



Volume 53, Issue 4 News of the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club: New Mexico & West Texas October/November/December 2015



Predators as prey

New Mexico’s Game Commission rejects public input and science by approving cougar-trapping, increasing bear quotas and blocking release of endangered wolves



Photo courtesy Art Rescues

Wildlife advocates rallied before the Aug. 27 Game Commission meeting, where despite overwhelming public sentiment, commissioners unanimously voted to expand bear-killing for trophy hunters and approve the use of leghold traps to kill cougars. See Page 3

Animas River spill a wake-up call:
Mining accountability needs to improve, but New Mexico has been moving in the wrong direction.
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River Hugger/CC BY-SA 4.0




EPE’s war on solar: The electric utility for Las Cruces and El Paso is fighting off self-generated power by penalizing solar users. **Page 10**



Fantastic Day in Farmington:
As the BLM considers reforming its outdated coal-leasing program, community members turned out in force to decry the sometimes invisible but deadly costs of coal. **Page 8**

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Votes hurt wolves, cougars, bears

Decisions to expand trophy hunting for bears, approve trapping of cougars provoke outcry

By Mary Katherine Ray
Chapter Wildlife Chair

Whether deciding about wolves, bears or cougars, the New Mexico state Game Commission has increasingly revealed its disregard for our native carnivores. Earlier this year, the seven-member board appointed by Gov. Susana Martinez, voted to deny the privately owned Ladder Ranch the permit needed to hold Mexican gray wolves awaiting release into the wild at the facility built and previously used for this purpose.

And then New Mexico Game and Fish, the state agency that carries out wildlife policy and which is overseen by the Game Commission, denied the Fish and Wildlife Service permit to release wolves into the wild into New Mexico.

In early summer, New Mexico Game and Fish began the process of reviewing the rules governing the hunting of bears and cougars; a process undertaken every four years. Under this Game Commission, the outcome was disheartening if predictable.

Four years ago, the bear quotas, or number of bears that hunters are allowed to kill, were significantly increased. Hunters responded with gusto, killing nearly double the number of bears in the following years than previously. But NM Game and Fish wanted to kill even more. To justify raising the quotas again in 2015, the agency expanded the area on the map that it considers to be primary bear habitat by 35 percent without any ground surveys to see if bears are really occupying these new areas in the densities asserted.

The agency also claimed that a new bear population study using hair snares and DNA analysis to identify individual bears indicated bear densities are higher than previously thought. But this population study has not been published and the information made available to the public show that the agency cherry-picked estimated densities from the study data that could substantially overestimate bear numbers. The net result is that NM Game and Fish proposed to raise the number bears that hunters can kill each year by another 26 percent to 804 bears.

The proposal that garnered



Photo courtesy Art Rescues

More than 200 people showed up Aug. 27 to testify to the New Mexico Game Commission against increased bear-hunting quotas and cougar-trapping, and few came to speak in favor, but the commission allowed only 30 minutes of testimony from each side.



On Sept. 29, the Game Commission denied the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service permission to release endangered Mexican gray wolves into the wild in New Mexico.

the most attention was that to allow mountain lions to be trapped and killed in brutal leg-hold traps and wire foot snares for fun and profit. In 2011, the cougar quotas were also dramatically raised. The quotas are so high now that hunters are not killing enough cougars to reach them. Even New Mexico Game and Fish concedes that the cougar population size is not known. No new credible cougar population studies justify the existing cougar quotas, but it is lot easier to trap a cougar than hunt one. If you are bent on killing more, indiscriminate trapping is the logical proposal.

New Mexico Game and Fish received thousands of comments in opposition to the bear and cougar rule proposals. Opposition was strong enough that public lands were removed from consideration for cougar trapping. Then Land Commissioner Aubrey Dunn requested that cougar trapping be allowed on State Trust Land. By the time of the hearing, State Trust Lands were incorporated back into the cougar-trapping proposal along with private

lands. Private and state trust land comprise three quarters of the land area in New Mexico.

The Game commissioners are all hunters. Two are Safari Club members, just like the dentist who killed Cecil the lion. Four are National Rifle Association members. Three have ties to agriculture. Two are lawyers; one specializing in representing the oil and gas industry and one in property-rights cases. None are scientists. For the more than 500,000 wildlife-watchers in New Mexico who don't hunt but care about wildlife conservation, there is zero representation on the Game Commission.

When the discussion began about the bear and cougar proposals, one of the commissioners made a motion to adopt the rules even before any public testimony. Then the Commission chair announced that public testimony would be limited to 1 hour — half for supporters of the proposal and half for opponents, even though the proportion in the room was greatly skewed to the latter. Perhaps no amount of public testimony would have

mattered. There was minimal discussion among commissioners before the unanimous vote to adopt the rules one hour later.

In response, our Sierra Club chapter issued an email plea to you, our members and supporters to help fund a radio and online ad campaign. We're asking people who care about bears and cougars as important to nature to send a message to Gov. Martinez urging that she ask her Game Commissioners to reverse its reckless decision. To be sure, it's a long shot, but in the process, let's make sure that the public knows these horrible decisions regarding wildlife policy are being made by the appointees of the governor, and that elections have consequences for nature, too.

At the Sept. 29 meeting, the Game Commission continued its anti-carnivore policy by unanimously voting to deny the Fish and Wildlife Service permission to release endangered Mexican wolves into the wild. Despite the attendance of a large crowd of wolf and carnivore supporters, the commission ignored public sentiment, federal and state laws that mandate recovery of endangered species and accepted wildlife science about the importance of wolves to the integrity of ecosystems.

All New Mexicans, and all Americans, have a stake in recovering endangered species. The ball is now in the Department of Interior's court. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seeks to cooperate with states regarding recovery of endangered species, but if the state refuses to cooperate, the Endangered Species Act still must be upheld.

Ads urge governor to act

By Mary Katherine Ray

On Sept. 21, the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter launched a radio campaign targeting Gov. Susana Martinez regarding her Game Commission's decisions to allow trapping of cougars and increased bear-killing by trophy hunters.

The ads asked New Mexicans to urge Martinez to direct her Game Commission to reverse the cougar and bear votes.

(Please visit riograndesierraclub.org to listen to the ad.)

Martinez appointed every commissioner on the panel. The commission's unanimous decisions came despite more than 1,000 comments, thousands more petition signatures, hundreds of New Mexicans attending the Aug. 27 meeting and numerous newspaper editorials opposing cougar-trapping and increased bear-killing. Recent polling showed New Mexico voters are opposed to trapping by a 3-to-1 ratio.

The ads were funded by donations from chapter members who want to bring more public attention to these irresponsible decisions.

Both before and since the vote, the chapter has seldom seen an outcry this big about a wildlife issue, from our members and from the general public. People in New Mexico are upset that the Game Commission just didn't seem to care what the majority want for our state.

Inspiration from the Pope, the people

I was driving down from Denver where 10 Sierra Club members and activists from New Mexico had traveled to testify in one of three EPA hearings on its newly proposed methane rules. The view was incredible with rainstorms rolling along the horizon, the sun illuminating the streaks of moisture from behind, casting a double rainbow over the opposite sky. The colors arched innocently over the landscape and didn't cast a shadow over the coal and oil trains that plugged along the highway, unaware of what's at stake.



Camilla Feibelman
Chapter director

We were a car-load that represented a real cross-section of the state. Robert Tohe, a Dirty Fuels Sierra Club organizer from Yahtey, N.M., and his wife Hazel James, a food sovereignty organizer, both members of the Navajo Nation and grandparents. Jessica Gonzalez, a Santa Fean for generations back, just about to graduate from Santa Fe Community College and one of the leaders of our Santa Fe Climate March last year. Marina, 12, and her mom, Genie Stevens, both of Santa Fe's Global Warming Express kids group. And Jon Weiss, a retired physicist who is a faithful volunteer in Albuquerque. On their way back to Farmington in a separate car was Daniel Tso a former Navajo Council Member, Elliot Jim, a former oil and gas worker who wants to do something about the impacts of industry, and Gloria Lehmer, who works tirelessly for progressive causes in a town where she is very much in the minority.

We let the radio wander through the satellite stations as we followed the road south and as we pondered the topics of our time. We listened to news snippets from the Pope's arrival, in stark contrast to the latest on the VW pollution scandal. How cynical of VW engineers to push their "clean diesel technology" at the cost of kids' health — though diesel burns cleaner, it emits more particulate matter, which leads to more smog and more asthma and respiratory disease. In



Photo by Camilla Feibelman

From left: Rio Grande Chapter Director Camilla Feibelman, Hazel James, Jessica Gonzalez, Genie Stevens, Marina Weber, Robert Tohe and Jon Weiss head to Denver to testify at hearings on the EPA's proposed methane rule.

100 Days of Climate Action

We've launched 100 Days of Climate Action with groups including 350NM, Environment New Mexico, Juntos, Interfaith Power and Light, Positive Energy Solar, Osceola Solar, the Solar Energy Association, 516 Arts, Ciclovía Abq to offer opportunities to take action for a hopeful climate future. Below are just two of many events. See riograndesierraclub.org/events-calendar for a full listing.

6:30-8:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 8:
Learn more about the PNM San Juan stipulated agreement and the PNM rate case. Public hearings will take place on Oct. 13. This is your chance to find out more. Where: Jewish Community Center, 5520 Wyoming NE,

Albuquerque. Contact info: camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org, 505-715-8388.

7-9:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 22:

Natural Gas: Bridge Fuel or the Bridge to Disaster? Methane Study Group forum featuring Dr. Bernie Zach, retired climatologist at Sandia. Discussion on the Four Corners methane hot spot, the dark side of natural gas development the new federal methane regulations will follow a screening of the film *Disruption*, about the New York People's' Climate March. Where: Jewish Community Center, 5520 Wyoming NE, Albuquerque. Contact info: jimmacknm@comcast.net, 505-350-6000.

the face of this crime is Pope Francis, with his gentle message reminding us that we must care for our planet and for one another, calling on the United States to be a leader on technology, solutions and inclusion.

We arrived late back to Santa Fe, where we dropped off some of our passengers and others still later in Albuquerque and woke early for a breakfast to watch Pope Francis. Sierra Club climate activists gathered in our

new Albuquerque Office (which is on Lead just east of Yale) to listen to the Pope's message to Congress. At 7:15 a.m., we watched the dignitaries file in and listened to the pope's message, only two of us with Catholic roots, but all of us inspired by the pontiff's message of the courage and activism of Americans like Martin Luther King Jr. He called on all of us to care for migrants as we would hope to be cared for ourselves and to protect the environment as something humanity can't survive without. The following day at the UN, Pope Francis went further, saying that we must recognize that we are part of nature, that we can't live without it and must act to protect it.

