



Rio Grande Sierran

Volume 53, Issue 3

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

July/August/September 2015

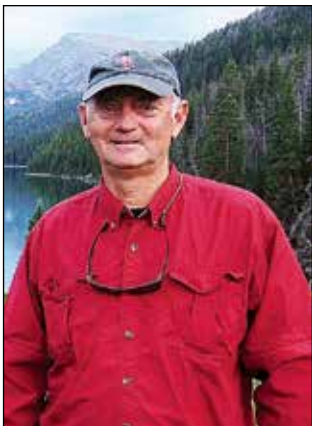
Looting a treasure

In the past year, the BLM has approved hundreds of leases for horizontal fracturing in the Greater Chaco region, damaging sacred sites and impacting resources and community safety in an area revered for its culture and remoteness. See Page 9 to learn more.



Photo courtesy Earthworks

As methane from a natural-gas well flares in the background, an oil tanker drives past the sign for the nearby Chaco Culture National Historical Park. Improved drilling technology has sent oil and gas companies clamoring for leases to frack in the area.



Welcome, Mayor Coss: At its June meeting, the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter Executive Committee elected former Santa Fe Mayor David Coss as our new chair. **Page 3**




Wildlife under attack: The public speaks out as the N.M. Game Commission considers raising the hunting quota for bears and allowing trapping of cougars. **Pages 8 and 9**



Still stuck on the energy of the past: PNM's attempt to penalize residents for installing solar has failed, but El Paso Electric is trying another anti-solar tactic, and PNM has been granted another extension on its dangerous coal plan. **Page 11**

EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET

 **Rio Grande Chapter**
Sierra Club
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Santa Fe, NM 87505

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Inside:

Solar Summer is your chance to act

Join our events to learn how to spread the word about access to solar energy and get solar installed affordably on your home. **Page 3**

Southwest Chief gets lifelines

But the rail line still faces rough tracks ahead. **Page 6**

Water Quality Control Commission OKs dairy deal

After six years and two strong rules that didn't stick, a settlement salvages some safeguards to protect groundwater from dairy waste. **Page 5**

Los Alamos bag ban fails to clear panel

"Save the Bag" campaign comes out victorious, for now. **Page 10**

More: Water Sentinels and copper mining: **Page 4**. Northern New Mexico Group: Recycling and gardening tips and underground wildlife: **Pages 12 and 13**. El Paso Group: **Page 14**. Hikes and events; **Pages 15 and 16**

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Page 1 banner photo by Lajla Ryen

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Contributions — articles, photos, artwork, poems, letters to the editor, paid advertisements — are welcome. Send to the editor (see Page 2). Submissions by

Volunteers needed

Northern New Mexico Group Volunteer Coordinator: This important position seeks out, tracks, and monitors volunteers to help out with our many commitments and issues. Pat Carlton, 505-986-1596, carlton505@comcast.net
Tabling Coordinator: Seek out tabling opportunities around Santa Fe for the Northern Group to distribute literature and sell merchandise, and coordinate tabling volunteers. Contact Norma McCallan 505-471-0005, nmccallan@mindspring.com
Zero Waste Team: Chairs Jessie Emerson, osoherbalsjessie@gmail.com, and Sharon Guerrero, floogiebaloot@yahoo.com, need team members to work on recycling and waste issues in the Santa Fe area.

Rio Grande Chapter members will take precedence over others.
Articles are subject to editing. Letters to the editor may be up to 500 words, are also subject to editing and are printed at the discretion of the editorial board.
The contributor's name and email address will be printed as a source of more information, unless the contributor specifies otherwise. Submissions must be received by the 10th of the month prior to publication.
Editorial practices as developed and adopted by the Rio Grande Chapter will be used in production of the *Rio Grande Sierran*. Contents of the Group pages are the responsibility of the editor for that Group and any policies that are in place from that Group.
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If you're not a member yet but like what you see, **join now for only \$15!** You can either cut out and send the form on Page 10 or go to riograndesierraclub.org/donate on the Web.

Coss to chair Rio Grande Chapter

By Susan Martin, Chapter Executive Committee

The Rio Grande Chapter's executive committee voted in new leadership at its June quarterly meeting after our terrific chair, John Buchser, stepped down to concentrate



John Buchser

on water projects for the chapter. John turns over the chair position to David Coss, the most recent

mayor of Santa Fe with a long record of environmental protection.

John served seven years as the Rio Grande Chapter chair. With his calm demeanor and inclusive personality, he welcomed newcomers and encouraged their talents and energy while showing his appreciation to all our selfless volunteers.

"I have known John for many years. Like me, he got involved in the Sierra Club through the outings program and still deeply appreciates his opportunities to enjoy our special landscapes," said Rio Grande Chapter Vice Chair Norma McCallan.

"John has always looked out for the health of our chapter and opportunities for all our members to express their feelings and get involved. He is always courteous to everyone, even if disagreeing with them," McCallan said.

Buchser has been an active member of the Northern Group's political committee for



Photo courtesy Art Rescues

New chapter Chair David Coss speaks at a rally protesting New Mexico Game Commission's denial of the Ladder Ranch permit to hold Mexican wolves.

years and has put much effort into supporting our endorsed candidates.

"He has wanted to devote more time to his favorite subject of water issues, now more important than ever with our extended drought and warming temperatures, and he will be a strong leader of the chapter's water committee," McCallan said.

John will continue to work with the chapter on many fronts. In Santa Fe, he has been involved in establishing a living-river master plan for the Santa Fe River and securing a commitment of 1,000 acre-feet of water for the river in statute.

In fact, John and David worked together on the river project, a passion for both.

David Coss's impressive environmental leadership includes 25 years in natural-resources management, surveying land, watershed health and water

quality, habitat improvement, land reclamation, endangered-species management, air quality and solid-waste management.

He served as director of the Environmental Protection Division of New Mexico Environment Department with Gov. Bruce King, Judy Espinosa and Ron Curry and was also a Field Operations Director at the State Land Office for Ray Powell and Pat Lyons.

While David was on city council and in the mayor's office, Santa Fe completed the LEED Gold-certified Santa Fe Community Convention Center and the Buckman Direct Diversion Project; converted 25 percent of its energy use to renewable energy; rescued the College of Santa Fe from bankruptcy during the great recession; and enacted a living-wage ordinance that was the highest in the nation and adjusts annually for inflation.

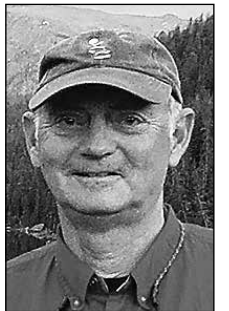
David was also a union organizer and officer in Communications Workers of America, AFL-CIO for nine years and was the union steward for Political Chair Susan Martin when she was employed at the state Environment Department.

David took the reins as chair of the chapter's Legislative Team this spring.

"To no one's surprise, his voice carries a lot of weight — when he speaks, folks listen. I am impressed that he has agreed to chair our chapter and that he has decided that Sierra Club would be a primary focus for him once leaving the Mayor's office," McCallan said. "I knew David and had walked local neighborhoods for him during his campaigns, but now I really look forward to working with him in the months and years ahead."

A message from our new chair

I am honored and excited to become the chair of the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club executive committee. I have always been enchanted by our New Mexico environment and I look forward to this opportunity to work for its protection through the Sierra Club.



David Coss

I have had a great career in natural-resources management for state government, as an officer and organizer in the labor movement and as an elected leader in Santa Fe city government. During my career, I have been an admirer of the Sierra Club, especially in New Mexico and El Paso. You have been hard-working and effective in so many important battles and political campaigns. New Mexico would be a much poorer place if not for the Rio Grande Chapter.

Now, working with allies, our efforts are more important than ever. Our priorities are climate and energy, wild lands, wildlife and New Mexico's precious water resources. Sierra Club has always been guided by a commitment to environmental justice for all people and the right of all people to clean air and water and the ability of all community members to enjoy our fabulous New Mexico landscape.

Together, we will carry on this great legacy. Thank you for being in the Sierra Club.

—David Coss

Solar Summer: Step back from the abyss and act

Sierra Club members and activists come from all backgrounds. But I think on Thursday, June 18, we all felt a little bit Catholic, and those of us who are Catholic or were raised so might have been especially proud. Pope Francis brought his powerful voice to the science of climate change and made a call to action to all people to protect our delicate planet from the ravages of climate destruction. But that day was also a day of national mourning in the wake of the racist, terrorist killings in South Carolina. Jon Stewart, who gives many of us comfort in humor, took his program that night to reflect. Here's what he said:



Camilla Feibelman, Chapter director

ings in South Carolina. Jon Stewart, who gives many of us comfort in humor, took his program that night to reflect. Here's what he said:

Go solar, get a discount, help our chapter!

To find out if your home is eligible for a \$750 Sungevity solar discount, request an iQuote at content.sierraclub.org/solar/sungevity?ref=203 or call Sierra Club Solar Homes Coordinator MacKenzie Cane at 415-977-5634. If your home qualifies, Sungevity will also give the Rio Grande Chapter \$750. Read a progress report from a volunteer leader who went solar with Sungevity on Page 13.

"I honestly have nothing other than just sadness once again that we have to peer into the abyss of the depraved violence that we do to each other and the nexus of a just gaping racial wound that will not heal yet we pretend doesn't exist. And I'm confident, though, that by acknowledging it, by starting into that and seeing it for what it is, we still won't do jack s—. Yeah. That's us."

Can this be a different kind of moment? Can we first acknowledge that climate is a racial-justice issue? Can we see that the the people and countries that have paid the highest price for climate change are in the global south? Might this be a moment where we take the action

we know we must? Will we join together across communities, races, neighborhoods, classes, ages, ideologies to protect the people and places we love? We must, because the alternative is not acceptable.

With this in mind, the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter has launched its Solar Summer program for people like you who are already active, to harness your work to get even more people involved. At Solar Summer Orientation, we will give you the tools you need to reach out and make a difference. We'll go over writing letters to the editor, effective informational tabling, powerful presenting at public hearings and making presentations about renewable

energy with organizations you are involved with. These are skills you can apply to our efforts to take New Mexico toward a renewable future and to other important areas like racial and social justice.

So many people are already speaking up. In May, we rallied with solar-industry workers, residents living in the shadow of San Juan Generating Station's coal pollution and small-business owners at PNM's shareholder meeting to protest the utility's risky investments in dirty energy. And it's working: support for PNM's coal plans is collapsing. See Page 8 for more.

Solar Summer will help to build a base of people who support a renewable future for New Mexico.

To get involved in Solar Summer, please email us at riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org. To learn more about going solar, see "Progress report on going solar with Sierra Club" on Page 13, and check out July 7 and Aug. 23 climate-related events on Pages 15 and 16.

