Residents decry NM nuclear dump; Holloman proposes 10,000 F-16 sorties a year over Gila Forest

Radioactive rods would travel by rail: Page 3

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Our primary endorsements
Each election season, the Rio Grande Chapter endorses candidates we think will best protect our natural resources. See our picks on Pages 8-9

Dirty Copper Rule upheld
New Mexico’s Supreme Court upheld the industry-written rule despite acknowledging that copper mines will “inevitably” pollute large areas of groundwater. Page 6

All about bats
There’s a lot you might not know; for one, they’re not blind! Page 14

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Conservation Issues

Advice on how to get involved with the Sierra Club.

Volunteer opportunities
The Rio Grande Chapter needs a treasurer to replace the current treasurer, who is taking a break. A volunteer treasurer provides quarterly financial statements to the board; monitors transactions in bank accounts and general ledger; monitors the process through which the contractor bookkeeper prepares year-end financial statements; and coordinate with chapter director on financial matters.

April/May/June 2018
Residents across state speak out about proposed high-level nuclear dump in SE New Mexico

By John Buchser
Chapter Water chair

to citizens lobbying at the Roundhouse, 30 legislators signed on to letters objection to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s inadequate public-comment period on a proposed dump for high-level nuclear fuel rods between Carlsbad and Hobbs.

The commission said the Legislature could comment on the proposal; one environmental-impact statement after it is released in a year or so. That makes it even more important for the public to comment during the 60-day scoping period that ends May 29.

The proposal to store spent fuel from all the nation’s nuclear reactors has many problems. One of the most critical is that of poorly designed transport casks that are too heavy for most railroads in New Mexico. Another major issue is that the proposal to “temporarily” store this radioactive waste is contrary to current law.

In April, activists toured the state with a mock radioactive-waste canister to highlight how risky the shipment and storage of the nuclear waste is.

“Our land is not the nation’s dumping ground for dangerous high-level radioactive waste, with its risks for cancer, birth defects and deaths. Those who created the waste should take responsibility for it. Our sacred land is not your pay toilet,” said Rose Gardner, a Eunice resident and founder of Alliance for Environmental Strategies.

“We ask people from New Mexico and around the country to support us in halting this dangerous plan, which not only creates risks for us at ground zero, but risks along transport routes nationwide.”

High-level radioactive waste could end up being stored for up to 120 years, according to the application. The federal government has promised and failed for more than 35 years to develop a permanent underground repository for high-level reactor wastes.

“What happens if the federal government breaks its promise to move this waste away or won’t pay to clean it up?” asked Nick King, pastor at Carlsbad Mennonite Church. “This is an ethical and moral concern that affects communities and God’s creation.”

The Holtec facility once built is estimated to employ fewer than 15 employees and 15 security forces. These numbers pale in comparison to the job-creation potential of other industries that may not have a future in the event of nuclear-waste contamination.

More than 10,000 rail cars would haul this risky waste, rumbling on rails through or near major cities in New Mexico, in a process that would take 20 years.

In the last three years, there have been seven train accidents in New Mexico, including trains derailing and/or wrecks.

Other issues with the proposal:

- In its environmental report, Holtec states that the federal government would pay for the transportation of the waste, but current federal law allows payment only for shipment to a permanent repository, not to a private storage site such as Holtec’s.
- Radiation risks to workers in the facility and along transport routes are underestimated.
- Casks are welded closed. Repair processes to fix broken casks or leaking fuel have not been developed.
- The cask bracket system to hold used fuel rods immobile is failing.

F-16 flyovers threaten Gila; your action needed

Donna Stevens, Upper Gila Watershed Alliance

The Gila and Aldo Leopold Wilderness areas are known for their immense natural beauty and outstanding opportunities for solitude. Would the Gila still be beautiful if it were no longer quiet? Let’s make sure we never find out.

Background: Last fall, conservationists learned that Holloman Air Force Base plans to expand its F-16 fighter-jet training airspace. Two alternative Military Operations Areas have been proposed: (1) Expand the existing Talon area east of the White Sands Missile Range, and (2) Expand the existing Cato/Smitty areas and create a new Lobo Military Operations Area near the Silver City and the Gila and Aldo Leopold Wilderness Areas.

Alternative 2 would have major effects on Southwest New Mexico, with 10,000 additional missions and an average of 30 per day. Ten percent of flights will be supersonic, and 10 percent will occur at night. Flights can be as low as 500 feet above ground, and some will drop air-defense flares and chaff, about 15,000 of each annually. A bundle of chaff consists of 5 million aluminum-coated plastic fibers that are released to form an electronic cloud and hide aircraft from radar detection. Flares are also released as part of air defense; dropped from 2,000 feet above ground level, they burn for about four seconds. Although the Air Force says the flares present no fire risk, there are documented cases of flares starting fires on the ground.

The proposed expansion in F-16 training missions over the Gila clearly puts the health of the national forest, Gila and Aldo Wilderness areas and nearby communities like Silver City at risk from extreme noise, wildlife and environmental contamination. Trying to wean itself off the boom-and-bust cycle of extractive industries, the Silver City area has relied on natural amenities to attract tourism, outdoor recreation and retirees to diversify its rural economy. This strategy is severely threatened by Holloman’s proposal. Opposition to Holloman’s proposal is much more than a not-in-my-backyard issue. The Gila River, the Gila National Forest, and the Gila and Aldo Leopold Wildernesses are part of our national heritage, which belongs to everyone.

Air Force Meetings

When the community found out about Holloman’s proposal, residents of southwest New Mexico were outraged by the lack of public notice and failure to hold a scoping meeting in Silver City, the population center most affected by Alternative 2. The Grant County Commission requested a public meeting with the Air Force, and when this took place last November, Air Force representative Alan Shafer declined to answer many questions, saying that the answers would be included in the draft Environmental Impact Statement, expected in 2018.

On March 8, Lt. Gov. John Sanchez’s office convened a second public meeting with Shafer. Despite less than two days’ notice, more than 400 residents attended the meeting and protest rally. Not one person spoke in favor of the Holloman proposal.

There is little doubt that the F-16 training at Holloman is going to happen as part of our country’s military preparedness. But how Holloman will optimize its airspace to accommodate the training has yet to be determined.

The Air Force should use lands already impacted by military exercises, such as White Sands Missile Range (3,200 square miles), Fort Bliss Army Base (1,700 square miles) and other areas.

F-16 training over the Gila would change its fundamental character. It will take the proverbial village to respond to this threat; we urge you to do your part. Holler louder than an F-16!
Celebrating 55 years as a chapter

Recently, we were pleased to be involved in an effort organized to increase coordination between unionized labor and environmental groups in New Mexico. The cooperation and mutual support of labor and environmentalists are essential to building a progressive Southwest. Working together, we can create communities that recognize the beauty of our beautiful regional while providing just wages, health care and education to all families.

In the first round of discussion, it was fairly straightforward to agree that our political priorities for labor and the environment this year are essentially the same. Both know that keeping and improving progressive majorities in the Legislature is critical. New Mexico also has the opportunity this year to elect a governor who will protect our air and water and our working families. So for unions and environmentalists, it is all hands on deck for the 2018 elections—but other priorities for collaboration also became apparent.

First, as the environmental community pushes for more renewable energy, economic opportunity is going to occur, so we must ensure the new jobs are better, not worse, than the jobs that will be ending as we adapt to technological change and face up to climate realities.

My friend Brian Condit, president of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, pointed out that members of his union typically receive over $50 an hour in wages and benefits. The US has seen so many of our good jobs replaced by low-wage work with no benefits. It will benefit all of us to make sure we are fighting for better wages and working conditions as we fight for renewable energy and healthier communities.

A second area of common concern is southeastern New Mexico. Somos un Pueblo Unido representative Marina Piña has led organizing efforts among immigrant dairy workers and oil-field workers in places like Roswell, Hobbs, Carlsbad and Clovis. The Sierra Club understands that in addition to the concerns with water quality, air quality and animal welfare in these industries, there is also grave concern for worker health, safety and wages. Immigrant-bashing and law-enforcement raids continue to disrupt these working families, while political representation from those same counties continues to be both anti-union and anti-environment.