As summer melts away into the crisp of fall and we transition from our Solar Summer activities to 100 Days of Climate Action in the lead-up to the Paris talks on climate change, I invite you to join us, to get involved, to heed the Pope's call to humanity, that together we can make a difference. For some practical ways to get involved check out our new website at riograndesierraclub.org.

Sierran publication information

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

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

The contributor's name and email address will be printed as a source of more information, unless the contributor specifies otherwise. Submissions must be received by the 10th of the month prior to publication.

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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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To stay updated on issues you read about in *The Sierran*, go to riograndesierraclub.org and subscribe to the chapter e-mail list.

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

Volunteers needed

Northern New Mexico Group Volunteer Coordinator: This important position seeks out, tracks, and monitors volunteers to help out with our many commitments and issues. Pat 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

State sues to block water protections

By Rachel Conn
Amigos Bravos

Gov. Susana Martinez's administration has again jumped at an opportunity to diminish protections for our drinking water. In September, the EPA finalized a Clean Water Rule that clarifies that waters that were historically covered under the federal Clean Water Act, such as small tributary streams and wetlands, are once again covered by the federal law.

The Martinez administration, joining 12 other states, filed a lawsuit to block the rule. A federal judge has ruled that while the suit is pending, the rule will not apply to waters in the 13 states.

This action by the state is doubly irresponsible because, unlike other states, New Mexico does not have a state regulatory structure in place to control discharges into our rivers and streams.

The federal Clean Water Act, passed in 1972, guided the transition from rivers that literally caught on fire to healthy watersheds. It requires wastewater and industrial facilities to clean water before discharging into the nation's rivers.

Supreme Court decisions in 2001 and 2006 left protections for some waters that had been covered under the Clean Water Act, such as those that flow intermittently or are isolated, uncertain. EPA estimates that at least 280,000 people in the state receive drinking water from ephemeral and/or intermittent sources.

The new rule clarifies that some of the rivers, streams, and wetlands that fell through the cracks in the post-2001 confusion are indeed protected.

Because of the state's lawsuit, New Mexico's waters are still being denied those protections.

High e. coli levels found in Rio Fernando

By Eric Patterson

Water Sentinels — Rios de Taos has completed its 2015 monitoring schedule. We have added new members to our monitoring team. Disturbingly, we have found high levels of e. coli in several places in the Rio Fernando de Taos that indicate that further testing is needed. Sentinels have started testing two additional sites on the Rio Grande this year and hope to add additional monitoring sites in 2016. Sentinels would love to add monitoring sites on downstate streams that may be impacted by dairy waste. If you have a specific site of concern, please contact Eric Patterson at eepatt@gmail.com.

Water Sentinels will be working with a new crop of Taos High School students this year. David Gilroy, our liaison with the Tiger Salamanders, won the Outstanding Taos High School Teacher of The Year Award last year. He plans two monitoring outings with students this fall. All student members will join Sierra Club and Trout Unlimited and participate in Fishing Day events co-sponsored by the Department of Game and Fish.

The 1872 Mining Law still allows companies to mine for minerals on our public lands without paying any royalties and without any federal environmental requirements for cleanup.



Photo courtesy Gila Resources Information Project

Above: Chino copper mine in Southern New Mexico. A lesson from the Gold King disaster should be that mine operators should be required to clean up their toxic messes and prevent contamination of our drinking water, but the Martinez Administration's Copper Rule now expressly allows mining companies to contaminate the groundwater underneath their mines in perpetuity.

Animas spill a call to act

By Allyson Siwik
Gila Resources Information Project

We watched in horror and sadness as an orange plume of mine wastewater flowed down the Animas River from an accidental release at the inactive Gold King Mine in Colorado in August, impacting communities, farmers, wildlife and recreation along the way.

Our thoughts are with the people who have been adversely affected, and those who have worked around the clock to restore the watersheds contaminated by the accident.

Environmental Protection Agency contractors were attempting to clean up the inactive Gold King Mine to stop its ongoing release of contaminated water when a plug holding back rising groundwater burst. Gold King is just one of hundreds of thousands of inactive or abandoned mines in our country, mostly in the West, 15,000 of which are here in New Mexico.

These abandoned and inactive mines are the legacy of the federal 1872 Mining Law that to this day allows hard-rock mining companies free reign to mine anywhere on our public lands without paying any royalties on the minerals extracted and without any federal environmental requirements for operations and cleanup.

Mining companies historically walked away from their operations, leaving a toxic mess behind. These abandoned mine lands continue to degrade surface- and groundwater quality, affect wildlife and impact recreational opportunities.

The federal Superfund program, created to clean up toxic waste sites, is significantly underfunded and insuf-

ficient to address the magnitude of this problem. Across the state of New Mexico, cleanup of abandoned mine sites has been hampered by lack of funding.

The situation with historical mine contamination at the Chino mine site in Southern New Mexico is similar to Gold King's: The local community didn't want a Superfund designation, but while the state and Freeport McMoRan said they would get it cleaned up in five years under an Administrative Order on Consent, studies are still ongoing and cleanup is far from complete nearly 20 years later.

The Gold King Mine is technically "inactive," and has an owner who should be held accountable. The Gold King Mine and many associated mines in the Animas River Watershed are not simply abandoned — there are private and federal owners who should be as accountable as the EPA.

What needs to be done to prevent future disasters like Gold King?

Clearly the 143-year-old federal mining law needs to be reformed. U.S. Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich have announced legislation that includes charging a fair royalty on public minerals that would fund a Hardrock Reclamation Fund to clean up abandoned mines, a comprehensive survey of abandoned mine lands and a plan to clean them up, as well as "Good Samaritan" legislation that would protect those involved in environmental cleanup from liability. The legislation is a good start at addressing the contamination that already happens to our water from these thousands of abandoned and inactive mines.

At the state level, we need strong laws and enforcement.

Yet recent efforts in New Mexico have focused on gutting environmental protections, putting our groundwater and environment at risk. The Martinez administration's "Copper Rule" allows copper mines to pollute groundwater at mine sites rather than prevent contamination. The Copper Rule is under review by the New Mexico Supreme Court.

Additionally, mining giant Freeport-McMoRan attempted in the 2015 legislative session to weaken the New Mexico Mining Act, potentially relieving mining companies from cleanup at inactive mine sites and allowing other rollbacks that let mining companies off the hook for pollution prevention and cleanup. That bill died in committee thanks to key legislators and community activists who were quick to respond to the attempt to gut this important law that prevents situations like Gold King from happening in New Mexico.

"The Animas River toxic spill provides an opportunity for state Environment Secretary Ryan Flynn and the state of New Mexico to re-evaluate their neglect of, and indifference to the need for strong environmental regulations in northwest New Mexico," said Mike Eisenfeld, New Mexico energy coordinator for San Juan Citizens Alliance. "The Animas River spill, unfortunately, is the tip of the iceberg when it comes to environmental problems facing our rivers in New Mexico, including legacy hard-rock mining, coal mining and burning, and uranium/vanadium."

Let the Gold King Mine accident be a reminder that there is much work to be done to ensure that all mines are cleaned up responsibly to protect our public health.

Take Action

Learn more about the new PNM San Juan agreement and the PNM rate case. Public hearings in the San Juan case will begin Oct. 13. This is your chance to find out more about both cases. **When:** 6:30-8:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 8: **Where:** Jewish Community Center, 5520 Wyoming NE, Albuquerque. **Contact:** camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org, 505-715-8388.

PNM plans to hike customer fee

By Mona Blaber
Chapter communications coordinator

On Aug. 27, PNM filed a rate-hike request after its first request was rejected by the Public Regulation Commission.

PNM's first rate request earlier this year included a steep monthly fee for those who install solar panels on their rooftops, as well as a 12 percent rate hike for all customers.

The PRC rejected that request after the commission's hearing examiner said PNM hadn't provided enough information to

support its requests.

After considerable opposition from environmental groups, PNM has dropped the request for the monthly solar fee (which would have amounted to \$21-\$35 a month). It said it may attempt to float the fee in the future, but the first case's failure left a shortened timeframe, so it chose not to fight that fight. Which means your opposition makes a difference!

However, there are other troubling aspects of the new rate request. PNM wants to increase the residential customer charge from \$5 to \$13.14 per month, increasing costs to customers no matter

how energy-efficient they are or whether they generate a portion of their energy. The charge hits low-income customers especially hard.

Environmental advocates will review the company's fuel clause to determine whether it should continue. The fuel clause removes the risk of fossil-fuel price increases to the company, removing an incentive to switch over to renewable energy resources.

The rate case has other important aspects, both good and bad. We'll email members with an analysis and opportunity to make comments in the coming months.

PNM's new plan is better, but ...

By David Coss
Rio Grande Chapter chair

On Aug. 13, PNM filed a new plan for the future of the coal-fired San Juan Generating Station as part of its negotiations with the Public Regulation Commission.

The agreement includes some significant improvements from PNM's previous proposal, but it still allows two units of the plant to continue operating and includes only a small percentage of renewable energy as replacement power for the retired coal, so this process will require our ongoing and active participation.

The new agreement does give New Mexico an opportunity to completely transition away from San Juan Generating Station in 2022. In addition to shutting down two units, as the previous plan did, it requires PNM to file a case with the Public Regulation Commission in 2018 to justify continued operation of the plant and does not allow PNM to enter into a new coal agreement before the culmination of this case. PNM would issue a request for proposals that would allow bidders for all sources of power, including solar, wind and geothermal, to bid on replacement power.

The PRC has not yet ruled on PNM's plan and will take public comment and hold hearings in the coming months.

The agreement still allows PNM to obtain 132 MW in remaining San Juan units to absorb departing owners' shares, but it prevents PNM from buying more coal from San Juan or other plants unless it gets approval from the Public Regulation Commission. This means that if other owners flee the plant when the ownership agreement expires in 2022, PNM's holding company can't just buy up their shares without Commission approval and continue to act as "owner of last resort." The 132 MW will be at zero book value, so PNM will have less incentive to keep the plant operating after 2022.

PNM agreed to these concessions only after weeks of negotiations with environmental groups and other intervenors. While the Sierra Club is a member of Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy, which signed the agreement, we are not represented by CCAE in PRC proceedings and are not an intervenor in the San Juan case.



The Public Regulation Commission has yet to decide on a new agreement between PNM, the attorney general and some environmental groups in the case to shut down two units at coal-fired San Juan Generating Station, above, near Farmington.

