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.

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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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As the BLM considers reforming its outdated coal-leasing program, community members turned out in force to decry the sometimes invisible but deadly costs of coal.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

PNM’s new San Juan plan and rate case
PNM’s new agreement requires it to make the case for coal in 2018. Its renewed rate-hike request is hard on low-income ratepayers. Page 6

Chaco leasing and drilling:
Advocates meet with Udall to try to stem tide of drilling. Page 9

Methane regulations — it’s time to act
Methane is a far more powerful heat-trapping gas than carbon dioxide, and new regulations could significantly reduce leaking from oil and gas drilling. Page 9

Voting in the Chapter election is for Sierra Club members only. Please send this ballot with the Club-member label information intact on the reverse side, or vote online — online voting will be available in November through email and at www.sierragrandescrub.org. To vote on paper, mail this completed ballot to: Sierra Club Election Committee, 9671 De Vargas Loop NE, Albuquerque NM 87109. Ballots must be postmarked by Nov. 16, 2015. Two-member households can each vote, using both boxes. Please also send your vote to: Sierra Club Election Committee, 9671 De Vargas Loop NE, Albuquerque NM 87109. Ballots must be postmarked by Nov. 16, 2015. Two-member households can each vote, using both boxes. Please also send your vote

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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 in 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 guns, killing nearly double the number of bears in the following years than previously. But NM Game and Fish went on 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 snare 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 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 land.

The most attention was that to allow mountain lions to be trapped and killed in brutal leg-hold traps and wire 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 land. 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 law enforcement specialists specializing in representing the oil and gas industry and one specializing in representing endangered species. The ball is now in the Department of Interior’s court.

In response, our Sierra Club chapter issued an email plea to you, our members and supporterers 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 gray 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.

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.

Bears, mountain lions, wolves

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.

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.

(Visit riograndesierraclub.org to listen to the ad.) Martinez appointed every commissioner in 2012 and the commission’s unani- mous 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.

Before both 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 rule. 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.

We were a car-load that represented a real cross-section of the state. Robert Tohe, a Dirty Fuels Sierra Club organizer from Yehaye, N.M., and his wife Hazel James, a food sovereignty organizer, both members of the Navajo Nation and great-granddaughter Jessica Coriz, 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 physician 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 crisp of fall and we transition from our time. We listened to news snippets from the Pope’s arrival, in stark contrast to the crisp of fall and we transition from our

the face of this crime is Pope Francis, with his gentle message reminding us that what’s at stake.

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 ewe website at riograndesierraclub.org.
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 de Taos 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 downstream streams that may be impacted by dairy waste. If you have a specific site of concern, please contact Eric Patterson at epatterson@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.

Animas spill a call to act

By Allyson Siwik

Gila Resources Information Project

Waterwatched 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, 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 insufficient 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: The local community didn’t want a Superfund designation, but while the state and Freeport McMoRan said they would 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 ground- and water-environment at risk. The Martinez administrations’ “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/vandium.”

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.
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 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 like 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.
Chapter debuts new office, website

By Fred Houdek
Central New Mexico Group

The Rio Grande Chapter and Central New 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 pitara 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 energy issues in New Mexico and West Texas. Please visit the new site and leave a comment letting us know what you think!

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 Bosquitos event!

Saturday, Oct. 3: Bosquitos event: Plant Walk, Botanic Gardening, and Raptor! 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 Sara Saville of Albuquerque Herbals. Learn about plants of the Bosque.

3-4 p.m.: Botanic Gardening.

4:15-5:15 p.m.: Learn about raptors with Lisa of Hawks Aloft. Bring water and snacks.

Come to one or all of these fun classes. Please RSVP: Sara Savile 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 use of the bridge but do please 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, canes, etc.

water, hat, sunscreen, snack and lunch if you want to picnic afterward. Contact: Camilla Feibelman at camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org, 505-715-8988.