Importantly, work done by Marima and Somos has shown that all the communities mentioned are “majority minority.” That is, the majority of the population in Eddy, Lea, Chaves and other southeastern New Mexico counties is Latino. Somos has begun efforts to identify and register to vote all qualified workers and their family members. This work has the potential to change the type of representation, senators and other elected officials from southeastern New Mexico. With organizing and voter registration, we can replace politicians who are anti-union and anti-environment with representatives who support worker safety and water-quality protection; who show a concern for good wages and healthy communities.

Charles Goodmacher of the National Education Association brought up a third area for collaboration—renewable energy in our public schools. In many communities, the public schools own substantial land and buildings. Districts like Santa Fe have shown how to convert many facilities to renewable energy. Groups in all areas of the state could support this type of effort.

I am proud that the Sierra Club continues to be pro-union. The potential for new collaboration and projects with our union allies is real and happening right now.

Methane safeguards face biggest threat yet

By Camilla Feibelman
Rio Grande Chapter director

You’ve read it here more than once. Oil and gas operations throughout the state are wasting natural gas they extract from our public lands.

Methane — the key component of natural gas that also happens to be a powerful greenhouse gas — is leaked, vented or flared throughout the oil and gas drilling, transport and storage processes. As part of the Paris Climate Agreement, the Obama Administration passed rules at the EPA and BLM that would slow this waste, protect health, reduce climate change and bring more royalties into the state treasury.

That these methane rules (against all odds) are still in effect is thanks to the persistence of the Rio Grande Chapter is working to turn these rules back (against all odds) are still in effect is thanks to the persistence of the Rio Grande Chapter is working to turn these rules back and the public comments from citizens submitted in support of the safeguards. That’s in addition to the hundreds of thousands of comments that citizens submitted in support of the original rule.

We sometimes hear that this administration is in chaos or is too disorganized to do too much harm. But the sad reality is that our environmental protections are being systematically dismantled. When we desperately need to take significant action to reduce climate pollution before it’s too late, Zinke’s revisions are a huge step backward.

The Zinke proposal would result in the same amount of climate damage as 8.3 million cars driven over 10 years. Not to mention the fact that oil and gas operations also release dangerous toxins such as benzene and other ozone-forming pollutants that can trigger asthma attacks and worsen respiratory diseases such as emphysema.

More methane waste means more air pollution that will harm families, especially those living closest to oil and gas development. We hope you’ll join us in the fight to protect New Mexico, its people and its public lands by commenting by midnight April 23 — comment links available at riograndesierraclub.org.
Chaco's surprise reprieve

By Miya King-Flaherty
Our Wild New Mexico

In an unanticipated move, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke cancelled a March lease auction of 4,454 acres in Greater Chaco to oil and gas companies. Thanks to the efforts of our New Mexico Congressional delegates, the Frack Off Chaco Coalition, the Navajo Nation and All People Council of Governors, National Congress of American Indians, 15 Navajo chapter houses, the Legislature and thousands of concerned citizens, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke instructed the Bureau of Land Management to defer the sale pending analysis of cultural resources in the lease area.

In response, the Frack Off Chaco Coalition held two events, one in Albuquerque and the other at the BLM New Mexico State office in Santa Fe. Organizers presented a large “Thank You” card to Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich’s staff in Albuquerque to remind them that more work is needed to ensure protections for public health and cultural resources. Sen. Udall’s state director, Greg Bloom, read a statement from the senator promising that he will continue to fight for impacted residents and our national heritage in and around Chaco.

At the BLM New Mexico State office, organizers delivered more than 200,000 public signatures calling for a moratorium on drilling in Greater Chaco and for meaningful public health, cultural and environmental protections.

Community members in Greater Chaco are also taking a stand against unchecked oil and gas leasing near their homes by planting signs along U.S. 550 in Counselor, N.M. The messages read: “Entering Energy Sacrifice Zone,” “We Are Greater Chaco,” “Violence Against Land is Violence Against Us,” “Extraction Threatens Our Health and Safety,” “Selloff Of Sacred Lands Doooda,” and “Methane Gas: Odorless Toxin in Our Air.”

“One of the purposes of the signs is to get the community talking. The dangers associated with natural-resource extraction affect us in one way or another whether we want to believe it or not. Becoming aware of the so-called political ground we stand on is powerful, and we must stand against destruction if we are to ensure there will be a future living with and on the land,” said Kendra Pinto, Navajo Nation Twin Pines resident.

Although the lease sale has been deferred, the BLM continues to approve drilling permits near homes and public spaces. This is a small victory, but the battle continues.

Above: Daniel Tso and Sam Sage helped deliver 200,000 petition signatures to the BLM state office asking for a moratorium on drilling in Northwest New Mexico’s Greater Chaco region.

At left: Kendra Pinto, Counselor Health Impact Assessment project manager, installs a monitor to measure indoor and outdoor air quality within 1 mile of an oil well in Navajo Nation Counselor Chapter, N.M. Sierra Club provided funds for the 20 monitors the team installed April 15 and will pay for lab analysis and reports to each household, church and chapter house being monitored, as well as air-quality reports when monitoring is complete in 32 days.

Top photo by David McGahey
Bottom photo by Teresa Seamster

Sanvedo citizens to draft drill ordinance

By Miya King-Flaherty

At the March 15 Sanvedo County Commission meeting, the commission voted 4-1 to approve a Citizens Working Group composed of 11 voting members and three non-voting members led by geologist Don Phillips. These members are responsible for developing a county oil and gas ordinance that includes protections for our drinking water and communities as well as meaningful tribal consultation.

Among the members are Mary Feldblum of Earthworks’ Oil and Gas Accountability Project, former Planning and Zoning chair John Arango, state Rep. Derrick Lentz, governor Eddie Paulsgrove, and three Planning and Zoning commissioners — including chair Aparicio Herrera.

The Citizens Working Group will have the ability to invite legal, scientific and land-use experts as well as industry to present, along with the general public.

Based on testimonies and research, the working group will draft an ordinance to present to the Planning and Zoning commission for a public hearing and vote. The working group’s first meeting is in April.

What drilling has done to my homeland

Samuel Sage is a leader in the effort to protect Greater Chaco communities from the impacts of fracking. Since fracking wells have emerged in and around Navajo Nation Counselor Chapter, residents are experiencing negative impacts to their health and social and cultural well-being as well as to their air and water. Here, Sage shares some of his experiences:

By Samuel Sage

My homeland, 18 miles south of Counselor State, has been getting destroyed by the U.S. Government (BLM) and the companies it hires. Although the consequences are unknown. One day, heavy equipment is there clearing roads for more heavy equipment. Three different pipelines and a large electrical transmission line made their way across the land from West to East. These destructions changed the landscape. First, new kinds of weeds were transported by heavy equipment tires. Animals cannot eat them. Second, water flows in the washes/arroyos were changed or dammed. Certain earth dams down the way could not be refilled; they dried up. Third, ugly bright white poles and signs along pipeline routes and giant poles with cables between them took over the landscape.

This occurred in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. Few pump jacks began showing up. They were very noisy. Few community members were receiving royalty monies. Alcohol abuse was a big problem. People that received money spent their days drunk. Some bought vehicles, but some of these vehicles broke down before they made it home.

There was a bar along Highway 44 (550). People would go there day and night. So many of the community people died along the highway walking or in vehicle crashes. In the late 1990s, I was working as a community organizer. We began working on closing the bar. There were five of us. We would walk along Highway 550 in protest against the bar. The first march a few people participated. Later Counselor Mission students joined. During Red Ribbon week, we would post/ place “white crosses” where people died. There were quite a number of crosses. Oil and gas development was very slow in the community; most of the activities were in the northern areas, around Navajo Dam. Still in the late 1990s, we were informed the bar was closing. A lot of people in the community were very upset with us because the bar was closing.

