguars, black-footed ferrets, 70 bird species (including the painted bunting, above), reptiles, fish, and mollusks.

- Environmental champions retake New Mexico House and Senate. Hundreds attend Sierra Club post-election meetings for new volunteers.

- BLM finalizes rules to reduce methane waste from oil and gas facilities on public lands. In New Mexico, enough natural gas is wasted each year to heat 530,000 homes.

December

- 55 people attend comment-writing workshop to submit BLM comments on Chaco.

- Saddle Butte LLC withdraws application for Piñon Pipeline (see Page 3), which could have quadrupled oil production in greater Chaco Canyon.

- Gov. Martinez names Ken McQueen, former vice president of oil company WPX, to head New Mexico's Energy Department, which oversees permits for new wells, regulates oil and gas activity and enforces oil and gas statutes. WPX has drilled more than 100 wells in recent years in northwest New Mexico, including some across the highway from Lybrook Elementary School.

Students explore, protect Texas

Sean Cordier
Americas High School
My name is Sean Cordier and I am currently an active member of the Sierra Student Coalition at my school. I learned about this amazing club in the sophomore year of high school through my friend Matthew Rodriguez and my librarian, Neysa Hardin.

In the past year I have had a number of very memorable and positive experiences that not only brought me closer with nature and my community but also with people who share similar aspirations for the world around us.

A majority of my time invested into SSC has been for community-service projects. Our main project has been building a wheelchair-accessible trail in the Franklin Mountains. So far many weekends have been invested into this labor of love, and many more will go in until its completion. Aside from our rather large project, we have also done multiple cleanups in the Franklin Mountain range all the way from the abandoned tin mine to “The Elephant” hiking trail. As part of the Every Kid in a Park initiative, we gave fourth-graders a free annual national park pass in hopes of getting them in touch with nature at a young age, and we also held a petition drive to save Castner Range by designating it as a National Monument.

Our club has also had leisure and educational time, hiking through the Cottonwood Mine and learning about malachite growth over time as well as the



Photos by Neysa Hardin

Americas High School students on a pollinator-counting trip in Franklin Mountains State Park. The Sierra Student Coalition El Paso’s main project has been building a wheelchair-accessible trail in the Franklins.

tin mine and the history of its workforce. We have also recently gone to the White Sands National Monument on a quest to learn more about cryptobiotic soil and determine which one of us had the best sledding skills (me of course).

My most memorable excursion has been to the Gila Cliff Dwellings, where our club went to a non-excavated site and we were able to literally discover 400-year-old pottery shards. This was also the first encounter with cryptobiotic soil as well as my first close encounter with a snake out in the open.

The Americas High School chapter of SSC has had a great impact on me. The bonds made here in our club are like no other I have felt. SSC in my school has had and will continue to have a deep and lasting impression on the students who join.



Sean Cordier entering the crawl space into a copper mine in Franklin Mountains State Park.

Make a difference
Interested in starting a Sierra Student Coalition at your school? Contact Camilla Feibelman at camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org.
For the sake of wilderness and our ecosystem, the Mexican wolf should be given the chance to reclaim its role in the Chihuahuan Desert of West Texas. **Help return the wolf to Texas:** Visit facebook.com/returnthewolftotexas and click the Take Action link.
Sign up to help students in Texas get involved: Contact Rick LoBello at rcklobello@gmail.com.

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Southern New Mexico Group

Jewell visits Bears Ears, hikes Organ Mountains

By Ken Newtson
Southern New Mexico Group chair

Although the national election results were devastating, the Southern New Mexico Group was very successful supporting local elections. Four state senators, six state representatives and two county commissioners endorsed by the Southern Group were elected. Group members held fundraisers and conducted phone banking, lit drops and door-to-door canvassing for the candidates.

Southern Group members participated in a trip to Cliff, Utah, to support the proposed Bears Ears National Monument. Over 700 attendees met with Interior Secretary Sally Jewell to discuss the proposal established by an intertribal coalition including the Hopi, Ute, Navajo and Zuni. Jewell also visited Las Cruces to support the Organ Mountain Desert Peaks National Monument,

Southern New Mexico Group

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where visitation increased by 102% in 2016.

Southern members attended Gila National Forest Plan Revision meetings in Socorro, Truth or Consequences, Silver City and Las Cruces. Several groups, including the Sierra Club, provided comments to the Forest Service.

After the elections, the Southern Group held a meeting inviting new members to become involved, and many folks signed up to help with upcoming activities.

The Bureau of Land Management held meet-

ings at New Mexico State University to discuss the future use of the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument.


A formal survey was conducted that will help BLM develop the Resource Management Plan for the monument.

The Southern Group held a holiday party Dec. 15. Most of the night’s discussion focused on the difficult times ahead, particularly the threat of public land transfers.


Want to get involved with Southern New Mexico Group? Email me at newtsonk@comcast.net.