Clean-water groups appeal copper ruling

Allyson Siwik, Rio Grande Chapter Executive Committee and Director, Gila Resources Information Project

The New Mexico Attorney General and water-protection groups have filed petitions with the New Mexico Supreme Court seeking reversal of the Court of Appeals' opinion upholding the validity of the Copper Rule, which regulates discharges from copper mines. Contrary to state law, the Copper Rule makes polluting groundwater at mine sites legal as long as contamination is contained.

The petition, filed by New Mexico Environmental Law Center on behalf of Gila Resources Information Project, Turner Ranch Properties, L.P. and Amigos

This is a precedent-setting case for water-quality protection in New Mexico.

Bravos, asks the Supreme Court to take up a number of questions including: Does the Copper Rule violate the New Mexico Water Quality Act by permitting water pollution rather than preventing or abating it?

New Mexico Attorney General Hector Balderas and former State Groundwater Bureau Chief Bill Olson have also filed petitions with the Supreme Court.

Operations by Freeport-McMoRan, the largest publicly traded copper company in the world, have already contaminated 31 square miles of groundwater at the

company's three copper mines in Grant County. In 2011 and 2012, the company settled a \$20 million damage claim for groundwater and wildlife damages caused by that pollution.

This is a precedent-setting case for water-quality protection in New Mexico. If the Copper Rule stands, what's to keep other operations like industrial dairies, uranium mines and Los Alamos National Laboratory from getting the same deal?

Groundwater in our state belongs to all New Mexicans and is protected under the

Water Quality Act for our communities and for future generations. As communities throughout the state are confronted by the critical impacts of long-term drought, it is irresponsible to allow mining companies to pollute our precious groundwater that is needed by everyone and used by 90 percent of New Mexicans for drinking water.

The New Mexico Supreme Court needs to restore the integrity of our Water Quality Act so that it protects groundwater for all of us.

For more information on the Copper Rule, visit the NM Environmental Law Center case history page at http://nmenvirolaw.org/site/cases/new_mexico_copper_mine_groundwater_regulations

Water Sentinels testing, teaching

By Eric Patterson
Water Sentinels coordinator

Water Sentinels-Rios de Taos were joined by new members

Jon Klingel, Meg Peterson, Gaea McGahee, Cliff Collins, Jo Carey, Claire Latowsky, Jim Crowl and Julia Wilson on our first monitoring of the season May 28.

We are monitoring selected sites on the Rio Fernando de Taos, Rio Pueblo de Taos, Rio Hondo, and the Red River. This year, we will also be testing at several locations on the Rio Grande.

The rivers were all higher than normal with a good spring runoff. We are again finding high levels of E. coli on the Rio Fernando, which indicate further testing will be needed, as this has been a recurring problem. Our cooperating partner, Amigos Bravos, has applied for a grant to do more extensive monitoring on the Rio Fernando.

Water Sentinel Jim Morgan (who has a doctorate in chemistry) has been doing water-monitoring on the east side of the mountains, in conjunction with the Cimarron Watershed Watch.

Jim met with the Philmont Scout Ranch people and showed them some monitoring techniques using our multimeters and dissolved oxygen test kits. Philmont has ordered its own equipment and will incorporate water-monitoring into several of their 21-day treks this summer. If it goes well, it may be a part of the Philmont experience for thousands of Scouts in the future.

Water Sentinels and the Rio Grande Chapter of Sierra Club are interested in looking at sites on the Pecos River that may be impaired because of waste from the dairy industry. If you have a concern about such a location, please email Eric Patterson at eeppatt@gmail.com or call at 575-776-2833.

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Above: New Water Sentinel Gaea McGahee collecting a sample to monitor the Red River on May 28.



At left: Tiger Salamander Sandra Renteria with the presentation of her project 'Heavy Metals in Taos County Water' at the April 28 Trout Unlimited banquet.

Photos by Eric Patterson

Tiger Salamander news

Water Sentinels — Rios de Taos has a grant from the Sierra Club's Grassroots Network to involve young people in monitoring water quality. Taos High School formed an environmental group called the Tiger Salamanders. These students have participated in several

water related projects, led by science teacher David Gilroy. The students (and Mr. Gilroy) are Sierra Club members. Most of the students are also Trout Unlimited members. They have done water monitoring on the Rio Pueblo de Taos and on the Red River near Questa. The Tiger Salamanders did an Earth Day cleanup on a stretch of the Rio Fernando near their school and participated in a Watershed

Watch Fishing Day event sponsored by the New Mexico Game and Fish Department, in cooperation with River Source, New Mexico Wildlife Federation and Trout Unlimited. About 60 students from Questa and Taos High Schools attended the event headed by Rich Shrader, Colleen Welch, and Carlos Herrera from Game and Fish.

The event included water-monitoring, planting willow

trees, fly-casting lessons, fly-tying, and some really good fishing.

Several of the Tiger Salamanders conducted research projects under the supervision of David Gilroy. They presented the results of their research projects on posterboards at the annual fundraising banquet of the Enchanted Circle Chapter of Trout Unlimited. The projects and presentations were excellent and well received by the Trout Unlimited attendees.

One Tiger Salamander, Daniel Romero, received a Sierra Club Award for Excellence for his research project and for his outstanding contributions to the Tiger Salamander organization. He also received a fly rod and reel from the Sierra Club. The Water Sentinels and the Tiger Salamanders are looking forward to continuing their work together during the next school year.

July/August/September 2015

Water commission OKs dairy deal

By Dan Lorimier
Chapter Conservation
Coordinator

At its May 12 meeting in Santa Fe, New Mexico's Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC) adopted sweeping amendments to the existing discharge rules for our more than 150 Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) dairies.

Thanks to a last-minute settlement among the Citizens Dairy Coalition (our coalition, represented by New Mexico Environmental Law Center); the state Environment Department; the Attorney General's Office; and the dairy industry, the new rules retain the state's ability to closely monitor for groundwater pollution and to enforce prompt remediation.

In our view, if the amendments as proposed by the dairy industry had been adopted by the WQCC, regulators and citizens would have had far less oversight of an industry whose potential to pollute our groundwater is very high. The "stipulated agreement" retained the elements of close monitoring of groundwater quality by dairies, quarterly reporting

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to the Environment Department and very timely responses to pollution identified in the monitoring reports, paid for by the polluting dairy or dairies.

What did we lose? The old rule detailed what a dairy CAFO must do and what it cannot do, in many operational functions including back-flow prevention, lining waste lagoons and requiring certified nutrient management plans for fields receiving dairy effluence as irrigation. The new rule gives dairies much more discretion about how they accomplish profitable operations while protecting our groundwater.

Instead of requiring dairies to run their operations "by the book," we are now relying on the industry's and individual dairy's ability to protect this vital resource.

Given this shift in perspective from proscriptive to proactive in the state's regulation of the dairy industry, what are we left with? The most important tool for the Environment Department now is close monitoring of groundwater quality with sufficient numbers of monitor wells in appropriate locations on the dairies, coupled with industry's agreement in the regulation to quickly respond to groundwater

If the amendments proposed by the dairy industry had been adopted, regulators and citizens would have had far less oversight of an industry whose potential to pollute our groundwater is very high.

pollution with approved and meaningful remediation plans and the execution of those plans.

How will this new rule impact the mission of the Citizens Dairy Coalition? Since 2009, when legislation was passed requiring industry-specific discharge rules for dairies, the chapter and the coalition have wrangled with the industry and the Environment Department, fighting for comprehensive rules to prevent groundwater pollution from dairy operations. With the adoption by the WQCC of this new and hopefully final rule, our focus will shift from creating the rule to monitoring the dairies' reporting to the Environment Department, as well as closely monitoring the Environment Department's responses to these many reports. Additionally, as problems with unjust labor practices, criminal nuisance and animal abuses continue, the Coalition will continue to

interface with the industry and its regulating agencies to find fairness and balance for workers, neighbors and animals.

The New Mexico dairy industry and its regulating agency, the New Mexico Environment Department, have both accepted more responsibility for safeguarding the citizen-owned groundwater resources we depend upon so heavily.

With added responsibility for the Environment Department, we can expect stronger oversight and pollution-response enforcement under administrations committed to protecting the quality of our groundwater resources rather than sacrificing those resources to corporate profits.

It shouldn't take too long to see if this new paradigm is working. If it is not, we go back to the drawing board and probably a highly proscriptive rule for our corporate, CAFO dairy industry.

Deal shuts door on funding for Gila River alternatives

By Allyson Siwik, Chapter
Executive Committee, Gila
Resources Information Project/Gila
Conservation Coalition

After weeks of negotiations, the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission approved in June a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) to form the entity that will be responsible for the design, construction, operation and maintenance of the billion-dollar Gila River diversion project. As of press time, nine local governments have signed the agreement in advance of the July 3 deadline.

Local governments are signing on to financing a \$1 billion diversion project that is technically infeasible, unaffordable, and unnecessary given that non-diversion alternatives can reliably meet water-supply needs at a small fraction of the cost of a diversion.

By signing onto the JPA, local governments may issue bonds, levy taxes and assess user fees on water users to pay for

the costs of the New Mexico Unit. The Arizona Water Settlements Act (AWSA) subsidy of \$100 million won't cover the full cost of the Unit, leaving a gap of \$900 million-plus for taxpayers and water users to cover.

The JPA explicitly prohibits funding of cost-effective non-diversion alternatives and takes funding away from community water projects that could benefit people throughout southwest New Mexico. AWSA funds could be used to fully fund diversion and ditch infrastructure improvements for irrigators on the Gila and San Francisco Rivers, municipal water projects like conservation, effluent reuse and water supply infrastructure improvements, and watershed restoration. These community projects represent the common-sense and responsible approach to meeting our future water needs.

For more information on defending the wild Gila River, visit www.protectthegila.org

Be an Albuquerque Bosque Sentinel

Albuquerque is one of only two urban places in the country that protects its riparian zone as a natural place rather than a developed urban park.

To help protect what makes our Bosque so special, we're forming a Bosque Sentinels Program. If you are interested, you can select a part of the Bosque that you'd like to monitor. You'll get to know the terrain and be able to report to Open Space if there are litter, fire or vandalism

problems. You'll get to know the different projects that the Army Corp, MRGCD or the City are carrying out and be able to interpret those projects to other users. You also might become a trained outings leader and take people to visit the area.

If you'd like to get involved please email savethebosque@gmail.com or check out savethebosque.org or. In the meantime, see Pages 16 for Bosque outings on July 12 and Aug. 1.

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Bernalillo County OKs Santolina master plan

Chantel Chavez and Antonio Maestas
Southwest Organizing Project

The residents of Bernalillo County are wrestling with questions about the well-being of New Mexico after the Bernalillo County Commission approved the Santolina development master plan on June 16.

In this time of drought, residents are worried about how the lack of water will affect their everyday quality of life. Even before the proposed megadevelopment, the drought made many question the longevity of our agricultural

livelihoods, as well as the health impacts on our residents.

The effect of the drought plaguing New Mexico are evident by clear observation of our rivers, acequias and the condition of our land. Our state is dry, threatening the livelihood of our local farmers and businesses.