In 2000, I was elected Counselor Chapter president. One of my first major challenges was learning that the BLM-Farmington field office was ready to approve a Resource Management Plan without Counselor Chapter’s knowledge. This information was brought to us by Diné CARE. They asked if BLM had come out to talk to us. No, no BLM people came to us. A meeting was set up with BLM and three Navajo chapters by Diné CARE, San Juan Citizens Alliance and Oil and Gas Accountability at BLM-Farmington field office. The first meeting was so tense that I thought we were all going to be involved in a giant fist fight, white men against Navajo men. BLM personnel would step in and disappear back to their Chapter offices and about seven BLM personnel, stone-cold faces without expressions. We sat very quiet without any movement.

(To be continued next issue.)
Copper mines and our drinking water

Copper mine endangers water, wildlife

By Michael Jensen
N.M. Environmental Law Center

New Mexico’s Environment Department is pushing through a discharge permit for New Mexico Copper Corp.’s Copper Flat Mine that relies on incomplete and inaccurate information and does not account for impacts to surface and groundwater.

Contaminants in groundwater and surface water will pass under and across Ladder Ranch, impacting four perennial streams that cross Ladder Ranch on their way to the Rio Grande and that support wildlife restoration and ranching operations.

Potential contamination of surface and groundwater could negatively impact endangered and threatened species. Mexican gray wolves are housed at Turner Ranch Properties’ Ladder Ranch before reintroduction. Ladder Ranch and the Hillsboro Pitchfork Ranch host mule-deer restoration efforts.

Other habitat restorations and reintroductions involve Rio Grande cutthroat trout, Chiricahua leopard frog, Bolaen tortoise, and two species under review for endangered listing: Rio Grande chub and Rio Grande sucker.

The Environment Department’s draft permit does not include the recent conclusion by the Third Judicial District Court that the mine has only about 862 acre-feet per year of water rights, not the more than 20,000 it needs. The draft permit shows substantially higher production at the mine than the amount claimed in New Mexico Copper’s permit application and supporting documents and has a smaller disturbed area, smaller waste rock piles and a lower depth in the planned pit lake.

Independent analysis indicates that the pit lake will function as a flow-through pit during rapid fill of the pit post-closure (not an evaporation basin as claimed by New Mexico Copper); this means that it must meet water-quality standards and/or that the corporation must pump this means that it must meet water-quality standards and/or that the corporation must pump groundwater could negatively impact endangered and threatened species. Mexican gray wolves are housed at Turner Ranch Properties’ Ladder Ranch before reintroduction. Ladder Ranch and the Hillsboro Pitchfork Ranch host mule-deer restoration efforts.

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NM approves 1,200 MW of wind energy

By Mona Blaber

New Mexico's Public Regulation Commission approved a large-scale wind energy project in New Mexico and west Texas.

Commissioners had expressed skepticism about a ratemaking mechanism the company proposed as part of the project, but the coalition for Clean Affordable Energy attorney and other parties developed a compromise with SPS, Rio Grande Chapter activists called and emailed commissioners to urge passage. All five commissioners voted to accept the compromise. Your input makes a big difference in cases like this.

According to SPS, this project will bring the renewable portion of its New Mexico retail electricity sales to a whopping 49%, if the utility is required to retire the Renewable Energy Certificates associated with the production. This will be an issue in SPS's upcoming renewable portfolio case, where your engagement may be needed again.

RSP, which serves southeastern New Mexico, proposed the wind projects last year, saying they will save ratepayers billions of dollars. The company didn't actually need the capacity; the facilities — two in New Mexico and one in West Texas — were proposed purely to save money. Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy (of which Sierra Club is a member), the attorney general and Western Resource Advocates struck a deal with SPS to prioritize New Mexico contractors and workers in the New Mexico project, so it will bring jobs and investment to New Mexico in addition to climate progress.

Unfortunately, outcomes haven't been as positive in efforts to get SPS to drop a fee imposed on ratepayers with solar rooftops. Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy and Vote Solar moved to dismiss the tariffs as being unlawful, but the hearing officer and commission denied the motion. The issue will now be considered in a pending SPS rate case. The ruling sets a bad precedent that could allow PNM and El Paso Electric to charge solar users more than other customers. CCAN may appeal.

Renewable energy, Legislature

By Dan Lorimier and Mona Blaber

Rio Grande Chapter staff

Most of the progress made in 2018 New Mexico legislative session stopped at the governor’s desk. But some bright spots gave hope for better outcomes under a new governor in 2019.

Solar tax credits: On the final night, the House passed Senate Bill 79, which renues the 10% tax credit for residents and small businesses who install solar panels. This credit, which had been in place in New Mexico but expired in 2016, would reduce the effect of the most recent U.S. tariff on solar panels. Unfortunately, Gov. Susana Martinez failed to sign it by the deadline, killing it (also called a pocket veto). Martinez also vetoed the bill in 2016, but November’s election will decide whether our next governor will see the value of solar in fighting climate change and developing our state’s economic strengths. Thanks to Environment New Mexico for its leadership on this bill.

Bad Seed bill: HB161, an ALEC bill that would have stopped any local government from, for example, requiring labeling of genetically modified crops or imposing public-health restrictions like setbacks or pesti-cide-drift regulations, died in the House State Government, Indian Affairs and Veterans Committee. Thank you for writing and calling this committee’s members. Thanks also to the New Mexico Food and Seed Sovereignty Alliance for its leadership in analyzing and opposing this bill and to the many traditional and indigenous farmers who testified against it.

Chaco memorials: SM42 and HM85 affirmed New Mexico’s commitment to protecting and preserving the cultural and historical sites in the Greater Chaco landscape and were amended, thanks to efforts by the Chaco Coalition, to include protection for the people living in the region, not just archaeological treasures. Both memorials passed their committees but were not heard by their full chambers.

Study on workforce training for uranium cleanup: HB 208 and SB 251 would have appropriated $250,000 to study programs needed to train New Mexicans for jobs created by recent funding for cleanup of uranium sites.

Las Cruces votes to go 100% clean by 2050

By Kurt Anderson

Southern New Mexico Group

On April 2, The Las Cruces City Council passed a resolution to obtain 25% of the city’s electricity from renewable energy by 2022, 30% by 2030, and 100% by 2050.

The resolution passed unanimously following a presentation by city Sustainability Officer Lisa LaRocque, who outlined options available (from “go it alone” to public-private arrangements) and their projected costs and savings. She said all indicated that the goals could be met well before the proposed dates.

Councilors’ discussion and presenta-tions focused on PV solar as the most promising power source.

Councilor Gilly Sorg sponsored the resolution. Environment New Mexico led the effort to pass it. Residents testifying in favor of the goals noted that increased levels of solar energy use by the city would mean clean air, lower energy costs and meaningful action to protect future genera-tions from climate disruption.

“Setting a strong solar goal for the City of Las Cruces will mean a more sustainable future for our residents, while the government can save on energy costs over time,” LaRocque said.

Las Cruces currently gets about 7 percent of its electricity from renewables.
New Mexico Legislature

Chapter organizer Dan Lorimier retires

Dan Lorimier, longtime Rio Grande Chapter organizer for Southern New Mexico, retired in April. He was also the chapter’s lobbyist during legislative sessions. Dan was known at the Roundhouse as an Albuquerque seat, sponsored a community-solar bill to allow those who don’t own their residences or can’t afford solar panels to obtain solar energy.

District 3: Dan Lorimier

Dan Lorimier, longtime Rio Grande Chapter organizer for Southern New Mexico, retired in April. He was known at the Roundhouse as an Albuquerque seat, sponsored a community-solar bill to allow those who don’t own their residences or can’t afford solar panels to obtain solar energy.

State auditor: Bill McCamley

Bill McCamley is a retired state auditor, a position that has the authority to investigate the financial aspects of any activity of state government and can use that authority to help shape policy and protect the environment.

By Mona Blaber

Sierra Club has endorsed Bill McCamley for state auditor, a position that has the authority to investigate the financial aspects of any activity of state government and can use that authority to help shape policy and protect the environment.

2018 Primary Endorsements

Note: The endorsements on these pages represent only those made as of April 19; others will be decided later in election season. Check riograndesierachclub.org for updates. Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter endorses only in contested primaries. Rep. Ben R. Lujan and Sen. Martin Heinrich have been endorsed but are unopposed in the primary.