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: Sara Savile 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 Tbr. Bring: Good shoes and wheels, walkers, canes, etc. water, hat, sunscreen, snack. Please RSVP to Colston Chandler (505-343-9498 or ccam@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 Bay Gordo. 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 Gordo 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 Montoya predicts that we won’t even match the measly 12% turnout of 2011.

We need a council that is friendly to environmental concerns. If three of our candidates win, we will have a veto-proof pro-Bosque, pro-environment majority on City Council. Please vote on Oct. 6!
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," said Colleen Cooley, energy outreach coordinator of Dinè 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 Romoto of Picuris Pueblo. "Everywhere you guys go you leave a mess.

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."

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."

— Eliolleta 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!"

— Colleen Cooley

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

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 land 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 organizations who contributed to an outstanding listening session, including: Dinè CARE; San Juan Citizens Alliance; Western Environmental Law Center; Wild Earth Guardians; Junto; 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; Doedla Desert Rock; 4 Corners Idle NO More; Medicine2Strong; Sierra Club and more.
Chaco leasing continues

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

A massive surge of approvals by 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 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 operation 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.

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, teresa.seamster@gmail.com or robert.tohe@sierraclub.org.

Methane regulation: Time to act

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 worst 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 develped 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 is typically 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’re landowners and 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. In the long run, 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 a few outliers are responsible for a large percentage of leaks.

That affects health at ground level. Methane is a pernicious greenhouse gas and a pollutant the reason is typically 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.

Two oil and gas industry sources have indicated their support for federal regulation, along with Attorney General Hector Balderas.

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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.
EPE on front lines of war on solar

By Jim Tolbert

1 Paseos, 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 surcharge.

Recently, Eco El Paso, an organization that promotes eco-sensitive and energy-efficient communities, has been building dialogue, 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 Stockley as “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 Paseos 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 and may use city water. 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 1 Paseos to oppose EPE’s efforts to destroy the solar energy industry, follow www.elpasoukraineaturally.blogspot.com and the Facebook page of Citizens Against El Paso Electric’s Attack on Solar: facebook.com/groups/899844660100771.

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

By Stephen Fischmann

The only excuse EPE has is that system-wide peak demand must be cut. This requires billions of dollars to 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 those wasted investment to boost EPE, please explain again.

Reducing peak demand

The four new plants will cost $10 billion, a one-time return on all that money for EPE’s ratepayers. The cost of a kilowatt-hour (kWh) for residential customers is 9.3 cents. To reduce electricity demand spikes on hot summer afternoons, if you’re thinking there must be far less costly ways to meet peak 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” rates 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 effective 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 pencil 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. Deflecting EPE customers 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 strategy plan-

By Stephen Fischmann

O clouds. It is not to be underestimated what solar has to offer.

The only excuse EPE has is that system-wide peak demand must be cut.
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 Eugenia 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 Wilderness Alliance staff member Nathan Small is stepping down. Jack Ekman, 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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El Paso Group endorses Mayor Miyagishima

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 costs/benefit review?” to “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 Darrin Shanman 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.
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.

Northern New Mexico Group

 Signing up to protect the Caja Wildlife

Northern New Mexico Group Contacts

Executive Committee

Co-chairs: Norma McCallan, 505-471-0005, nmccallan@mindspring.com, and Teresa Seamster, 505-466-8964, ts.seamster@gmail.com

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Shane Woolbright, 405-323-2569, mesoinc@hotmail.com

Conservation Chair: Norma McCallan

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Energy Team: Shane Woolbright, 505-474-2870, mesoinc@hotmail.com; Elliot Stern, 505-989-9486, sternwcs@comcast.net

Other responsibilities

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Membership: Alice Cox

Volunteers: Open

Office: Jerry Knapczyk

Outings co-chairs: Tobin Oruch, 505-820-2844, tobin.oruch@yahoo.com, and Alan Shapiro, 505-424-9242, nm5s@yahoo.com

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Book Sales: Janet Peacock 505-988-8929, sfdayhikes@gmail.com.

