To-do list:

- Improve renewable-energy requirement, increase green jobs
- Protect Chaco Canyon, Sandoval County and region from fracking
- Stop cruel trapping on public lands in New Mexico
- Outlaw coyote-killing contests
- Protect our families’ drinking water
- Keep electricity rates affordable and develop clean energy

Plan:

- Elect great people to Congress, state Legislature, county commissions and other state and local offices.
- See our endorsement list, Pages 7-9

More inside:

Albuquerque passes solar initiative
Tax breaks for solar and fossil all met roadblocks in the budget-constrained New Mexico legislative session Jan. 19-Feb. 18. Page 3

Environment secretary leaves for oil and gas
Gov. Martinez has named Butch Tongate to replace Ryan Flynn at the Environment Department. Page 5

El Paso Electric revokes anti-solar plan
The utility had planned to put solar users in a separate rate class, allowing them to be charged more than other ratepayers. Page 11


EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET
Voting in the Chapter selection is for Sierra Club members only. Please use this ballot so your member number and assigns on the mailing label on the other side. Two-member households can each vote, using both boxes. Each member can vote in the chapterwide Executive Committee election and for his or her local group. Candidate statements for the chapter Executive Committee are on Page 3. El Paso Group ballots and candidate statements will be mailed separately. Mail completed ballot to: 1807 Second St., Unit 45, Santa Fe, NM 87505. Ballots must be postmarked by Dec. 3, 2018. Electronic ballots will be emailed to members in November if you wish to vote online.

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Rio Grande Sierran
Editorial Board: John Buchser, David Coss, Benton Howell, John Buchser
Local Groups: David Coss, Richard Barish, Ken Hughes, John Buchser

Rio Grande Chapter Executive Committee

Pajarito Group Executive Committee (4 open seats)
- Howard Barnum
- Jody Benson
- Paul Paryski
- Michael Di Rosa

Northern Group Executive Committee (5 open seats)
- Sandrine Gaillard
- Tom Gorman
- Teresa Seaman

Central Group Executive Committee (3 open seats)
- Odile de la Beauniardiere
- Julie Wilt
- Fred Houdere

Southern Group Executive Committee (4 open seats)
- Glenn Landers
- Christine Newtson
- Mary Katherine Ray

Vote on your chapter and group executive committees

Rio Grande chapter Executive Committee

Please vote for three:
- David Coss
- Eric Patterson
- Patrick Madden

October/November/December 2016
PNM gets (some of) what it wants

By Mona Blaber
Rio Grande Chapter communications director

On Sept. 28, the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission voted on the contentious PNM rate case.
PNM, the electric utility serving most of New Mexico, had asked for a 15 percent residential rate increase. A PRC hearing examiner in August recommended a 6.6 percent increase instead.
The hearing examiner exonerated PNM for failing to justify several multimillion-dollar transactions it wanted customers to pay for.
The commission’s final decision held good news and bad news for ratepayers and the climate.
While PNM gets to make consumers pay for its unjustified coal and nuclear decisions, the commission prevented PNM from imposing significantly higher service fees, and customers won’t have to foot the bill for the company’s unnecessary San Juan Generating Station expenses.
Key elements of the case:
- Commissioners didn’t allow PNM to saddle customers with a $53 million bill for unnecessary equipment it installed at San Juan Generating Station. The “balanced draft” equipment was not required by either the Environment Department or the EPA and is of dubious environmental value. If PNM got its way, its shareholders would have earned a rate of return at consumers’ expense, and millions would have been added to the cost of retiring San Juan coal plant and transitioning to clean energy.
- The commission refused PNM’s request to raise monthly service fees from $5 to $13. These service charges hurt low-income customers the most, because no matter how little electricity they use, they must pay the fees. High fees also punish energy-efficient residents, who see little reward for saving electricity.

Solar victory!
El Paso Electric revokes its proposal to put solar-roof top owners in a separate rate class. See Page 11.

Commissioners Sandy Jones and Valerie Espinoza voted against the final rate hike.
“This is a sad day” for consumers, Espinoza said.

PNM should add renewable energy now

By Shane Woolbright
Northern N.M. Energy Chair

The Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club has several members who are participating in PNM’s Integrated Resource Planning, or IRP. The IRP is a required effort for PNM to plan for future electric-generation resources with members of the public and stakeholders. The planning effort will continue through next summer.
Nearly all groups involved in the process want PNM to add renewable generation. Groups are lobbying the Legislature to require substantially more renewable energy by 2030. PNM has in its planning process alternative scenarios where renewable energy and energy conserva- tion would reduce fossil fuel. Meanwhile in its rate case, PNM invested hundreds of millions of dollars in nuclear and coal without planning or public input and with the idea that the PRC would hand it hundreds of millions without question.
Recently, MidAmerican Energy in Iowa, with nearly twice the energy load of PNM, received approval from the Iowa regulation board for $3.6 billion in wind energy investment that would provide 85% of its 1.2 million consumers’ energy in just five years.
An ad hoc committee of Sierra Club volunteers has been meeting on the IRP and has considered scenarios that might be part of a long-range plan.
PNM plans to file another rate case within weeks. And no matter how much input PNM receives supporting renewable energy, it does not have to meet those consumer and stakeholder desires. With all of this in mind, the chapter Executive Committee has approved a resolution seeking that PNM include in its next filing to the PRC a request for pre-approval of a package of renewable energy investment now. Not on a planning horizon, not on a rate — now.
Our resolution sets a framework to put those green units of energy into the PNM system at limited cost to consumers.
A program that adds 450MW of wind and 100MW of solar power would replace 25% of the energy PNM receives from coal-fired San Juan Generating Station.
To learn more, please contact me at director@meso.org.

Albuquerque passes solar initiative

By Mona Blaber, Chapter communications director

At the end of September, the Albuquerque City Council unanimously set a goal to get 25 percent of electricity at the city’s facilities from solar energy by 2025.
Achieving this goal will help make Albuquerque a leader in solar energy, decrease air and water pollution and save the city money.
“The effort was led by our coalition partner Environment New Mexico and generated thousands of calls and emails to city councilors supporting solar energy.
“I was proud to work with Environment New Mexico to move solar energy forward in the city of Albuquerque,” said Councilor Pat Davis, co-sponsor of the resolution.
“Setting a strong solar goal for the City of Albuquerque will provide numerous benefits, from protecting the city against future electric-rate increases to creating badly needed jobs.”
Solar energy is a jobs creator. In New Mexico, there are 102 solar companies that employ nearly 2,000 people, the majority located in Bernalillo County.
The City of Albuquerque currently gets about 3 percent of its electricity from solar energy. Upon reaching the goal set by the City Council, the city could save approximately $3.6 million each year at current electric rates, with savings likely to increase with ever increasing energy costs.
“We applaud the Albuquerque City Council for setting a strong goal for solar energy,” said Sanders Moore, director of Environment New Mexico.
“Solar energy protects our environment by decreasing air and water pollution, and improves public health. I am very proud that the Albuquerque City Councilors unanimously voted to embrace solar energy and move our city and state forward.”
The measure was supported by partners including 350.org, New Mexico Interfaith Power & Light, New Mexico Solar Energy Association, and Union of Concerned Scientists, among others.
We’re fired up and ready to vote

T
this election, I can hardly wait for early voting to begin on October 11. I want to vote for environmental candidates up and down the ballot. I want to vote to fight pollution, intolerance and pollution in our state and in our country.

As I wait to vote, I am alarmed that due to tax cuts and a bad economy, New Mexico has run up a $600 million state deficit. Job creation is nearly non-existent, yet New Mexico has become a hot spot for air pollution, groundwater contamination and gross mismanagement of wildlife. After all the tax cuts, deregulation, job cuts, service cuts etc., New Mexico has a $600 million deficit! What is Governor Martinez’s response? We’re fired up and ready to go vote

Finding time for kids and time for saving them

O
ur baby boy was born on July 15 at 8 pounds 6 ounces. I’ve taken these first few months of Rafael’s life to reduce my scale of thinking to his small universe. I spend hours at a time staring at him, watching him breathe at night (and at the same time thinking about whether the air he breathes with clean), watching him wiggle as he nurses (and wondering will there be green places where he can play), listening to his sweet noises (and hoping he’ll experience quiet and places where he can see the stars), and laughing as he holds his right arm up watching his batted fist for minutes at a time (I think reminding that indeed, yes we can — so is sie pued).

Each thing he does seems like a small miracle, but even more than miraculous is that he is the result of our great love for our children.