According to recent reports, farmers are borrowing water from the city of Albuquerque to irrigate their fields due to the lack of water in the acequias. This creates an increase in the use of the city's sacred water and leaves everyone, not just the farmers, in a rut. In this time

of need, we need to focus on preserving our state's water.

Not only will we see the effects of Santolina in our water but we will also see it play out with the community's health.

The construction of the Santolina development will cause an increase in blowing sand, which will lead to respiratory illnesses and infections directly linked to poor air quality.

If we were to move forward with Santolina's vision, our water shortage will only worsen. The developers project that Santolina will use at least 20 million gallons of water per day.

Santolina has left the people of New Mexico worrying about the future of their agriculture and livelihood. Perhaps worst of all, the Santolina development has caused the community to fear that they lack the support of our elected officials.

During the last Santolina hearing it was evident that commissioners Wayne Johnson, Lonnie Talbert and Art De La Cruz had already set their minds to approve the Santolina Development master plan. These commissioners voted to not allow public comment at the start of the hearing, choosing to

leave it until the end. Because of this, these commissioners passed the master plan before listening to the public's concerns that day. The hundreds of comments in opposition over the past two years also seemed to have no impact on their votes.

The long-term effects of Santolina are detrimental to New Mexico's well being and will leave the Southwest region without the critical resources we need to survive. We call upon the people of New Mexico to stand with us to reject this development and preserve our culture and heritage.

Smarter ways to move

Ken Hughes, Sierra Club Building Healthy Communities Team Leader

Sierra Club chapters from Maine to Hawai'i are jumping on board campaigns to give folks lots more transportation options and opposing freeway expansions that often go through wildlife habitat.

With a boost from the Board of Directors' approval of dedicated staff and funding, 24 chapters aim to promote affordable and diverse housing along an urban rail line; increased use of transit, cycling and walking; sustainable developments near new transit lines, extension of Amtrak service, shift of funding from more freeways to more transit service and placement of new and repaired sidewalks, and many other cool projects.

We at the Building Healthy Communities Team have some wonderfully hard choices to make on which applications to fund.

Here in cities where many Rio Grande Chapter members live or work, exciting projects are also in the works:

— Las Cruces has a new bus station that anchors service within the city and to New Mexico State University as well as service to places such as Silver City.

— El Paso's proposed streetcar would connect downtown with the university and shopping/entertainment stops.

— Santa Fe, with the state's first bike corral offering 12 parking spaces converted from a parking spot for one car, plans to transform St. Michael's Drive from a '70s-era six-lane street into a four-lane boulevard with plenty of



Photos courtesy City of Santa Fe and City of Albuquerque

Top: St. Michael's Drive in Santa Fe now. Middle: Vision of St. Michael's Drive as a four-lane, pedestrian-friendly boulevard. Bottom: A rendering of what an Albuquerque Rapid Transit stop at Nob Hill would look like.

room for cyclists, pedestrians, transit rides and motorists.

— Finally, the proposed Albuquerque Rapid Transit, or ART, will be like a subway with a view. ART will not only offer fast and efficient travel, it will maximize land uses at Central Avenue stops

for new businesses and apartments that no longer need to devote land to vast swaths of parking.

With service from the West Side through downtown and over to University of New Mexico, and service to Central New Mexico Community College,

Kirtland Air Force Base and the Sunport, ART could literally transform the old Route 66 into a true 21st-century corridor.

Funding awards by the Building Healthy Communities Team will be announced soon. Stay tuned!

Southwest Chief gets lifelines

By Norma McCallan
Chapter vice chair

You may remember that the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, which owns much of the tracks in New Mexico that the Southwest Chief travels daily between Los Angeles and Chicago, announced it would not renew its contract with Amtrak, due Dec. 31, to maintain the tracks since there is now little freight traffic along this section.

This would seriously affect New Mexico, Colorado and Kansas, since the tracks and signaling devices are in serious need of repair and soon won't be able to handle passenger trains.

A coalition of Amtrak supporters, including local governments, worked out a solution in which Amtrak, the three affected states and BNSF would each put in \$4 million a year for 10 years to make the repairs. Colorado and Kansas both agreed, but the funding bill languished in the New Mexico Legislature. A new plan seeks a federal grant that requires significant funding commitments from all communities and counties served along the route.

New Mexico's Transportation Department did commit \$1 million (which Gov. Martinez recently supported), contingent upon local dollar commitments. Studies have shown that the Southwest Chief brings in significant economic benefits to the counties and towns along its route, and there has been widespread support from them, including Colfax County and the city of Las Vegas. Santa Fe County Commission committed \$12,500, and a resolution for that amount is pending in Santa Fe's City Council.

BNSF has agreed to keep the line open. Unfortunately, the recent Philadelphia Amtrak derailment tragedy provided an occasion for Congressional leaders who don't support railroads to reduce Amtrak's 2016 funding, while others saw the lack of Positive Train Control signals at the accident site as another example of Congressional neglect of passenger rail, as the Chief faces other hurdles in the Midwest because of lack of money to update tracks to comply with safety laws.

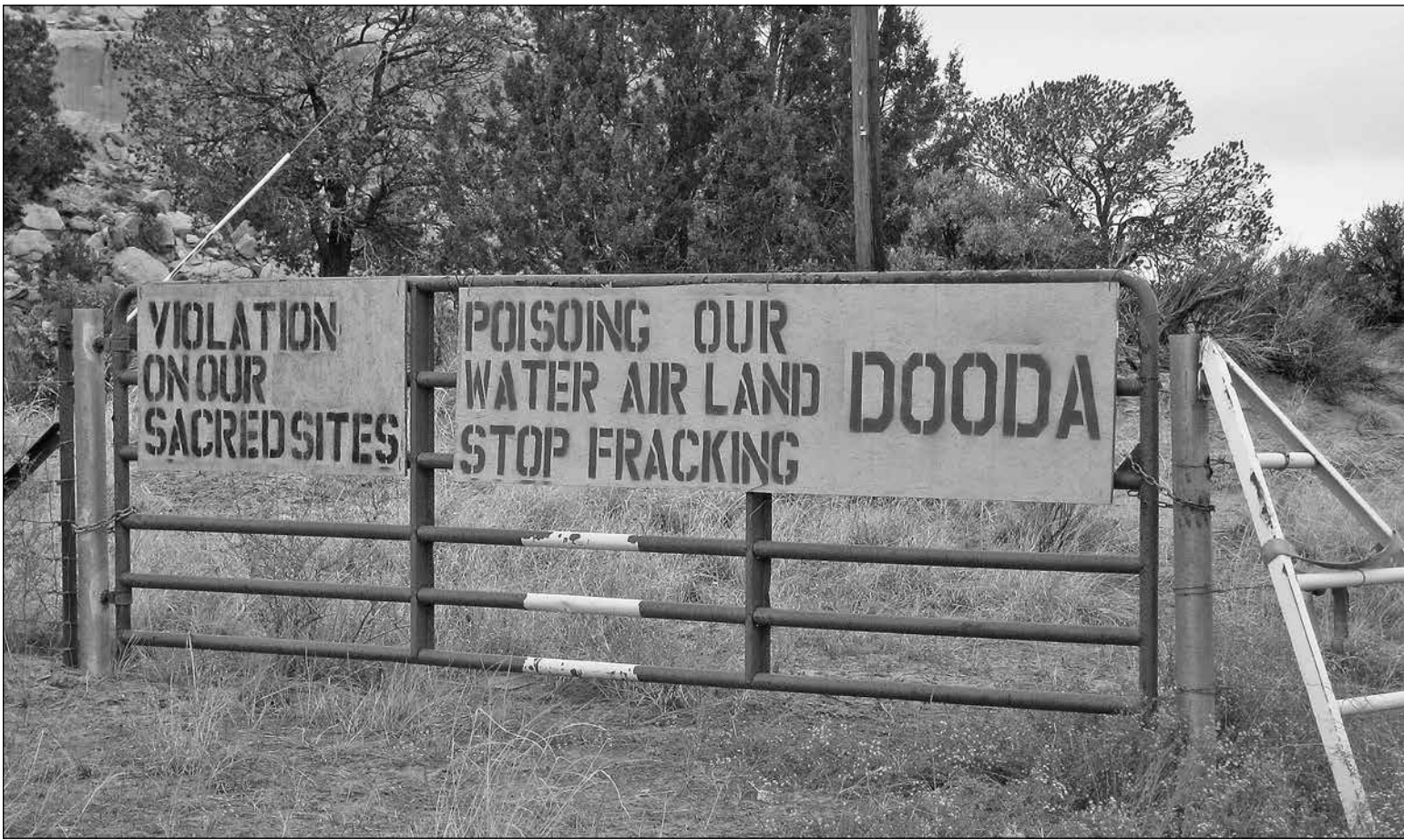


Photo by Teresa Seamster

A sign in Counselor expresses the feelings of many as the area around Chaco Culture National Historical Park and outlying sites, many of which are sacred to Navajos, have become the latest boom site for oil and gas companies. (“Dooda” means “No!” in Navajo.)

The dirty history of oil near Chaco

By Robert Tohe
Our Wild America coordinator

Chaco Canyon’s ancient legacy and oil and gas industry have been on a collision course since oil was first discovered in 1920s.

The early role of the federal government, through the Department of Interior’s Indian Office, was to expedite private enterprise to lease and exploit oil resources within the Mancos Shale. Traditional headmen for the Navajo remained steadfast and refused to grant land for oil leases.

Navajo people considered traditional headmen as the governing body and authority to grant leases or refuse outside offers for its resources. However, the Indian Office’s repeated incursions in Navajo authority on behalf of oil corporations resulted in usurping the authority of Navajo headmen over oil leasing.

In 1922, Secretary of the Interior Albert B. Falls decided that since these oil-rich lands were created by executive orders, Navajos could be removed from control over oil leasing. The Indian Office made an end run and self-appointed a group of government-selected individuals, creating a separate tribal council to approve oil leasing, while recognized by the Department of the Interior. The current form of Navajo Tribal Government has its roots in those events in the 1920s.

Not much has changed. A recent summit by members of the Chaco Coalition resulted in a hand-delivered letter to BLM Farmington Field Office Director Victoria Barr to “renew our call for an immediate moratorium on all permitting of drilling, leasing of further lands for drilling, and approval of related infrastructure, including the Piñon Pipeline, until the BLM completes its study of impacts related to fracking in the Greater Chaco region and such development has received approval in the pending RMP (Resource Management Plan).”

The letter also demands a comprehensive study of the impacts of oil and gas development on community health, the environment, and cultural resources, as well as a study of the economics of an alternative-energy development scenario that includes a just transition to a clean-energy future for the Greater Chaco region.

What you can do

Join a Sept. 18-20 field trip to Farmington and meet with Navajo leaders on the Chaco drilling issue. See Page 12 for more information.

Western Environmental Law Center is hosting a film and discussion with leaders involved in the Chaco struggle. See westernlaw.org for more information. Email riogrande.chapter@sierra-club.org to receive action alerts on this issue.