"CCAIE believes that entering into the new settlement will offer the best opportunity for shutting down the remaining units of the plant in 2022," said Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy attorney Chuck Noble. "We are concerned that, even under the best of circumstances, the current case will not result in a shutdown of more than two units of the plant. Even if the commission does not grant PNM's request to acquire additional ownership in San Juan unit 4, PNM can acquire that ownership interest through an affiliate, and the commission would have no jurisdiction to stop that. If that

happened, PNM could decide to keep the plant operating for many years."

The agreement forces PNM to pay off some of its debts on the San Juan plant sooner, making a transition away from coal more economically viable when the coal contract ends in 2022. And starting in 2020, it requires PNM to buy 1 megawatt-hour of renewable-energy certificates for each additional megawatt-hour generated by the coal PNM is taking on at the remaining units. The certificates would have to be Clean Power Plan-compliant, meaning they would have to come from newer renewable generation and demonstrate

a preference for New Mexico renewable energy.

We will continue to push PNM to build real renewable energy, on the ground, in New Mexico, stimulating job growth here.

We will continue our grassroots activism at the Public Regulation Commission to advocate for more New Mexico-built renewable energy and a commitment to end San Juan's pollution.

It's important for all pro-environment organizations and advocates to use the ongoing public process to push for an even better plan, starting with renewable energy built on the ground in New Mexico.

This agreement makes a near-term transition from San Juan coal more likely, but it does not guarantee retirement of the remaining two units of this aging, polluting plant. That means we have a lot of work to do in the next three years. Each of us must keep the heat on PNM to seriously invest in clean-energy job creation in the Four Corners and end San Juan's pollution.

Send us a note to let us know you're committed to keeping PNM's feet to the fire: camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org. We have set up action teams throughout the chapter that can help you take action on this important issue. So please let us know if you want to stay or get involved.

PNM has been forced into this stipulated agreement by a large array of allied organizations and your activism. Instead of a plan that rubber-stamped operation of the aging San Juan plant in perpetuity, there will be continued pressure and opportunity to transition from dirty coal to clean energy. This was not easily conceded by PNM and has changed the direction they were going.

You should know that every rally in the cold or heat, every email, every letter, every telephone call and every meeting attended has helped to get us to this point. Yet this is a critical time when we must be prepared to work even harder.

This is a continuation of the efforts that began when the Sierra Club and others took PNM to court to protect New Mexico and the Four Corners from the haze and harmful air-quality impacts of San Juan 12 years ago. I hope each of you will carry on this fight to the final elimination of coal-burning in our state and our country.

Chapter debuts new office, website



Photo by Fred Houdek

The new Albuquerque Rio Grande Chapter office is at 2215 Lead Ave., near the UNM campus.

By Fred Houdek
Central New Mexico Group

The Rio Grande Chapter and Central Group have recently relocated to a new office in Albuquerque.

The address is 2215 Lead Ave. SE, Albuquerque, N.M., 87106. It is on the north side of Lead Avenue, a block east of Yale. It is the last unit in a little strip mall with a laundromat, Duggan's Coffee Cafe, and a piñata shop.

We hosted an open house in September at the new location, which is three blocks from the

main University of New Mexico entrance on Central Avenue. We hope to attract more foot traffic from the campus, and it is more centrally located for our members.

The office is staffed with volunteers on Monday and Tuesday from 1 to 4 p.m. and for Volunteer Wednesday from 1 to 4 p.m.

On Wednesday our volunteers do data entry and work on various special projects. It's fun! Please contact Camilla Feibelman at camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org if you'd like

to join us, or just show up!

We hope you stop by to say hello or join us on Wednesdays.

New website

In addition, the chapter in September unveiled its new website. You can check it out at riograndesierraclub.org.

There's lots of fresh content letting you know how to take action and volunteer to make a difference to our wildlife, land, water and climate here in New Mexico and West Texas.

Please visit the new site and leave a comment letting us know what you think!



Photo by Sarita Streng

Outdoors enthusiasts test the accessibility of Bosque trails in September. In October and November, the Rio Grande Chapter will host two more wheelchair outings to the Bosque.

Bosquitos and wheelchair events

Check out our outings this fall at the Albuquerque Bosque — and if you have little ones, make sure to check out the Bosquito events!

Saturday, Oct. 3: Bosquitos event: Plant Walk, Botanic Gardening, and Raptors! All-ages event. Attend Bosque Education Day at the Bachechi Open Space. We will attend three workshops together:

1:45-2:45 p.m.: Plant walk with Dara Saville of Albuquerque Herbalism. Learn about plants of the Bosque. 3-4p.m. Botanic Drawing with Lisa Morgan 4:15-5:15p.m.: Learn about raptors with Lisa of Hawks Aloft. Bring water and snacks. Come to one or all three of these fun classes. Please RSVP: Sarita Streng 505-288-8713 saritastreng@yahoo.com

Saturday, Oct. 17, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.: Bosque By Wheelchair at Rio Bravo Riverside Picnic Area, fishing pier and nature walk. This area includes a quarter-mile trail made of crushed gravel. There is ADA parking, an ADA fishing pier for the irrigation ditch and a picnic area. The purpose

of this outing is to enjoy the trail but also to see how well it works for people who use wheelchairs or other assistive devices and make recommendations to agencies on how they can improve and care for these trails. We will do our best to ensure its ease of use before the outing but please do know that we may discover unexpected challenges. If you need special assistance, please contact us beforehand. All are welcome on this outing. 10 a.m. to noon. To access the Rio Bravo Riverside picnic area, take Rio Bravo Blvd. west from Broadway. Before the bridge turn right onto Poco Loco Road and follow it west into the parking area. Bring good shoes and wheels, walkers, crutches, canes, etc., water, hat, sunscreen, snack and lunch if you want to picnic afterward. Contact: camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org, 505.715.8388

Sunday, Nov. 8: Bosquitos Bosque Treasure Hunt with Noel Chilton, noon to 2 p.m. Bosquitos Treasure Hunt with Noel Chilton: Learn how to use compasses and sundials while learning about the Bosque

At the Open Space Visitor Center,

you'll make your own navigation tools to use as you discover new lands! Your compass and sundial will guide you along as you encounter strange creatures. Bring water bottle and snacks. Contact: Sarita Streng 505-288-8713 saritastreng@yahoo.com

Saturday, Nov. 14, 9 a.m.: Bosque By Wheelchair at the Bachechi Open Space: This area, just outside the river's levees, has a forested and wetland area, in addition to a rose garden and educational center. We'll explore the grounds and then make our way to the Paseo del Bosque trail to explore routes down to the River. The purpose is to enjoy the trail but also to see how well it works for people who use wheelchairs or other assistive devices and make recommendations to agencies on improving and properly caring for these trails. If you need special assistance, please contact us beforehand. All are welcome. When: 10 a.m. to noon. Where: 9521 Rio Grande Blvd NW To Bring: Good shoes and wheels, walkers, canes, etc. water, hat, sunscreen, snack. Please RSVP to Colston Chandler (505-343-9498 or ccent@swcp.com).

Club endorses Davis, Chavez for Council; vote Oct. 6!

By Richard Barish,
Central New Mexico Group

The Sierra Club has endorsed two outstanding candidates, Pat Davis and Israel Chavez, in the Oct. 6 Albuquerque City Council election.

Pat is running in District 6 to replace retiring Councilor Rey Garduño. District 6 includes the University area and the southeast heights, among other areas. Pat is a former police officer who has run Progress New Mexico for some years. He has been endorsed by teachers, firefighters and other unions, as well as outgoing Councilor Garduño and U.S. Rep. Michelle Lujan Grisham. He is a strong supporter of issues important to the Club, including energy and Bosque issues.

Israel is taking on longtime incumbent Brad Winter in District 4, mostly north of Montgomery and east of the railroad tracks. Winter may be vulnerable because of the high crime and drug-use rates in this district, together with the fact that it is widely believed that Winter, with a second home in Florida, will not serve out his term, but will resign at some point so the mayor can appoint his successor. Israel is a young, bright, and politically savvy guy, endorsed by both unions and private-sector tech firms. He is supportive of the Club's positions.

This is an election where your vote can really make a difference. Voter turnout for the city's October elections is always low, but will be especially low this year, when there is no mayoral election. Joe Monahan predicts that we won't even match the measly 12% turnout of 2011.

We need a council that is friendly to environmental concerns. If both of our candidates win, we will have a veto-proof pro-Bosque, pro-environment majority on City Council. Please vote on Oct. 6!



Pat Davis



Israel Chavez

A fantastic day in Farmington

By Nellis Kennedy-Howard
Senior Beyond Coal
Campaign Representative

On Aug. 20, more than 100 people gathered at a session hosted by the Bureau of Land Management to testify in support of reforming the outdated federal coal-leasing program, which shortchanges taxpayers by undervaluing our public coal and subsidizing polluting coal operations.

The listening session, held in Farmington, N.M., was certainly an unprecedented event where the multitudes far outnumbered any small sign of opposition. This is truly outstanding given that Farmington is home to two major coal plants, two coal mines and over a thousand coal workers. More than half of those attending were people of color, including Native American, Hispanic and Latino activists.

For decades coal-mining companies have been paying royalty rates that are far too low, shortchanging taxpayers out of \$30 billion in lost revenues, according to independent analysis. Under the current federal coal program, many coal companies aren't required to set aside enough money or insurance to clean up public lands after they are done mining — potentially leaving communities and taxpayers on the hook for billions of dollars and dangerous situations later on.

It couldn't be more clear that the overwhelming majority in attendance in Farmington were in favor of reforming the BLM's coal-leasing program in ways to keep coal in the ground and for coal companies to pay their fair share.

More than 60 people spoke in favor of reform, and only 3 speakers testified against.

There was a tremendous variety of speakers, including tribal activists, Latina mothers, city leaders from Telluride and Taos, faith leaders, clean-energy advocates and other concerned taxpayers.

"Coal mining and coal-fired power plants have had devastating impacts on the Navajo Nation for over 50 years," Coleen Cooley, energy outreach coordinator of Diné CARE, told the BLM panel. "Despite big promises from polluters about the benefits of coal mining and coal energy, many on the Navajo Nation are still at poverty-level living conditions, without running water and electricity in their homes."

"I'm here to remind you of your obligation to our children," said Deke Romero of Picuris Pueblo. "Everywhere you guys go you leave a mess.



Community members showed up in force to testify at the BLM's Aug. 20 hearing on coal-leasing reform. The speaker ratio was 60 to 3 in favor of the government reforming its system, which essentially subsidizes coal pollution.

Photos by Camilla Feibelman and Nellis Kennedy-Howard



You've failed the American people, sold our resources, basically given them away to these companies. ... You have all the data that shows what you're doing is wrong, but you continue these policies. When are you going to wake up? We can't sustain this. You're taking our children's future away with your policies."