Sierran publication information

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

The contributor’s name and email address will be printed as a source of more information, unless the contributor specifies otherwise. Submissions must be received by the 10th of the month prior to publication. Editorial practices as developed and adopted by the Rio Grande Chapter are used in production of the Rio Grande Sierran.

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

If you wish to opt out of the mailed copy of this publication information, your entire donation will be up to 500 words, are also subject to editing and are printed at the discretion of the editorial board.

Donate — it’s easy!

When you contribute to the Rio Grande Chapter, your entire donation stays here in New Mexico and West Texas to protect our air, land, water and wildlife. You can use the Q-code app on your smartphone to scan our code here, or send your check to: Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter 1807 Second Street, Unit 45 Santa Fe, NM 87505.

Contributions, gifts and dues to the Sierra Club are not tax-deductable. To stay updated on issues you read about in The Sierran, go to riograndesierranclub.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 riograndesierranclub.org/join on the Web.

Volunteers needed

Northern New Mexico Group Volunteer Coordinator: This important position seeks out, tracks, and monitors volunteers to help out with our many commitments and issues. Contact Pat, 505-986-1595, carlos505@comcast.net.

Tabling Coordinator: Seek out tabling opportunities around Santa Fe and Albuquerque for the Northern Group to distribute literature and sell merchandise, and coordinate tabling volunteers. Contact Teresa Seamster, tc.seamster@gmail.com.

Sierra Club members know how important this election is. We've heard from our members, the endorsements made by the Rio Grande Chapter in this election will be important throughout our state and region.

I want to thank and congratulate all of the Rio Grande Chapter volunteers and staff who met with candidates in their community, consulted with others and participated in the endorsement process. Individuals from Taos to Las Cruces and from Silver City to Las Vegas worked hard to endorse candidates that would best address their environmental issues. I also want to thank all of our endorsed candiates for being willing to serve. Take a look at the candidates we have endorsed in our special election section on Pages 7 through 9 and commit that you, your friends and your family will vote. Please vote for environmentally progressive candidates as soon as you can and then help turn out the vote for these candidates in your community.

Mobilizing our membership to volunteer is the key to the Rio Grande Chapter’s winning record for our endorsed candidates. Please contact your political chair, Susan Marlin, at smarlin31@comcast.net, or Mona Blaber at monablaber@gmail.com to volunteer for the most crucial races across the state.

I can hardly wait to vote. This election is too important to stay home.
Environment chief heads to Oil and Gas

By Susan Martin

Chapter Executive Committee

In August, New Mexico Environment Secretary Ryan Flynn announced he was stepping down. Soon after he was named New Mexico Oil and Gas Association executive director.

A recent Santa Fe New Mexico article about the Martinez administration’s favors to Helena Chemical Co. exposes just how subservient Gov. Susana Martinez and Flynn have been to polluting industries and campaign contributors. But advocates who have defended clean-water safeguards against Flynn’s dismantling efforts already knew that.

Almost any new Environment boss would be an improvement, given Flynn’s plundering of air and water protections at the behest of polluting industries and his ability to charm those he wants something from, including too many legislators. For example, remember the time Flynn’s disdained his own technical team’s draft of a rule that was supposed to protect our drinking water from copper-mining contamination? What did he submit instead to the Water Quality Control Commission? A substitute rule containing every single change requested by copper-mining giant Freeport-McMoRan.

The original draft was developed during a months-long process that included industry representatives, technical experts, community members and environmentalists. The rule Flynn replaced it with expressly allows copper mines to contaminate groundwater — which his own staff told him would violate the Water Quality Act.

Clean-water and community groups appealed, and that case is now in front of the state Supreme Court, which heard oral arguments in September. Then there’s the time Flynn stopped enforcing the Dairy Rule, which is supposed to protect our drinking water from the millions of gallons of untreated waste produced by New Mexico dairies. All that waste was going unregulated because the dairy industry wanted to weaken the rule, and Flynn facilitated their success.

Flynn’s parting shot is an attempt to limit public participation in permitting processes (see article below). Martinez has named longtime Environment Department employee Butch Tongate to replace Flynn. He is considerably more qualified and has greater knowledge of environmental regulations and safeguards than Flynn. But Tongate chaired the Water Quality Control Commission for the hearings that rubber-stamped that industry-written Copper Rule.

Tongate has an opportunity to at least enforce the weakened safeguards that are still in place and present concrete public-input requirements. There’s room for hope but also skepticism that our families’ water and air will remain protected under the new Martinez Environment Department than under the old.

Water-rule changes may stifle public

By Mona Blaber

The Martinez Environment Department is proposing changes to water-quality regulations that could cause more harm than good to our water. The Environment Department is proposing rule changes it says will improve the state’s compliance with federal water requirements.

But these changes would allow facilities to permanently skirt water-quality rules and weaken standards on some contaminants. The department is proposing that variances, which temporarily excuse facilities from complying with groundwater rules, should become permanent.

Variances are supposed to be temporary exceptions to water-quality rules to be reviewed every five years (with public notice and participation) to give facilities time to come into compliance, not a permanent excuse to ignore the rules. Removing time limits removes the public’s chance to oppose a variance.

The proposals are ostensibly to bring the state up to federal standards on contaminants. And some changes are worth supporting, such as increases to permit fees that haven’t been regulated industry to offer permits that aren’t compliant.

But these changes would also allow facilities to permanently skirt water-quality rules and weaken standards on some contaminants. The department is proposing that variances, which temporarily excuse facilities from complying with groundwater rules, should become permanent.

To see the proposal, go to www.nmenv.gov/andinec/. Send comments by Oct. 17 to NMENV.GWQBlaturale@state.nm.us.

Volunteers monitoring dairies

By John Buchser

Rio Grande Chapter Water Chair

The Rio Grande Chapter is helping to protect the aquifers of New Mexico by monitoring quarterly reports from 13 dairies we suspect are polluting our groundwater.

Dairies produce large amounts of waste in the process of keeping their milking facilities clean. This waste includes large quantities of manure, which is ultimately applied to fields as fertilizer for crops. The storage of this waste can be a safe process if the waste pits are lined with impermeable (synthetic) liners. However, in the development of recent regulations, there was industry opposition to these liners, due to the claimed cost. As a result, clay liners are now allowed.

The majority of dairies use plastic liners. However, about 15 percent do not. Our coalition consultant, Kathy Martin, with the help of former Environment Department Groundwater Quality Bureau Chief Bill Olsen and chapter conservation coordinator Dan Lorimier, is training chapter volunteers to compare the permit, reports, and visual data from Google Earth to determine where violations exist. Most existing clay liners of the type of clay we have in New Mexico generally don’t work, so we fully expect to show that many of these dairies continue to not meet regulations for keeping our waste within legal limits of groundwater pollutants.

We must file a request with the Environment Department for each quarterly report for each dairy we are looking at. Training is provided by Kathy to help each volunteer monitor two or so dairies.

We just started this process this summer, and already we are noting quarterly reports that raise questions. One expects that the data from monitoring wells for nitrates, sulfates, and chloride will vary slightly from quarter-to-quarter. If you have ever been in a chemistry class and try measuring something more than once, the likelihood is that each data point will vary slightly. If your measurement results in all the numbers being the same, especially when separated by 3 months, one suspects that some of those values are incorrect. Of course other impacts can be substantial, especially upgradient dairies other than the facility under consideration. That is why the permit application process includes documentation on things that can have an impact, including both up-gradient and down-gradient monitoring wells.

We believe there is insufficient staff at the Environment Department to carefully review the current data against past data, and that the priority of reviewing the quarterly reports is usually reserved for dairies renewing their permits (every five years). More than half of New Mexico’s dairies have contaminated groundwater in excess of state water-quality standards. Thus our goal is to work with the department to bolster its capacity to assure New Mexico’s dairies that our dairies operate within the law. This extra oversight, we hope, will result in a more closely monitored and well-regulated industry.

Clean water is one of our most valuable resources!

A typical New Mexico dairy produces as much waste each day as a small city. A group of Sierra Club volunteers is monitoring reports from 13 dairies suspected of polluting groundwater beyond state standards.

Water

By Mona Blaber

The Martinez Environment Department is proposing changes to water-quality regulations that could cause more harm than good to our water. The Environment Department is proposing rule changes it says will improve the state’s compliance with federal water requirements. But these changes would also allow facilities to permanently skirt water-quality rules and weaken standards on some contaminants. The department is proposing that variances, which temporarily excuse facilities from complying with groundwater rules, should become permanent.

To see the proposal, go to www.nmenv.gov/andinec/. Send comments by Oct. 17 to NMENV.GWQBlaturale@state.nm.us.
NASA study shows methane sources

By Miya King-Flaherty Chapter Public Lands fellow

On Aug. 15, NASA released a report that affirms what we already know about the infamous 2,500-square mile methane cloud that hovers over the Four Corners area. Throughout oil and gas operations, methane leaks occur from storage tanks, pipelines and well pads, adding to the methane plume and exacerbating climate disruption.