Chaco communities in the Oil Field crosshairs

By Teresa Seamster
Northern New Mexico Group

How can oil-drilling leases cause the loss of an individual’s safety, private property and ability to follow religious practices?

The greater Chaco area in northwest New Mexico’s San Juan Basin is experiencing a ramping up of oil and gas development that has shaken residents with multiple impacts.

A stretch of federal highway that runs through Counselor, Lybrook and Nageezi and a web of new dirt access roads to well pads near these small communities along US 550 have made local travel slow, congested and often dangerous.

In January, a hot oil truck crashed into a propane tanker and exploded, closing US 550 at Lybrook for over 3 hours while the fire burned. There is no fire station or emergency responders closer than Cuba, more than 30 miles away.

“There’s a 25-mile stretch of US 550 through Lybrook that has been turned over to Halliburton, WPX and Encana by our state highway department,” said a Mountainair contractor who commutes weekly to Farmington. “The company trucks criss-cross the highway continuously and drop so much dirt that it’s dangerous and you’d need equipment to move it.”

There is evidence that federal managers and private companies have worked together to exchange land with private

“There’s a 25-mile stretch of US 550 through Lybrook that has been turned over to Halliburton, WPX and Encana by our state highway department.”

— Contractor who commutes to Farmington

landowners to negotiate a lease on the piece of preferred land.

“The BLM is working with the oil companies to exchange federal land for Navajo allotee land that is preferred for leasing by an oil company,” said one allotee about a land swap offered him. “Of course what they don’t tell you is that you only own the surface of the new acres and that any day an oil rig could show up on your land and you can do nothing about it.”

“Most allotees own land that is so fractionated between the many heirs to the land that the simplest thing to do is agree to lease to the oil companies on their terms,” commented one allotee with over 100 heirs to his family land.

Many Navajos living around Chaco practice traditional ceremonies. The road building, pad installation and exploratory drilling around Chaco since February have already destroyed ancient religious sites that have been visited annually for hundreds of years.

“They have already scraped off the ceremonial site on the

road to Nageezi where our community has gone to for centuries,” commented one resident at a Chapter House meeting in Counselor.

“Look at Heart Mesa and what they’ve done,” said a resident of Ojo Encino during a slide show at the Chapter House that showed well-pad installations on the side of Heart Mesa that infringed on sacred sites — in violation of BLM guidelines.

The Greater Chaco Coalition of more than 30 Navajo, community and environmental organizations is calling the attention of BLM, state and tribal governments to the escalating problems that increased oil and gas development is causing for the inhabitants and culture of the greater Chaco area.

Recently, the Farmington Field Office of BLM provided a map that shows a 5-mile and 10-mile buffer zone around Chaco Culture National Historical Park designating where BLM lands will not be leased for development. However, these zones already have some active leases, and no buffer has been suggested for communities or important ancient Chaco outliers, great houses and roads outside the zones.

For the people of Lybrook, Counselor and Nageezi, there is no mitigation in sight for the damage and pollution from hundreds of oil trucks, thousands of trips back and forth to the wells, “night deposits” of produced water from fracked wells that have been seen dumped in local arroyos,

“What they don’t tell you is that you only own the surface of the new acres and that any day an oil rig could show up on your land and you can do nothing about it.”

— Navajo allottee who was offered a land swap by BLM for land valuable to oil companies

months of methane flaring from wells less than a mile from the area school, and sudden closures of the highway and the school due to oil operations.

In response to some 30,000 comments to BLM and another 200,000 petition signatures opposing the increased oil development near Chaco, U.S. Sen. Tom Udall requested in May that a high-level delegation from Washington DC visit Chaco and address the concerns and impacts. On June 29, Interior Department Deputy Secretary Mike Connor visited Chaco Culture National Historical Park with Udall and met briefly with coalition groups and the public. The coalition’s main request was a moratorium on further leasing and development until the BLM completes a Resource Management Plan for the Mancos Shale-San Juan Basin and addresses the multiple issues caused by hydraulic fracturing.

The Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter is assisting with a Health Impact Assessment in the Lybrook and Counselor area.

Carnivores may fall prey to politics

Game Commission sets its sights on wolves, bears, cougars

By Mary Katherine Ray
Chapter Wildlife Chair

Wildlife in the news

Nearly 100 wildlife advocates attended the Game Commission meeting in Taos on June 13 to protest the harmful proposals that New Mexico Game and Fish is making about bear and cougar hunting and to implore the Game Commission to reverse the ill-advised decision to deny renewal of the Ladder Ranch's wolf facility permit.

The public weighs in on carnivores

Will the Game Commission get the message? Hundreds of wildlife enthusiasts have attended presentations around the state about new hunting rules for bears and cougars. Despite drastically raising the quotas for bears and cougars four years ago, New Mexico Game and Fish is still not satisfied and wants more and more dead bears and cougars.

To kill more bears, the quotas will have to be raised beyond even the increase in 2011. To kill more cougars, because cougar hunters are not reaching the cougar kill limits, more creative ways to kill, such as allowing trapping, are on the table.

The public and press outcry about allowing traps on public land for cougars seems to have made a difference. The agency is now only proposing to allow sport trapping for cougars on private land.

A small victory, but to allow more trapping anywhere for any species using archaic and cruel body-gripping traps is still a step backward.

Nearly a hundred advocates from Taos, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Las Cruces, Magdalena, Silver City and around the state attended the Game Commission meeting in Taos to tell commissioners that the Department does not have defensible science to justify the killing of more bears and cougars.

Members of the public testified that politics is the source of these proposals and not science, that carnivores are crucially important to the integrity of ecosystems, including how they contribute to riparian forests and stream health, that traps are cruel and indiscriminate and should have no part in managing cougars, or any wildlife, and that the opportunity for viewing of these large carnivores is important, as is just knowing these species are present.

No decisions will be made until the next Game Commission meeting, which is scheduled for Aug. 27 at Santa Fe Community College. Please plan to attend!

The formal proposals won't be out until the end of July, but you can make comments now and help influence what that final proposal will look like. Please send your comment reminding the agency that carnivores are at least as important as herbivores to the health, diversity and resiliency of natural systems, and request that bears and cougars be more strongly



Photo by Mary Katherine Ray

Above: A black bear walks the canyons of Southern New Mexico in June. The Game Commission increased quotas on bear hunting in 2011 and is considering a proposal to allow more bears to be hunted, though some evidence indicates bears' numbers are dwindling.

Act!

The Game Commission will make critical decisions about bears and cougars at its Aug. 27 meeting at Santa Fe Community College. Please plan to attend!

The formal proposals won't be out until the end of July, but you can make comments now and help to influence what that final proposal will look like. Please remind the agency that carnivores are just as important as herbivores, if not more so, to the health, diversity and resiliency of natural systems, and request that bears and cougars be more strongly protected, not less. **Comments should be sent to DGF-Bear-Cougar-Rules@state.nm.us.**

protected, not less. Send comments to DGF-Bear-Cougar-Rules@state.nm.us

Bears

It is worth remembering that four years ago, in 2011, the bear quota (the number allowed to be killed each year) was raised by 67 percent. The result has been that more bears have been killed in the last four years than in any similar time period since bears became a big-game species.

In the first three years since the quota increase, over 700 bears a year have been killed in New Mexico (nearly 800 in two of those years).

Alarming, this last year, even though a similar number of hunting licenses were sold, the kills dropped by more than 28 percent. Are bears getting harder to find?

The number of females being killed is also of concern. Yet the Department wants more bears to die. It wants to raise the quotas and open up areas to bear hunting that are closed now. At least for now, it is not proposing an unethical spring bear hunt.

The Department is conducting a study of bears in three mountain ranges, the Sangre de Cristos, the Sandias and the Sacramentos. It has involved setting up bait stations such that when a bear visits, some of his hair will be snagged and left behind so that individual bears can be identified from their DNA.

This can be used to estimate bear density and to track individual bears if there are enough stations. But so far no claims are being made that this study will have enough data to determine whether bear populations are stable. Moreover, the results of this study have not yet been published or peer-reviewed.

The public does not have a way to evaluate the information. According to Game and Fish, the plan is to simply review the data internally.

Bears deserve better. They reproduce very slowly, not having their first cubs until around age 3 or 4. The cubs take two years to reach adulthood. As it is now, with the average age of bears being killed by hunters being around 5 years old, a female bear is lucky to have one cub before she is shot. Bears can live to be 20 years old.

New Mexicans deserve better, too. A bear is the logo of the New Mexico Game and Fish Department. Bears are the New Mexico State Animal. Game and Fish should not be viewing them only as animals to kill or populations that must be severely suppressed.



Wolves

The bias against carnivores extends to wolves, too. At the Farmington Game Commission meeting in May, commissioners denied Ladder Ranch the permit to continue to hold Mexican wolves at its special facility to acclimate them to their habitat as they await release.

The Commission, which recently granted itself authority to deny such permits, had previously approved a similar permit for black-footed ferrets, a much smaller carnivore, on the private Vermijo Park Ranch also owned by Ted Turner. But when it came to wolves in the holding pens on the Ladder Ranch, despite the facility having operated without problem for the last 17 years, the Commission did an about-face, saying no.

In late May, around 150 advocates attended a rally for wolves and wildlife at the Roundhouse, asking Gov. Susana Martinez to reconsider this action. At the Taos meeting, Game commissioners heard the same request. This decision is contrary to the state Endangered Species

Proposals imperil bears, cougars, wolves

Continued from Page 8

law, which lists Mexican wolves in addition to the federal listing. But so far commissioners haven't budgeted.

Cougars

The quotas for cougars were raised by 51 percent in 2011. They are so high that hunters, even using dogs, can't kill enough cougars to reach these kill numbers. To facilitate more cougar-killing, the Commission has adopted year-round cougar hunting and increased the bag limit from one to two. The result is that New Mexico is killing more cougars and also is killing a disturbing number of female cougars, but is still not reaching the astronomical quotas.

To accomplish killing even more cougars, the agency is proposing to allow trapping. It is a lot easier to trap a cougar than to hunt one. Trappers are even catching them now by mistake — we all know traps are woefully indiscriminate — but as of now they must release them. The public outcry in opposition to the cougar-trapping proposal has been so large that the Department has pulled back on the original proposal and now says it is only seeking to allow trapping on private land.

But state Land Commissioner Aubrey Dunn sent a letter to the Department and Game Commission requesting that cougar trapping be allowed on state trust land, too. This is a disappointing development but hardly surprising given that former Game and Fish Director Jim Lane is now an assistant director for the State Land Office. The exorbitant quotas that cougars and bears now suffer were adopted during Lane's tenure at N.M. Game and Fish. Lane also promoted trapping by having agency truck tailgates painted with the words, "take a child hunting, fishing and trapping."