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Military outings serve those who served

By Fred Houdek
Central New Mexico Group chair
The Sierra Club Military Outdoors Program has reported for duty in New Mexico!

The goal of this new program is to provide active-duty veterans and their families the opportunity to spend time together in the great outdoors.

It offers an opportunity for individuals who have served to once again feel a sense of camaraderie, adventure and teamwork that they may not have experienced outside the military. Numerous studies have shown that time spent in nature promotes mental health and emotional resiliency and provides the ability to create positive relationships and new networks.

This program is being headed by Terry Owen and John Link, veterans of the U.S. Navy and U.S Air Force, respectively.

“As soon as I learned about this program, I leapt at the chance to obtain the necessary training to guide and lead my brothers and sisters that have worn the uniform as well as their families,” Owen said. “I know first-hand the positive effects that being in a forest or in the mountains has on my body, mind and emotions, and there’s no drug that can replicate that.” Link, who is a physician at the Albuquerque VA hospital, sees it as another opportunity to continue to serve. Every day his work brings him in touch with the after-effects of military service; both the seen and unseen wounds.

Both agree that the training they recently received with other military veterans in Leadville, Colo., was outstanding. The weekend-long course was the first of what Sierra Club hopes to be many to give vets the ability to lead others. Sierra Club hosted 30 veterans representing all branches of service and ranging from the Vietnam era to Operation Enduring Freedom. One student noted that “almost immediately there was a common feeling of trust and mutual respect which made the training much more than what it was designed to be.”

Many veterans have also seen the



Above: John Link, Marcia Skillman, Terry Owen and Matt Stewart on the first Rio Grande Chapter Military Outings Program hike, near the TWA crash site in the Sandia Mountains.



At left: The “A” from TWA Flight 260 wreckage.

impact on our planet and nature that human activity causes.

The destruction caused by war provides a fast-forward view of what damage we can inflict on the planet. For many it’s a wake-up call to get involved and find ways to protect and defend the Earth.

Owen and Link recently completed their first guided hike to the TWA crash site in the Sandia Mountains. TWA Flight 260 crashed on Feb. 19, 1955, in a snow storm near what is now the Sandia Tram route. Walking among the wreckage on a beautiful New Mexico morning, the hikers took a few minutes to silently acknowledge what had occurred there before descending back through the forest among ponderosa pines and juniper.

After returning to the trailhead,

Vietnam-era vet Harry Carpenter said, “veterans have had unique experiences that only other military veterans can understand, and this hike and connecting with others has been wonderful.”

The Military Outdoors program offers a safe setting to share those experiences while making new ones. If you’re active-duty, a military veteran, family member or friend, and you wish to have new experiences, Owen and Link will be scheduling both easy and more challenging hikes in the coming months in Central and Northern New Mexico. **For more information or if you wish to participate, contact Terry Owen at 505-301-4349, teowen@q.com**, or check the Sierra Club Military Outdoors website: content.sierraclub.org/outings/military.

Central New Mexico Group events

The Central New Mexico Group’s most recent Sierra Club and Beers have attracted so many people that our Albuquerque office can’t fit them all, so our next event will be a “Sierra Club and Root Beer” at the Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice. Chapter director Camilla Feibelman will talk about actions you can take to protect the environment under a Trump administration.

What: Sierra Club and Root Beer

When: 7 p.m. Friday, Jan. 6

Where: Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice, 202 Harvard Drive SE, Albuquerque.

RSVP: Fred Houdek at fhoudek@gmail.com or 630-809-4234.

The next Sierra Club and Root Beer will be March 3, same time and place.

Volunteer Wednesday

We have volunteers in our Albuquerque office on Wednesdays to do data input, make calls and help with other projects. If you can join us, contact miya.king-flaherty@sierraclub.org. We are also looking for volunteers to keep the office open when staffers aren’t present. Contact camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org

Artist of the Month

Join us Feb. 6 for First Friday Art at the Sierra Club Albuquerque office, 2215 Lead Ave. SE. See great art by Victoria Mlady and enjoy food, fun and great people!

Group Executive Committee

Chair: Fred Houdek, fhoudek@gmail.com, 630-809-4234.

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Secretary: Heather Kline, heather9387@yahoo.com, 505-577-2798

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Political chair: Richard Barish, richard.barish@gmail.com

Volunteer profile: Ellen Loehman, website manager

Ellen Loehman is our website manager. She posts most of the content you see on our website.

Question: How did you get involved with the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter?

Answer: I’ve been a member of the Sierra Club since about 1970. I was active in the Loma Prieta Chapter in the Bay Area, and when we moved here, we naturally started attending meetings. I volunteered in the office once a week, was on the ExComm, handled membership and did the newsletter for a while. But that dissipated with kids and career. After I retired, I knew it was time to re-activate myself.

Q: What type of work do you do for the chapter?