Special guest Navajo Nation Shiprock Chapter President Chili Yazzie spoke in favor of BLM doing more to protect Navajo communities: "Today the equilibrium of Earth is out of balance because of unrelenting digging and drilling. We are killing the earth. The life of the earth is ebbing. If this hearing is not a sham, if you truly have

influence on this process, hear us as we stand here in defense of our Earth Mother that sustains us all."

Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye also attended the session to hear from concerned Navajo citizens.

There was a short convening along the banks of the Animas River prior to the listening session for Native peoples to gather in prayer about the messages to be shared with the BLM, to congregate with songs on the hand drum and to offer prayers for the Animas River disaster.

This event was made possible by the many concerned citizens who attended the event and ultimately the many organiza-

tions who contributed to an outstanding listening session, including: Diné CARE; San Juan Citizens Alliance; Western Environmental Law Center; Wild Earth Guardians; Juntos, a program of Conservation Voters New Mexico Education Fund; Environment New Mexico; New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light; National Wildlife Federation; Western Organization of Resource Councils; Western Coalfield Alliance; 350.org; New Energy Economy; Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment; Dooda' Desert Rock; 4 Corners Idle NO More; Medicine2Strong; Sierra Club and more.

Testimony excerpts:

"The utility companies – they eat the Earth up here, suck out her breath so they can get electricity, and we are stuck with nothing."

— **Louise Benally**

"If you are going to continue this environmentally destructive practice of mining coal on our lands, at the very least make sure the coal companies pay us our fair share of their profits instead of robbing us of income that we could use to build stronger communities."

— **Elioleta M. Holtsin**

"Navajo people bear the brunt of this environmental devastation and the health problems like asthma and heart disease that come with it, but we never see our fair share of the profits these polluters make off our lands and people."

— **Sarah Jane White**

"Our bodies have been contaminated by the dirty air, by the poisonous rains. I can feel it, the animals can feel it. When the snow melts and the livestock drink that water, they get sick. Coal is a major culprit of this problem."

— **Ed Becenti**

"We have suffered the burden of climate injustices for far too long; it's time to transition to cleaner energy now!"

— **Coleen Cooley**

Methane regulation: Time to act

Denise Fort, Research Professor, UNM School of Law; Chapter Energy Committee chair

New Mexicans are well aware that we have the dubious honor of contributing to an enormous methane hot spot that hovers over the Four Corners Area. Methane is a pernicious greenhouse gas and a pollutant that affects health at ground level.

And lost methane means lost revenues, because royalties and taxes would otherwise be owed on it.

The Obama Administration is moving forward with methane regulation. The regulations take two forms: one directed at lessees on federal lands (BLM regulations) and the other proposed by EPA to regulate air emissions from operations on all lands. We work with an active coalition of environmental groups and affected citizens to support these regulations. Four of our five congressional representatives have indicated their support for federal regulation, along with Attorney General Hector Balderas.

Methane pollution is weird. It's really just natural gas, which the operators don't find worth capturing for a variety of reasons. Leakage occurs when a well is first developed and is exacerbated in fracking by the use of fluids intended to replace water. It can occur in the transport of gas through pipelines and in the processing of gases. Most visibly, flaring is a means of burning off unwanted gas. But why would a company burn off a seemingly valuable resource? The reason typically is that there are no pipelines near an oil well (oil and gas are often co-produced), and the price of oil is sufficiently high that the company doesn't want to build a pipeline and capture gas. Poor maintenance practices are also involved, as field research is beginning to indicate that a few outliers are responsible for a large percentage of leaks.

The interests of the oil and gas companies and their contractors aren't the same as those who own the land (we the people, in the case of BLM lands) or those who receive royalties or other revenues from oil and gas development (including the state). The damage to the earth and our future from these emissions is significant.

What can we do? In the short run, we need to be vocal about the damage caused by methane and companies' responsibility to stop these emissions. The proposed regulations are good, but not sufficient, so we should anticipate further refinement. Industry is responding with a familiar, and inconsistent, refrain: the regulations are too expensive, and we're already doing what they require. (Huh?) The industry may be waiting for the end of the Obama Administration in hopes of a more pliant president. That has obvious implications for us in electoral terms but also suggests that we need to persuade a lot more people that these regulations make sense. For example, the Colorado legislature enacted these controls at a state level. We also need that buy-in from our legislators. Bottom line: **let Chapter Director Camilla Feibelman know if you can help: camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org.**



National Park Service

Fajada Butte, sacred site of the “sun dagger” petroglyph at Chaco Canyon, is visible from the latest drilling sites approved by New Mexico’s Oil Conservation Division. The BLM has leased 68,000 acres for oil and gas drilling to both the north and south of Chaco since January.

Chaco leasing continues

By Teresa Seamster, Northern New Mexico Group, and Robert Tohe, Our Wild America

A massive surge of approvals by BLM and the Oil Conservation Division for oil companies like WPX and Encana to drill closer to native communities near Chaco Canyon led to a recent meeting of concerned groups with U.S. Sen. Tom Udall's legislative staff in Santa Fe.

Sierra Club, Navajo allottee and former councilor Daniel Tso, staff member Robert Tohe and Western Environmental Law Center advocates met with Udall staffer Anthony Sedillo in September, detailing the problems faced by Navajo residents in the Lybrook, Counselor and Nageezi communities.

First, the amount of acreage that has been leased and approved for drilling both north and south of the Chaco Cultural National Historic Park has jumped to more than 68,000 acres of new development since January.

Second, the Oil Conservation Division (OCD) recently approved 62 wells in the near vicinity of the Nageezi Chapter House, placing residents in close proximity with a massive swath of drilling and fracking sites.

Third, the testimony of WPX's lawyer in August shows that “due diligence” in notifying Navajo allottees of



Take action

WPX has made a request to BLM to construct a pipeline to transport crude oil, natural gas, produced water and liquid hydrocarbons from West Lybrook to its central delivery point. The BLM's public-comment period ends Oct. 16. Western Refining has requested a crude-oil pipeline from its Lybrook facility. The BLM's public-comment period for that project also ends Oct. 16. To comment, go to BLM_NM_Comments@blm.gov. **To get involved and learn more, contact Teresa Seamster or Robert Tohe, tc.seamster@gmail.com or robert.tohe@sierraclub.org.**

the company's lease agreement and intent to drill on their land was woefully inadequate, consisting of a single mailing to unverified addresses with no follow-up to thousands of landowners. Further, a single public meeting in Farmington was attended by only a few dozen people due to the long distance from affected communities and lack of notification in any Navajo-language media outlets, radio or local newsletters.

Tso, of Ojo Encino, summed up what many residents are seeing:

“The approvals by OCD

look like a quilt of units equaling more than 68,000 acres of BLM and Individual Indian Allotments. The directions of the horizontal drilling on the approved units look like circuit boards.”

Testimony has been submitted to the Oil Conservation Division of people experiencing nausea, sudden severe headaches, chest tightness and many other health problems. There are no safeguards for Lybrook Community School, half a mile from a big operations yard that has four flaring stacks.

Tom Singer of Western

Environmental Law Center said upcoming EPA methane standards can help protect communities by covering a greater geographic area of methane's footprint from oil and gas emissions, citing ozone and toxic emissions over the Albuquerque South Valley. He said BLM's current “voluntary reporting” standard, wherein only 10 out of more than 450 companies are reporting fracking ingredients, is inadequate.

Tso told Sedillo that the Navajo Nation has little to show in tangible benefits for all this — no new schools, paved roads or hospitals.

“The tsunami of fracking activity, when it is actually seen, felt and tasted, will be too late,” Tso said. “Over 150 wells and companion tanks of produced water and crude oil and compressors and the connecting pipelines will be the overcape of the pristine scenery — a devastated landscape.”

A joint letter has been prepared to Udall urging a halt to new drilling until the BLM completes the Mancos Shale-San Juan Basin Resource Management Plan amendment and related environmental-impact study. Also, the groups are requesting congressional support for the Navajo Chapter House resolutions to request mitigation of cumulative impacts of polluted water, toxic air emissions, incessant noise, light pollution, oil spills, severe land-surface damage and destroyed sacred sites resulting from this intense ongoing development.

EPE on front lines of war on solar

Ratepayers, community members fighting back in Las Cruces, El Paso

By Jim Tolbert

El Pasoans, including members of State Sen. José Rodríguez's Sustainable Energy Advisory Committee, are coalescing around a plan to stop the El Paso Electric Company's attempt to kill the solar energy industry in El Paso. Not only does EPE want to raise everyone's rates by as much as 12 percent, it wants to penalize photovoltaic solar energy users with a 24 percent increase.

Recently Eco El Paso, an organization that promotes eco-sensitive and energy-efficient community planning, building design, construction and facility maintenance in El Paso, has tentatively agreed to become an intervenor in the rate hike case before the Public Utilities Commission.

The El Paso Sierra Club Group Executive Committee voted to support Eco El Paso and pledged \$1,000 toward legal expenses.

Using language employed by the Koch Brothers and ALEC, EPE joins a nationwide campaign by utilities and the oil, gas and coal industries to misinform the public about solar energy. Solar users are referred to by EPE CEO Tom Shockley as "free-loaders" or "free riders." EPE's propaganda paints solar users as being subsidized by the utility while relying on non-solar users to expand and maintain the grid.

Non-solar users need to understand two shocking facts. First, as ratepayers they have been paying for the expansion of EPE production facilities even though demand in El Paso has been falling with more energy-efficient homes and appliances. EPE has found that the grid is a valuable market. El Pasoans pay for production while EPE sells excess energy to other utilities through the grid.

The other fact is that EPE doesn't subsidize solar users; solar users subsidize EPE. Solar users sell electricity to EPE for 2.5 cents, and EPE resells it for 10-plus cents. Solar reduces transmission and distribution costs on the grid and wear and tear on equipment such as transformers. What may be solar energy's most valuable contribution to the El Paso Southwest is that it requires no water except to clean the panels perhaps twice a year. How many gallons of water does it take to frack a well for the natural gas that heats even more water to drive the turbines to make electricity? Millions and millions.

To learn more about the benefits of solar energy and the efforts by people in El Paso to oppose EPE's efforts to destroy the solar energy industry, follow www.elpasonaturally.blogspot.com and the Facebook page of Citizens Against El Paso Electric's Attack on Solar: [facebook.com/groups/899844460100771](https://www.facebook.com/groups/899844460100771).



Photo courtesy Solar Smart Living

A Solar Smart Living employee works on solar panels for the Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility in El Paso. Solar Smart Living CEO Larry Perea said El Paso Electric's proposed penalties for residential solar users could kill jobs in the industry.