District 13: Rep. Patricia Roybal Caballero

Rep. Patricia Roybal Caballero has an impressive 100% score from Conservation Voters New Mexico for always voting to protect our air, drinking water, climate, land and wildlife. In 2017, Roybal Caballero, who represents an Albuquerque seat, sponsored a community-solar bill to allow those who don’t own their residences or can’t afford solar panels to obtain solar energy.

District 2: Rep. Derrick Lente

Rep. Derrick Lente, serving Sandoval, Rio Arriba and San Juan counties, is a staunch advocate for his constituents. He prides their input above that of lobbyists and others who don’t represent the public’s interests, protect the environment, and especially his guitar playing and singing! Smith said.

By Miya King-Flaherty

Janene Yazzie’s commitment toward protecting the public’s interests, protecting environmental and human rights, and ability to advance indigenous rights is exemplified in her advocacy for social, economic and environmental justice.

Yazzie has been an active member of the Chaco Coalition working to help protect Greater Chaco residents and land from the negative impacts of the fracking boom. She has a deep and high-level understanding of how best to represent, elevate and incorporate the public’s concerns into meaningful policies that are good for all New Mexicans.

Yazzie demonstrated flexibility, clarity and openness in answering questions, as well as a thoughtful analysis of the energy-water nexus and the need to minimize the use of water in energy production. She also emphasized the need to carefully measure the economic impact on ratepayers when making decisions on energy issues.

She demonstrates a strong work ethic and advocates for thoroughly researching issues before deciding on them.

Yazzie worked at Pinede Ridge to develop customized smart-energy solutions. She provides leadership in balancing the intersection of customer cost with energy solutions and economic development. It is for these reasons that Sierra Club endorses Janene Yazzie for Public Regulation Commissioner in District 4, which covers northwest and parts of central New Mexico.
2018 Primary Endorsements
Governor: Lujan Grisham has strong record

By Camilla Feibelman
Michelle Lujan Grisham has served New Mexico’s 1st District in Congress for six years and in that time she’s earned a 91% League of Conservation Voters score, with 100% scores the last two years. The congresswoman’s combination of high energy, visionary leadership, technical knowledge of highly complex issues, and array of experience make her our pick for governor.

Debbie O’Malley

By Richard Barish
The Sierra Club has endorsed Debbie O’Malley in her bid for re-election to the Bernalillo County Commission. Debbie served two terms in the Albuquerque City Council before being elected to the County Commission, and in both offices, she has been a staunch supporter of pro-environment legislation. As a Bernalillo County commissioner, Debbie has been one of our go-to commissioners to oppose the proposed Santolina development. Santolina is a sprawl development project on the southwest side that would likely have to dry up farms in the valley to provide water for the development. The new Commission will be considering the details of the Santolina development, and Debbie serves on the Water Utility Authority Board, which will be considering water for the subdivision, including a water reclamation project. We need a strong environmentalist like Debbie to try to prevent the worst effects of this project.

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Land Commission: VeneKlasen

By Teresa Seamster
When we heard Garrett Veneklasen was running for state Land Commissioner, the image of him jumping in front of the microphones at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and opposing violent activist Ammon Bundy and his illegal occupiers was still fresh in the media. All of a sudden, new ethical energy was entering the Land Commission race. The Sierra Club endorsement for Garrett is based on many aspects of his lifetime of experience, community involvement and organizational leadership in New Mexico the past 15 years. His advocacy for public lands remaining in public hands has been exemplary and directly contributed to the designations of Rio Grande del Norte and Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monuments and Valley Caldera’s transition to the National Park Service. Having spent much of his life working on land-based projects that involve watershed restoration and wildlife mitigation, Garrett understands land stewardship and best-management practices. He is committed to science-driven wildlife management on state trust lands for all native species and opposes indiscriminate killing. He promises a moratorium on trapping until there is scientific proof it meets a conservation need and to prohibit killing contests on State Trust land.

Sandoval Commission: Margaret Cassidy-Baca

By Richard Barish
So I called Margaret Cassidy-Baca to tell her that we had endorsed her, and I got about a minute into my standard spiel when she interrupted me to tell me about her concern that the Park was not being adequately consulted about the new Sandoval County oil and gas ordinance being drafted that would regulate fracking. A long conversation ensued.

This is what Margaret is like. She is focused on the issues, and she is especially passionate about inclusion and cultural sensitivity in this very diverse county.

Regulation of fracking is the biggest environmental issue in Sandoval County. Companies are trying to frack there in the Albuquerque Basin, but the Albuquerque Basin is full of faults and fractures that will allow for the easy passage of pollutants into the groundwater. If fracking is allowed, pollution of the groundwater is all but inevitable. Fracking regulations are routinely challenged, so they need to be carefully drafted to discourage and withstand legal challenges. Margaret is not just an environmentalist. She is a smart, hard-working, detail-oriented attorney. She is the person we need on the Sandoval County Commission to help ensure that we have enforceable fracking regulations. The Sierra Club is proud to endorse Margaret Cassidy Baca for Sandoval County Commission.

Santa Fe Commission: Rudy Garcia

By Teresa Seamster
Long-time land-use manager Rudy Garcia is a dedicated local professional who is thoroughly familiar with all aspects of county planning and the need to carefully weigh all impacts of new developments on water, infrastructure and quality of life in Santa Fe County. In his 26 years in local government, Garcia has worked in land use and was a project manager in the former Project and Facilities Management Department’s Open Space/Trails Division, identifying culturally and environmentally significant properties that were acquired to preserve their individual characteristics. He was also involved in the drafting of Santa Fe County’s regulations for oil and gas. Garcia is currently Santa Fe’s Land Use Director. He knows the land very well, and he is familiar with the proposed site and the science behind the risks it poses. Lujan Grisham has also stood up on one of the country’s most divisive issues when as Congressional Hispanic Caucus Chair she introduced the “Build Bridges Not Walls Act” to prohibit implementation of President Trump’s executive order to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Beyond her role as an environmental champion in Congress, Michelle has worked at all levels of government, from county and state to federal. It is our sense that her experience combined with her commitment to protecting our families makes her the best choice for governor of New Mexico.
Bosque action team back in action

By Richard Barish

Bosque Action Team

With the bosque-friendly Keller administration now running the City of Albuquerque, a re-energized Bosque Action Team has reconvened to see what it can do to positively influence the future of the bosque. The bosque faces daunting challenges. The cottonwood forest that we all love is aging and declining. Cottonwoods generally live for about 75 to 120 years.

During each outing.

comfortable prior to and remaining safe, warm and is necessary, and the lead-

varying difficulty are planned in the Sandia mountains. The winter has been no exception, the land they defended. This is aging and declining. Cottonwoods exist, and I wasn’t familiar with Sierra Club but I’m glad I found out about it!” said Chris Gutierrez, a US Army Afghanistan-Iraq-era veteran. Regardless of background, participants often stay in contact after an outing because they enjoyed the camaraderie.

This program is only successful because of those who join us. To encourage more veterans to get involved or utilize the leadership skills they learned in the military, Sierra Club offers outings, clinics and training across the country, often free or at reduced cost for vets. To learn more, go to content.sierra-club.org/outings/military.-featured-trips. For outings in the Central Rio Grande area, which are typically free, contact Terry Owen, teowen@q.com, 505-301-4349 or go to www.riogrande-esierrclub.org/outings.

Our thanks to Sierra Club volunteers who helped and commented at city meetings, including Brenda McKenna, Peggy Norton, Leslie Chavez and Fred Houdek.

M兵y actions and cosens

Military Outdoors Program offers active-duty mili-

Cottonwood seeds need spring floods to germinate. Most of the cotton-

woods in the Bernalillo County bosque germinated in a couple of floods in the early 1940s, so they are now about 75 years old. Many or most will die in the coming decades. They have not been replaced by new generations of cotton-

woods, since spring floods in this reach are now rare.

The bosque also faces challenges from global warming. The prediction is that in the warmer future we are facing, there will be about 30% less water in the Rio Grande on average. As a result, the water table will drop, and cottonwoods may lose contact with the water table and die. This has already happened in at least one location. If nothing is done, exotic, weedy trees may replace cottonwoods, and there may be more dry, open areas that don’t provide habitat for very many species.