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Youth involvement: Paige Pinnell, 505-988-2733

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Farmington: Art Jaquez, 505-360-0176, artjaquez22@gmail.com

Taos: Eric Patterson, 575-776-2833, eepatt@gmail.com

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, gormanmd@gmail.com.

Northern New Mexico Group

October/November/December 2015

How to go solar

By Sandrine Gaillard, Northern New Mexico Group

S

witch 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 roof 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. Find 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 LED.

3. A good example is electricity usage of 450 kWh per month. Over a year, that's 5,400 kWh, requiring 3.5 kW of solar panels. Depending on the company and types of solar panels, this will cost between $10,000 and $13,000.

4. 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.

5. If you are connected to the grid and are a PNM customer, on the month you use less, your system will produce electricity back to the grid, and you will get a check from PNM.

6. A $12,000 system will end up cost- ing 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.

7. If you are connected to the grid and are a PNM customer, on the month you use less, your system will produce electricity back to the grid, and you will get a check from PNM. One month's worth of solar equals one month's worth of electricity you need to run your home.

8. Get a few quotes from solar companies. 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."

4. Switch to Solar NOW! Contact: sandrine.sierrach-Al@gmail.com

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 a lot 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 down to $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 $300 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 use most of your electricity come via the clean, renewable sun from panels if 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 to keep in mind:

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 your 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 cannot 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: santafecounty.nm.gov/public_works/energy. While the list of solar businesses is meant for Santa Fe County, most of them also install in Bernalillo and Santa Fe Counties. If you live in Santa Fe County, contact me for free solar advice and technical assistance (992-3044, colarke@santafecounty.nm.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 Saverthebaggers showed up in force and 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 dog doo (these are actual, loud objections). But those of us who care about the Earth are not going to be left up, and the good news? 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 the world.

On Sept. 19, the Pajarito Group’s Andy and Shu-Mei Chung celebrated their 1st anniversary with about 30 other Sierrans, including Rio Grande Chair David Coss. The event 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 dog doo (these are actual, loud objections). But those of us who care about the Earth are not going to be left up, and the good news? 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.”

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October/November/December 2015 Rio Grande Sierran 15

Hikes and Events, continued from Page 16

marciahillman@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, mjzimmin@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 of the week. Hiking through a transition zone, keep an eye on the trail and keep an eye on the map. 1,000 feet of gain. Relax with tram ride back. Two dogs OK. Tobin Oruch, (505) 690-6253, tobinn.oruch@yahoo.com.

Sunday, Nov. 2: Strenuous hike to Diamond B. This trip is an extra night night hike with some extra challenges. One way to the summit of Cerro de la Garita. 1,781-foot elevation gain, steep at times. About 8 miles and 1,200 feet of gain. Marla Skillman, (505) 699-3008, marciahillman@hotmail.com.

Sunday, Nov. 2: Strenuous hike to White Mesa and traverstine springs west of Bernalillo, about 7 miles and 500 feet of gain. Marica Skillman, (505) 699-3008, marciahillman@hotmail.com.

From trip leader Michael Di Rosa on his July hike 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. Pictures are Hans Bakker and Iris Chung from our lunch spot overlooking the Valles Toredo, with Pajarito Mountain in the distance.”

November

Saturday-Sunday, Nov. 7-8: Moderate BackPack to Blue Mountain. This trip in the Apache Kid Wilderness begins at a relatively low 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, (15) 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) 667-0955 or 231-9629 medillon@gmail.com.

Sunday, Nov. 8: Strenuous hike in South Sandias on Hawkwatch/Cres/ 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, tobinn.oruch@yahoo.com.

Sunday, Nov. 8: Bosquitos Bosque Treasure Hunt with Noel Chilton, noon to 2 p.m. Learn how to use compasses with sandals and learn 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 creesets! Open Space Visitor Center. Bring: water bottle and snacks. Contact: Sara Strieg 505-288-8713 sarastrieg@outlook.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 Ryen, (505) 466-4063.