A: I am the Tuesday volunteer in the Albuquerque office. But once Camilla found out that I knew how to handle websites, that became my primary job — adding events and articles to our website.

Q: Why do you volunteer for the Rio Grande Chapter?

A: Why not? I have three passions in life (besides my family): science, education and the environment. Those passions didn’t end with retirement. What else should I do? Play golf or bridge? That is not the way I was raised.

Q: What inspires you to work for the environment?

A: Our home needs advocates — people who take a reasoned approach to the choices we must make. As a chemist, I understand the trade-offs that



we make about energy: the pros and cons of nuclear, petroleum and renewable energy. I understand the plight of people who struggle simply to survive — to have food, clean water and shelter. I’m definitely not a tree-hugger.

Q: What would you tell others who are interested in

doing more to help?

A: Do what you can and what you are comfortable with. Volunteer organizations tend to use people up if they can’t say no. For instance, I stated clearly that I would give three hours a week in the office; I don’t like to call people on the phone and so I don’t. Find your strengths and offer them up: Can you make phone calls or write letters? Can you research an issue or attend political meetings? Can you write an article? Can you organize stuff? Can you take notes? Can you do fundraising?

Q: What’s your favorite thing about the Sierra Club?

A: True story. This is the reason I know we will survive the next four years. In the early 1980s, we had a Secretary of

the Interior (James Watt) who was likened to a fox guarding the chicken coop. Membership in environmental organizations soared.

The Sierra Club (which was then primarily an outings organization) spearheaded a petition drive to get him fired or discredited. I posted a petition on the bulletin board at work. One day after lunch, a man in bicycle gear stomped into my office and wanted to sign my petition. And that is how I met my husband, my soul-mate and love of my life. Dark clouds do have silver linings.

Would you like to help with website tasks or posting on social media? Please write to riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org.

A step forward on animal traps

By Denise Fort, Rio Grande Chapter Energy Chair

On Nov. 29, the Santa Fe County Commission unanimously passed a resolution directing staff to support efforts to end trapping on federal lands within the county and to support state legislative efforts to ban trapping.

At the hearing on the resolution, a parade of witnesses talked about the cruelty of trapping, the economic value of wildlife, especially in a state like ours, and how trapping has interfered with people's use of the public lands. Some of the most moving testimony came from people who had dogs caught in traps. The terror of the dogs, and of the people who tried to rescue them, spoke very strongly to the Commissioners. Our own chapter Wildlife chair, Mary Katherine Ray, also described her realization that she might have been injured and far away from help when her dog got caught in a trap.

I've learned more than I wanted to know about body-gripping traps and their use in New Mexico as we've dug into this issue. Unlike many of the environmentally damaging practices that we encounter, it's important to remember that it's a minuscule number of people who choose to do this. As Ray pointed out, it makes no sense to allow this very small group of



Photo courtesy Art Rescues

In her last month as a Santa Fe County commissioner, Kathy Holian helped pass a resolution directing county staff to support efforts to end trapping on federal lands within the county. The Northern New Mexico Group recently honored Holian for her public-service career (see article below).

people to have so much impact on all other forms of recreation on public lands.

No license is needed to trap for coyotes or skunks, so there are no records of the true number of traps being set. The New Mexico Game and Fish Department also does not know where traps are located, even on public land. Trappers are not required to report the non-target animals they catch by mistake. Neither the public nor our wildlife is being served by this disregard. The Santa Fe County Commission stepped into this vacuum in a first step to protect New Mexicans, tourists, our dogs and our wildlife.

Make a difference for wildlife

- Talk to your state senators and representatives, who can pass legislation in the upcoming session banning leg-hold traps on public lands. The Sierra Club is holding lobby-training sessions across the state (see Page 5 for details).
 - Write letters to the editor about the need for safeguards against trapping.
 - Sign the petition to end trapping on our public lands at trapfreenm.org.
 - Attend Land, Water and Wildlife Day at the Roundhouse on Feb. 8 (see Page 5 for details).
 - Plan to testify in person or contact your legislators about bills to end trapping and coyote-killing contests. To get updates on wildlife bills as they make their way through the Legislature, sign up for our Wildlife email list at www.riograndesierraclub.org/wildlife/.
- If you have questions or want to get more involved, please contact Mary Katherine Ray at mkrscrim@gmail.com or 575-772-5655.

Group holiday party honors Kathy Holian

By Teresa Seamster
Northern Group chair

For the past eight years, the people of Santa Fe County's Fourth District have been privileged to have competent, responsive, compassionate governmental representation in the form of County Commissioner Kathy Holian.

Susan Martin, Political chair of the Rio Grande Chapter of Sierra Club, described Holian as "completely committed, intelligent, and dedicated — a conservation champion and a wildlife warrior!"