The NASA study identified 250 sources in the San Juan Basin that significantly contribute to the methane cloud. Even more astonishingly, only 10 percent of these sources — also known as “super-emitters” — are responsible for more than half of all methane emissions.

In an effort to document and highlight the severity of methane emissions in the Four Corners, Sierra Club representatives teamed up with an Earthworks-certified thermographer to retrace “super-emitting” areas delineated in the NASA report.

After hours of searching for “super-emitting” sites using a FLIR infrared camera, the crew located one area near a Go Cart racing track in Aztec, N.M. In this area, the crew found three oil and gas wells in close proximity, all revealing methane leaks. One well pad had four leaks. Another, less than 100 meters away, had one, while the third pad, less than a mile away, had three leaks. This is a total of eight leaks in a single area that constantly release methane into the air. The following day, representatives from Diné CARE, San Juan Citizens Alliance, Earthworks, the Sierra Club and several media outlets visited a number of methane-emitting sites to see the problem first hand.

Oil and gas operators are the largest industrial source of methane pollution in the Four Corners area. Methane is a greenhouse gas that is 86 times more potent than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period. Reducing methane waste also cuts pollutants like volatile organic compounds such as benzene, toluene, or xylene that form ground-level ozone or smog when they interact with sunlight. Smog has been linked to a host of health problems including asthma, heart failure and upper-respiratory disease.

Now is the time to adopt common-sense rules that the Bureau of Land Management and the Environmental Protection Agency have proposed to address methane waste from the hundreds of thousands of existing oil and gas facilities across the country. The BLM and EPA rules are a win-win, generating more revenue for industry as well as helping to curb global warming.

For more information about the NASA study, or to read the report, please visit: www.rriograndesierraclub.org/nasa-methane-study/

BLM planning smaller Chaco lease auction

By Miya King-Flaherty Chapter Public Lands fellow

Despite a recent explosion that destroyed thirty-six storage tanks on July 11 in Nageezi, N.M., the Bureau of Land Management’s Farmington Field Office continues to lease lands and approve drilling permits.

The BLM’s Environmental Assessment reports, which are supposed to thoroughly analyze the impacts of hydraulic fracturing (fracking) before approving leases and drilling permits, constantly cite “Findings of No Significant Impact” to the surrounding communities, land, water or sacred sites.

The occurrence occurred at a newly developed WPIX site that caused 55 residents to evacuate their homes — some lost their pets and others lost livestock. This site is less than a mile away from many residences, and within 5 miles of dozens more. Safety continues to be a concern for communities living in the greater Chaco area.

The site is 1,500 feet from multiple Navajo allotment lands with federally owned minerals — also known as a split allotment. The BLM is moving forward with leasing more parcels of land in the greater Chaco region for oil and gas development. Many of these parcels, containing oil and gas, were identified by the BLM as “super-emitters” contributing to the methane plume.

At a September BLM community meeting in Counselor, Samuel Sage speaks out against the BLM’s auction of public land in the greater Chaco region to oil and gas developers.

In the Counselor-Ojo Encino-Torreon Tri-Chapter area, include cultural and ceremonial sites.

The nominated parcels all involve Navajo allotment lands with federally owned minerals — also known as a split estate. Although the surface rights are privately owned tribal lands, the federally owned minerals have precedence when oil and gas industries express interest.

This past spring, the BLM proposed leasing 2,122 acres in the greater Chaco area, then removed the nominated parcels, admitting they lacked sufficient tribal consultation. Now, the BLM is moving forward with their nomination after reducing the acreage from 2,122 to 843.

The Rio Grande Chapter joined a coalition of groups to launch protest comments against the nomination of these parcels. With your help, we generated thousands of comments against the BLM’s “Findings of No Significant Impact” report.

While the BLM is still working on its Resource Management Plan-Amendment, it has yet to do a thorough environmental analysis on the impacts on the environment or surrounding communities of horizontal drilling in the Mancos-Gallup Shale formation. The agency also failed to do a thorough survey of sacred sites. Instead, the BLM is fast-tracking leases and permit applications to drill by completing individual Environmental Assessments.

The BLM continues to violate the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Historic Preservation Act.

To date, there are more than 200 fracked wells in the greater Chaco area. The BLM has approved an additional 160 more. One of the latest fracking wells is within 1,500 feet of multiple residences, and the approval process for the well lacked an Environmental Justice analysis.

You can help prevent more fracking: From Oct. 19 to Nov. 17, the BLM will accept protest comments against the lease sale of the 843 acres, followed by a formal 30-day protest period that begins Nov. 18. We plan to join our coalition partners in launching a full-on charge of comments and need your help to make an impact. Personalizing your comments is the most effective way for the BLM to consider them.

Health Assessment update

Groups working to address the impacts of fracking on local communities continue to forge ahead with the Health Impact Report. Though still in its early stages, Counselor outreach representative Kendra Pinto has been able to collect testimonials from impacted community members.

Since methane and volatile organic compounds are leaked, vented and flared throughout the oil and gas process, degrading air quality, the next stage will be to collect toxic air emissions in close proximity to residents’ homes.

For information on how you can help, please visit our website: www.riograndesierraclub.org/chaco.

Learn more: Watch a video on fracking in the greater Chaco area and please share with others. www.riograndesierraclub.org/chaco-canyon-precious-frack/
A note about Sierra Club endorsements

By Susan Martin

The most powerful way to protect our water, wildlife, land and climate is through good environmental policy, and the most powerful way to ensure good policy is by electing pro-environmental candidates.

The Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter sends questionnaires to and interviews eligible candidates, and two chapter committees must approve every endorsement by a two-thirds vote in order for a candidate to be endorsed. (Incumbents can be judged by their public record rather than a questionnaire).

These pages list only endorsed candidates who have opposition in the Nov. 8 general election. The chapter may add to its list of endorsed candidates after press time.

Our chapter political action committee runs a grassroots, volunteer-based effort to elect environmental champions who will work to prevent climate disruption, protect our wildlife and wild spaces and keep our drinking water clean. We recruit volunteers for key swing races, canvas, inform our membership and run ads to promote great candidates. Helping these candidates win is the best way to impact your local government, and you’ll have fun and meet some great people.

Get in on the action! To learn how to volunteer or donate to our winning efforts, please write to Mona Blaber at rioriver.chapter@sierraclub.org or Susan Martin at smartin311@comcast.net.

New Mexico Senate

District 10: Dave Simon

Dave Simon, former Director of New Mexico State Parks, has thirty years of experience working on conservation and environmental issues, including professional and volunteer positions at the local, state, and national levels.

Simon, a former Rio Grande Chapter director, vows to fight to safeguard New Mexico’s water and land, keep public land in public hands, promote renewable energy, protect wildlife, and reform the New Mexico Game Commission.

The stakes for the environment in the race for this open Albuquerque-area seat are sky high. Simon’s opponent is, literally, married to the oil and gas industry; her husband is an oil and gas industry lobbyist and is the former chair of the New Mexico Oil and Gas Association.

District 9: John Sapien

Sen. Sapien has been a strong voice in opposing the Sand Ridge application to drill for oil near Rio Rancho and for enacting protective ordinances in Sandoval County. He will continue to be an ally on important environmental issues in the Senate.

In his career and his tenure in the New Mexico House, Jeff Steinborn has proven to be a leader in protecting the water we drink, our land, our wildlife and our climate. He has sponsored legislation that would outlaw coyote-killing contests in New Mexico and was an outspoken advocate for designating Organ Mountains Desert Peaks a national monument, which permanently protected the area and brought in an economic boost. His expertise is apparent when he’s speaking up about the importance of renewable energy, common-sense protections for drinking water and access to public lands.

In this north-central Doña Ana County seat, Steinborn is challenging Sen. Lee Cotter, who has a 0% record on environmental issues.

District 36: Jeff Steinborn

Stefanics has been a long-time friend of the conservation community. As a former state senator for District 39 and as a current Santa Fe County Commissioner, Stefanics has been an advocate for the safety and availability of water, the quality of our air, and for the protection of our most special places.

As a state senator, Stefanics was a member of the Conservation Committee, and in the Legislature she pledged to work to protect our state’s natural, traditional and cultural heritage and support land grants as political subdivisions.

Sen. Stefanics has been a long-time advocate for the safety and availability of water, the quality of our air, and for the protection of our most special places.