Saturday, Nov. 14: Fall hike in the Bosque. We’ll hike the west-side stretch of the Bosque from Montano 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 night to the trailhead and talk briefly about the new embayment installed by the Corps of Engineers. Then on to the new pond at the edge of the Bosque. There will be a discussion of the Corps project and the importance of the Oxbow and its place in the Rio Grande Valley State Park. Meet: Parking lot just east of the SE corner of Montano and Coors. RSVP Peter Kelling at cloudshand-water@juno.com.

Saturday, Nov. 14: Explore the Cacahueto — 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 5,500 feet. Steep trails. Limit 5 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.

Saturday, 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 nm3@yahoo.com.

Saturday, Nov. 21: Bosque By White Water Rafting with 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, 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 17, at the Rio Grande Blvd NW. Please RSVP to Colston Chandler, 505-343-9248 or cccc@swcp.com.

Sunday, Nov. 21 (or 22): Moderate hike on La Liza to the overlook, about 9.5 miles and 1,200-foot elevation gain. Daisy Levine, 466-8358. Limit of eight hikers.

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

Sunday, Nov. 28: 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 downtown 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 tips 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. Marca Skillman, (505) 699-3008, marciahillman@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) 690-8713.

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, tobinn.oruch@yahoo.com.


Saturday, Dec. 19: Strenuous snowshoe hike on Raven’s Ridge in ski basin, maximum of 6 miles and 1,800 feet of gain. Marica Skillman, (505) 699-3008, marciahillman@hotmail.com.


Sunday, Dec. 20: Easy hike in the Nambe badlands. About 4 miles to see hoodoos up close and distant mountain panoramas. Alan Shapiro 505-424-9242 or nm3@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 $1,000 to the Rio Grande Chapter. Please visit sierrachl.org/solarhomes or call Sungevity at 855-438-7860 to learn more. The $1,000 discount available only in October. Go for it!
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 (773) to the Continental Divide trail (813) to the Valle Victoria trail (#731) and finally the Elk Creek trail (#733) to the Elk Creek trailhead. Early start. One or two dogs OK. About 30 miles with 2,500 feet elevation gain and a maximum elevation of 12,000 feet. Both camps will be above 11,000 feet Larry, loresen. 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 Dr Rosa, work: (505) 667-0095 or 231-9629 mdriba@gmail.com.

Saturday, Oct. 3: Bosque plant walk, botanical gardening, and raptores 4:15 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 Darla Saville of Albuquerque Herbsmith; Botanic Drawing with Lisa Morgan; and Learn about Raptores 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 505-281-2791 saritastreng@gmail.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, swtraveler@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 976-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, swtraveler@aol.com.

Saturday, Oct. 10: Exploring the last desert grassland. This all-day outing will take us through the largest remaining intact Chihuahuan Desert grassland, Otero Mesa. A mostly driving adventure to discover the ecology, wild-life and petroglyphs of this spectacular, threatened grassland. We’ll drive to Alamo Mountain in the Corruidas Mountains, where hikers will have the option to scramble up the mountain. 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Contact Howie Dash, 575-652-7550, howiedash@aol.com (Southern Group), or Jerry Kurryka, 915-526-6297, jerrykurryka@hotmail.com (El Paso Group).

Saturday, Oct. 10: Strenuous hike to East Pecos Bally — 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, loresen.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 Shapiros 505-424-9242 or nm5s@yahoo.com.

Sunday, Oct. 17: Bosque by wheelchair at Rio Bravo 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, snacks and lunch if you want to stay to picnic afterward. Contact: camilla.leibelsman@sierracle.org, 505-715-3888.


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: Oxide.dlb@outlook.com.

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

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 miles are round-trip. Participants must sign a liability waiver. Bring 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.

Contact leader before the outing to confirm participation and details. Please see riograndesierrelclub.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.org with SUBSCRIBE RIO-NORTH-OUTINGS.

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 suits you!