A strong advocate for local agricul-

ture and animal and wildlife protection, Holian sponsored a final county resolution in December to stop inhumane body-gripping traps in the county and to work with public lands agencies on this issue (see article above). Given the increasing numbers of domestic and non-target wildlife caught in traps every year, the support for the measure was overwhelming and approved unanimously.

"I have never seen Kathy let her constituents down in matters of fairness and what is best for all our county residents," said longtime district resident Teresa Seamster

after one contentious Board of County Commissioners meeting. "She comes prepared and informed about the agenda items and if there are opposing sides — for example on the designation of La Bajada National Monument — she urges the proponents to meet with the opposing side and figure out the details so the community is unified when the board votes."

Commissioner Holian was honored in December at the annual Holiday Party given by the Sierra Club Northern New Mexico Group in a gathering of about 100 members at the Santa Fe Women's Club.



Send us photos of your backyard wilderness!

Who are you sharing your habitat with this winter? The Northern New Mexico Group would like photos and descriptions of the wildlife you are seeing this winter in your back yard or out on your property from anywhere in the state! For those who have ever seen Mary Katherine Ray's photos — be prepared to be blown away!

Please email Teresa Seamster at tc.seamster@gmail.com with your selections and encounters with our wonderful New Mexico wildlife!

At left: A yearling mule deer looking over the wall at the Seamsters' house in Santa Fe County and wondering if the birdseed is worth a try. The rest of the small herd of does and juveniles was beyond the tree line.

Photo by Tom Seamster

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Landowners oppose Verde Line

By Teresa Seamster
Northern New Mexico
Group chair

The Verde Transmission Line project has finally stepped into the public limelight after more than six years of privately held and undisclosed negotiations between Hunt Power of Dallas and the northern pueblos of Pojoaque, Santa Clara, and Ohkay Owingeh. The reaction of hundreds of Española Valley landowners has been swift.

Because agreements between Hunt Power and the three pueblos and the Jacona Land Grant owners have already been approved, resident Rob Heineman, who just found out about the project, said he felt “the community’s flesh is being ripped apart by a pack of wolves” in this valley where “several heritages have co-existed so peacefully and thoughtfully.”

The proposed 33-mile, 345-kV high-voltage transmission line would have towers 120 feet tall and spaced 800 feet apart.

The route is to run from Ojo substation northwest of Española across the Río Grande only 1,600 feet north of Black Mesa, which is considered a site that is both sacred to San Ildefonso and of regional cultural importance, and then down the west side of Española Valley to Norton substation west of Santa Fe.

The Española Valley is the gateway to the Jemez Mountains and the world-renowned Bandelier National Monument and Valles Caldera National Preserve that is home to the second-largest elk herd in the state. Up to 700,000 visitors a year travel NM 502 through Pojoaque and San Ildefonso Pueblos to see the spectacular mountains, cultural heritage sites, wildlife, and sweeping vistas of Northern New Mexico.

The following comments were prepared by landowners who contributed their concerns to the stopverdeprojectnm.org website created by Flaviano Prosperini, his wife, Elena Guardincerri, and Mattie Allen, who have properties that would be impacted by the Verde right-of-way. They were delivered at the BLM meeting in Pojoaque.

•Hunt has repeatedly stated at previous scoping meetings that they have not identified customers for the line and have had no negotiations with PNM concerning the future use of the line.



Above: a photo illustration of what Black Mesa would look like with the Verde Line constructed. Photo illustration by Tadz Kostrubala.

You can make a difference

If you are concerned about the Verde transmission line and would like to weigh in, Please submit email comments to the Bureau of Land Management at BLM_NM_Verde@blm.gov or mail to: BLM, Verde Transmission Line Project, PO Box 27115, Santa Fe, NM 87502-0115 by Jan. 5.

- The proposed Verde line runs from Norton to Ojo point to point, without an intermediate stop in Hernandez. Should the Verde line be constructed, Jemez Co-Op will still rely solely on the Ojo-Hernandez-Norton 115kV line for supply, adding no capacity or economic value to the valley.
- This leaves PNM as the only plausible candidate to use the proposed Hunt line, even though at the Nov. 29 Santa Fe County Commission meeting Hunt denied PNM’s involvement and declared that the proposed line has no users yet and there are no contracts in place for the transmission of renewables.

- The OLE project, virtually the same transmission line, connecting the same substations, routed through the Jemez Mountains was proposed by PNM in the 1990s and it was not approved by the PRC. The PRC ruled that PNM had not made the case for additional capacity requirements.
- Further energy demand in the Albuquerque area can be absorbed by existing lines and many more solar panels.
- PNM is retiring 919 MW of coal capacity at San Juan and no longer needs to import that energy into Albuquerque from the Four Corners area. Any future generation capacity needs can be located closer to the load.
- Regarding the reliability of the system, there is no proof that the existing electrical grid is unreliable. The system runs quite well with the existing 115 kV line closing the loop. When questioned about system reliability at the Española scoping meeting, Hunt admitted that there have only been two major outages in 30 years.
- Hunt has not made a case for the need of the line, nor has the company shown that the current system’s reliability is in question.