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Chapter political chair

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Election 2016: Make history

N.M. House of Representatives

District 1: Glojean Todacheene

Todacheene was the first Native woman to serve as San Juan county commissioner. She is running for this Northwest New Mexico seat because “environmental issues, out-of-state migration and a loss of funding from oil and gas industry are big issues in the state. We need to use science to solve problems.”

District 2: Ronnie Martinez

Martinez is a fire-fighter who expresses a passion for protecting our world and way of life for his young daughter. His opponent has voted in favor of protecting the environment just 7% of the time, according to Conservation Voters New Mexico.

District 3: Joanne Ferrary

Ferrary lost this East Las Cruces seat in 2012 by just eight votes. She has been a longtime community activist and involved in environmental issues in Las Cruces. Her opponent has a lifetime environmental voting record of just 14 percent.

District 4: Mary Hotvedt

Hotvedt is a lifelong resident and community activist in District 38 (Silver City and surrounding areas) and sponsor of the Gila River festival. She supports legislative action to protect our wildlife, increase renewable-energy standards and keep the Gila River free-flowing.

District 5: Rudy Martinez

Martinez was a House representative with a strong environmental record when he lost a close race for this Doña Ana-Sierra-Grant County seat in 2014. His opponent sponsored a bill in 2015 to remove all protections from cougars in New Mexico.

District 6: Stephanie Garcia Richard

Garcia Richard has been a leading voice for protecting our water supply and investing in renewable energy in her Los Alamos-area district. She has a record of successfully negotiating passage of bills, including one that established New Mexico’s Oil and Gas Conservation Commission.

District 7: Brian Egolf

Egolf, the House minority leader, will become the majority leader if we elect pro-environment lawmakers in November. Egolf has been a smart leader, defending against destructive anti-environment bills and proposing innovative legislation to promote renewables.

District 8: Matthew McQueen

In his first full term in this Eldorado-and-south seat, McQueen has become one of the Legislature’s most informed and passionate environmental champions. He is a vital and outspoken ally for our air, water, land and wildlife.

District 9: Jose Gonzales

Gonzales is running for the southern seat because “Latinos need an advocate who can represent their interests.”

District 10: Andres Romero

Romero made environmental policy a central issue in his 2014 campaign. Now as a first-term legislator, he has remained committed to ensuring New Mexicans can enjoy clean air, water and land. He has a stellar voting record and has spoken on the floor many times in favor of pro-environment bills.

District 11: Anselmi

Anselmi has the highest lifetime pro-environment voting record of any of her campaigns.

District 12: Fernando Chavez

Chavez was a leading voice in the passage of New Mexico’s Oil and Gas Conservation Commission.

District 13: Ben Quintanilla

Quintanilla’s campaign is focused on protecting our air, water, and land.

District 14: David Griego

Griego’s campaign is focused on protecting our air, water, and land.

District 15: Ane Romero

Romero is running in a key Albuquerque district needed for a more environmentally friendly Legislature. She believes New Mexico can be a national leader in renewable energy and must invest in renewable systems to limit climate disruption as well as create jobs and insulate the state budget from booms and crashes of an oil economy.

District 16: Alex Cruz

Cruz is proud to support the acquisition of Valle de Oro.

District 17: Ed Garcia

Garcia is proud to support New Mexico becoming a leader in solar and wind manufacturing. Liz is proud to create jobs and insulate the state economy.

District 18: Vicky Chavez

Chavez is proud to support New Mexico becoming a leader in solar and wind manufacturing.

District 19: Steven Poole

Poole is a strong advocate for the environment and promoting non-polluting renewable resources.

District 20: Giovanni Haqani

Haqani is passionate about creating a sustainable world, which, he says, always involves considering and being conscious of the environmental context. He emphasizes that New Mexico is uniquely positioned to foster the growth of the green-energy sector.

District 21: David Longoria

Longoria is proud of bills, including one that established New Mexico’s Oil and Gas Conservation Commission.

District 22: John Wallace

In Sandoval County, Wallace has been involved in efforts to stop gravel mining and oppose fracking in Rio Rancho and has organized neighborhood cleanups. He also worked with local groups to promote water conservation in Placitas Village. His opponent has a 21% environmental voting record.

District 23: Daymon Ely

As a Sandoval County commissioner, Ely was instrumental in putting additional air-quality controls in place for Intel. He also worked with Sen. Heinrich on environmental-friendly land issues for the Rio Puerco Valley. Most recently, he testified in favor of a moratorium on test drilling in Rio Rancho by Sandridge Energy.

District 24: Elizabeth Thomson

As a state legislator, Liz Thomson was proud to support the acquisition of Valle de Oro. She has also been an advocate for New Mexico becoming a leader in solar and wind production and manufacturing. Liz is proud to have never taken a dime from oil and gas in any of her campaigns.

District 25: Tyler Witten

Witten is running for this northern seat because “we need to use science to solve problems.”

District 26: Bobby DElaRosa

DElaRosa is a strong advocate for the environment and promoting non-polluting renewable resources.

District 27: Tom Salazar

Salazar is a strong advocate for the environment and promoting non-polluting renewable resources.

District 28: Mark Sharp

Sharp is a strong advocate for the environment and promoting non-polluting renewable resources.

District 29: Natalie Figueroa

As a high-school teacher, Figueroa helps students explore issues related to our environment so they understand we have a shared responsibility to make our communities healthier and more sustainable. Figueroa pledges to fight for public policy that supports the protection of our water, air, land and natural resources and creates jobs and opportunities.

District 30: Bob Scott

Scott told us “I am grateful that I live in New Mexico, a place with so much natural beauty. We need to protect and nurture the environment because it is one of New Mexico’s greatest assets and must be used wisely so that it is available to our children and their children.” Scott is opposing an incumbent with a 29% environmental score.

District 31: Bill McCamley

Rep. McCamley has proven to be a steadfast defender of environmental safeguards and wildlife in his tenure representing this south-central Las Cruces district. He is one of the few voices of reason on the Wildlife and Agriculture Committee, and his thoughtful arguments on the floor are key to stopping bad bills and advancing good ones.

District 32: JoAnn Fairman

Fairman is running for this north-central Las Cruces seat, McQueen is one of the few voices of reason on the Wildlife and Agriculture Committee, and her thoughtful arguments on the floor are key to stopping bad bills and advancing good ones.

District 33: Angelica Rubio

Rubio’s qualifications and knowledge make her an outstanding choice to follow Rep. Steinhorn, who is stepping down to run for Senate, in this north-central Las Cruces district. A native New Mexican, Rubio has a deep understanding and passion for issues relating to environmental justice and environmental racism.

District 34: Steven Poole (incumbent)

Poole is a strong advocate for the environment and promoting non-polluting renewable resources.

District 35: Jason Candelaria

Candelaria is a strong advocate for the environment and promoting non-polluting renewable resources.

District 36: Nathan Small

Small is an outdoorsman, conservationist and former Las Cruces City Councilor. Working for New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, Small was instrumental in the designation of the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument in 2014.

District 37: Mary Hotvedt (incumbent)

Hotvedt is a longstanding representative in District 38 (Silver City and surrounding areas) and sponsor of the Gila River festival. She supports legislative action to protect our wildlife, increase renewable-energy standards and keep the Gila River free-flowing.

District 38: Rudy Martinez (incumbent)

Martinez was a House representative with a strong environmental record when he lost a close race for this Doña Ana-Sierra-Grant County seat in 2014. His opponent sponsored a bill in 2015 to remove all protections from cougars in New Mexico.

District 39: Stephanie Garcia Richard (incumbent)

Garcia Richard has been a leading voice for protecting our water supply and investing in renewable energy in her Los Alamos-area district. She has a record of successfully negotiating passage of bills, including one that established New Mexico’s Oil and Gas Conservation Commission.

District 40: Brian Egolf

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District 41: Matthew McQueen

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for U.S. Congress, the Rio Grande Sierra Club endorses two incumbents who have stood up for the environment and one challenger.

In District 1, Rep. Michelle Lujan Grisham has amassed a solid environmental voting record, and she opposes the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which would allow corporations to challenge environmental laws and regulations as expropriations of their profits before unaccountable arbitration panels consisting of corporate trade lawyers.

In District 3 (Northern and eastern New Mexico), Ben R. Lujan has been a climate champion since his tenure as a Public Regulation commissioner requiring utilities to produce more renewable energy and pass out energy-efficient light bulbs. Luján serves on the Natural Resources Committee and is an outspoken advocate for resource protection. Luján has an excellent 95 percent record of pro-environment voting, according to League of Conservation Voters. In District 2 (Southern New Mexico), Merrie Lee Soules is an engineer who has intervened as a citizen in utility cases at the Public Regulation Commission to require utilities to comply with renewable-energy requirements and keep rates fair for consumers. Soules is challenging one of Congress’s worst polluter advocates, Steve Pearce.