The size of the cougar population is not known. The quotas are based on estimates that are little more than guesses. A hair study similar to that for bears is in the planning stage but has not yet been started or even budgeted. Yet the agency still wants more dead cougars. Officials have gone so far as admitting at the Farmington Game Commission meeting in May that this push is to appease the sponsor of the failed legislative bill last winter that would have removed all protections from cougars. These proposals are politically motivated and not based on science or biological need. They make mockery of any pretention wildlife managers have to base decisions on science and biological need.



Left: Motorists honked in support of wildlife advocates outside the Taos Game Commission meeting in early June.

Photo by Charles Fox



New Mexico Game and Fish is proposing to allow cougar trapping on non-public land. This cougar kitten was among the uncounted by-catch animals trapped each year in New Mexico. Even the 'Albuquerque Journal' did not mince words when it titled a recent editorial 'N.M. should get rid of, not expand, cruel traps.'

Expansion of trap reporting

A positive development that has emerged from the Game Commission is a proposal to allow citizens a way to report the trapping of non-target animals. As it stands now, if a hiker's dog is trapped, there is no database where this information is collected, so there is no way to know how often it happens or the outcomes. In order for such a database to work, the department would have to let the public know that a reporting mechanism exists. There would need to be press releases and possibly signage at trailheads and campgrounds.

The danger is that if the public were not aware, the department could use absence of evidence of non-target captures as evidence of absence that they are occurring.

The proposal would also ask trappers to report their own non-target captures. However, as with reporting of target catches, which is required now, except for bobcats, there is no way to verify trapper reports. About 15 percent of trappers don't bother to turn in a report at the end of the season at all. At the commission meeting in Taos, during the public comments for the bear and cougar rule, a trapper admitted to capturing at least two cougars by accident.

The BornFree undercover

investigation of trapping that was in New Mexico for a short time in 2011 found the capture of cougar kittens (see photo), a black bear and a squirrel.

When Game and Fish set traps for a cougar near Silver City that had attacked and killed a human in 2008, the traps also caught a javelina, a bear and a horse and rider. Coati mundi have also been reported by the press to have been trapped by accident. There is no database, however, to keep track of these incidents, either.

No formal proposal on the new reporting is open to comment yet. It isn't clear whether trappers are supportive of this new reporting.

Ray wins 'Humane Citizen' award

By Mona Blaber

In June, Animal Protection New Mexico announced its Milagro Awards, honoring "champions for animals." APNM gave its Humane Citizen Award, for efforts by a private



Wildlife Chair Mary Katherine Ray

citizen to promote the humane treatment of animals, to Rio Grande Chapter Wildlife chair Mary Katherine Ray.

"Mary Katherine has been a dedicated,

grassroots animal advocate for wildlife protection for decades. She is particularly active in current efforts to ban gruesome killing contests statewide, as well as efforts to ban cruel body-gripping traps and poisons on New Mexico's public lands," said APNM Executive Director Elisabeth Jennings.

Mary Katherine began volunteering for the Sierra Club when she inadvertently sprung a trap while walking with her dogs and discovered that it had shut so tightly she could not reopen it. Her involvement deepened when she encountered a coyote in a leg-hold trap. By the time she could get back with help, the coyote had escaped the trap, leaving behind her paw in the trap's jaws.

With a BS in biology, a passion for wildlife and extensive knowledge of state Department of Game and Fish regulations, laws and practices, Mary Katherine has served as an expert witness before New Mexico House committees debating wildlife legislation. "She has contributed greatly to the establishment of a coalition and momentum for wildlife-friendly legislative change," Jennings said.

The Milagro Awards are hosted every four years by Animal Protection of New Mexico. The awards ceremony is open to the public and will be held Oct. 3. Tickets are on sale online (apnm.org/milagro) or by calling (505) 265-2322, ext. 32. Visit www.apnm.org/milagroawards/ for details.

No bag ban for Los Alamos — yet

By Jody Benson
Pajarito Group newsletter
editor

After 21 months of strategizing, communicating with the local government and Krogers Corporate, after research, meetings, letter-writing, public presentations, and op-editorializing — after addressing the SavetheBaggers' issues by changing our request from a bag ban to a per-bag charge that would have given all of us, environmentalists and free-choice consumers alike, pretty much what we wanted (you want a bag, you can have it; just pay the merchant's cost) — after all this, the effort to reduce distribution of free single-use plastic shopping bags in Los Alamos has failed to advance.

As with every other undertaking requiring a behavioral change (no matter how insignificant), the attempt to Ban the Bag has smacked against the wall of opposition built with bricks of misunderstanding and simple obdurateness. The arguments for keeping a free single-use plastic shopping bag are numerous and noble: I need it for garbage and the dog; a bag ban would kill retail and tourism; even Greenpeace says bags aren't a problem; it's government interference; you're infringing on consumer choice; the majority of people want the bag; educate not legislate. "The plastic bag is the last bastion of freedom." And, "I don't want to be arrested for walking out of a store with a plastic bag."

We know from Smiths statistics that almost 50 percent of people of Los Alamos already choose to act responsibly and bring their own bags (4.5 bags per person per week vs. the national average of 9.2). But a small cadre of people who would rather SavetheBag than the environment is much more vehement and vocal than the Pajarito Group. And they won this round.

Here's what happened:

The almost 50 percent who support bringing their own bags did not take the small political action required to convince the Environmental Sustainability Board. The one teeny action was to go to the County's Open Forum and click the button supporting

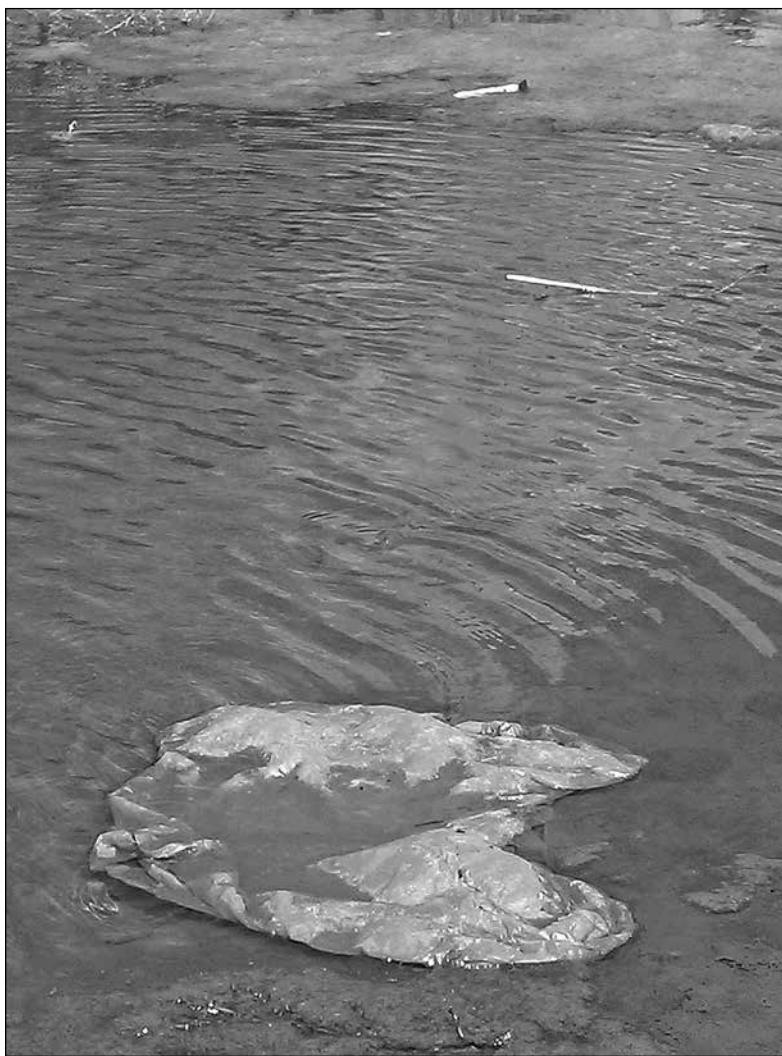


Photo by Michael Di Rosa

Though a majority of the Los Alamos County Environmental Sustainability Board members said they supported a ban on single-use plastic bags in Los Alamos, pro-baggers made more comments on an anonymous county forum seeking feedback. A recommendation to ban the bag failed with a 3-3 tie.

the ban or reduction.

We didn't succeed because we didn't show up.

On that County Forum, 80 percent of respondents insisted that they, capitalism, and democracy would be irreparably harmed if the merchant charged 10 cents for a bag (this is not hyperbole). At the Council and ESB meetings, the pro-baggers made the same statements, with one even insisting that charging for bags would create a communist state replete with government minders.

The vote at the ESB was a tie, 3-3. The board still has to make a recommendation to the County Council, likely on July 16. This is a chance for us to show up and show support for a ban or fee. Two of the Board members stated that they wanted the ban or fee, but they regretfully voted against it because that was the will of the

majority. (To this support, albeit not a vote, the pro-baggers said there shouldn't be so many environmentalists on the Board.)

Even though each board member had been assigned a sector of businesses to interview on how a ban or fee would harm business—and even though the majority of businesses said either would have little effect—the Board still voted on behalf of those who responded negatively on the Forum and who threatened to sue if a bag charge was initiated because there were more of them than of us.

(One merchant stated that a ban or fee wouldn't affect him, but if a customer "pitched a fit," he'd give the guy a bag. From the audience came the shout, "I'd pitch a fit," to which others added, "Me too.")

The vocal minority showed up. We didn't.

Lesson learned:

Change takes hard work, lots of time, and commitment. Maintaining the status quo doesn't. If those who want to protect the environment aren't committed to the time and work it takes to accomplish the desired protections — if we don't show up to give decision-makers support in making difficult decisions — then decision-makers will usually go with the vocal majority no matter the consequences to the well-being of the true majority.

The Status Quo-ers showed up. We did not.

Some good news: since the vote, people have expressed astonishment that the ESB, previously so supportive, refused to recommend approval to the Council. These Save-the-Environmenters say "it ain't over yet," and that they're ready to get involved as soon as we start leading the next effort.

A new effort will take time. It will take commitment and new strategy, but reducing bag use must happen simply because life can't support their impact anymore. Remember how long it took to ban smoking in enclosed spaces like restaurants and office buildings? Forty-three years: from 1964 when the surgeon general designated cigarettes as cancer-causing, to June 2007 when New Mexico banned smoking in enclosed public spaces in order to protect nonsmokers — 42 years of fighting for something that almost no one now opposes.

The first bag law, the PlasTax in Ireland, only went into effect in 2002, and that year plastic bag use was reduced between 90% and 95%. California voted to ban the bag statewide in 2014, but plastic bag manufacturers sued the state (as the Status Quo-ers threatened to do in Los Alamos).

Changing the status quo toward a view for a healthier future takes strong leadership. But leaders won't lead until they know they not only have a bunch of us to watch their backs, but just as many to make the way safe ahead. As we regroup, re-strategize, and recommit, we must remember that those fighting against change show up and "pitch a fit." It's time for us to do the same.

Meetings

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

Every summer we celebrate our love of the natural world by going out to celebrate it rather than coming into a meeting to learn about it. Enjoy the summer outdoors, and we will see you in September for our annual Members Picnic.