Lagging in Las Cruces: EPE, please explain

By Stephen Fischmann

Our local electric utility, El Paso Electric (EPE), just submitted its 20-year operating plan for approval by the Public Regulation Commission. It's a real wallet-buster for consumers, and a head-scratcher for anyone who follows the utility industry. If you like history, it makes for a revealing excursion into 1960s energy-industry thinking. Here are just a few of the many plan features that can use some explaining:

Plant Investment

Four newly built gas-fired power plants dubbed Montana 1-4 are projected to run an average of just 150 hours per year through 2034. When obtaining final regulatory approval to construct the facilities in September 2013, EPE said each plant would operate 3,500 hours per year. The four new plants will cost a total of \$370 million to put in service.

Consumers now stand to be charged billions of dollars to keep mostly idle facilities open for 40 years. Is this a case of inept planning, or a deliberate deception? Either way, should customers be asked to pay for it?

EPE, please explain. (And I hope our attorney general is listening!)

The plan shows five addi-

tional existing power plants operating between zero and 40 hours per year until they go out of service between 2020 and 2024. That means ratepayers will be stuck with maintenance and financing costs for a total of nine power plants that are idle 99 percent of the time. And be required to pay EPE an annual 10 percent return on all that wasted investment to boot!

EPE, please explain again.

Reducing peak demand

The only excuse EPE has for operating nine plants less than 1% of the time is that they are needed to meet peak electricity demand spikes on hot summer afternoons. If you're thinking there must be far less costly ways to meet peak power demand, you are right. Adopt proven strategies to reduce peak power use!

A simple pricing strategy has been shown to reduce peak demand in homes by 20 to 40 percent. Charge a steep premium for power used during a few peak-demand summer afternoon hours, and offset it with an even steeper discount for power used during non-peak hours. Called "Time of Use" rate plans, consumers who have voluntarily adopted them report significant cost savings with no loss of comfort.

Well-designed peak-demand rate plans have proven so effec-

Take action

EPE's rate cases have nationwide implications for solar energy. You can participate by commenting to the PRC in New Mexico and PUC in Texas, and by contacting your local elected officials. Please contact riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org to learn more.

tive that California is requiring time-of-use rates for all residential electric customers by 2020. EPE's current time-of-use program is so awful that less than 100 of its 83,000 New Mexico residential customers have signed on. Their 20-year plan foot-draggs with a vaguely defined study and pilot.

EPE, please explain.

Other ways to reduce peak demand include incentives for installation of peak energy-control devices, expanded energy efficiency upgrades, and a multitude of targeted ratepayer incentive strategies. Rapidly falling prices for batteries that store non-peak power for later use promise even more peak-reduction opportunities in the near future.

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission staffers estimated that system-wide peak demand could economically be cut

by 20 percent as far back as 2009. Technology advances are rapidly increasing that potential. Yet, the new El Paso Electric plan establishes no peak-demand reduction goals and no roadmap for stepped-up reduction efforts.

EPE, please explain.

Renewable Energy

Solar power consistently pencils out as a least-cost power source in our area, and costs continue to fall. As entire nations and individual states set goals of 50 percent renewable energy or more, EPE's plan calls for a measly 7 percent, in spite of a state law requiring 20 percent renewable energy by 2020!

Corporations like Google and Wal-Mart are by passing utilities to purchase cheap renewable power directly from other sources. Stand-alone home solar panel plus battery systems are projected to provide lower-cost power than utilities within 10 years. Defecting EPE consumers could leave remaining customers with a huge tab for today's bloated plant and transmission investments. Despite these developments, EPE's 20-year plan assumes a world of captive customers forced to accept whatever costs are shoved down their throats.

Steve Fischmann is a former New Mexico state senator and former corporate strategic planner.

Southern Group endorses Mayor Miyagishima

By Ken Newton
Southern New Mexico
Group

The Las Cruces city elections, to be held on Nov. 3, include the mayoral race, three City Council races and a municipal-judge race.

The Sierra Club Southern New Mexico Group has endorsed the presiding mayor, Ken Miyagishima, who is running against former City Councilor Miguel Silva and businesswoman Eugina Ortega.

Ken has demonstrated his commitment to creating a livable Las Cruces for all the city's residents. He has rejected the narrow view that our prosperity can be measured by the profits of a few, but must instead include quality of life issues for all.

Two-term councilor for District 4 and New Mexico



Miyagishima

Wilderness Alliance staff member Nathan Small is stepping down. Jack Eakman, a healthcare administrator, is running against Gilbert Vasquez, a former sprinkler fitter for fire-suppression systems, to replace Nathan in District 4. District 2 race has incumbent Greg Smith running against Philip VanVeen. The race to fill Miguel Silva's position as District 1 Councilor includes Kasandra Gandara, Eli Guzman, and Steve Calderazzo.

Southern New Mexico Group Executive Committee

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Photo by Neysa Hardin

Americas High School students in El Paso Group's Sierra Student Coalition performed a reader's theater of the children's story 'The Campfire that Changed America' to fourth-graders at Loma Verde Elementary on Sept. 8.

El Paso students acting up

By Neysa Hardin
El Paso Group Sierra Student
Coalition Leader

On Sept. 8, Americas High School Sierra Student Coalition partnered with the Chamizal National Memorial to celebrate International Literacy Day.

SSC students performed a reader's theater of the children's story "The Campfire that Changed America" to fourth-graders at Loma Verde Elementary. The students re-enacted the Yosemite camping trip between President Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club, that led to the establishment of our national parks and monuments.

"Teaching little kids about the importance of preserving natural places is important so that when they grow up, they will want to take care of our planet," said Julia Castillo, who played President Roosevelt.

Americas High School Sierra Student Coalition students presented a copy of the book to Loma Verde's librarian to add to

the school's library collection.

At the end of the performance, Ranger Olivares and Centennial Ambassador Herrera from the Chamizal National Memorial provided every fourth-grader with a free National Park pass as part of the National Parks' "Every Kid in a Park" centennial celebration program.

Americas High School Sierra Student Coalition students are capitalizing on the centennial birthday of the National Park Service to introduce youth to the outdoors and to teach the importance of conservation.

Throughout the 2015-2016 school year, Americas High School Sierra Student Coalition students will visit national parks and monuments around the West Texas and Southern New Mexico area to spread the message about preservation of America's public lands.

To learn more about joining our Sierra Student Coalition, contact Neysa Hardin at nrhardin@yahoo.com.

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House panel asks tough questions on Gila diversion

By Dan Lorimier

New Mexico's interim Legislative Water and Natural Resources Committee met in August in Silver City to hear about the proposed Gila River diversion project.

The public and many officials have objected to the project for several reasons: There are real questions about whether a diversion can be successfully constructed; cost estimates have ballooned to \$1 billion, which would have to be borne by New Mexico taxpayers and water users; and the diversion would sacrifice our state's last free-flowing river.

About 175 concerned citizens packed the meeting room at WNMU.

The committee heard presentations by the town of Silver City, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Interstate Stream Commission and the newly formed N.M. Central Arizona Project entity. Silver City chose not to become part of the CAP entity with all its uncertainties and risks. The Interstate Stream Commission reported that the project was going along fine, ignoring the layers of problems facing diversion plans. The Bureau of Reclamation had big concerns with the ability of the CAP entity to finance, build and operate the project.

Questions from committee members revealed a general sense of incredulity towards Gila diversion efforts. Questions ranged from "How can New Mexico know so little after 10 years of financial and engineering studies and now be stuck having to make huge technical, financial and environmental decisions without sufficient information?" to "Did you study the impacts to tourism, species protection and other local impacts when you produced the latest cost/benefit review?" Bureau of Reclamation's answer to that question was a flat "no."

When asked where the extra \$900 million for this project would come from after federal funds are exhausted, CAP Chair and Hidalgo County Commissioner Darr Shannon said "That's a good question! This water may be expensive, but we just cannot let it flow out of New Mexico. Members of the CAP all know how to use a shovel."

Committee members seemed to leave frustrated with those answers. It is unclear how these frustrations will be played out in the 2016 Legislative Session.

Signing up to protect the Caja Wildlife



The first of several signs prohibiting off-road travel in sensitive habitat has gone up on the Caja del Rio. In a collaborative effort with BLM-Taos office and volunteers from the Forest Service and Northern Group, the small but important livestock pond area east of Tetilla Peak has been mapped and monitored for Burrowing Owls and Gunnison's Prairie Dogs.

At the pond, invasive weeds have grown into an almost impenetrable border, protecting a myriad of tiny spadefoot toads, bullfrogs, sandpipers and migrating birds.

"The rain has brought back the amphibians and migratory wildlife to this area that looked like a barren landscape last year," said Teresa Seamster, wildlife contact for the Sierra Club Northern New Mexico Group. "BLM and Forest Service biologists and GIS experts have volunteered their time to help protect this lovely mesa, and we value their efforts enormously."

Above: Happy volunteers at the first pond sign.



Photo by Teresa Seamster

Above: At the Historic Grove, past board members, staff, scientists, biologists and supporters of the Valles Caldera turned out to celebrate the long-awaited transfer of the trust to the National Park Service as a new national preserve on July 25.

About 100 attended the last trustees meeting of the Valles Caldera National Trust and the transfer ceremony, and had many personal stories about the long road of conflict and collaboration this beautiful preserve has traveled.

Meetings and Events

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

The **Conservation Committee** resumes

its monthly meetings at 7 p.m. every third Tuesday of the month in the fall. Conservation Committee meetings are held at the Sierra Club Santa Fe office, 1807 Second St., Suite 45.

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

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.



Northern New Mexico Group Contacts

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How to go solar

By Sandrine Gaillard, Northern New Mexico Group

Switch to Solar NOW has been the message carried through by our dedicated Solar Summer 2015 team, a joint effort among Sierra Club members, officials and residents of Santa Fe County, the City of Santa Fe and the state of New Mexico.

It is time to focus our efforts for another 14 months to Solarize Santa Fe while state and federal tax credits remain in effect, allowing every homeowner in New Mexico who pays thousands of dollars in taxes to install solar panels on their roofs at a very reasonable cost. And what better place than New Mexico to install solar panels, given our 300 sunny days a year?

Here's how the math works:

1. Start by finding out your monthly electricity consumption. A PNM bill shows how much you've used over the last 12 months.

2. Think about all the places in your home where you can reduce your electricity consumption. Make sure you've switched all your lightbulbs to CFL or LEDs. I found a few incandescent 100-watt bulbs in my house when I did that, and CFLs or LEDs use about 10 watts!

3. A good example is electricity usage of 450 kWh per month. Over a year, that's 5,400 kWh, requiring a 3-kW system. Depending on the company and types of solar panels, this will cost between \$10,000 and \$13,000.