Sierra Club presidential endorsement
The Sierra Club has enthusiastically endorsed a presidential candidate, but because of federal campaign and financing restrictions, we cannot list that choice in this chapter newsletter. To check our presidential endorsement, please see: content.sierradclub.org/voterguide/ to learn more.

Los Alamos County Council: Peter Sheehey
Peter Sheehey is an incumbent on the Los Alamos County Council and is among six candidates running for three spots on the council. Sheehey is an outspoken defender of the environment on the council and consistently supports Los Alamos conservation and climate efforts, including the Carbon Neutral 2040 initiative, which is a suite of innovative goals, plans and benchmarks for Los Alamos to be carbon-neutral by 2040. Sheehey also championed curbside recycling of lawn waste to be mulched. He was a driving force behind the “walkable Los Alamos” initiative that supports downtown development and a more walkable city. Sheehey publicly supported amenities to get people outdoors. These include the Pajarito Environmental Education Center, the walking paths as Atomic City Transit. And Sheehey was an advocate of the campaign to transfer the Valles Caldera Preserve to National Parks ownership, a key local victory for the public.

Sheehey supports the citizen-developed Comprehensive Plan in making decisions. He was formerly a member of the Planning and Zoning Committee and championed publicly supported amenities — including the huge town system of trails, the municipal swimming pool, the golf course and tennis courts and expanding bike trails on upgraded road plans. And Sheehey walks (or buses) his talk: He takes the local bus whenever he can, including to the Los Alamos Co-op, which is very inconveniently located two miles out of town.

Secretary of State: Maggie Toulouse Oliver
We enthusiastically endorse Maggie Toulouse Oliver in the key race for Secretary of State. The Sierra Club is a coalition partner in the Democracy Initiative, which states: “Our democracy is built on the idea that every citizen can participate in the electoral process and each ballot counts equally. However, barriers exist that prevent some Americans from voting, rendering our voices unequal.”

We want to arrive at a democracy in which the voice of the people counts.

In 2013, the Supreme Court ruling in Shelby County vs. Holder struck down key protections of the 1965 Voting Rights Act and opened the door for the same discriminatory voter suppression laws that the Civil Rights Movement protested more than 50 years ago. These increasingly common barriers include restricting the types of identification and complicating the process required to register and obtain a ballot.

Oliver has an excellent record as Bernalillo county clerk of making voting more accessible, and she would bring needed reform and organization to the Secretary of State’s office.

Sandoval County: Alexis Jimenez
This Sandoval County Commission seat is critical because the county is facing the threat of fracking and has no ordinances in place to address the dangers to water, health, cultural values and infrastructure that oil and gas drilling bring.

Alexis Jimenez supports a moratorium on all exploration and drilling while the county draws up and discusses suitable ordinances.

The current draft ordinance, guided by mining school New Mexico Tech, is woefully inadequate, and in the meantime the county is vulnerable to drilling near Rio Rancho.

The current commission has dragged its feet on a moratorium, so electing commission members who will actively put residents’ health and safety first is crucial.

From left: Grant County Commission candidates Alicia Edwards, Marilyn Alcorn and Harry Browne.

Grant County Commission Three for the Gila
By Mona Blaber
In Grant County, voters have a great opportunity to elect a county commission that could swing the commission to a pro-environment — and pro-Gila River — majority. Alicia Edwards, Marilyn Alcorn and Harry Browne are all committed conservationists who have pledged to preserve Southwestern New Mexico’s unique treasures and resources.

Edwards is running in District 3; Alcorn is vying for the District 4 seat; and Browne is running in District 5. All three candidates oppose the billion-dollar Gila River diversion plan that experts have called infeasible. Instead, these candidates advocate for much more cost-effective alternatives to meet Grant County’s future water needs.

Browne is one of the founders of the Aldo Leopold Charter School. He is also the former executive director and a current board member for Gila Resources Information Project, the organization at the forefront of protecting the Gila River and fighting the state Copper Rule (see Page 7), which is a wish list for mining giant Freeport McMoRan and allows contamination of groundwater underneath mines.

Edwards is the founder of the Grant County Volunteer Center and the founding director of the Commons Center for Food Security and Sustainability. She is also the county Healthy Kids-Healthy Communities coordinator.

Alcorn, a Navy veteran and former teacher, is the board president of Silver Adult Care Services, a nonprofit she founded in 2009.

What district am I in? To learn which district you’re in for any office, check your registration information at voterview.state.nm.us.

What are the hot races? Want to know where your help will have the biggest impact? Write to Mona Blaber at monablaber@gmail.com. Join us Oct. 8, 15, 22, 29 and Nov. 5 on canvasses in the most hotly contested races near you. Email Susan Martin at smartins31@comcast.net or Mona Blaber at monablaber@gmail.com.
Three things you can do to stop trapping

The problem is deeper than this governor; it is that the state does not protect ecological value or wildlife, so the focus is on killing in the guise of management (and revenues from) “game” species.

A second policy is that of federal deference to these pro-hunting state commissions. Thus, if states fail to protect nongame species from hunting and trapping, federal land managers follow, and wildlife on our federal lands are no better managed than are state and private lands.

If this issue touches you, there are several ways you can make a difference.

The latest explosions or, if we are, that we need not address them by altering the way we as a species and as individuals operate. Polluting industries, in their PR campaigns of obstruction, are following the model of deception pioneered by tobacco companies denying the health impacts of smoking.

Ravens, wrens and trees

By Denise Fort
Wildlife Team volunteer

The trapping of wildlife is barbaric, a relic of a time when species were exterminated in the West to supply furs for houses across the world. As wildlife populations shrink in New Mexico and the value of wildlife viewing is beginning to be understood, it is long past time for the state to ban trapping. The painful encounters of dogs and other animals in traps is bringing this practice to wide-spread condemnation.

A constellation of unfortified policies has taken this to place. The regulation of hunting is in the hands of the Southern New Mexico Group Game Commission, as Sierrans know, is appointed by the governor and reflects a narrow range of anti-wildlife positions.

A coalition of groups, including our Sierra Club chapter, will be back in the Legislature this January with legislation to stop trapping on public lands and to end animal-killing contests. Now is the time to speak to your state legislators and try to line up support from chambers of commerce, newspapers, etc. The economic value of wildlife viewing is becoming evident around the state; why wouldn’t we provide more opportunities to New Mexico’s visitors and residents?

These issues also highlight the importance of your vote! Check Pages 7-9 for the Sierra Club list of endorsed candidates, all of whom have voiced their opposition to trapping. Who is elected will make the difference on whether these bills can prevail!

Third, we are examining whether the BLM and Forest Service will close an area of high recreational use to trapping using existing regulatory authority. Santa Fe’s Cajé del Rio is one such area, where we hike, picnic and enjoy splendid views. Noodles, a border collie mix, was taking her human on a hike up the mesa when she was caught in a leg-hold trap.

This and similar occurrences on other recreational lands is unacceptable; why should those who profit from selling coyote skins to foreign buyers outweigh the interests of everyone else? Speak to those who are managing your national forests and public lands and ask them to use their authority to restrict trapping. You can join the mailing list for the Santa Fe National Forest Plan Revision by writing to santafeforestplan@fs.fed.us. To volunteer for our anti-trapping efforts, write to Mary Katherine Ray at mkxscrime@gmail.com.

By Mary Katherine Ray
Chapter Wildlife chair

As you read this issue of the Sierra, feelings of being overwhelmed would be understandable.

The challenges to nature are daunting. The climate is changing. There are forces at work trying to sow doubt about the worldwide physical evidence that humans are causing these changes or, if we are, that we need not address them by altering the way we as a species and as individuals operate. Polluting industries, in their PR campaigns of obstruction, are following the model of deception pioneered by tobacco companies denying the health impacts of smoking.

Wildlife, especially carnivores, struggle in a world crowded with humans, where the biomass of one species, our own, exceeds that of all other living wild land vertebrates on earth combined.

Yet in our state there are factions that cannot tolerate the existence of more than a few hundred wolves. The wild places that wild creatures call home are under perpetual threat of exploitation. The latest scheme to persuade people that our nation’s public lands should be turned over to individual states to do with as they please is a ploy for industry to gain access to drill, mine, log and otherwise render Nature in all her vibrant glory into nothing more than numbers in quarterly earnings reports printed on a page.