More than 3,275 Northern New Mexico residents have signed a petition circulated by landowner, biologist, part-time actress, bow hunter, organic farmer and mom Mattie Allen, all strongly opposing the Verde Line.

One of the greatest concerns is the proximity of local schools to the project right-of-way. Dr. Kurt Moore, retired Los Alamos Laboratory space physicist, submitted comments to BLM that the proposed line exceeds magnetic safety guidelines and recommended minimum safe levels associated with cancer in humans “within the ROW and along NM 84 between El Duende and Hernandez.” A minimum safety distance is 1,200 to 2,000 feet. The right-of-way is 150 feet with many residences and public facilities within 100 to 200 feet.

Heineman summed up the feelings of many in the audience when he concluded:

“They have yet to meet with me, and they want to build on or adjacent to my land. I say to my neighbors, I will never benefit at the expense of my neighbors. You are all I have in this valley.”

Resolution supports national monument

Excerpted from an op-ed Taos County Chair Jim Fambro and Commissioners Mark Gallegos and Tom Blankenhorn in the Taos News.

On Dec. 6, the Taos County Commission passed a unanimous resolution affirming the support of our beloved Río Grande del Norte National Monument.

This vote also serves as a memorial to the late Ron Gardener, who worked diligently on efforts around the Río Grande del Norte National Monument in the 1990s.

The vote to support the National Monument could not come at a more important time. Recently, outside interests have threatened to repeal our National Monument — something that our constituents fought for and have come to depend upon for their livelihood, recreation, traditional and small-business interests. Continued protection is important for certainty in the ongoing BLM monument-planning process to best serve the community as well as protect against further development such as threats of energy transmission running through the Monument.

We go to the canyons, mountains, and rivers to hike, fish, and gather firewood. And our small businesses have grown and prospered because of the assurance that these lands will always be here.

Over the course of 25 years, a diverse coalition came together to preserve this spectacular place for future generations to enjoy. The group grew to become business owners, elected officials, Native American tribes, Hispanic/Latino leaders, ranchers, veterans, and conservationists. And when legislation continued to hit a brick wall in Congress, President Obama designated the Río Grande del Norte National Monument on March 25, 2013.

People in Taos celebrated the designation. We celebrated it because we could foresee the economic growth that would come from putting a star on the map in northern New Mexico. Indeed, there as a 40 percent increase in visitors to the National Monument, and Taos County has enjoyed significant increases in lodgers’ tax and gross receipts revenues from the accommodations and food service sector.

And thanks in part to the Monument and our state’s other protected public lands, the tourism industry generated the largest economic impact in state history for the sixth year in a row. This resulted in nearly \$6.3 billion being added to the New Mexico economy that supported 90,400 jobs.

Continued on Page 15

Volunteering on trails at Bandelier

By Jody Benson
Pajarito Group Chair

If you’ve tried to hike the Frijoles Canyon Trail between the Headquarters and Ponderosa Camp Ground since the 2011 Cerro Grande Fire — and worse, since the 500-year flood of 2012 — you struggled through a Canyon scoured into unrecognizability and barred by piles of burned trees stacked like fortresses.

Before new growth began to heal the canyon walls and mesas, annual floods precluded wasting time and effort on rebuilding the trail.

But if you’ve been into Frijoles Canyon this year, you would have been delighted by the month-by-month progress on the trail. A gang of dedicated volunteers, primarily Sierrans from the Northern New Mexico and Pajarito groups, has been among those helping Bandelier Trail Boss Kevin Stillman to reroute the trail above the flood plain.

From headquarters, the trail for about two miles beyond Alcove House (Ceremonial Cave) has been rerouted/rebuilt almost to the beginning of “the Narrows,” where you can route-find along the stream. From Ponderosa Campground, the trail has been rerouted/rebuilt to within a mile of the Narrows.

Because of the fires, subsequent flooding, and only the barely-treading-water-funding for the parks (which means there is only one paid Trail Guy for Bandelier), the Monument’s trails were, in many areas, decimated. Lost trails meant that if you wanted to explore the backcountry, it would be helpful if you already knew how to get to wherever you were going.

Stillman, however, has worked to organize multiple organizations of volunteers whom he takes into the backcountry so that, little by little, Bandelier trails are directional again. You are invited to join the effort and be rewarded by a trail appearing through a previously impenetrable pile of logs, ankle-twisting washout, or burned-over expanse of rocky mesa.

The strenuousness of tasks ranges from raking trail and pruning brush to sawing logs and building big-rock-based walls. You work at your own level.



Photos by Les Drapela

Top: Bandelier trail boss Kevin Stillman works with Jody Benson and Kathleen Chymbor (from left), two of the Sierra Club volunteers helping to restore trails at Bandelier National Monument.
Above: Tom Chymbor helps to wall in a washout on Frijoles Canyon Trail.