A \$12,000 system will end up costing you \$7,200, given the 40 percent in tax credits available until the end of 2016 (30 percent federal and 10 percent state). Solar panels are getting cheaper every year, so you may think you can wait, but since these tax credits reduce the cost by 40 percent, you can cut years off your wait now.

4. If you are connected to the grid and are a PNM customer, on the months where you use less, your system will send electricity back to the grid, and you will get a check from PNM. On months when you use more, you will have to pay PNM a few dollars.

5. If your house needs a new roof, do it before getting your system installed. Most roof systems will not require that any holes be drilled, as these may cause leaks. Also, any part of the roof that you have to fix to install your system is tax-deductible as part of the installation cost!

Here's how you can get started:

PNM rate increases make solar a better bet

By Shane Woolbright

In my effort to keep Sierra Club members up to date on why they should install solar panels, the return on those panels has gotten much better due to the coming hikes that PNM will add to our bills.

If you'll remember, my solar panels cost a bit more than \$12,000 for 3,000 watts from Sungevity. Sungevity donated \$750 to the Sierra Club as part of its promotion of SC and solar power. My tax credits brought my cost



Shane Woolbright

An installer works on solar panels for Shane Woolbright's home in December. See Shane's article below to learn about the economics of his system.

1. For personalized information, contact Santa Fe County Energy Programs Specialist Craig O'Hare (see article at right).
2. Keep in mind that a one- to two-month window is necessary from the time you start investigating to the time the panels are providing you with the electricity you need to run your home.
3. Get a few quotes from solar companies.
4. Solar companies will help you with the tax paperwork. If you can't pay out of pocket, or can only pay a portion, they will help you with financing.

And finally, here's how you can

help get the word out:

1. You don't have to know the ins and outs of solar systems to start spreading the word! All you have to do is share this information with your family, friends and anyone you know who might want a system installed.
2. Don't forget to mention Craig O'Hare's contact info!
3. If you want to give a presentation to your homeowner's association or neighborhood, contact me and I will pass on a great presentation by 350.org's Tom Solomon called "The Low Cost of Going Solar."

So Switch to Solar NOW!

Contact: sandrine.sierraclub@gmail.com

down \$4,920, so the net cost of the system was \$6,630.

I have not paid a power bill this year, and my savings on my power bill project to \$720. PNM also sends me checks for the amount of solar generation I send back to the grid. Those checks will exceed \$120.

With PNM's proposed rate hike of about 6 percent included, total savings will be around \$900 annually for the \$6,630 invested.

I get a great return, and I'm not

contributing nearly so much to climate change.

If members will send me their PNM bill, I'll be happy to let you know what you ought to consider in the way of solar panels, or you can contact Sungevity directly by emailing tlopez@sungevity.com. Sungevity is offering a special deal in October: \$1,000 discount for you, \$1,000 to the Rio Grande Chapter if you go solar with them.

Think you can't afford solar? Think again

By Craig O'Hare

If you're a PNM customer, around 90 percent of your electricity is coming from coal, nuclear and natural gas power plants hundreds of miles away. Why not have most of your electricity come via the clean, renewable sun from panels a few feet above your head on your roof?

Getting off of fossil fuels has always been the right thing to do with respect to the environment, public health and preventing global climate disruption. In the past, however, going solar was a pricey proposition viable, for the most part, only for the well-to-do.

That's no longer true! Solar electric (photovoltaic – "PV") systems are about 60 percent less expensive than they were just 5 to 6 years ago. In addition, there's a 40 percent (30 percent federal, 10 percent state) income-tax credit that makes PV totally cost-effective and viable for even middle-income households.

The finances work out such that you're basically trading your usual monthly electric utility payment for a monthly loan payment of about the same amount. If you live in Santa Fe County and your gross household income is less than \$104,000 per year, look into a loan from Homewise (983-9473, www.Homewise.org) — a low- and moderate-income lender. In other counties, check with a credit union or your local bank. Many solar companies also offer attractive financing.

There are two additional financial benefits of PV to consider: 1) You're immune to future electric utility rate increases. That means that your financial benefit continues to increase over time. 2) The resale value of your home is higher now that you have a solar electric power plant on your property.

There's something satisfying about not paying to bring fossil-fuel-derived power into your home every day. I haven't paid an electric bill in the 4 years I've had my system on my roof.

I can't overemphasize the point that the biggest myth I continue to encounter is that solar remains cost-prohibitive. In addition to being a lifelong Sierra Club member, I work for Santa Fe County installing solar on county facilities and letting the public know how cost-effective solar has become. The most common comment I receive is "I had no idea that solar was so affordable. I've wanted to go solar for a while now but thought it was still just for the wealthy."

Even if you don't live in Santa Fe County, feel free to access my website to learn more: santafecountynm.gov/public_works/energy. While the list of solar businesses is meant for Santa Fe County, most of them also install in Bernalillo and Sandoval counties. If you live in Santa Fe County, **contact me for free solar advice and technical assistance (992-3044, cohare@santafecountynm.gov)**. The time to go solar is now!

Pajarito Group re-energizes together

By Jody Benson
Group newsletter editor

What happened with the bag?

Not enough of us showed up; Council didn't have enough votes to pass the 10-cent fee; the Savethebaggers showed up in vocal droves. The motion that finally passed the Council was simply to "Continue to Educate." The Republicans on the Council don't want to "spend County money on a thing this trivial," so the mandate is that it's up to the citizens — you, us — to do the educating.

Save-the-baggers are already doing their educational darndest to proselytize that paying for a single-use shopping bag will infringe on their consumer freedom and cause the sidewalks to be paved in doggie doo (these are actual, loud objections). But those of us who care about the Earth are not giving up either, and the good news? Since the Council's rejection, as we continue to participate in informational tabling events, we have heard from people who were actually educated from our efforts, as in: "I never really thought of it before, but I'm trying to remember my own bags."

Keep talking about it. Sooner or later it'll happen; the Earth cannot sustain this suffocating amount of waste. We hope our not-so-progressive town won't be the last in America to join the concerned of the world.

Annual Beer & Brats

After all the strategy sessions, the letters to the editor and op-eds, after hours of meetings with the Sustainability Board and County Council — after our initial setback when the Council blew the bag down the road yet again, about 30 Pajarito members and guests joined to re-energize and re-Group at the annual Beer, Brats, and (vegetarian-option) Burgers Picnic.

Chapter Chair David Coss reiterated the four focus areas:



Photo by Michael Di Rosa

On Sept. 19, the Pajarito Group's Andy and Shu-Mei Chung celebrated their 51st anniversary with about 30 other Sierrans, including Rio Grande Chapter Chair David Coss.

water, wildlife, public lands, and climate, and as he listed the Chapter successes, he reminded us that every success depends on years — decades — of dedicated struggle. And even when we smack headlong into a brick wall (or into Mary Katherine Ray's thousand guns defending the pile of corpses from coyote-killing contests, or Pajarito's smash into Save-the-baggers' 24/7 blog), with the Sierra Club's expertise and commitment behind us, we can bang our heads until, brick by brick, the wall falls down.

Coss also reminded us that the success of our issues depends on whatever administration controls the state or nation. If we want to continue to Enjoy the Planet, we must Protect it; at minimum, add your voice to the online action alerts calling for protections for public lands, water, and wildlife, for reducing fossil fuels by choosing job-creating, local clean energy, and legislating mandatory reduction of bag waste in Los Alamos. The act of being informed, then working for the candidate who will represent your issue, voting for that candidate, and continuing to be engaged with whoever is in power, is critical.

Finally, don't neglect your passion. Work for what you love. If you love wildlife, you can dedicate your life to saving

the bear, cougar and coyote, the elk, otter, cutthroat, and eagle. All those hours of saving lives will have meaning. Public lands? Clean energy? All of the above? The effort is toward love, not just frustration or impotent rage. Plenty of people share your passion, and many of them will be willing to work with you. Commit to your passion — even for a few hours a week — and watch your world change along with the hearts and minds of those whom you rally to the cause. Contact any of our Executive Committee members or Issues Chairs listed below to spread the love.

The Parable of the Bison

Over extreme chocolate cake with royal icing at the end of the picnic, Dave and Donna Gemeinhart told this story:

Driving through Yosemite they saw in the distance something like a mirage of traffic shimmering within the heat haze of car exhaust. As they approached, the first thing they were able to make out was the behemoth of a Winnebago moving at what seemed like an inch a minute. Then they saw what truly led the line — a huge bull bison, walking smack dab down the middle of the

road.

With a wink and a nod, the bull passed the Gemeinharts' now-motionless car. He turned to grin at them, his huge black head filled with the inherited memory of how, 140 years ago, men with guns shot his ancestors to near extinction from trains, to leave the plains soaked in blood and the Native Americans without sustenance.

"But," said his grin, "We're still here."

Despite the fact that black swaths of asphalt have replaced the black herds of bison, despite that tract homes for humans have replaced habitat for antelope and black-footed ferrets, and that gas development replaced prairie grouse and grass — because of the far-sightedness of a few committed leaders, there are still territories wherein dwell astonishments.

And on he walked, momentarily replacing a long line of insignificant human goals and deadlines with the experience of awe and wonder. Progress? What defines it? The electronic device demanding your attention? The speed of your Wi-Fi? Eliminating nature and all the great beasts to make a road faster and parking lots bigger?

Remember me, he says, and how this slow walk transformed your soul.

Meetings

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

October 6: Terri Martin, Southwest Regional Organizer of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance will speak on the "Campaign to Protect Utah's Redrock Wildlands," and the important role New Mexicans can play. Terri and SUWA work closely with the national staff of the Sierra Club and the local Utah Chapter on the Utah Redrock Wilderness effort. You may already be a supporter of this critical effort, so please come join us to meet Terri and discover what we can do to protect this singular and beloved landscape.

Nov. 4: Robert Gibson, chair of the Los Alamos Future Energy Resources Committee, presents: "Future Energy Resources for Los Alamos County."

Los Alamos County's Board of Public Utilities (BPU) adopted a goal in 2013 to "become a carbon-neutral electric provider by 2040." This year, BPU appointed an ad hoc Future Energy Resources (FER) Committee to recommend a definition of "carbon-neutral," future electrical energy resources in that context, and policy regarding distributed energy generation (i.e., "rooftop solar"). This talk will summarize LA County's overall energy use, energy supplies, and carbon emissions, and then outline the study and recommendations of the FER Committee.

Dec. 2: Update on the Smart Grid Project. The Los Alamos Department of Public Utilities, Los Alamos National Laboratory, and Japan's New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organization teamed to develop smart-grid technology — new-generation electrical power networks that efficiently control and balance the supply and demand of power through digital information that integrates small and large-scale renewable energy sources. This project terminated on March 31. Please come hear about the results of this unique, truly progressive collaboration. (See www.losalamosnm.us/utilities/Pages/LosAlamosSmartGrid.aspx)

Who wants to show the movie "Bag It"?