And yet ... there is still so much to celebrate. Nature, despite our abuse, is resilient. We have come to the close of another monsoon season when all it takes for the desert to burst into grass green and wildflower color is a little rain. You can find cause for celebration in all the creatures who still manage to survive and thrive, from beetles to birds, rabbits to coyotes. You can find cause for celebration right in your backyard with the migration of hummingbirds, the less obvious warblers and year-round resident wrens and flickers.

Take heart. Take time to be under the sky and under the trees. Listen for the songs. Put down the phone, step away from the computer, turn off the TV. The beauty is still everywhere. On the original 9/11 of 2001, I had to do just that after the incomprehensible horror of those collapsing buildings. I walked out onto the back porch, and two ravens flew just over the trees, cawing joyfully to each other. In their world that morning, there was no crashing, no exploding, no senseless destruction. For a moment, I stepped into that world and realized that the reality is bigger than we are.

Pay attention, volunteer, donate, vote; do what you can to stand up against the polluters, the exploiters, and the abusers, but don’t forget the rewards. Smell the balsam-sweet cottonwood trees whose leaves are starting to fall, tingle to hear the hawk scream, walk through a forest or along a stream and lose yourself to the quest for a glimpse of a yellow warbler whose travels will take him to the tropics and back again without burning a single drop of gasoline.

Many have lamented that if we don’t fight for wilderness and wild places, we could lose them, and that is true. But an even worse tragedy would be to lose them without ever knowing them at all.

Have you found your wren today?
Victory! EPE revokes anti-solar plan

By Robert Moss, Eco El Paso board member

El Paso is again “The Sun City” but has an opportunity to be “SolSmart” too.

In a surprising settlement of its rate case in Texas, El Paso Electric in August completely withdrew its proposed fees on the sun.

EPE had in August 2015 proposed a new rate structure that would have caused its residential customers to be separated into two residential rate classes: those with solar and those without. Under that proposal, unwarranted charges would have penalized customers who had made investments in rooftop solar for using clean energy from the sun.

The utility, following recent moves by other monopoly utilities, had falsely asserted that the solar customers were not paying their fair share and were shifting costs to other, poorer customers. Fortunately for customers in El Paso, the city’s leaders, the Office of Public Utility Counsel, Eco El Paso and other intervenors waged an effective legal battle to discourage the unjustly discriminatory rate structure.

Adding to news settling the rate case, EPE announced it had sold the last remaining coal from its generating portfolio, while highlighting its increasing investment in renewable energy. Provided the company maintains this path, these pronouncements provide EPE an opportunity to further demonstrate leadership in support of sustainable systems.

The City of El Paso also has an opportunity to make the most of the recent gains in support of the environment. On Sept. 26, the federal SolSmart program announced the first 22 communities to receive recognition. SolSmart is a Department of Energy program that acknowledges communities working to make it easier to go solar. Cities are recognized with three designation levels, gold, silver and bronze.

Coalition renews Big Bend International Park campaign

By Rick LoBello

The El Paso Sierra Club Group and the Greater Big Bend Coalition are peti-

The proposed park boundaries include Big Bend National Park and protected wildlife areas in the Mexican states of Chihuahua and Coahuila.

A new website, greaterbigbend.org, contains a link to the change.org petition drafted by our coalition and additional information on the international park project. Most visitors to Big Bend National Park — and park enthusiasts nationwide — have no idea that an international park on the Rio Grande was first proposed by Congress in February 1935. On Nov. 24, 1935, environmental officials from Mexico and the United States met in El Paso and signed the first binational agreement to create an international park.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote to Mexican President Manuel Ávila Camacho in 1944 expressing his opinion that Big Bend National Park (established in 1944) would remain incomplete until “both sides of the Rio Grande form one great international park.” In 1946, President Harry S. Truman wrote to President Camacho on “behalf of the late President Roosevelt” to continue the international park campaign.

International parks are not unknown to the National Park Service and North America. The US and Canada established the Waterton Glacier International Peace Park in 1932, combining Glacier National Park (Montana) and the Waterton Park (Alberta). While both nations manage their respective parks separately, the guiding principle is that shared ecosystems — divided only by arbitrary political boundaries — should be conserved as a single, unified preserve.

The coalition agreed to the following proposal for the size and scope of the park at a meeting on Sept. 3.

The Greater Big Bend Coalition calls upon the U.S. and Mexico governments to designate lands currently protected by the National Park Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife and Commission Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas as one giant U.S.-Mexico International Park.

Both countries would retain their national sovereignty over all lands within the international park area and each land-management agency would continue to manage lands as authorized by each government.

The combined area would be managed using the successful model of cooperation at Waterton Glacier International Park on the U.S.-Canada border with each protected area managed and protected under its respective national legislative frameworks. Guiding principles would be established relating to natural and cultural resource management, visitor use and interpretation, science and research and relations with peoples living in the area, reflecting strong cooperation among the property managers.

The Boquillas International Crossing between the Big Bend National Park and Boquillas, Coahuila, should be the sole crossing within the national park, and no bridge should be built in Big Bend National Park. International bridges built or reopened in the future, such as La Linda Bridge north of Big Bend National Park, should be considered.

The next step to establish this new 80-year-plus proposal for both countries would be for both countries to draft legislation calling for the creation of the international park or for the presidents of the United States and Mexico to jointly declare the area as an International Park with the support of the land-management agencies involved. Legislation may be required since the lands that could be included already have protected status.

The International designation could be a symbolic gesture made by presidential orders in the U.S. and Mexico.

Each of the eight protected areas proposed to be included as part of the International Park has a distinctive climate, physiographic setting, mountain-desert interface and significant scenic values with abundant and diverse flora and fauna.

1. Big Bend National Park, Texas, 801,163 acres

2. Maderas del Carmen Protected Area, Coahuila, 520,000 acres

3. Ocampo Natural Protected Area, Coahuila area, 826,000 acres

4. Cañón de Santa Elena Protected Area, Chihuahua, 511,508 acres

5. Big Bend Ranch State Park, Texas, 311,000 acres

6. Black Gap Wildlife Management Area, Texas, 54,000 acres

7. Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River (196-mile portion of Rio Grande)

8. Monumento Río Bravo del Norte in México (300 -portion of Rio Grande)
Northern New Mexico Group

Pigeline issue hits close to home

By Teresa Seastmer Northern NM Group Chair

Northern New Mexico Group's Executive Committee voted to prepare a letter for the Rio Grande Chapter to show our solidarity with the members of the Standing Rock Sioux in opposing the Dakota Access pipeline. A similar letter from the New Mexico Congressional Delegation is in process and a statement soon after from the Department of Justice, U.S. Army and Department of Interior show an almost simultaneous pro-active response to the events at the Standing Rock Sioux. Below are excerpts of the three letters among a few examples of how people at all levels of the political spectrum, from grassroots to the highest elected office, responded when people's rights were violated, legal protest was attacked, and due process was bypassed.

Letter 1: Rio Grande Chapter to Congressional Delegation

Sept. 8, 2016

The Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club has 7,500 members in New Mexico and West Texas and is united in standing with the First Peoples of Standing Rock to demand the immediate stop to the illegal proceedings of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

The 1,104-mile four state pipeline has been allowed to start construction without adequate government oversight, and is now threatening the water supplies of millions of residents and crossing thousands of acres of cropland and important Native Peoples' spiritual, cultural and archaeological sites. Support for the pipeline, according to an August poll of Iowans in the Des Moines Register, has dropped to 38% despite intense media promotion by Dakota Access.

The Army Corps of Engineers granted the Dakota Access pipeline (410) under an emergency fast-tracking process called “Nationwide Permit 12” that allows the Corps to essentially rubber-stamp pipeline projects on private property or Native American lands with little environmental review and no meaningful public input.

The letters incorporated this fast-track process in conflict with numerous federal laws and agreements. ...

New Mexicans in Albuquerque and Santa Fe were part of nationwide events Sept. 13 in solidarity with Standing Rock Sioux efforts to protect their water supply from the Dakota pipeline.

For those who have never faced the threat of eminent-domain seizure of their private or tribal lands knowing the process sanctioned in non-specific wording in state statute and allows continual corporate “landman” pressure to get private easements. Private landowners have little protection under law except to hire their own counsels to try and negotiate unenforceable land-use agreements with multibillion-dollar corporations.

The costs and risks of pipeline accidents, malfunctions, leaks and damages are the responsibility of the landowner except on the 150-foot easement strip that runs through their land. Tribal and rural communities are unable to provide trained first responders in case of the all too frequent accidents, and local banks respond to the increased risk by cancelling farm and home mortgages, dropping homeowner's insurance and raising loan rates. ...

We are deeply disturbed that private corporation security guards and attack dogs have assaulted peaceful and largely Native American demonstraters. This racial violence evokes the shameful part of aggression against Native Americans. ...