The Bosque Action Team is planning a campaign to save and restore the Bosque. We have a restoration working group exploring what we can do so that the bosque will continue to provide good habitat for native plants and animals and will continue to be an attractive place for people to visit.

We also need a working group that brings people to the bosque to learn about it and another group that promotes environmental education in the public schools. We also have a website, SaveTheBosque.org, that needs a coordinator.

If you want to be a part of this campaign, please contact me at richard.barish@gmail.com.

Trainings for outings leaders

The Sierra Club Central New Mexico Group is seeking addi-
tional volunteer outings leaders for their hiking events.

Outings leader must be at least 18 years of age, have a basic first-aid/CPR certification and complete the free Sierra Outings Leaders Training (OLT) course.

We will offer the next OLT 101 course on May 12 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. To get your first-aid/CPR certification, and complete the free Sierra Outings Leaders Training (OLT) course.

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Sierra Club and Root Beers

The Central Group hosts a general meeting, Sierra Club and Root Beer, at the Center for Peace and Justice, 202 Harvard Drive SE, every other month on the first Friday at 6:30 p.m. We serve light refreshments and have a guest speaker who discusses timely issues/topics. At our March meeting, Mark Rudd, retired CNN instructor and lifelong organizer, led a lively discussion on the relationship between the environmental movement and political power.

At the May 4 meeting our speaker will be Carlos A. Bustos, Sierra Water Conservation Program manager for the Albuquerque-Bernalillo Water Authority. He will be addressing Albuquerque’s successful water-conservation efforts and the recently adopted plan “Water 2120: Securing Our Water Future.”

First Friday Art

The Sierra Club’s Central New Mexico Group office (2215 Lead Ave. SE, Albuquerque) will be hosting its monthly First Friday art events on April 6 and June 8 from 6 to 8 p.m. Refreshments are provided. April’s featured artist, Peter Kelling, will show black & white nature photography, on display through May. June’s First Friday will showcase landscape paintings by Eliza Schmid, on display through July. Please contact Heather Kline (505-577-2798, heather5387@yahoo.com) with questions or if you are an artist interested in showing your work.

Central New Mexico Group contacts

Chair: Fred Houdek, fhouddeke@gmail.com, 630.809.4234
Vice Chair: Ray Shortridge, rshortrid@gmail.com
Treasurer: David Ther, greglock@gmail.com
Secretary: Heather Kline, heatherkline78@gmail.com, 505.577.2798
Outings: Odile de La Beaudjierde, odile@pitot.org, 505.433.469
Carol Chamberland, pictografts@comcast.net
Mark Rudd, mark@markrudd.com
Peter Kelling, cloudsandwater@uno.com

Other Responsibilities
Political and Bosque Chair: Richard Barish, richardbarish@gmail.com
Art showings: Heather Kline
Volunteer coordinator: Lauren Kominick, sierralrubriogrande@gmail.com, 315-272-7317, tabling. Patty Duncan, ppgnm@comcast.com, Volunteer Wednesdays
Wildlife: Leslie Chavez, chavezle@99@gmail.com
Military Outings: Terry Owen, teowen@q.com, 505-301-4349
UNM Sierra Student Coalition Co-presidents: Tom Bottomly, bottom-
tomy@unm.edu; Keely Scheffler, kscheffler979@unm.edu

Military Outdoors Program participants stop to show their pride at the Sandia Tramway on a beautiful February day.

Military actions and cosens

By Terrence Owen

Military Outdoors Program offers active-duty military, veterans and their families the opportunity to enjoy the land they defended. This winter has been no exception, with monthly outings to experience high alpine hiking in the Sandia mountains.

Each quarter, hikes of varying difficulty are planned so virtually anyone of any fitness level can get outdoors with others in a welcoming environment. No experience is necessary, and the leaders provide information on remaining safe, warm and comfortable prior to and during each outing.

Numerous studies have shown the therapeutic effects that time in nature produces, and not just for veterans. Typically, about half of those who join these outings are associated with the military, but everyone is welcome to join the fun. Veterans and their families have a strong tie to the land they defended.

“This program and Sierra Club’s focus on preserving U.S. wildlands are why I joined and why I support their efforts,” Vietnam vet and Purple Heart recipient Harry Carpenter said on a recent four-mile hike of the Sandia crest to the Tram. “I didn’t know this program existed, and I wasn’t familiar with Sierra Club but I’m glad I found out about it!” said Chris Gutierrez, a US Army Afghanistan-Iraq-era veteran. Regardless of background, participants often stay in contact after an outing because they enjoyed the camaraderie.

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Albuquerque votes for the coyotes

On March 5, the Albuquerque City Council passed a resolution to condemn coyote-killing contests. The resolution, sponsored by Councillors Diane Gibson and Cynthia Borrego, passed unanimously.

Bills to prohibit coyote contests have been introduced in the Legislature three times, and in 2017 passed the Senate but didn’t get a vote on the House floor.

The resolution supports legislation prohibiting coyote-killing contests throughout New Mexico. Gibson encouraged other cities and counties to pass similar resolutions to push state lawmakers to address the issue again. The coalition advocating for the resolution plans to make that happen.

Our thanks to Sierra Club volunteers who helped and commented at city meetings, including Brenda McKenna, Peggy Norton, Leslie Chavez and Fred Houdek.

Central New Mexico Group

April/May/June 2018
Sierra Student Coalition leadership training
Calling all student leaders! Applications are now open for the Sierra Student Coalition's leadership training program. Sprog Sprog equips young people with tools for environmental and social justice activism and supports students to become effective change-makers in their campuses or communities. The program is for youth ages 14 and up and includes trainings on climate justice, anti-oppression, campaign planning, effective communications and more.

UNM Sierra Student Coalition ready for 100%
The Sierra Student Coalition has been making big moves toward our goal of 100% of the energy it uses from renewables.

This semester is our first as a chartered student organization on campus. Having met with Labo Energy, UNM's energy provider, and other departments involved with energy on campus, we feel confident in our goals. They all have expressed support for our efforts. We have also created a wonderful alliance with other environmental groups on and off campus. The rest of the semester will be dedicated to passing a resolution for support from the faculty senate at the university, along with spreading the word and educating students on renewables and our campaign.

Global Warming Express kids taking action
In 2017–18, Global Warming Express, the science and civics education program by and for kids, has exceeded expectations in Las Cruces, Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

All of the Global Warming Expressers have engaged deeply with science and sustainability training and are moving into public speaking and community action in their neighborhoods. In January, the GWE kids spoke at the New Mexico Legislature. In February, some of the GWEers in Albuquerque met with newly-elected Mayor Tim Keller, who promised them he would ban plastic straws from Albuquerque city buildings. In April and May, GWEers will be meeting with the mayors of Las Cruces, Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

The new book by GWE founders Marina Weber and Joanna Whynser is now available at bookstores (see ad below). Proceeds benefit our program.

Praise for The Global Warming Express, a New Book About the Environmental Crisis, Written by Kids for Kids

The Global Warming Express is a wake up call on the great challenge of climate change—and one that I hope we will all heed. Thank you, Marina, for a remarkable adventure story, and for reminding us, as my father did in his time, that we have to act now.

—Nancy Pelosi, U.S. Speaker of the House

There’s not a moment to be lost.

—Tom Udall, U.S. Senator for New Mexico

The tale is utterly charming, and the message urgent. Pay heed. There’s not a moment to be lost.

—Author and environmentalist William deBuys

Marina is an incredibly talented author. I admire her and Joanna’s passion for fighting climate change. Great writing comes from great thinking, and these girls have a great future ahead of them. We must all celebrate The Global Warming Express.

—Nancy Pelosi, Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives

A great gift for the children in your life!

Available now from your local bookseller or online • $14.95 • ISBN 978-1-533289-93-7 • Full-color paperback • 128 pages
Northern New Mexico Group

Facts, dos and don'ts on bark beetles

By Sandrine Gaillard Ph.D.
Northern New Mexico Group

D id you know?
1) Bark beetles are common pests of conifers (such as pines), and some attack broadleaf trees. Over 600 species occur in the United States and Canada. They are small, cylindrical, hard-bodied insects about the size of a grain of rice. Most species are dark red, brown, or black.