The Pajarito Group has the DVD (with public screening license) for the movie *Bag It* — the film that inspired us to take on the effort to Ban the Bag Los Alamos.

This DVD is available to be shown to clubs or house parties. If you would like to reserve it, please email Mark Jones: Jonesmm1@comcast.net.

Pajarito Group Contact Information

pajarito.riograndesierraclub.org

Executive Committee

Chair: Mark Jones, Jonesmm1@comcast.net, 505/662-9443
Vice-chair/Secretary: Jody Benson, echidanaejb@gmail.com, 505/662-4782
Howard Barnum, hnbarnum@aol.com
Iris Chung, itlchung@hotmail.com
Michael DiRosa, mddbmm@gmail.com, 505/663-0648
Nona Girardi, nonamg@aol.com

Committee Chairs

Bag Ban; Treasurer: Mark Jones
Conservation; Outings: Outings Leadership Training: Michael DiRosa, mddbmm@gmail.com, 505/663-0648
Environmental Education: Pauline Wilder, xxmpxx@gmail.com, 505/662-7768
Global Warming: Charles Keller, alfonso@cybermesa.com, 505/662-7915
Grazing, Natl Forests, Wetlands, Wilderness: David Gemeinhart,

ddgem50@comcast.net, 505/428-0360
Mining: David Torney, dtorney@valor-net.com, 575/829-3433
Newsletter Editor, Publicity, Sprawl, Transportation, Endangered Species/Wildlife: Jody Benson
Open Spaces, Caldera Issues: Howard Barnum, hnbarnun@aol.com
Political, Cool Cities, Membership Co-Chair: Mark Jones
Water Issues: Barbara Calef, bfcalf@yahoo.com, 505/662-3825

Hikes and Events, continued from Page 16

marciaskillman@hotmail.com

Saturday, Oct. 31: Stroll through the beautiful autumn Bosque with stops for short poetry readings to help us deepen our connection to this forest and river. We will also learn about conservation efforts and wildlife sightings in this area, as well as visit some hidden land art. Moderate 3-mile loop through both young and mature forest, no elevation gain. No dogs. Limit 15 people. Bring: Hat, sunscreen, water, and binoculars (optional). RSVP: M.J. Zimmerman, mjzim@hotmail.com or 505-341-4534.

Saturday, Oct. 31: Moderate hike to Giant Footprint Ruins. Beautiful hike near Jemez Springs to the top of the mesa. About 6-8 miles. The hike starts with a possible stream crossing and then a very steep climb of about 500 feet up an old road to the mesa top and then cross-country to the ruins. Great views from atop the mesa through pine trees. Marcia Skillman, (505) 699-3008, marciaskillman@hotmail.com.

November

Saturday-Sunday, Nov. 7-8: Moderate Backpack to Blue Mountain. This trip in the Apache Kid Wilderness begins at an 8,200-foot-elevation trailhead and requires high-clearance, 4-wheel-drive vehicles for access. This is an 8-mile round trip with 2,000 feet of net elevation change. Our summit camp will enjoy sunset, sunrise, and outstanding views. Nearby Cub Spring will supply water. Some participants may wish to spend an extra night at the trailhead. John Walton, (915) 539-5797, walton@utep.edu.

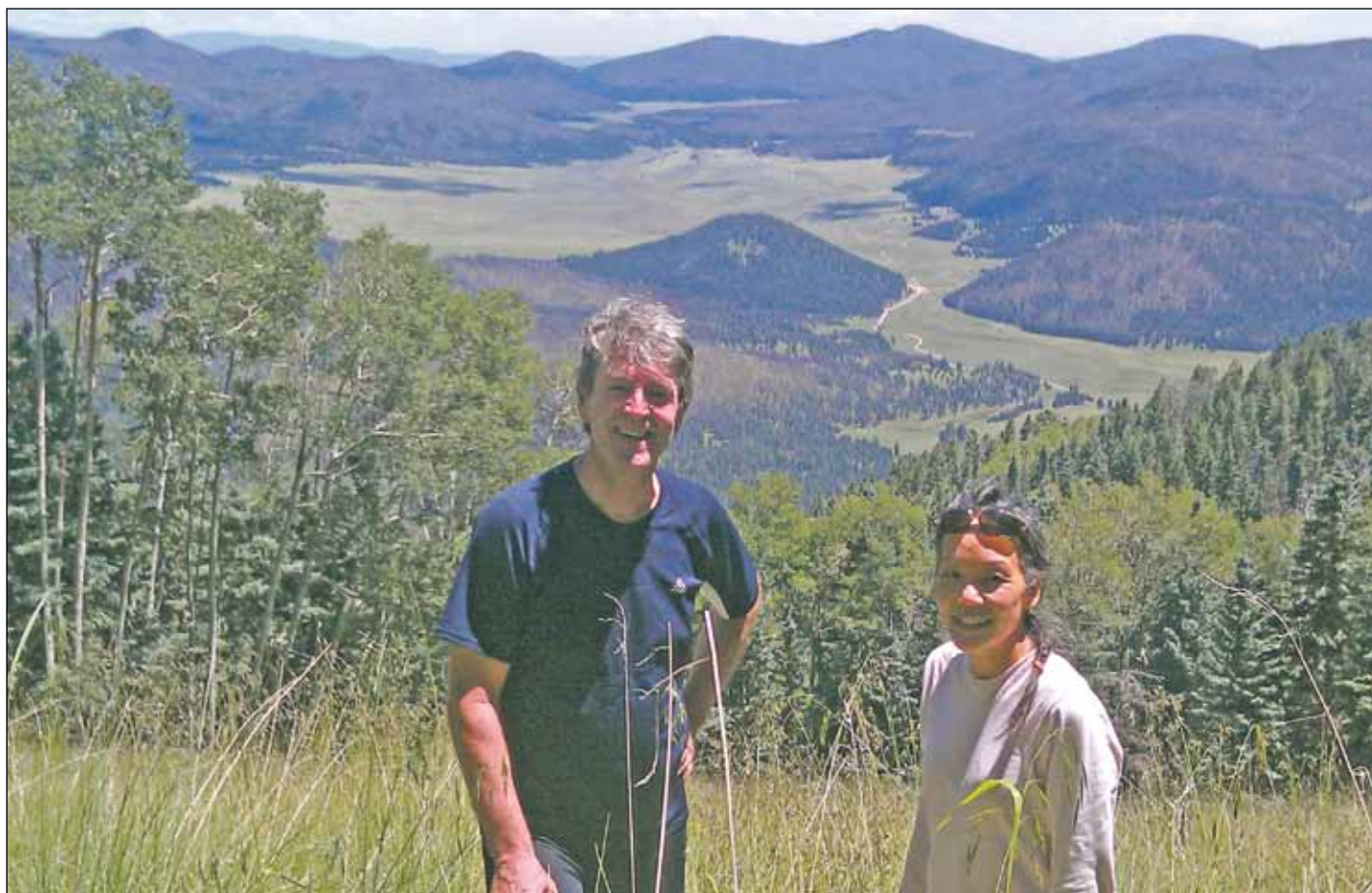
Saturday, Nov. 7: Strenuous Tetilla Peak loop hike, about 12-14 miles and 1,000-foot gain, mostly off trail, fascinating area. Michael Di Rosa, work: (505) 667-0095 or 231-9629 mddbbm@gmail.com.

Sunday, Nov. 8: Strenuous hike in South Sandias on Hawkwatch/Crest/South Peak/Embudito/Tres Pistoles loop, about 11 miles with 3,000 feet of gain. Hawkwatch is steep, loose and vague at times but short. Great views. Two dogs OK. Tobin Oruch, (505) 690-6253, tobin.oruch@yahoo.com.

Sunday, Nov. 8: Bosquitos Bosque Treasure Hunt with Noel Chilton, noon to 2 p.m. Learn how to use compasses with sundials while learning about the bosque. All ages. Make your own navigation tools to use as you discover new lands. Your handmade compass and sundial will guide you as you encounter strange creatures! Open Space Visitor Center. Bring: water bottle and snacks. Contact: Sarita Streng 505-288-8713 saritastreng@yahoo.com

Sunday, Nov. 8: Moderate hike to Alamo Canyon Rim in Bandelier. About 6 miles, 1,000-foot gain. Limit of 8 hikers, no dogs allowed in Bandelier. Bring park pass if you have it. Dag Ryan, (505) 466-4063.

Saturday, Nov. 14: Fall hike in the Bosque. We'll hike the west-side stretch of the Bosque from Montañito to the Oxbow (about 1.5 miles). The stand of cottonwoods behind the Bosque School should be beautiful this time of year. Then we'll take a side trail to the river and talk briefly about the new embayment installed by the Corps of Engineers. Then on to the new pond at the edge of the Oxbow. There we will talk about the Corps project and the importance of the Oxbow and its place in the Rio Grande Valley State Park. Meet: Parking lot just



Michael Di Rosa

From trip leader Michael Di Rosa on his July bike outing: 'We rode from the San Antonio hot springs into the Valles Caldera, with permission from the preserve, and then hauled up the northern rim to the summit of Cerro de la Garita for panoramic views of the valleys and volcanic remnants below on a beautiful day. Pictured are Hans Bakker and Iris Chung from our lunch spot overlooking the Valle Toledo, with Pajarito Mountain in the distance.'

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.

east of the SE corner of Montañito and Coors. RSVP Peter Kelling at cloudsand-water@juno.com.

Saturday, Nov. 14: Explore the Cañoncito — on the Placitas side of the Sandias. Strenuous hike going up Bart's and down Cañoncito trail. Total distance about 11 miles. Altitude change: about 3,500 feet. Steep trails. Limit 8 and 1 dog OK. Register by Nov. 12 with Odile.dlb@outlook.com.

Saturday, Nov. 14: Strenuous hike to North Sandia Peak. Starting at Tunnel Spring trailhead, we will hike to North Sandia Peak via Del Orno Trail, Trail 130B, and North Crest Trail, Trail 130. Our return will be via the 10K Trail, Trail 200, Osha Loop Trail, Trail 201, and Osha Spring Trail, Trail 247. We will need to set up a short car shuttle before starting the hike. Early start. Two or three dogs OK. About 14 miles and 4,000 foot elevation gain. Larry, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com, (505) 913-0589.

Sunday, Nov. 15: Moderate hike to stunning Kitchen Mesa at Ghost Ranch in Abiquiú, about 5 miles and 600-foot elevation gain. Alan Shapiro 505-424-9242 or nm5s@yahoo.com.