We respectfully urge that our elected officials convey our request that President Barack Obama order an immediate review of the situation in North Dakota and the coercive actions of the pipeline company to take the strongest possible steps to prevent further injustice.

Letter 2: Congressional Delegation letter to President Obama

Sept. 8, 2016

Dear Mr. President: We would like to bring to your attention the attached letters and resolutions shared with us by Pueblos of Isleta Governor E. Paul Torres on behalf of the All Pueblo Council of Governors representing 20 pueblos, Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez, and the President of the Shiprock Chapter Duane Chilie Yazzie. In particular we call to your attention the resolution from the Shiprock Chapter calling on your administration to intervene in the deplorable recent escalation of violence between private security personnel and Native American protestors over the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

We oppose and condemn unjustified violence against protestors in the strongest possible terms. The aggressive actions undertaken by private contractor security personnel in North Dakota including the use of pepper spray and dogs are alarming, and it is important that the concerns regarding this project are given due consideration and steps are taken to ensure the safety of everyone on site. ...

We request an immediate intervention into this escalating violence and that your administration respond to the growing concerns in tribal communities across New Mexico about the potential for violent and destructive acts may face criminal sanctions from federal, tribal, state, or local authorities. The Departments of Justice and the Interior will continue to deploy resources to North Dakota to help state, local, and tribal authorities, and the communities they serve, better communicate, defuse tensions, support peaceful protest, and maintain public safety. ...

"Finally, we fully support the rights of all Americans to assemble and speak freely. We urge everyone involved in protest or protective activities to adhere to the principles of nonviolence. Of course, anyone who commits violent or destructive acts may face criminal sanctions from federal, tribal, state, or local authorities. The Departments of Justice and the Interior will continue to deploy resources to North Dakota to help state, local, and tribal authorities, and the communities they serve, better communicate, defuse tensions, support peaceful protest, and maintain public safety. ..."
A day with the Taos Water Sentinels

Teresa Seamster, Northern New Mexico Group

T here is not much to top spending a day in the late-summer sunshine, wading and checking the waters of some of our northern rivers.

Friday, Nora Patterson is the linchpins of the Taos Water Sentinels. Skilled at all aspects of sampling and monitoring water quality, they keep records on the rivers of Northern New Mexico, train volunteer monitors, team up with Amigos Bravo and Taos High School students to provide vital water measurements for lab analysis and send results to the state Environment Department.

Our state is strapped for funding when it comes to monitoring our many streams and rivers. The Pattersons have secured their reputation with the state with their reliable data collection and analysis and their attention to detailed protocol when sampling and shipping. Part of that protocol is taking “ custody” of every sample shipment, noting who took the sample, who received the sample for shipping, and who provided delivery to the lab.

When every step is recorded, the chances of the EPA lab in Alamosa receiving a degraded sample resulting in useless results are almost nil, and the Sentinels can be confident that their results are accurate before going into the state’s river database. When training new monitors, Eric always stresses: “Bad data is worse than no data. Take your time and get it right.”

One site tested primarily for E. coli is the Rio Hondo, flowing past Taos Ski Valley.

The process of taking water samples is deceptively easy. It takes only 10 minutes to gather ice, and Eric was already done about 5 meters downstream from the John Dunn Bridge with the last samples.

At 9:15 a.m., we were finished and back in Valdez. All samples were in the cooler with ice, and Eric was already back with his samples from the Rio Fernando de Taos.

The Taos County officials who came were excited about the tests. Tasked with streamside and arroyo cleanups, they can see collections of trash of more than 25 tons in one day. Both Ed and Lorenzo wanted to know more about what washes into the water, and how much results can tell you.

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Nora told them water analysis can detect much more than E. coli, nitrates, phosphate and ammonia, it can also indicate cocaine usage, estrogen levels and residues from campfires.

The day was an immense education in beautiful weather and surroundings. With a teacher like Nora, who wastes no time on non-essential information but aids understanding with a wealth of demonstration — all schooling should be like this!

To volunteer for Water Sentinels or learn more about testing water near you, contact Eric Patterson at eepatt@gmail.com.

Top: Taos Water Sentinels

Chris Ellis and Nora Patterson point out developments that impact the Rio Hondo waters to Taos County Solid Waste Director Ed Martinez and Enforcement Officer Lorenzo Gutierrez.

Above: Nora and Lorenzo test for dissolved oxygen at confluence of Rio Hondo and Rio Grande.

Right: Nora and Teresa below John Dunn Bridge with the last samples.

Volunteer profile: Teresa Seamster

Seamster is chair of the Northern New Mexico Group.

Q: What is your role with Sierra Club?

A: The chair of our group has many responsibilities: organizing monthly excursions, meetings, keeping members informed of group activities, submitting comments and writing letters of support on a wide spectrum of city-county-regional issues, attending coalition meetings, arranging volunteer activities and publicity such as outings, tabling, and presenting at public events such as the recent “Co-Existence with Carnivores” panel.

We also have published a hiking book, and I arrange for book shipments from the publisher and work with groups such as Taos Water Sentinels and Dr. Eric Metzler to award proceeds from the book sales to their water-monitoring and pollinator research in the state.

My main work is split between monitoring wildlife in Santa Fe County, speaking at Game Commission meetings on behalf of the State Wildlife Action Plan (due to pass at the end of this year), getting trained to assist with water-monitoring, working with our Santa Fe National Forest and Carson National Forest coalition on forest-plan revisions, working on the Environmental Committee of the Sustainable Santa Fe Commission, and working on a Health Impact Assessment with the Tri-Chapter communities in the Chaco area.

Q: How did you get involved with Sierra Club?

A: Carol Oldham (former chapter organizer) and I met at a PRC meeting in 2008. We started talking after PRC commissioner Ben R. Lujan pointed to her in the crowd and told the PNMs to meet with her and give her more CFL light-bulbs to hand out. I was impressed by the Chapter’s simple program to hand out CFLs and promote energy efficiency at public schools and volunteered to get trained, creating a powerpoint and speaking to fourth-through sixth-graders. After two years I joined the executive committee under Norma McCallan’s urging.

Q: What environmental issue is your biggest passion?

A: Whatever impacts the things I value: wildlife, forests, clean water, Navajo families (I was head of the Communications Department at San Juan College before I moved to Santa Fe from Aztec and many of my students were from the Navajo Nation. I got to know many fami-
Changing protocol for euthanizing bears

By Jody Benson

On a very hot June 18, during the Valles Caldera Marathon, a mother bear attacked mara-thoner Karen Williams, who ran too close to one of her cubs. The injuries required Williams to be transported to UNM Hospital for treatment. Reasonable people would recognize that in this encounter the mama bear was just doing her thing. She was being defensive and reasonable. Protective people understand that the single encounter would not give a predator a taste for human or wildlife habitat.

As in most bear/human interactions, the state’s action was predictable. Two days after the encounter, NM Game and Fish deployed a radio collar with a GPS tracking device (the bear had been tagged for a black bear study) tracked down the mama bear and killed her.

What was not predictable is that Karen Williams, an emergency-room nurse in Los Alamos who spends a lot of time in the wilderness, decided to (1) research rabies and the rules requiring an animal’s un evaluated “euthanasia,” and (2) enlist local state Rep. Stephanie Garcia Richard to draft a bill that rewrites the rules on all wild and that bears must be euthanized.

The current rule directs that all wild animals that bite humans must be eutha- nized and the brain extracted so the DOH can test for rabies. But Williams, an endur- ance runner who spends many hours on the trails, wants to create a protocol that uses an evidence-based, scientific approach to determine whether a bear should be euthanized.

Rather than “destroying” all animals, the fate of the other bears would be assessed through a decision tree that includes: (1) the species’ potential for rabies (the rule already exempts raccoons and rodents, for example, because they don’t rabid — bears can be under a similar exemption), (2) whether the action is predatory or defensive, and (3) whether the attack location is in human or wildlife habitat.

The logic of the new rule can be summed up: Bears rarely get rabies. The reaction of this mama bear was provoked only because she thought Williams threatened her cubs.

Williams’ research shows that since 2012, there have been 85 cases of rabies in New Mexico, primarily in skunks (42) and bats (30), with one coyote, seven foxes, two raccoons, two dogs, and one ringtail. She also cites a 1963 study indicating that bears might be compara- tively rabies-resistant; a black bear inoculated with 1,000 MLD50 of the virus showed no signs of disease over a five-month period, while a dog and three Arctic foxes that had received 100 MLD50 of the same inoculum died of rabies in 67 to 106 days.