2) The natural role of bark beetles (Coleoptera: Curculionidae: Scolytinae) is canopy opening, thinning, and diversification of stand structure and composition.

3) Adult bark beetles can emerge anytime during the year, but most commonly in late spring and again in late summer to early fall.

4) Bark beetles feed on trees weakened by drought, disease, injuries, or other factors that may stress the tree. Bark beetles can contribute to the decline and eventual death of trees.

However, only a few aggressive species are known to be the sole cause of tree mortality.

More than 20 species of bark beetles feed on weakened, dying or dead spruce, fir and hemlock.

Pine trees are attacked by a small bark beetle, the Ips confusus, called the piney ips beetle. Once present in pine trees, these bark beetles inoculate the tree with a blue stain fungus. This fungus is injected into the sapwood through stings from the bark beetle. It grows within the tree from the trunk to the branches. It is for this reason that tending a tree from controlling or exterminating the beetle larvae with the bark of the tree, it is extremely difficult to control them with insecticides. In fact, there are no longer any pesticides labeled for treating bark infested trees.

In the case of the Ips beetle, prevention is the only available effective control to manage them.

8) As of Jan. 23, more than 93% of New Mexico is experiencing drought conditions, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s drought-monitor map.

9) Prevention methods:

a) If debris is regularly infested and Alexine has not yet emerged, a few tips can quickly remove, burn or other factors.

b) Pay particular attention to old, slow-growing trees: crowded groups of trees, and newly planted trees in the landscape.

c) Dense stands of susceptible trees should be thinned (by completely removing some of the trees) to increase the remaining trees’ vigor and ability to withstand an attack.

d) Tree pruning is also helpful, but timing of pruning is important.

Avoid creating fresh pruning wounds during the adult beetles’ flight season.

Do not prune elm trees from March to September or pines from February to mid-October. Do not pile unseasoned, freshly cut green wood near woody landscape plants. Freshly cut wood and trees that are dying or have recently died provide an abundant breeding source for some wood-boring beetles.

i) Irrigation is crucial during dry summer months in drought years, especially with trees species that are native to regions where summer rains are unavailable.

irrigate the outer canopy, not near the trunk. Avoid the frequent, shallow type of watering that is often used for lawns.

A general recommendation is to irrigate trees infrequently, such as twice a month during drought periods, but a sufficient amount of water must be used so that it penetrates about 1 foot below the surface. The specific amount and frequency of water needed varies greatly depending on the site, size of the tree, and whether the species is adapted to summer drought or regular rainfall.

Preventive treatments must be applied by professionals to the trunk or branches to kill adults before they can get into the tree and lay eggs.

Treatment following successful attacks and egg-laying will not be effective.

Insecticide products available to home users are generally not effective for bark-bettle control.

10) If the bark beetles have already emerged, a few tips can help save the trees that are still unattacked.

a) If a professional landscaper or gardener suggests that spraying a tree already showing signs of infestation is the way to go, get a second opinion and most likely a new landscaper! Spraying is only preventative.

b) After emergence, adults may reinfect the same tree or, in most cases, disperse to attack susceptible trees elsewhere.

If trees are infected, properly prune infected limbs and remove and dispose of drying trees so that bark- and wood-boring insects do not emerge and attack nearby trees.

Never pile infested material adjacent to a live tree or shrub. If the main trunk is extensively attacked by bark beetles, the entire tree or shrub needs to be removed.

Unless infested trees are cut, and infested materials are quickly removed, burned, or chipped on site, large numbers of beetles can emerge and kill nearby host trees, especially if live, unattacked trees nearby are weakened or stressed by other factors.

For more information:
pleaseusnat.gov/sites/sjcoeh/files/77867.pdf
www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5360142.pdf
forestry.nv.gov/forestry-resources/forest-health/pinon-ips-beetle/

Photo by Teresa Seamster

A trap that lures bark beetles away from pinon trees in Santa Fe. Once bark beetles have infested a tree, it can’t be saved.

Northern New Mexico Group campaigns in brief

S.F. National Forest Wild and Scenic Rivers Map
Santa Fe National Forest recently released the 2018 Wild and Scenic Rivers map showing nine designated rivers and the majority of formerly designated Wild and Scenic Rivers downgraded to either “recreational” or no status.

The group submitted comments identifying dozens of stream segments “worthy” of being considered as additional fish species and habitats of concern along with Amigos Bravo, The Wilderness Society and other allies. Contact ctc.seamster@gmail.com and tdgorman@gmail.com

Counselor health committee receives approval
Three years of work in community education and preparing health-impact reports to BLM, Bureau of Indian Affairs and Navajo Nation health agencies have resulted in Institutional Review Board approval of the Counselor Health Impact Assessment and Hohotogo’o na’ada Committee protocol to study cultural and health impacts of fracking in three Chaco- area chapters. Contact ctc.seamster@gmail.com.

Resolution for Zero Waste in Santa Fe County
Zero Waste efforts are gaining attention worldwide as the deluge of plastic and non-reclaimed trash threaten marine life and overwork landfills. REDUCE is the key word whether in packaging, product manufacture or shopping. Without massive public changes – as embodied in a new county resolution — plastic products dumped into the oceans from all sources will outnumber fish by 2050.

Contact: joseigner@gmail.com

Jackalope Prairie Dog project
Prairie dogs are intrinsic to the culture of Santa Fe. The city has a statue of Saint Francis speaking to a prairie dog at his feet. These highly vocal and social animals are disappearing under construction, and the Northern Group is collaborating with PD Pals and others to relocate and save the small population of Jackalope “dogs” that have delighted visitors for 18 years.

Contact: tc.seamster@gmail.com and carlton505@comcast.net

Photo by Teresa Seamster
A trap that lures bark beetles away from piñon trees in Santa Fe. Once bark beetles have infested a tree, it can’t be saved.

For more information:
pleaseusnat.gov/sites/sjcoeh/files/77867.pdf
www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5360142.pdf
forestry.nv.gov/forestry-resources/forest-health/pinon-ips-beetle/

Photo by Teresa Seamster
A trap that lures bark beetles away from piñon trees in Santa Fe. Once bark beetles have infested a tree, it can’t be saved.
Santa Fe considers truck-plaza plan

By Teresa Seamster and Tom Gorman
Northern New Mexico Group chair
Santa Fe’s Planning Commission in March recommended against a Flying J proposal for a truck center at the junction of NM 14 and Rancho Viejo Blvd. This project has numerous positive potential impacts on the surrounding local communities, including threatening air, water and land quality for nearby residents. The increase in noise, light and air pollution will also significantly impact those who live and work in the area.

One of the greatest concerns is the traffic safety risk of having many large trucks exiting the interstate and attempting to merge onto southbound NM 14. The design of the exit, with the double diamond concept, makes it very hazardous to merge without dedicated lanes and with poor visibility to see traffic on NM 14.

Further, a project of this scope and impact on the Gateway to Santa Fe and on public safety, should be listed as a Development of Countywide Importance and subject to all the conditions and requirements in the Santa Fe Sustainable Development Code.

Finally, no amount of design change or mitigation can remove the adverse impact of this huge development at the entrance to Santa Fe. Instead of the City Different full of culture and beauty, we become another 15-minute rest stop. Instead of the City Different full of culture and beauty, we become another 15-minute rest stop. Instead of the City Different full of culture and beauty, we become another 15-minute rest stop.

Monteino forests in the West often have unnaturally high tree densities, probably due to ill-conceived fire suppression. Forest fires have always been part of the natural regime and produce numerous meadows. Recently prescribed burns and forest thinning have become one of the dominant tools of forest management.

It would be relatively easy to create small meadows when thinning forests. Doing so allows snow and other forms of precipitation to fall directly on the ground or on small plants and infiltrate into the ground slowly. In Hydrology and the Management of Watersheds, the classic textbook on watershed hydrology, the authors quote studies that show that in small cleared areas in montane forest watersheds, snow water equivalents (absorption rates) were 15-35 percent higher. Other more recent studies confirm these findings.