Stillman will school you in not only the task, but the proper engineering of a wilderness trail.

The work is appropriate for any age that can hike a few miles, work several hours, and focus on the task. Trail work is ongoing and will continue through the year as weather permits. Please contact Kevin Stillman at kevin_stillman@nps.gov to get the volunteer alerts.

Los Alamos County joins municipal power system

Los Alamos, with its own municipally owned utilities, is a member of the Utah Associated Municipal Power Systems, a not-for-profit consortium for providing comprehensive wholesale electricity to community-owned power systems throughout the Intermountain

How you can make a difference

Join the volunteers helping to restore Bandelier trails destroyed in the Cerro Grande Fire and subsequent flooding. The work is appropriate for any age. Contact Kevin Stillman at kevin_stillman@nps.gov to get the volunteer alerts, or Jody Benson at echidnaejb@gmail.com.

Letters to the editor reach thousands of people and are a great way to advocate for issues. Join our Rio Writers listserv or participate in Lunch and Learn workshops on effective letter-writing (by phone or in person). For either, contact camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org, 505-715-8388.

West. Of the 47 communities, Los Alamos is one of 39 that support a local zero-carbon effort.

Los Alamos already owns a renewable portfolio including hydro and solar but also has shares totalling 46 megawatts in two coal-fired power plants.

Doug Hunter, UAMPS general manager, told attendees of the December county meeting that to accomplish the zero-carbon goal, the common-sense solution is “energy efficiency — save power by discussing with customers why they use electricity, and why we need to remove unneeded kilowatt-hours from the system.” Because conservation will decrease future energy use, “we don’t want surplus power when people actually start practicing energy conservation. People are already learning to turn off lights.”

In its quest for carbon-free power to replace the baseload (24-hour-a-day power) now provided by aging coal-fired plants, UAMPS has partnered with NuScale to build a small modular nuclear reactor near Idaho Falls, Idaho.

NuScale CCO Michael McGough told the audience that NuScale is designed to be “small, scalable, and reliable.”

Each module should produce 50 megawatts at a cost of \$3 billion versus \$90 billion for an ordinary plant. The completion date is projected for 2024.

Please see www.nuscalepower.com/our-technology/technology-overview.

Pajarito Group Directory

Web page:
riograndesierraclub.org/pajarito

Executive Committee

Chair/Secretary: Jody Benson, echidnaejb@gmail.com, 505-662-4782

Howard Barnum, hnbarnum@aol.com

Iris Chung, itlchung@hotmail.com

Michael DiRosa, mddbmm@gmail.com

Nona Girardi, nonamg@aol.com

Committee Chairs

Bag Ban, Cool Cities, Treasurer: Mark Jones, jonesmm1@comcast.net, 505-662-9443

Conservation chair: Michael DiRosa

Global Warming chair: Charles Keller, alfonso@cybermesa.com, 505-662-7915

Mining: David Torney, dtorney@valor-net.com, 575/829-3433

Newsletter Editor, Transportation, Endangered Species/Wildlife: Jody Benson, echidnaejb@gmail.com, 505/662-4782

Caldera Issues chair: Howard Barnum, hnbarnun@aol.com

Water Issues chair: Barbara Calef, bfcalf@yahoo.com, 505/662-3825

Membership: Mark Jones, jonesmm1@comcast.net, 505/662-9443.

Join the Pajarito Group: Our executive committee is looking for members to help us strategize, plan events and campaigns, and enjoy the camaraderie that comes from saving the world together. Contact Pajarito Group Chair Jody Benson at echidnaejb@gmail.com or 505-662-4782.



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trip, 600-foot elevation gain starting at 9,600 feet. Good for first-time snowshoers. Bring your own or rent snowshoes and poles. Dogs OK. Contact Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, teowen@q.com by Feb 2.

Saturday, Feb. 4 and/or Sunday 5: Taos outing, see Jan. 7 for details.

Friday, Feb. 10: Full Moon snowshoe at 4 p.m. Location close to Santa Fe to be determined. Call 505-699-3008 or email marciaskillman@hotmail.com.

Saturday, Feb. 11: Strenuous snowshoe outing to Deception Peak, 6 miles and 2,500-foot elevation gain. Two or three dogs OK. Larry, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com, 505-913-0589.

Saturday, February 11: Difficult climb to be determined. Contact Odile, odile@pitot.org, 505-433 4692. End with optional potluck at Odile's house.

Saturday, Feb. 11 and/or Sunday 12: Taos outing, see Jan. 7 for details.

Saturday, Feb. 18: Moderate hike to the Rio Grande Ancho Canyon to Red Dot Loop. Moderate and beautiful hike through dramatic White Rock Canyon, with pink cliffs, springs, and petroglyphs as highlights. We will car-shuttle on return via the Red Dot trail, back to our start at the Ancho Rapids Trail near Bandelier. Pace is moderate, 8 miles on good and primitive trails and 1,000 feet elevation gain.