If those data and that decision tree show that bears — a species that rarely gets rabies, a mama protecting her babies in a wildlands far from normal human interactions — is not a threat, then why kill her? That’s what Williams’ research poses. That’s why she wants to change this archaic rule.

“Rabies is rare,” she said, “there is no need to go. Bears, skunks, foxes… but if it’s a bear, then look at what happened. It was just doing its thing, then don’t euthanize it.”

In creating the bill, Garcia Richard doesn’t need to reinvent the wheel. Again, Williams’ research found reasonable rules in other states (including hunter-centric Alaska), that address “predatory versus defensive” behavior.

Garcia Richard has already submitted new language to the Legislative Council Service. They are using Williams’ research to craft the bill. After the bill is refined, it goes to the chief clerk of the Legislators’ chamber, where it is assigned a number, after which it goes to (usually at least) two legislative commit- tees. Within the committees, expert witnesses present testi- mony, followed by audience comments. The committees decide whether to advance the bill to the floor.

Once the bill is approved, it goes to the governor, who may sign a bill, veto it or take no action (a bill that is “no action” can become either a law or a pocket veto, depending on when the bill is sent for the governor’s consideration).

As Sierra Club members, can help move the bill out of committee by attending hearings and offering our comments. Attending commit- tee meetings where the bill is being heard is more important than attending the session on the floor of the House or Senate. Because there’s no public comment on the floor, the Committee hearing is the only place you can have a voice. Please come prepared with a succinct, science-based comment.

The Sierra Club will also send out an online action alert. Watch for the notice, use it to write to your legislator, and forward the link. Finally, Garcia Richard has the draft bill in process. Garcia Richard is a friend of the environ- ment. In this election she faces Sharon Stover, who is well funded. A weakness that could tell us why don’t euthanize it.

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C

He soon acquired a following of dedicated hikers who would go wherever he would lead.

Tobin Oruch, (505) 690-6253, tobin.oruch@yahoo.com.

Saturday, Nov. 22 Alpine Meadows adventures above Ski Basin. See Oct. 4 description.

Saturday, Nov. 20: Strenuous hike or snowshoe in Taos. Dogs OK. Tobin Oruch, (505) 690-6253, tobin.oruch@yahoo.com.

Sunday, Nov. 20: Moderate hike around the basaltic plug of Cebazon peak (but not to the top of Cebazon peak). Gorgeous views. About 2.4-mile loop starts and ends with fairly steep 650-foot trail. End with optional potluck at Odile’s house. Odile De La Beaujardiere, 505-433-4692, odile@pidiot.org.

Sunday, Nov. 22 Alpine Meadows adventures above Ski Basin. See Oct. 4 description. (Last of season).

Saturday, Nov. 24-27: Moderate/strenuous hike or snowshoe in Taos. come for one day or more. Dogs OK. Tobin Oruch, (505) 690-6253, tobin.oruch@yahoo.com.

Saturday, Nov. 26: Moderate hike (eight miles, 1,100-foot gain) on Rio One With Ancho Canyon to Red Dot. Beautiful hike through White Rock Canyon, almost all on-trail. Car shuttle from Red Dot to Ancho Rapid, hike from Ancho to Red Dot. Sign up on Sierra Hiking Meetup for automatic updates. Mark Dunham, (505) 795-0199, medunham2@msn.com.

Saturday, Nov. 29: Road biking around Santa Fe (moderate, less than 20 miles). A number of trials now exist in the Explore hike/bike trails in Rio Grande del Norte National Monument south of Taos. John Bucher, (505) 231-6645.

Tuesday, Dec. 6: Road and mountain biking, Chama Valley. Aku, (505) 466-4063.

Tuesday, Dec. 20: Moderate hike to Otowi Peak and Chieh Line Trail, 8 miles and 1,000-foot gain. (Backman Crossing trails). Call to confirm day of hike.

December Saturday, Dec. 3: Moderate hike (3.5 miles, 1,200-foot elevation gain) to Black Canyon and beyond. Strep climb in places to high vantage point above the Santa Fe watershed. Go in at Black Canyon, then off-trail. Alan Shipton, nm35@yahoo.com.


Saturday, Dec. 3: Moderate/strenuous hike or snowshoe in Taos. Dogs OK. Tobin Oruch, (505) 690-6253, tobin.oruch@yahoo.com.


Tuesday, Dec. 6: Road biking around Santa Fe (moderate, 20 miles). See Nov. 29 event for details.

Saturday, Dec. 17: Strenuous snowshoe or hike depending on conditions. Two or three dogs OK. Larry, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com, (505) 913-0589.

Sunday, Dec. 18: Moderate/strenuous hike or snowshoe in Taos, come for one day or both. Dogs OK. Tobin Oruch, (505) 690-6253, tobin.oruch@yahoo.com.

Tuesday, Dec. 13: Road biking around Santa Fe (moderate, 20 miles). The New Mexico Bosque Action Team.

By Carol Chamberland

He was a quiet man who showed

many a hiker the joys of rambling off trail. He favored canyons and mesas where unusual geology was in full display, but during the heat of summer, he’d brave monsoon storms and head for the mountains and forests.

As a Rio Grande Chapter hike leader, Tom Petencin acquired a following of dedicated hikers who would go wherever he would lead.

Tom was a quiet man who showed a quiet observer to the hungry birds at the feeder or a patient watchman to the vagaries of the weather.
October

Tuesday, Oct. 4: Ascent to the Alpine Meadows Adventures Above Santa Fe Ski Basin (recurring hike). Weekly burst of 90 minutes ascending 2,000 vertical feet, with variety of scenic rewards at the top. Departure at 8:30 a.m. from De Vargas Mall, meet behind Albemans (west side). Mark Dunham medunham2@msn.com, (505) 795-0199.

Friday-Monday, Oct. 7-10: Strenuous four-day backpack in Southern Colorado’s South San Juan Wilderness. About 32-mile loop trip starting and ending at the South Fork TH. The second- and third-night campsites will be above 11,000 feet. One or two dogs OK. Larry, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com, (505) 913-0589.

Saturday, Oct. 8: (rescheduled from Sept. 10): Moderate exploratory Chama River Redwall Canyon off-trail scrambling. Seldom seen except by rafters, the Colorado Plateau Chinle formation closes in on the Rio Chama, 4 miles upstream from Christ in the Desert Monastery. Mark Dunham, medunham2@msn.com, (505) 795-0199.

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Saturday, Oct. 15: Moderate hike to Placer Peak in Ortiz Mountains, up to 8 miles and 1,700-foot gain. Mark Dunham, medunham2@msn.com, (505) 795-0199.

Saturday, Oct. 15: Strenuous hike to enjoy late autumn in the Canon del Rio de las Trampas with a hike to the Trampas Lakes. Length 11-13 miles and 2,500 to 2,700 feet of elevation gain, depending on group and conditions. We will visit all three lakes if we do the longer hike. Aku, (505) 577-2594.

Sunday, Oct. 16: Strenuous hike to Jicarita Peak, a windy, barren top south of Taos. Much of hike will be above tree line. Chances for mountain sheep and elk. Total of 12 miles, 2,800 feet of gain. Limit 8, one or two dogs OK. Early start from Eldorado. Dag Ryan, (505) 466-4063.


Saturday, Oct. 22: Creatures of the Night Bosquitos outing for families. Valle del Oro National Refuge. 5:30-8 Hike, storytelling. Meet at the front of the refuge.


Saturday, Oct. 22: Strenuous hike to Lobo Peak, up via the Yerba Canyon trail and down via Italianos Canyon trail. Nine miles and 3,900 feet of elevation gain. Early start. Two or three dogs OK. Larry, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com, (505) 913-0589.

Saturday, Oct. 22: Creatures of the Night Bosquitos outing for families. Valle del Oro National Refuge. 5:30-8 Hike, storytelling. Meet at the front of the refuge.

Sunday, Oct. 22: Easy, short off-trail hike to La Mesita near Embudo. See interest-ing example of an a’a lava flow. Very careful crossing of a section of this flow on way up to top of the mesa. Just 1.5 miles, 400 feet elevation, but somewhat tricky, slow climb. Alan Shapiro, nm5s@yahoo.com.

Tuesday, Oct. 26: Alpine Meadows Adventures Above Ski Basin. See Octover 4 description.


November

Tuesday, Nov. 1: Alpine Meadows adventures above Ski Basin. See Oct. 4 description.

Saturday, Nov. 5: Easy hike up a steep, shortcut route to the high ridge along the Hyde Park Circle Trail. Two miles, 550-foot elevation gain. Alan Shapiro, nm5s@yahoo.com.

Sunday, Nov. 6: Easy hike

Continued on Page 15