Small meadows also dramatically increase floral and faunal biodiversity. Meadow ecotones (transition zones) provide greater food and shelter for animals. It is relatively easy to create small meadows using machinery or by manual methods. One of the most important and effective river-protection organizations, American Rivers, has initiated a large project with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to restore meadows in the Sierra Nevada. To quote from American Rivers: — Meadows store spring floodwaters and release cool flows in late summer; — Grasses and soil filter out sediment and pollutants; and — flowers and plants provide high-quality forage and habitat for rare and threatened species.

As it becomes clear what a healthy meadow can provide, private ranchers, foundations, utilities, government agencies, conservation groups and others are all investing in meadow restoration. Meadows are also very effective in making watershed more resilient to the impacts of climate change. Increased biodiversity allows montane watersheds to adapt more effectively. More diverse species means more can survive. Meadows also slow wildfire propagation.

Hopefully, federal and state agencies and environmental organizations will consider creating small meadows as a method of increasing water supply, adapting to climate change and increasing biodiversity.

Paryski is former chief technical advisor for United Nations Development Programme and served on Gen. Bill Richardson’s Blue Ribbon Water Task Force, the Zenyes Sjaner Water Planning Council and the State Engineer’s Water Wise Development Committee.

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Bat education by Pajarito experts

By Jody Benson

Pajarito Group chair

Most of us have seen them flitting around streetlamps or dipping over streams or ponds as they hunt to consume half their body-weight in insects every night. But most of us have never seen one of New Mexico’s 29 species of bat up close — seen their wrinkly faces that look like Ewoks or aliens or those dolls made of flaked apples, and seen their furry little selves whose species are, in fact, closely related to primates. It was for the purpose of introducing us to our Chiroptera cousins that Justin Stevenson, co-founder of R.D. Wildlife Management and Frightwalls, brought five of his rescued bats to his Pajarito presentation in February.

Stevenson dispelled myths about bats: They are not blind; they do not mob you or fly into your hair; and they are not dirty. In fact, bats are so clean that when they’re not sleeping or hunting, they’re grooming themselves as they hang from wherever little bats can roost. When a bat in a colony wakes up during sleep for voiding (a.k.a., to pee), he will extricate himself from the pile, and find a spot away from the group to relieve himself before crawling back into the colony.

But the most important dispellable myth is that all bats have rabies. According to Stevenson, only half of 1 percent have the virus. The higher percentage cited is because bats tested are usually only those found on the ground, and they’re often on the ground because they’re sick or injured. Bats express “dumb rabe” — they don’t foam at the mouth or attack, but lie glassy-eyed where they fell. If you find a bat on the ground (or anywhere), do not pick it up with your bare hands. If you do, the bat reacts to the touch by what Stevenson describes as “vocalizing a loud squeaching,” and when, as is the human reaction, you hold tighter rather than release it, it bites. Bats are transmitted via saliva and the teeth are the inoculator.

Except for big brown bats with sharp teeth powerful enough to crunch down on large, hard-bodied insects such as beetles, most New Mexico bats’ mouths and teeth are so small that you may feel a little scratch but see no wound. If you feel anything at all, the bat must be killed. If it does, you need the very expensive vaccine. Even baby bats can be infected with rabies transmitted through the mother. If you rescue a bat, use leather gloves. Also, be gentle. These little creatures are very fragile, and with their little hind legs, bats can’t escape by running and launching like a bird.

Because they can’t launch themselves, bats roost upside down. Bats are leathery membrane stretched between the elongated four fingers of their hands down to their hind legs. Their back feet have sharp claws that, as Stevenson describes it, act like Velcro. From this upside-down position, they can drop and open their wings to launch like a hang glider.

When they sleep, bats go into a torpor in which their metabolic rate drops very low. In torpor, they save energy. But on waking, bats need about an hour of shivering and shaking to bring their body temperature all the way up. The wings that fall off its roost is in extreme danger from injury or predation. Nonmigrating bats usually mate before or even during hibernation. The sperm, however, is dormant within the female until hibernation ends. The birth takes place in spring or summer. After about 50 days of gestation, the female hangs head-up by her thumbs instead of her feet, gives birth to a baby that weighs one-fifth her own body weight, and catches that baby in her tail membrane. She licks the pup to free its naked wings and legs, and nudges it to a nipple under her wing where the baby clings to her fur as she goes hunting at night.

In only two or three weeks, when baby’s too heavy for mom to carry, mom weans it and leaves it home to wait for mom’s morning return to be fed on regurgitated food. Stevenson says that at this stage the pup spends a lot of time fluttering wings and practicing flight. A week later, it heads out to hunt on its own. In eight to 10 weeks, a bat is mature. Most species live from 10 to even 40 years, depending, of course, on luck. Stevenson says bats (without predation, accident, or disease) are more likely than other small species to live full life spans. As for living out a lifespan, Stevenson warns about human/bat territorial conflicts. People don’t want bats in their buildings. Smaller bats can get through openings as narrow as 3/8 of an inch. Therefore, it is essential to seal all openings 1/4 inch or larger. Bats can’t dig, drill, or bite through material, so even a Kleenex can be used to stop up a hole. However, do not close up an entrance hole before mid-August. You may be killing the pups because the parents can’t get back inside to care for them. Do not exclude them between May and August. If you must call an exclusionist, make sure they’re bat experts. A non-bat expert can kill a lot of bats. Justin Stevenson is an expert. His company is RD Wildlife Management and Consulting, www.rwdlife.com. Call RD.

Finally, the biggest threat to bats is white-nose syndrome, with 6 million to 7 million dying every year. This fungal infection originating in Europe, is human-transported, and was probably introduced to bats by caves. It is 90 to 100 percent fatal. The fungus thrives in cold weather and grows on the nose, wings and ears of bats during hibernation. It kills the bats by waking them during hibernation, thus using up the bat reserves, killing them through starvation, dehydration and hypothermia. The syndrome was first identified in the eastern US in 2006. It hasn’t been found in New Mexico yet, but because the disease spreads through contact and most bats are extremely social, the fungus spreads quickly. There’s no cure. To slow it, humans need to protect bat habitats from our contamination by avoiding any area where bats might live.

Despite how amazing a species they are, despite that they’re our cousins (and definitely cute), Stevenson says bats make really bad pets. The single exception in his entire career as bat rescuer is one pallid bat that he and wife and cofounder Holly rescued as an orphaned, bald baby fallen out of a chimney. To keep it protected, warm, and alive, Holly kept her under her collar as she worked. When that baby grew up to the age of release, the Stevensons took her with other rescues to the release site, and tossed them up to fly. The others launched without a thanks. Not little pallid. Stevenson said they were astonished, but also touched, that this wild thing wanted to stay. They put her back in the carrier, and brought her home.

Stevenson brought her and four other rescues: a silver-haired, western small-footed myotis, Mexican free-tailed, and a big brown bat — the one with sharp teeth — to awe the audience. Stevenson has been border to border in New Mexico to save bats. His email is contact@rwdlife.com.
Land of entrapment?

Tobin continued from Page 16

By Mary Katherine Ray  
Chapter Wildlife chair

The 2017-18 trapping season ended on March 15. Trappers set their traps for the purpose of exterminating wildlife from the pelt of the public’s wildlife beginning on Nov. 1 each year. During the trapping season this year, unfortunately there were not legal for the public to tamper with. A dog near Placitas was bitten as he tried to rescue his owner. A third of Western states already ban or severely restrict trapping, including our neighbors, Arizona and Utah. Every year, traps impose a narrow special interest of the trapper, and puts hikers at risk from hidden traps around the state. "I knew at once it was a trap when I saw the wedge," Mary Katherine Ray said. "I pushed the record button as the dog was caught and struggling when the trapper arrives."

Firsthand trap experience

By Mary Katherine Ray

My own dog was among those caught in a trap this winter while hiking on Cibola National Forest land. We were on a game trail that wandered up the bottom of a wide canyon. My dog was on a leash walking just a little ahead of me when she jumped and started scampering and barking at her foot. I couldn’t even see the trap she was barking so frantically at and yelling in pain at the same time. Her cries were ear-piercing!