Email medunham2@msn.com to confirm, or call (505) 795-0199 close to event.

Saturday, Feb. 25 and/or Sunday 26: Taos outing, see Jan. 7 for details.

Sunday, Feb. 26: Tour Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument. Moderate hike on the new Western Ridge trail to the top of Picacho Peak with 360-degree views of the entire national monument as well of views into Texas and Mexico. Return via either the original trail route or one of the other trails in development around the mountain. About 4 miles, 700 feet elevation gain. Contact Howie Dash for meeting time and place: 575-652-7550 or howiedash@aol.com.

Saturday, March 4: Moderate/strenuous snowshoe



Photo by Odile de la Beaujardiere

A Sierra Club outing took hikers around Cabezon Peak in November.

How you can make a difference

Get outside! Nature is still beautiful, still worth standing up for and still has the power to awe, humble and inspire. It will make you feel better; we promise!

And if you're interested in training to be a Sierra Club hike leader, contact odile@pitot.org.

outing to La Vega, 9 miles, 1,300 feet elevation gain. Two or three dogs OK. Larry, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com 505-913-0589.

Saturday, March 4 and/or Sunday 5: Taos outing, see Jan. 7 for details.

Saturday, March 11: Easy to moderate Foothills Hike. Sponsored by the Sierra Club Military Outdoors Program. All are welcome. If you'd like to explore the wonders of nature and hiking in New Mexico in the company of great people, this is the hike! Begin at the foot of the Sandia Tram in Albuquerque and proceed to the La Luz Trail cutoff. Beautiful views of the city. Three miles, 200 feet elevation gain. Dogs OK. Contact Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, teowen@q.com by March 9.

Saturday, March 11: Easy hike in Albuquerque's Petroglyph National Monument. Guided tour in Piedras Marcadas by specialist Bill Pentler. Great for children and grownups alike. Meet

at 9:30 a.m. Two dogs OK. Contact Odile, odile@pitot.org, 505-433-4692. End with optional potluck at Odile's house.

Saturday, March 11 and/or Sunday 12: Taos outing, see Jan. 7 for details.

Sunday, March 18: moderate hike at La Bajada (between Los Lunas and Belen). 10 hikers, one or two dogs OK. About 6 miles and 1,000-foot gain. Prehistoric and modern history illuminated. Contact Dag Ryen at (505) 466-4063 by March 15.

Saturday, March 18 and/or Sunday 19: Taos outing, see Jan. 7 for details.

Saturday, March 25: Moderate snowshoe, Raven's Ridge (close to Santa Fe). marciaskillman@hotmail.com, 505-699-3008.

Saturday, March 25: Moderate hike up Arroyo Hondo southeast of Santa Fe. Assuming we can drive up FR79, we will walk up Arroyo Hondo headwaters to the South Ridge of the watershed,

then east along the ridge to the last hill before Apache Canyon. Seldom-seen look at the Monument tower buried deep in the watershed, and at territory that remains attractive through the summer. Eight miles on old logging roads, and 1,400 feet elevation gain. Email medunham2@msn.com to confirm, or call (505) 795-0199 close to event time.

Saturday, March 25 and/or Sunday 26: Taos outing, see Jan. 7 for details.

Sunday, March 26: Moderate hike in the Abiquiu/Medanales area. Lisa Bowdey, (505) 699-2953.

Taos resolution, continued from Page 13

We also knew we were doing our part to safeguard our precious clean water. The American West is facing worse droughts every year and it is our responsibility to preserve the lifeblood of our community — OUR WATER. The National Monument's watershed helps sustain key irrigation source for farmers and acequias and a key water supply for many towns and cities.

We applauded the designation because it would preserve critical wildlife habitat. Our Monument serves as a rich and essential wildlife habitat for elk, mule deer, pronghorn antelope, bighorn sheep, otter, trout, pike, small-mouth bass and birds of prey, and encompasses a critical wildlife migration corridor. Because of its abundant wildlife, hunters and anglers come from near and far and contribute to Taos County's economic growth.

And finally, the Río Grande del Norte National Monument holds countless sacred cultural tribal sites, ruins and petroglyphs in addition to several invaluable Spanish cultural sites that date back as far as 400 years. As our resolution states, "The cultural antiquities here are the tangible historic record of human habitation of the entire area and are irreplaceable."

New Mexico has a strong conservation ethic that goes back generations. We are the home, after all, of one of our nation's first wilderness areas. Standing up to keep our public lands public is important for all of us to do. Please join us in defending the Río Grande del Norte National Monument.

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How you can make a difference

Donate to the Sierra Club! To donate, please go to riograndesierraclub.org/donate or send donations made out to Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter to 1807 Second St., Unit 45, Santa Fe, NM, 87505. Your entire contribution stays right here for the work we do to protect New Mexico and West Texas.