Where are our bighorn sheep?

Last September, the Los Alamos community was astonished to see a bighorn ram wandering along Trinity Drive. He is one of 35 adults (plus 10 lambs) trapped from the large herd on Wheeler Peak, and helicoptered to a holding pen before being trucked to Cochiti tribal lands. From Cochiti Canyon, the herd dispersed north and south (including to Los Alamos), but reconvened in time for breeding season. As of April, there has been only one mortality, a ewe that interacted with domestic livestock. New Mexico Game and Fish euthanized her to prevent her transmitting a fatal disease (e.g., domestic sheep pneumonia) that would decimate the wild herd as has happened throughout the West.

Even though this herd came from the high, cold Sangre de Cristos, New Mexico Game and Fish is confident that these sheep will adapt to the desert. (Desert bighorn and Rocky Mountain bighorn are the same species: *Ovis canadensis*. The difference is simply in where they live.) Survival depends on open areas and cliffs from which the sheep can spot predators.

The Las Conchas Fire and subsequent flooding scoured out the timber in many canyons that drain the Jemez south from Bandelier, making this area prime habitat for bighorn to thrive.

Listen for the clatter of pebbles from the cliffs, and look up for sheep as you scramble through these canyons this summer. You might see a newborn lamb on tiptoe watching your progress.

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pajarito.riograndesierraclub.org

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Water Issues: Barbara Calef, bfcalf@comcast.net

PNM feeling deadline pressure

By Nellis Kennedy-Howard
Senior Beyond Coal
Campaign Representative

PNM continues to scramble in a last-minute attempt to finalize agreements that would allow for the continued burning of coal at the San Juan Generating Station.

The Public Regulation Commission (PRC) voted 4-1 to allow PNM additional time to file signed ownership agreements and coal-supply agreements with the commission, extending PNM's deadline to Aug. 1. Commissioner Valerie Espinoza dissented, saying it's time to reject PNM's plan.

In May, PNM filed draft, non-binding agreements, which if finalized would lock the utility and its ratepayers into San Juan Generating Station for the foreseeable future. Under the draft coal-supply agreement with Westmoreland Coal Company, a Colorado-based mining operation, the prospective buyer would only continue operations at the San Juan mine until 2019 and proceed to close the mine and dismiss the workforce after the draft contract expires.

Meanwhile, PNM's plan to continue burning coal at the San Juan Generating Station continues to face hurdle after hurdle.

Most recently, the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Authority challenged PNM's ability to acquire coal capacity interest from exiting owners without seeking prior approval from the commission. As a public utility, class transactions involving the purchase of securities or other ownership interests are subject to commission approval.

PNM's plan to continue burning coal at San Juan Generating Station remains risky, unreliable and expensive. The cost of PNM's plan has risen by more than \$1 billion. Stakeholder after



Photo by Camilla Feibelman

At PNM's shareholder meeting in May, more than 100 people protested PNM's plan for coal-fired San Juan Generating Station as well as the utility's proposal to penalize residents who install solar panels.

Victory! PRC rejects PNM rate hike, solar tax

The New Mexico Public Regulation Commission in May rejected PNM's rate-hike proposal, which would have required New Mexico families to cover tens of millions of dollars in costs for the coal-fired San Juan Generating Station and added a hefty monthly fee for anyone who installed rooftop solar.

The decision follows a recommendation from a PRC hearing examiner that criticized PNM for failing to provide sufficient information to support its proposed rate increase.

The Sierra Club intervened in the case to oppose PNM's proposal, which would have raised overall rates by 12 percent while reducing rates for the largest customers.

In addition, PNM wanted to impose a monthly fee for residents who install rooftop solar — \$20-\$30 per month for the typical residential solar system, part of a trend of utilities

fighting growth of residential solar by penalizing those ratepayers. Environment America released a study in June that showed that distributed solar energy is worth much more to utilities than solar owners are being paid for, but PNM claimed the opposite, with little to no evidence.

In response, Nellis Kennedy-Howard, senior campaign representative for the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign, said:

"We applaud our officials on the Public Regulation Commission for protecting New Mexico families and ratepayers by rejecting PNM's risky, expensive, and unsupported rate-hike scheme."

It's not over yet. PNM will refile its rate proposal later this year, perhaps with many of the same components.

To receive action alerts and updates when PNM refiles, please sign up at <http://tinyurl.com/okflyrz>

commission, also expressed his concern that customers would be harmed by PNM's plan.

"The stipulation as a whole does not produce net benefits to the public," said Schannauer. "The dollar impact of the risks, however, appears to significantly exceed the dollars saved."

The recommendation highlighted the risk that customers may be left holding the bag for a plant that is proving to be a far greater liability than previously disclosed.

"PNM's increasing ownership and responsibility for San Juan may pressure PNM to continue to act as the owner of last resort, absorbing exiting owners' shares to protect its investment even if the plant has become uneconomic — in a version of the 'too big to fail' syndrome," Schannauer continued.

The writing is on the wall. PNM's plan for San Juan is unreliable, risky and expensive.

stakeholder has indicated opposition to PNM's plan, and the City of Albuquerque has passed

a resolution formally opposing PNM's plan. In his recommendation to the PRC commis-

sioners, Ashley Schannauer, the independent hearing examiner overseeing PNM's request to the

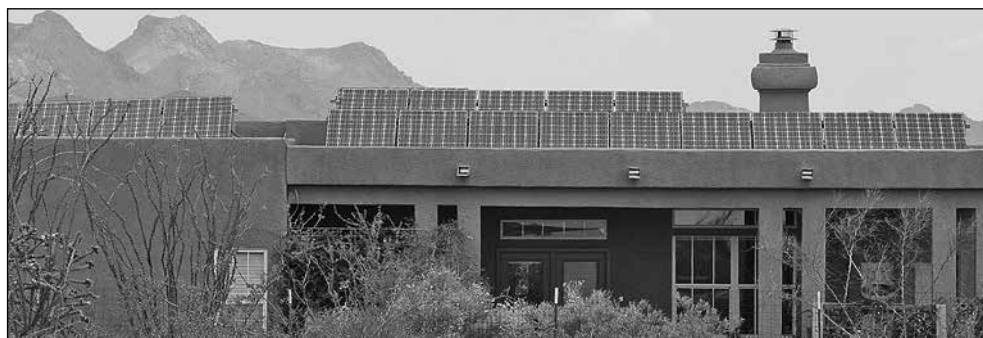
El Paso Electric latest to try to punish solar users

By Ken and Christine Newton
Southern New Mexico Group

On May 11, El Paso Electric (EPE), which serves Southern New Mexico and the El Paso area, filed with the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission for an increase in electric rates of 7.1 percent of non-fuel-based rates. These proposed rates will result in a 9 percent increase, on average, to Southern New Mexico total residential bills.

As EPE last filed for a non-fuel-based rate increase in New Mexico in 2009, an appropriate rate increase is reasonable.

Of concern is the creation of a special rate category for customers with solar energy systems and other distributed-generation systems.



Ken Newton

El Paso Electric proposes to put Southern New Mexico residents with solar rooftops in a different rate class than other ratepayers.

Although the connection rate for solar customers is the same as the regular residential rate, the usage rate is slightly higher, by .125 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh).

So rather than reward customers for using renewable energy sources, their cost per kWh would be higher than regular customers. Of greater concern is that by corraling residential customers with

solar systems into a separate rate class, the possibility of future increases that "punish" solar users is enabled.

Southern New Mexico residential customers should be benefiting from their investment in solar, renewable energy, and energy-efficiency initiatives. Instead, New Mexico ratepayers are being asked to subsidize El Paso and get punished for energy-conservation efforts that benefit us all. Please contact your Public Regulation Commission representative and El Paso Electric to express your concerns. Send an email to riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org to receive action alerts and updates on this issue. Las Cruces is one of the most progressive renewable energy cities in the Southwest. Let's keep it that way.

Santa Fe recycling initiative

By Sharon Guerrero
Zero Waste Team

Most of us have questions about the new recycling initiative being implemented in Santa Fe city and county. Here are some helpful hints and websites to clarify any questions you may have.

If you still have questions, contact Adam Schlacter, education outreach coordinator, Santa Fe Solid Waste Management Agency at 505-424-1850, ext. 420, or e-mail: aschlachter@sfswwa.org.

- All City of Santa Fe residents should have two recycling bins: One for glass ONLY and a second for mixed recycling (everything BUT glass).
- Please keep caps on all bottles and jars that are being recycled.
- Paperboard/chipboard (e.g. cereal boxes, cracker boxes, manila folders, etc.) are now accepted at the curb and at drop-off centers.
- Paperboard can be placed with your mixed recycling OR bundled with your cardboard.
- Please make sure to recycle your pizza boxes without any greasy paper, little plastic tents and leftover pizza.
- All No. 1 and No. 2 jars/bottles with a neck and screw or flip top are recyclable.
- Just because something has

Summer gardening tips

Zero waste means no toxic waste in the environment. Summertime, gardening, veggies and flowers mean pest control. Before you reach for a commercial product, read these tips:

1. Rabbits in the garden? Plant some food outside the garden for the bunnies.
2. Wormwood in a border will repel animals and, after establishing, tolerate drought.
3. A dusting of powdered aloe helps keep away insects.
4. Snails and slugs: Tried and true, set out a container of beer. They love it, to their sorrow. Diatomaceous earth slices through soft bodies. Put sawdust around plants; they can't travel a sawdust road.
5. Cornworms, tomato horn worms: When I see these big guys, I just relocate them (preferably not into a neighbor's garden). Sprinkle cayenne powder on plants. It gives the crawlies the "hot foot" and they move on. Rye flour on wet cabbage is not a sandwich. Sprinkled on wet cabbage plants, it dehydrates cabbage worms. Plant thyme and geraniums near

cabbage and corn.

5. Squash bugs: my nemesis. You must patrol the garden, keeping an eye on the squash. At first sight, spray with a mixture of earth-friendly soap, cayenne and water and SPRAY, SPRAY.

6. Roses: What every rose gardener fears: black spot, red spider mites, and aphids. Juice garlic leaves and add 4 pints of water, 1 tablespoon cornstarch, strain and spray on the roses. An old custom, plant garlic with the roses. A garlic oil spray for aphids: chop 3-4 oz. garlic bulbs, soak in non-gmo corn or canola oil, place in a warm space for a day, then you are ready to spray.

7. Remove sick or diseased leaves and plants; leave them out of the compost. Take good care of the worms in your compost bin. Add only organic scraps and nothing that has been recently sprayed. Water them, but not enough to drown them.

Happy gardening!
— Jessie Emerson, Zero waste

a recycling symbol does NOT mean it's recyclable.

- Please do not recycle clam-shell packaging, Styrofoam, plastic bags, or items containing food waste.
- If you don't recycle weekly, please rinse your containers or you'll have unwanted visitors eating the food residue.
- Similar to the city, county residents should keep their glass

separate for drop-off at County convenience centers.