Saturday, Nov. 21: Bosque By Wheelchair at the Bachechi Open Space: This area, just outside the river's levees, has a forested and wetland area, in addition to a rose garden and educational center. The purpose of this outing is to enjoy the trail but also to see how well it works for people who use wheelchairs or other assistive devices and make

recommendations on how agencies can improve and care for these trails. If you need special assistance, please contact us beforehand. All are welcome on this outing. 10 a.m. to noon. 9521 Rio Grande Blvd NW. Please RSVP to Colston Chandler, 505-343-9498 or ccent@swcp.com.

Saturday, Nov. 21 (or 22): Moderate hike on La Luz to the overlook, about 9.5 miles and 1,200-foot elevation gain. Daisy Levine, 466-8338. Limit of eight hikers.

Sunday, Nov. 22: Moderate hike to White Mesa and travertine springs west of Bernalillo, about 7 miles and 500 feet of gain. Marcia Skillman, (505) 699-3008, marciaskillman@hotmail.com.

Sunday, Nov. 29: La Luz Lazy. Strenuous up and easy down. Lower tram to upper tram will be 8.5 miles on a steadily rising trail with 4,200-foot elevation gain. Relax with tram ride down to parking. Royal Drews, (505) 699-8713.

December

Saturday, Dec. 5: Beginner's Snowshoe Clinic. Ready to start snowshoeing? Rent snowshoes and poles or bring your own and learn the ups and downs of snowshoeing in our fluffy New Mexico snow. Even if you've snowshoed before, this class is a fun, easy day of playing in the snow to learn the basics of winter safety and exploring offtrail locations. Cancelled if poor snow. Marcia Skillman, (505) 699-3008, marciaskillman@hotmail.com.

Sunday, Dec. 6: Eye of the Sandias. Easy/moderate hike on the South Sandias. Total distance: 4 miles. Altitude change about 1,200 feet. Limit

12, and 2 dogs OK. Possible potluck after the hike. Register by Dec. 4 with Odile.dlb@outlook.com.

Sunday, Dec. 6: Moderate hike up Atalaya, Santa Fe's favorite workout near St. John's. About 7 miles with 1,781-foot elevation gain, steep at times. Royal Drews, (505) 699-8713.

Sunday, Dec. 6: Moderate hike on Blue Dot/Red Dot Loop in White Rock, 8 miles and 1,200 feet of gain. We'll hike down to the Rio Grande from the ball fields on the Blue Dot Trail, then follow the river down to the Red Dot Trail, climb to Pajarito Acres, and then take the White Rock Canyon Rim Trail back to our starting point. Mostly on trail but steep and loose in spots. Great views. Two dogs OK. Tobin Oruch, (505) 690-6253, tobin.oruch@yahoo.com.

Saturday, Dec. 12: Strenuous hike on Raven's Ridge in ski basin, maximum of 6 miles and 1,800 feet of gain. Marcia Skillman, (505) 699-3008, marciaskillman@hotmail.com.

Sunday, Dec. 13: Easy Galisteo Basin Preserve hike, a 4- to 5-mile loop at a modest pace, 500-foot gain. Nice 360-degree views and a few short steep sections to keep us warm. 1-2 dogs welcome. Lisa Bowdey, (505) 699-2953.

Saturday, Dec. 19: Strenuous snowshoe or hike depending on conditions. Early start. Two or three dogs OK. Larry, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com, (505) 913-0589.

Sunday, Dec. 20: Easy hike in the Nambé badlands. About 4 miles to see hoodoos up close and distant mountain panoramas. Alan Shapiro 505-424-9242 or nm5s@yahoo.com.

Go solar, help the chapter, get \$1,000 back

Federal tax credits for rooftop solar expire at the end of 2016 — now is the time to go solar! If you go solar with Sungevity in October, you get \$1,000 off your system, and Sungevity will donate \$1000 to the Rio Grande Chapter. Please visit sierraclub.org/solarhomes or call Sungevity at 855-438-7860 to learn more. The \$1,000 discount available only in October. Go for it!

October-December Hikes & Events

October

Friday, Oct. 2, to Sunday,

Oct. 4: Strenuous backpack in the Southern San Juan Wilderness in Southern Colorado. Starting at the Red Lake trailhead (about 25 miles North of Chama off Highway 17) we will take the Red Lake trail (#733) to the Continental Divide trail (#813) to the Valle Victoria trail (#731) and finally the Elk Creek trail (#731) to the Elk Creek trailhead. Early start. One or two dogs OK. About 30 miles with 2,500 feet elevation gain and a max elevation of 12,000 feet. Both camps will be above 11,000 feet Larry, lorenz. hughes@gmail.com, (505) 913-0589.

Saturday, October 3: Strenuous hike to Wheeler Peak from Red River by way of Trail 91, past Lost Lake and Horseshoe Lake, a strenuous, mostly on-trail route of about 18 miles total and 3,600 feet of gain. Expect an early start and stunning fall scenery. Michael Di Rosa, work: (505) 667-0095 or 231-9629 mddbbs@gmail.com.

Saturday, Oct. 3: Bosquitos plant walk, botanic gardening, and raptors! 1:45 to 5:15 p.m. Kid and all-ages event. Bosque Education Day at the Bachechi Open Space. We will attend three workshops: Plant Walk with Dara Saville of Albuquerque Herbalism; Botanic Drawing with Lisa Morgan; and Learn about Raptors with Lisa of Hawks Aloft. Bring: water bottle and snacks. Come to one or all three of these fun and educational classes. Please RSVP here. Questions: Sarita Streng 505-288-8713 saritastreng@yahoo.com.

Sunday, Oct. 4: Moderate dayhike to Hillsboro Peak. Leave from Emory Pass and climb 1,900 feet over 4.5 miles to the historic cabin and fire tower on the 10,001-foot summit. On a clear day this hike offers tremendous views to the east of Kingston, Hillsboro, Caballo Lake, and the mountain ranges beyond. Harry Newman, swtraveller@aol.com.

Thursday-Friday, Oct. 8-9: Moderate backpack to Little Creek. This 6-mile loop trip will begin and end at Woody's Corral, about one mile from the Gila Cliff Dwelling Visitor Center. There is a 970-foot climb over 3.25 miles to the ridge above Little Creek. After camping overnight at the creek, we will descend through EE Canyon and the cliff dwellings. Harry Newman, swtraveller@aol.com.

Saturday, Oct. 10: Exploring the last desert grassland. This all-day outing will take us through the largest remain-

16 Rio Grande Sierran



Tom Chymbor

Kathleen Burch balancing on the knife edge between Deception and Lake Peak, referred to by some as 'The Sidewalk' because it's as wide as a sidewalk. The Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter has strenuous, moderate and easy hikes almost every weekend — read our calendar and find one that fits you!

ing intact Chihuahuan Desert grassland, Otero Mesa. A mostly driving adventure to discover the ecology, wildlife and petroglyphs of this spectacular, threatened grassland. We'll drive to Alamo Mountain in the Cornudas Mountains, where hikers will have the option to scramble up the mountain. 8 a.m. Las Cruces. There will be a separate meeting place for El Paso hikers at 9 a.m. Joint hike Southern Group and El Paso Group, with Southwest Environmental Center. Easy to moderate. Bring lunch and plenty of water. Contact Howie Dash, 575-652-7550, howiedash@aol.com (Southern Group), or Jerry Kurtyka, 915-526-6297, jerrykurtyka@hotmail.com (El Paso Group).

Saturday, Oct 10: Strenuous hike to East Pecos Baldy — hopefully the fall colors will be in bloom! Early start. Two or three dogs OK. About 16 miles and 3,800-foot elevation gain. Larry, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com, (505) 913-0589.

Sunday, Oct. 11 (or 10): Easy hike to Coyote Call and Scooter Peak from the back side. Just 3 miles roundtrip with 1 mile off-trail. Elevation gain is 800 feet. Great views of the Valles Caldera. Alan Shapiro 505-424-9242 or nm5s@yahoo.com.

Saturday, Oct. 17: Bosque by wheelchair at Rio Bravo

What you need to know

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

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

Always contact leader before the outing to confirm participation and details. Please see riograndesierraclub.org/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.sierraclub.org with any subject and a message that says SUBSCRIBE RIO-NORTH-OUTINGS.

Riverside Picnic Area, Fishing Pier and Nature Walk. 10 a.m. to noon. This area includes a quarter-mile trail made of crushed gravel. There is ADA parking, an ADA fishing pier for the irrigation ditch and a picnic area. Those who want to can also explore some hard-packed dirt trails. All are welcome on this outing. Bring: Good shoes and wheels, walkers, crutches, canes, etc. water, hat, sunscreen, snack and lunch if you want to stay to picnic afterward. Contact: camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org, 505-715-8388.

Sunday, Oct. 18: Strenuous hike to Hermit's Peak near

Las Vegas. About 8 miles with 2,750-foot elevation gain. Side trip to Hermit's Cave. Great views and early start. Royal Drews, (505) 699-8713.

Sunday, Oct 18: Strenuous hike in the Sandias on Whitewash/Tres Pistoles/Embudo loop, about 10 miles and almost 3,000 feet of gain. Starts and ends at Embudo Cyn parking at east end of Indian School. The first two miles of the "trail" are very steep and loose, but then the wooded, pretty Whitewash Trail begins. After two more miles we'll reach Oso Pass. From there we continue on Tres Pistoles for 1.5 miles or

so to the Embudo Trail and return to the parking lot on it. Great views. Two dogs OK. Tobin Oruch, (505) 690-6253, tobin.oruch@yahoo.com.

Saturday, Oct. 24: Visit a hidden wetlands on the Rio Grande, 9-11 a.m. Explore the Albuquerque Bosque on the west side of the river, immediately north of Central Avenue and extending slightly beyond an old diversion canal that has been turned into a wetland for silvery minnows and water fowl. The 2-2.5 miles is fairly level walking. Limited to 20 walkers. Bring: insect repellent, good walking shoes, hat, sunscreen, binoculars, water and snack. RSVP to Colston Chandler, 505-343-9498 or ccent@swcp.com.

Sunday, Oct. 25: Fall colors in the Sandias — Crest trail, north from the Antennas, return via Ellis trail. Easy/moderate hike, High altitude (11,000 feet), total distance about 5 miles, small elevation change. Possible extension to see fall colors and view from Kiwanis cabin. Limit 10. 2 dogs OK. Register by Oct. 23: Odile.dlb@outlook.com.

Sunday, Oct. 25: Strenuous Hike to Pedernal, mesa near Abiquiú and Georgia O'Keeffe icon. About 8 miles and 1,900 feet of gain with an exciting scramble to the top. Marcia Skillman, (505) 699-3008,

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