Eat lower on the food chain. Reduce consumption of animal products, especially beef, to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, water use and groundwater pollution. No regulation required!

Be an office volunteer. Can you spend a few hours manning —or womaning! — our Albuquerque office so it can stay open to the public when staffers aren't present? Please contact camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org.

Attend presentations co-sponsored by the Project Coyote and Sierra Club featuring a film screening and panel discussion on coyote-killing contests: Jan 5, Rio Grande Theatre, Las Cruces, 7-9 p.m.; The Guild, Albuquerque, 1-3 p.m. Jan 7; Jean-Cocteau Theatre, Santa Fe, 5-7 p.m. Jan. 8.



Photo by Aku

A very enthusiastic group of hikers toured the badlands near Medanales in December, starting in cold weather and then enjoying a perfect day and a scenic, off-trail loop through badlands that rival any scenery in New Mexico for beauty. See Jan. 21 listing for the next Medanales trip.

January-February-March hikes

Saturday, Dec. 31: Soda Springs Loop at Buckman.

Down wash and out Soda Springs trail, then up the old but well-built trail to the top of the Caja, then across the Caja and back down to the cars parked at the trailhead just below Diablo Canyon. Great views of White Rock Canyon. Advanced to Moderate, 8 miles, half off-trail, and about 1,100 feet elevation gain. Email: medunham2@msn.com to confirm, or call (505) 795-0199 close to event time.

Sunday, Jan. 1: Moderate New Year's Day snowshoe. location TBD, Marcia Skillman, marciaskillman@hotmail.com, 505-699-3008.

Tuesday, Jan. 3: Series of moderate aerobic afternoon hikes starting at noon, shooting for about 1,000 feet of gain in a fairly short (maybe 5-mile round-trip) hike. We will move time up if it is a bigger hike. Each hike destination will be specified separately in the Meetup site comments for this series. Also, Meetup RSVP feature is open for this series. However, still contact the leader if you are new, as he will waitlist unknowns who have not contacted him. Email: medunham2@msn.com to confirm, or call (505) 795-0199 close to event time.

Saturday, Jan. 7: Beginner snowshoe clinic, location TBD, marciaskillman@



Photo by Olivia Li

Snowshoers take a break on a trip to Spirit Lake on Dec. 18.

hotmail.com, 505-699-3008.

Saturday, Jan. 7 and/or Sunday, 8: Series of Taos outings. Moderate/strenuous hike or snowshoe in Taos area, come for Saturday, Sunday, or both. Dogs OK. Repeats most weekends of the winter season. Tobin Oruch, tobin.oruch@yahoo.com, (505) 690-6253.

Saturday, Jan. 14: Strenuous snowshoe outing to Nambe Lake, 7 miles and 2,000 feet of elevation gain. Two or three dogs OK. Larry, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com, 505 913 0589.

Saturday, Jan. 21: moderate hike on Piedra Lisa trail up to the Rincon Ridge on the north side of the Sandias (close to Albuquerque). Two miles,

1,100 feet elevation gain. 10:30 a.m. start. Splendid views. Two dogs OK. Odile, 505-433- 4692, odile@pitot.org. End with optional potluck at Odile's house.

Saturday, Jan. 21 and/or Sunday 22: Taos outing, see Jan. 7 for details.

Saturday, Jan. 21: Moderate hike to Window Rock at Medanales (Santa Fe SC Guide Page 370). Amazing lava dyke window in the middle of sandy terrain. See also the "sand-worm" formations popping from the wash beds, as well as an interesting shrine the locals have carved into soft rock walls. Nine miles on trail or in wash bottoms, and 1,000 feet gain. Email medunham2@

About our hikes

Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter outings are free and open to the public.

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

Dogs permitted only if noted in write-up.

Always contact leader before the outing to confirm participation and details.

Please see riograndesierraclub.org/ outings for up-to-date information and new hikes.

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.

msn.com to confirm, or call (505) 795-0199 close to event time.

Saturday, Jan. 28 and/or Sunday 29: Taos outing, see Jan. 7 for details.

Saturday, Jan. 28: moderate hike to Broad Canyon and Valles Canyon, in the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument. Beautiful canyon route with ancient petroglyphs. About 5 miles, easy elevation. Please no emails; call Paul Pierce, 505-670-7653.

Saturday, Feb. 4: Moderate

snowshoe about 5 miles, East Fork of the Jemez, marciaskillman@hotmail.com, 505-699-3008.

Saturday, Feb. 4: moderate snowshoe and/or hike in North Sandias, close to Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Sponsored by the Sierra Club Military Outdoors Program. All are welcome. Start at the 10K trailhead and proceed north. Stunning views of both the east and west side of the mountain. Five miles round

Continued on Page 15

January/February/March 2017