- It is anticipated that, as of July 2016, both the city and county curbside collection will include automated carts for collection rather than bins.
 - It is anticipated that as of July 2016, the list of acceptable materials will be expanded.
- For more information:
County: www.santafecoun-

tynm.gov/public_works/solid-waste

City: www.santafenm.gov/trash_and_recycling

Santa Fe Recycling:
www.SantaFeRecycling.org

Santa Fe County ordinance proposed for one-stream recycling and map: www.santafecountynm.gov/public works/solid waste

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Photo by Tom Till

Castleton in Southern Utah. Terri Martin of Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance will speak at our Oct. 9 Sierra Club and Beer.

Sierra Club & Beer: Redrock wildlands

Come join your fellow Sierrans for a Sierra Club and Beer gathering at The Commons, 2300 West Alameda, corner of Camino Carlos Real, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. on Oct. 9.

Terri Martin of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance will share some beautiful images and an inside update about the magnificent but still unprotected redrock wildlands of southern Utah.

The future of the redrock hangs in the balance this year! Learn about the Greater



Sierra Club and Beer

Beer, wine and munchies will be served. Please RSVP to Norma McCallan, 505-471-0005, nmccallan@mindspring.com or Tom Gorman, 505-438-3932, gormantd@gmail.com.

Canyonlands and Bears Ears monument proposals and, more problematic, the latest news on Utah Rep. Rob Bishop's public land legislation.

Meetings and Events

Field trip to the Four Corners area Friday-Sunday, Sept. 18-20.

Explore some of the special geological and paleontological treasures in Lybrook and nearby badlands with BLM paleontologist Sherrie Landon and meet with local Navajo leaders in this greater Chaco area experiencing ground zero in the recent explosion of oil and gas fracking. They will likely be able to show us some remote Chaco outliers and discuss what we can do to help with these vexing issues. Stay at the Angel Peak campground Friday and Saturday. Contact Norma McCallan 505-471-0005, nmccallan@mindspring.com, or Robert Tohe, Sierra Club Organizer, robert.tohe@sierraclub.org, 928-606-2362.

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

The Conservation Committee does not meet in July or August. It will resume monthly meetings at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 15.

The next Rio Grande Chapter meeting will be Saturday-Sunday, Sep. 12-13 at Sevilleta Wildlife Refuge. Members welcome. Email Camilla Feibelman, camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org



Photo by Jim Walters

A burrowing owl and its chick are among the wildlife thriving with recent rains and warm weather.

Unearthing life

Summer wildlife! Warm weather reinforced by some record amounts of rainfall in May has migratory wildlife populations on the rise and the ground underneath us is teeming with activity.

Jim Walters, avid enthusiast of burrowing owls and former employee with the National Parks Service, and Julie Luetzelschwab, a local birder and mapping expert, put the following photo essay together on the rich underground life in Santa Fe.

The BLM land on the Caja del Rio is of particular interest as a forgotten prairie dog site has been located near an existing livestock water hole, and some rare Burrowing Owl burrows have been found in that colony.

The Sierra Club Northern New Mexico Group is working with the BLM Taos office and with Julie and Jim to place signage around the densest part of the 50-acre prairie-dog/owl site, reminding the public that off-road motorized use is not allowed in the area while the very visible off-road vehicle damage to the habitat is allowed to recover.



At left: A tiny sentinel outside the burrow. Photo by Jim Walters

Below: A Western Diamondback, who likes both owls and prairie dogs on the menu, at Caja del Rio. The black tail rings are not typical this far north. Photo by Teresa Seamster

Bottom right: Off-road vehicle damage to Caja del Rio habitat favored by prairie dogs and owls in May. Photo by Julie Luetzelschwab

Bottom left: A burrowing owl's underground banquet. Photo by Jim Walter



Progress report on solar with Sierra Club

By Shane Woolbright
Northern New Mexico Group

In a previous issue of this newsletter I wrote about the process of putting solar panels on my home. Now, let's look at the economics.

My 3,000-watt system cost \$12,300. My federal tax rebate was \$3,690, while my state rebate will be \$1,230. I convinced a neighbor to go solar with Sungevity, which gives Sierra Club \$750 for each system and will give me \$750 for finding a new customer for Sungevity. So giving credit to the funds going to Sierra Club, my system had a net cost of \$5,230.

For that I have not paid a bill to PNM since the install last winter and currently have 493 kwh in the bank for generation above my usage.

The amount generated has been above projections. My savings are about \$50 per month for the winter months and will exceed \$60 per month this summer as I don't use more than 500 kWh in most months.

The solar units are netting me over \$600 per year. So I should have all my money back plus interest in 12 years.

I'll also have helped the Sierra Club with its funding and will have eliminated my electric carbon footprint.

If you don't have a spare \$12,000, no worries. Sungevity as well as other solar companies will provide funding so that you pay for the solar panels in an amount similar to your power bill. You're not out more money per month, but you will cut your carbon output AND help our local Sierra Club.

To learn if you're eligible for Sungevity's \$750 discount and chapter donation, request an iQuote at content. sierraclub.org/solar/sungevity?ref=203 or call Sierra Club Solar Homes Coordinator MacKenzie Cane at 415-977-5634.

How to go solar

Santa Fe County Energy Programs Specialist Craig O'Hare is spearheading a Solarize Santa Fe initiative that shows just how affordable going solar really is. Whether you live in Santa Fe County or not, his website is a great guide on going solar: www.santafecountynm.gov/public_works/energy

The list of solar businesses is meant for Santa Fe County, but most also install systems in Bernalillo and Sandoval counties. **If you live in Santa Fe County, contact Craig for free solar advice and technical assistance: (992-3044, cohare@santafecountynm.gov).**

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elpasosierraclub.org

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In May, El Paso Group sponsored an Americas High School hike to McKittrick Canyon in Guadalupe Mountains National Park. El Paso Group Executive Committee member Neysa Hardin, a librarian at the high school, is working to organize a Sierra Club youth group at the school.



Photo by Rick LoBello

A new wave of development along Loop 375 in El Paso is destroying lower-elevation habitats adjacent to Franklin Mountains State Park and much of the wilderness scenery El Pasoans have cherished for years.

Suburbia bad for business

By Rick LoBello
El Paso Group Executive Committee

The current wave of development in cities around the world threatens both businesses and quality of life.

Here in El Paso, when two men spotted a bulldozer blading a road across a pristine part of the Franklin Mountains in 1978, they inspired citizens across the community to take action to help stop the ravenous rampage of suburbia.

Today, a new conservation effort is underway as new bridges are built, roads are widened and more developments break ground. Many El Pasoans are saddened by what they see and feel hopeless in doing anything about it. Not so fast, says the Franklin Mountains Wilderness Coalition. A new citizens petition with more than 6,000 signatures calls upon the city to preserve undeveloped public lands on both sides of the mountains.

Earlier this year, *National Geographic* magazine characterized similar business and environmental challenges, asking this question: "Why do many reasonable people doubt science? We live in an age when all manner of scientific knowledge — from

climate change to vaccinations — faces furious opposition. Some even have doubts about the moon landing."

It is shocking to learn that most of the people responsible for mapping out our future have no clue as to the scientific value of protecting natural landscapes to local businesses and people.

Ecological services are free and include purification of the air we breathe and the water we drink, protecting wildlife biodiversity, soil and vegetation regeneration, seed dispersal, and pollination of crops and natural vegetation. These services also help to sustain aesthetically pleasing landscapes important to enhancing our wellbeing and fighting off nature-deficit disorder.

When ecological services are lost, taxpayers, businesses and governments incur significant costs to replace these services. Some services can only be partially replaced, and some can never be replaced by any amount of dollar investment.

Here in El Paso, one of the drivers of rising health-care costs is the quality of the air we breathe. Desert plants help to maintain our air quality by capturing dust particles during dust storms. When

bulldozers destroy what nature has spent thousands of years creating, businesses incur rising costs when people get sick and can't make it to work. People suffering from respiratory problems also experience a lower quality of life.

Another example is how the Franklin Mountains landscape is a significant driver for ecotourism and in encouraging people to live here and move here. The value of that driver may be very comparable if not higher than the ecotourism potential of the newly established Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument a few miles north in New Mexico. The protected mountain range is now estimated to contribute more than \$7.4 million in additional annual economic activity in Las Cruces.

Every day that development in El Paso continues at its current rate, the potential of ecotourism as an economic driver decreases.

Perhaps the current movement to protect natural resources in El Paso will trigger a new way of thinking about our future. Let's hope that local businesses and the community will demand change. For more information on how you can help, visit franklinmountains.org.



Explore, enjoy and protect the planet

All Creatures Great & Small



"Every good thing, great and small, needs defense"
- John Muir

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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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or visit our website: www.sierraclub.org

Membership questions?

Call 415-977-5653 or e-mail membership.services@sierra-club.org

July/August/September 2015

Hikes and Events, continued from Page 16

Saturday, August 15: Moderate hike to Stewart Lake, 8 miles, 1,800-foot elevation gain. Daisy Levine, (505) 466-8338.

Sunday, August 16: Moderate hike to Nambe Lake. 7 a.m. start, about 7 miles. Elevation: 10,252 feet to 11,400 feet, Marcia Skillman, marciaskillman@hotmail.com, (505)699-3008.

Sunday, August 16: Strenuous hike to Horse Thief Meadow. Early start from Eldorado, 11 miles, 2,200-foot gain. Limit eight, two dogs. Dag Ryen, 466-4063, by Aug. 13.

Saturday, August 22: Moderate/easy hike on Piedra Lisa Trail to the pass — on the Albuquerque side. Meet at 10 a.m. Odile de la Beaujardiere, Odile.dlb@outlook.com.

Sunday August 23: Moderate to strenuous hike in the Sacramento Mountains near Cloudcroft. 6-7 miles on the Rim National Recreation Trail. No more than 1,500 feet elevation change. Hiking in search of great views of the Tularosa Basin and White Sands National Monument — shouldn't be hard to find some from this trail — greening up from the summer rains. RSVP Paul Pierce (505) 670-7653, pablopaddlec@gmail.com.

Saturday/Sunday, August 22-23: moderate backpack trip to Serpent Lake with option to climb up to the Santa Barbara Divide and summit Jicarita Peak. Saturday hike in about 3.5 miles to camp, Sunday with options about 8 miles. Alan Shapiro (505) 424-9242, Nm5s@yahoo.com.

Sunday, August 23: Mushroom-oriented hike (looking for good edibles). Meeting at 8 a.m. at Kaunes's parking lot across from the State Capitol. Art Judd, aejuddsf@gmail.com

Sunday, August 23: Solar Summer Picnic. Celebrate a summer of Climate Action: the Pope's Climate Encyclical, the president's Clean Power Plan, and our collective action to bring New Mexico into a renewable future. Bring everything you may need: table, chairs, extra shelter, food, drinks, plates/utensils and something to share. Dogs on leashes OK. 3 p.m. Hyder Park in Albuquerque.