I knew at once it was a trap and took off my jacket to try to cover her head and protect her hands from her frantic biting. This was more difficult than I expected because I couldn’t separate her muzzle from the trap. Finally, I just made a wedge with the cloth to feel for the levers. Luckily I was strong enough to make them go down so my dog could slip out. She was trapped for less than a minute. At first, she wasn’t sure what to do, but after seeing the black part on her foot, and then she jumped up and started to run.

She was OK the next day except for some swelling and a small cut on the back of her foot. I attribute her not being more injured to such a short time in the trap. As a wildlife advocate, I’m grateful I knew how to release her. But I was still not prepared for what a horrible experience it was. My heart breaks to think of wildlife caught and struggling in a trap’s grip for hours on end only to be shot, strangled or bludgeoned to death when the trapper comes.

I pushed the record button on my camera to capture the horror as I worked. You will find a link to the audio and video on our website Page: Excursiones a la Naturaleza de Nuevo Mexico. You can visit www.org/trapping-season-beware. You can visit www.TrapFreeNM.org for information.

Saturday, May 19: Strenuous hike to Thompson Peak. We will follow the Apache Canyon route to Glorieta Baldy and then continue north for about 2 miles to Thompson Peak. About 17 miles with 3,900 feet of elevation gain. Two or three dogs OK. Larry, lorenz.hughes@gmail.com, 505-983-8296.

Saturday, June 23: Colorado 14er Hike and Camp. Join the Sierra Club Military Outdoors Program as we embark on a hike of Longs Peak. We’ll climb on Saturday, June 23, with optional camping the night before and after. This is a challenging, high-altitude hike of approximately 10 miles round trip and 4,400 vertical feet of climbing in a span of eight hours. Participants must be in good physical condition. Veterans, active-duty military families and all others are welcome to join us. RSVP to Terry 87102 at 8 a.m. Cecilia. Chavez.beltran@sierrclub.org or www.facebook.com/ExcursionesNaturaleraNM. We will leave a car at the Sulfur trailhead. Meet at 8 a.m. Cecilia. Chavez.beltran@sierrclub.org or www.ukfb.com/ExcursionsNaturaleraNM.

For information.

Hikes and Events continued from Page 16

the river. We’ll head south toward the Oxbow and then east toward the river. Contact Margaret, mardef1@aol.com for information.

Northern New Mexico outings:
Meetup site: www.meetup.com/Santa-Fe-Sierra-Club-Outings/.
To get weekly emails, send an email to Listserv@lists.sierrclub.org with any subject and a message that says SUBSCRIBE RIO-NORTH-OUTINGS.

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For information.
April-May-June hikes & events

April

Saturday, April 21: Moderate shuttle hike up the Burn trail, across and up the Saddleback trail, then down the Chamiza trail; 4.5 miles with about 1,000 feet elevation gain. Alan Shapiro, nm5s@yahoo.com, 505-424-9242.

Sunday, April 22: Celebrate Earth Day with the Ancients, sponsored by the Sierra Club Military Outdoors Program and everyone is welcome. Join us at 9 a.m. for a hike of the Mesa Prieta Trail to explore the south escarpment of Petroglyph National Monument and see a number of ancient petroglyphs. Hike is approximately 4 miles RT with 300 feet of elevation gain. Contact Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, teowen@q.com by April 20th to RSVP, obtain details and the meet-up location.

Saturday, April 21: Moderate hike to Eye of the Sandias. Meet at trailhead (15000 Copper Ave NE, 87123) at 9 a.m. Contact Cecelia.chavez.beltran@sierraclub.org or Facebook page: Excursiones a la Naturaleza de Nuevo Mexico.

Sunday, April 22, (Earth Day):
Moderate loop: about 3 miles, North on Ellis, Back on Crest Trails. Meet at 10:30 a.m. on the east side of the Smith’s parking lot, close to Central and I-40. Three dogs on leash OK. End with optional potluck at Odile and Jim's house. Contact Odile by April 21, 505-433-4692, or Odile@pitot.org, specify: (1) cell-phone number; (2) if coming to the potluck; and (3) where you can meet the group.

Saturday, April 28: Moderate hike, Tent Rocks. No dogs allowed. Meet at 10 a.m. on the north side of the Target parking lot at the corner of I-25 and Paseo del Norte. End with optional potluck at Odile and Jim’s house. Contact Odile by April 27, 505-433-4692, or Odile@pitot.org, specify: (1) cell-phone number; (2) if coming to the potluck; and (3) where you can meet the group.

Saturday, April 28: Moderate hike, Tent Rocks. No dogs allowed. Meet at 10 a.m. on the north side of the Target parking lot at the corner of I-25 and Paseo del Norte. End with optional potluck at Odile and Jim's house. Contact Odile by April 21, 505-433-4692, or Odile@pitot.org, specify: (1) cell-phone number; (2) if coming to the potluck; and (3) where you can meet the group.

Saturday, April 28 to Sunday April 29: Strenuous overnight backpack trip in Bandelier National Monument; about 22 miles starting and ending at the Visitor Center, with 4,100 feet of elevation change. We will camp in Capulin Canyon, near the Painted Cave. RSVP to Larry, lorrenz.hughes@gmail.com, 505-983-8296.

May

Saturday, May 5, moderate hike along the Continental Divide Trail, about 10 miles round trip with 1,800 feet of elevation gain. Hiking up from the Skull Bridge over the Rio Chama to the top of Mesa de los Viejos. Alan Shapiro, nm5s@yahoo.com, 505-424-9242.

Saturday, May 11: Two-hour easy-paced walk with Margaret and Julie, easy paced. Meet at 8 a.m. at the parking lot adjacent to the tree sculpture garden, immediately south of the Montaño Bridge on the west side of

Continued on Page 15

Gustavo, Tom and Annette descend the dunes on UN Peak 7463 in the Santa Fe National Forest near Abiquiu. All of our hikes list difficulty rating — check them out; there’s something for everyone!

Tobin Oruch, center, on a 2014 outing to Redondo Peak.

Tobin Oruch passes the outings torch

By Mona Blake

Our excellent longtime Northern New Mexico Outings chair, Tobin Oruch, stepped down in March to take a well-deserved break. Tobin started the Trail Mix email listserve that is essential to so many hikers around the state, and he grew the Northern New Mexico outings program immensely and introduced many New Mexicans to the outdoors and to the Sierra Club.

“Tobin has been leading hikes at least since 2005 when I started going on Sierra Club hikes,” said Alan Shapiro, who has been co-chair for the last few years and will take over as chair.

“I met Tobin when we formed a carpool up to Los Alamos. As might be expected from a group of guys, we didn’t share a lot of our personal stories, but I did learn and appreciate Tobin’s attention to detail and work ethic. Hey, he showed up every single day! I envied that long stride he had that kept us in the dust. Yet, he sure had plenty of outings! I didn’t share a lot of our personal stories, but I did learn and appreciate Tobin’s attention to detail and work ethic. Hey, he showed up every single day! I envied that long stride he had that kept us in the dust. Yet, he sure had plenty of outings! I envied that long stride he had that kept us in the dust. Yet, he sure had plenty of outings! I envied that long stride he had that kept us in the dust. Yet, he sure had plenty of outings!

Tobin Oruch has been chairing the hiking program and everyone is welcome.

About these hikes

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 water, lunch, sturdy hiking boots or shoes and clothing suitable for the weather. Leader reserves right to turn away anyone whose experience or equipment appears unsuitable. Leader may alter destination or cancel trip due to weather, conditions, or insufficient number of participants. Unaccompanied minors need written permission from a parent or guardian. Ask leader for form.

Dogs permitted only if noted in write-up.

Always contact leader before the outing to confirm participation and details. Please see rigonordsierraclub.org/outings for up-to-date hike information.

Our weekly outings e-mail, Sierra Trail Mix, provides outings updates plus useful outdoor information such as trail conditions. Send an email to Listserv@lists.sierraclub.org with any subject and a message that says SUBSCRIBE RIO-NORTH-OUTINGS.