Saturday-Monday (Labor Day weekend) September 5-7: strenuous three-day/three-peak car camp. Wheeler Peak, Gold Hill, and Lobo Peak. 8, 10, and 11 miles with about 3,000-, 3,400-, 3,500-foot elevation gains. Alan Shapiro, (505) 424-9242, Nm5s@yahoo.com.

Sunday, September 6: Wheeler Peak via Williams Lake — early start from Taos Ski Valley, moderate pace, steep climb,



Daisy Levine

Hikers on an April outing to Black Mesa gather around one of the shield petroglyphs they saw.

Get into outings:

Tobin Oruch, Outings co-chair for our Northern New Mexico Group, has an excellent weekly e-mail on outings, Sierra Trail Mix.

It provides information on outings 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.

10,191 feet to 13,100 feet (about 3,000-foot gain). 8 miles roundtrip. Marcia Skillman. Calls only, 505-699-3008.

Saturday, September 12: Strenuous loop hike to Lake Johnson. Starting at Panchuela trailhead, we will start our hike to Lake Johnson along the Cave Creek trail. Our return will be via the Winsor Ridge trail. We will need to set up a short car shuttle before starting the hike. Early start. Two or three dogs OK. About 18 miles and 4,000-foot elevation gain. Larry, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com, (505)

913-0589.

Friday-Sunday, Sept. 18-20, field trip to Four Corners, with BLM paleontologist Sherrie Landon and Sierra Club organizer Robert Tohe. Learn more about local geological and paleontological treasures and meet with local Navajo leaders experiencing ground zero in the recent explosion of fracking there. Norma McCallan, 505-471-0005, nmccallan@mindspring.com.

Saturday, September 19: Strenuous hike on Latir Wilderness loop above Questa. About 14 miles and 4,000-foot gain with some offtrail on optional high peak. Early start, two or three dogs OK. Tobin Oruch, (505) 690-6253 Tobin. oruch@yahoo.com.

Sunday, September 20: Strenuous hike, Santa Fe to Cowles/Cowles to Santa Fe (two groups), 12 miles, 2,800 feet elevation gain. Limit of 10 hikers. Daisy Levine, 466-8338.

Saturday, September 26: Easy-moderate hike in Eldorado Preserve. 5-6 miles, 800-foot gain, some off-trail. Historic and geologic overviews. Limit 12, two dogs. Contact Dag Ryen at 466-4063 by Sept. 23.

Sunday, September 27: Moderate/easy hike from La Luz trail down to the Lower Tram Terminal. Meet at 2:30 p.m. Odile de la Beaujardiere, Odile.dlb@outlook.com.

Sunday, September 27: Tour Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument. Hike the Pine Tree Loop, Aguirre Springs. Spectacular views of the Organ Mountains and the Tularosa Basin to the east. Moderate hike, elevation gain of 1,000 feet. 4.5-mile loop. Day-use fee required for Aguirre Springs. Howie Dash, 575-652-7550.

Oct. 9: Sierra Club and Beer at The Commons, 2300 West Alameda in Santa Fe, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Terri Martin with the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance will share some beautiful images and an inside update about the magnificent but still unprotected redrock wildlands of southern Utah. The future of the redrock hangs in the balance this year! Beer, wine and munchies will be served. Please RSVP to Norma McCallan, 505-471-0005, nmccallan@mindspring.com, or Tom Gorman, 505-438-3932, gormantd@gmail.com.

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Thank you for being a defender of our air, land, water, wildlife and climate here in New Mexico and West Texas!

Involvement boosts Soil and Water turnouts

By Susan Martin
Chapter Political Chair

Soil and Water Conservation Districts were established under the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt as a response to the catastrophic dust storms in America.

A Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is authorized to conserve and develop the natural resources of the state, provide for flood control, preserve wildlife, protect the tax base and promote the health, safety and general welfare of the people of New Mexico.

Some SWCD boards have violated their mission of natural-resource conservation by engaging in partisan politics, overtly working against wildlife conser-

vation and land conservation such as the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument. Sierra Club volunteers were instrumental in slapping down a tax by the Doña Ana Soil and Water Conservation District Board last year because of the anti-conservation and anti-government record of that district.

In April, our Central New Mexico Group endorsed Andrew Hatuzinger for a second term on the Valencia County SWCD. Arcane rules forced Andrew to run as a write-in candidate, but with the help of Sierra Club volunteers, Andrew was re-elected May 5 to continue his work providing education and technical assistance in natural-resources conservation.

The Central Group also made two

endorsements in the June 2 Middle Rio Grande Conservation District election. John Kelly, the endorsed incumbent, won, and Janet Jarrett, who ran for the at-large seat, was not successful.

The Southern New Mexico Group endorsed Kurt Anderson, Sally Williams and Roger J. Beck for the May 5 Doña Ana SWCD election and did great work communicating with voters and turning out the vote. Unfortunately, U.S. Rep. Steve Pearce recorded a robocall late in the campaign supporting the anti-environmental incumbents. All candidates endorsed by Pearce won re-election, but voter turnout was the highest in memory for a SWCD election, a tribute to the engagement done by our volunteers.



Aku Oppenheimer

Trip leader Aku Oppenheimer led a scouting trip in June through Rio en Medio/Rio Nambé to help update our popular 'Day Hikes in the Santa Fe Area' book, checking trail conditions and scouting for a possible new hike. Above, Dave, Julie, John, and Lisa descend The Elevator Shaft (Trail #403) through a burn area. Rio Grande Chapter leads free hikes of all difficulty levels—check out the listings below!

Hikes & Events July-August-September

Saturday, July 4: Easy hike to Grass Mountain in the Pecos, 7 a.m. start but quick pace — 4-5 miles, elevation gain about 1,000 feet, one-hour drive each way. Marcia Skillman, marciaskillman@hotmail.com, (505) 699-3008.

Saturday, July 4: Strenuous hike to Santa Fe Baldy. Early start. Two or three dogs OK. About 14 miles and 3,600-foot elevation gain. Larry, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com, (505) 913-0589.

Tuesday, July 7: Introduction of Pope Francis' Encyclical: Lunch and a presentation on *Laudato Si*, or Praised Be: On the Care of the Common Home. The panel includes: Msgr. Richard Alona, longtime advocate for ecumenism and justice concerns, Sister Joan Brown, osf, executive director of NM Interfaith Power and Light, and Larry Rasmussen, author and lecturer on Earth ethics. RSVP needed for lunch to Sr. Joan Brown at joan@nm-ipl.org. Free with donations accepted.

Saturday, July 11: Moderate/strenuous hike from Jacks Creek to Dockweiler, 10 miles, 1,600-foot gain, with car-shuttle. Rochelle Gerratt, rgerratt@comcast.net

Saturday July 18: GPS class:

Introduction to GPS. Basic navigation techniques, use of the trip computer, waypoints, tracks etc. GPS units provided. Limit 15. Meet at 10 a.m. at the Albuquerque Open Space Visitor Center, 6500 Coors Blvd. parking lot on north side. RSVP to John: gjuanito@hotmail.com.

Sunday, July 12: Bosque by Wheelchair. One of the main wheelchair-accessible locations in the Bosque is out of Valle del Bosque park. The purpose is to enjoy the trail but also to see how well it works for people who use wheelchairs and make recommendations to agencies on improvement and care of these trails. We are exploring the true accessibility of the trail, and we may discover unexpected challenges. All are welcome. If you need special assistance, please contact us before hand, but we also will have outings leaders who can help on inclines if needed. 8:30-10 a.m. Valle del Bosque Park, 480 Sunset Road SW, Albuquerque. To Bring: Good shoes and wheels, water, hat, sunscreen, snack. Contact: Sarita Streng, 505.288.8713, saritastreng@yahoo.com

Saturday, July 18: Strenuous hike, Trampas Lakes, with possible off-trail return over steep Jicarilla ridge and past San

Leonardo lakes (or vice versa). Very pretty area. About 14 miles, 3,000-foot gain, slightly more for optional Sheepshead bagging. One or two dogs OK. Tobin Oruch, (505) 690-6253, Tobin.oruch@yahoo.com.

Sunday, July 19: Moderate hike to Santa Barbara West Fork, 11 miles, 1,100 feet. Wildflowers and great views. Daisy Levine, (505) 466-8338.

Saturday, July 25: Mountain-bike ride in the Jemez, likely whole or in part within the Valles Caldera. Intermediate skill and good fitness needed for the 25- to 30-mile trip. Michael Di Rosa (505) 667-0095 (work), (505) 231-9629 (evening), mddbbm@gmail.com.

Sunday, July 26: Strenuous hike to Pecos Baldy Lake, with optional summit of East Pecos Baldy. Early start from Eldorado, long day, 16 miles, plus another mile to summit, 2,600- or 3,800-foot gain. Limit eight, two dogs. Dag Ryen (505) 466-4063 by July 21.

Saturday, August 1: Medicinal Plants of the Bosque. Take an evening walk in the Bosque with herbalist and geographer Dara Saville. We will discuss native medicinal plants and their connection

to both the natural landscape and the people of the Middle Rio Grande Valley. 5:30 p.m., Arenal on the southwest side, meet at Westside Community Center, 1250 Isleta Blvd. SW. Bring walking shoes, camera, notebook, and water. Contact: Dara Saville, albuquerqueherbalism@gmail.com

Saturday, August 8: Strenuous hike on Gold Hill Loop above Taos, in newly designated Columbine Hondo Wilderness. Up Long Canyon, off-trail along spectacular, wide ridge above treeline, return on Gavilan Trail if weather permits. About 12 miles, 4,000-foot elevation gain, 12,711-foot summit, early start, two or three dogs OK. Tobin Oruch, (505) 690-6253, tobin.oruch@yahoo.com

Saturday, August 15: Strenuous hike to Old Mike Peak. Starting on the Williams Lake trail, we will hike up Wheeler Peak and then continue south and east another 1.5 miles or so along the ridge line to Old Mike Peak. Early start. Two or three dogs OK. About 11 miles, 3,700-foot elevation gain. Larry, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com, (505) 913-0589.

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Remember

Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter outings are free and open to the public. Level of difficulty is listed in hike descriptions. All mileages are round-trip. Participants must sign a liability waiver. Bring water, lunch, sturdy hiking boots or shoes and clothing suitable for the weather.

Leader reserves right to turn away anyone whose experience or equipment appears unsuitable. Leader may alter destination or cancel trip due to weather, unfavorable conditions, or insufficient number of participants. Unaccompanied minors need written permission from a parent or guardian. Ask leader for form. Dogs permitted only if so noted in write-up.

Always contact leader before the outing to confirm participation and details. Please see riograndesierraclub.org/outings for the most up-to-date information and new hikes.

To receive Tobin Oruch's weekly e-mail with updated outings information, send an email to Listserv@lists.sierra-club.org with any subject and a message that says SUBSCRIBE RIO-NORTH-OUTINGS.