



Green Wave



In November, voters swept pro-environment candidates into office across New Mexico. But they have a lot of problems to tackle now that they’re here.

Inside: Election wrap-up: Page 7. **How to get active to save our climate, water, land and wildlife:** Page 8



Photo courtesy David Clark

We won’t forget about you, Roxy

While on a walk with her human in November, Roxy, left, died in a neckhold trap near a recreational trail in Northern New Mexico.

Sierra Club and allied groups will again advocate for legislation in the upcoming legislative session to ban trapping on public land in New Mexico, so we can help prevent senseless deaths like Roxy’s. **Pages 6 and 7.**




Photo by David McGahey

BLM leases off more of Chaco

Hundreds turned out to protest the Bureau of Land Management’s continued leasing of Greater Chaco land for oil and gas drilling. The agency did pull back some parcels of land from the Dec. 5-6 lease sale, but its promises for impact studies and tribal consultation continue to go unmet. **Page 5.**

Testing Greater Chaco water: **Page 12**

EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET



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More inside:

Five wolves dead in November

Causes of death are unknown as the wild population of endangered gray wolves, only 114 at the end of 2017, may take a hit. **Page 6.**

Reversal allows arroyo contamination

Trump EPA proposes to gut the Waters of the U.S. rule. **Page 13.**

Sandoval County rejects another oil measure

Ordinance would have limited public notice on drilling permits. **Page 5**

More: Holtec and nuclear: Page 3. **Central New Mexico Group:** Page 11. **Northern New Mexico:** Pages 12-13. **Hikes:** Pages 15-16

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When you contribute to the Rio Grande Chapter, your entire donation stays here in New Mexico and West Texas to protect our climate, land, water and wildlife. You can donate at **riograndesierrclub.org/donate**, or send

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Contributions are welcome. Send to riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org. Submissions by Rio Grande Chapter members will take precedence. Articles chosen to be published are subject to editing.

Letters to the editor may be up to 400 words, subject to editing, and are printed at the discretion of the editorial board. Editorial practices as developed and adopted by the chapter will be used in production of the *Sierran*.

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To stay updated on issues you read about in *The Sierran*, go to **riograndesierrclub.org** and subscribe to the chapter e-mail list, or write to monablaber@gmail.com and ask to be added to our opt-in list.

Volunteer opportunities

Mentor kids on climate and civic engagement!
Are you someone who loves kids and would like to help them learn the leadership and critical thinking skills needed to face the world of their future with clear eyes and strong voices?
The Global Warming Express (www.theglobalwarmingexpress.org), the award-winning “by and for kids” climate-science, arts and advocacy program for elementary-school kids, is looking for one more new after-school mentor for the last half of the 2019 school year in Las Cruces.
We provide training, supplies and a stipend, and you commit to being in an elementary school once a week in Las Cruces.
Only one space open! Please hurry — applications are due by Friday, Jan. 11, 2019. Apply at theglobalwarmingexpress.org/gwe-mentor-application.
January/February/March 2019

From left, Susan Selbin, Derrick Toledo, Global Warming Express's Lori, and Keely Scheffler traveled to Denver for the one hearing held on the EPA's gutting of its own methane-reduction safeguards.



PNM plan to close San Juan on track

By Mona Blaber

The Public Regulation Commission on Dec. 19 moved New Mexico one step closer to a nearly coal-free future. The commission accepted PNM's "Integrated Resource Plan," a 20-year plan that New Mexico's utilities are required to submit every three years. It includes the retirement of the remaining units at coal-fired San Juan Generating Station by the end of 2022 and an exit from PNM's 13 percent participation in the Four Corners Power Plant when the existing coal agreement expires in 2031. While not all partners have committed to closing Four Corners in 2031, PNM and Tucson Electric's withdrawal plans signal that that coal plant, too, has become too costly.

The plan adds 50 megawatts of solar but adds gas in 2023 to replace San Juan Units 1 and 4. The Coalition for Clean, Affordable Energy filed a comment supporting the coal-plant exits but objecting to the gas reliance. The plan is not binding, and Sierra Club and our CCAE allies will use every opportunity to convert PNM to a renewable-heavy portfolio.

SPS gets to sell wind credits: The PRC also ruled in December that SPS could sell all the "renewable-energy certificates" from the massive Hale and Sagamore wind projects it's building. That means other utilities in New Mexico or other states can use the credits to comply with state requirements instead of building their own renewables.

SPS has touted the renewable benefits of these wind farms, and a utility that buys the credits could also claim the same environmental benefits, leading to double-counting. Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy will ask for a rehearing. Your voice matters in convincing commissioners that selling credits reduces renewables.

Vote Solar, SPS appeal rate case: When the commission in September rejected SPS's monthly fee on solar-using customers, it was a big win for solar energy. SPS has appealed another aspect of the case, and Vote Solar is also appealing because, while the commission rejected the fee, it seemed to reject a legal argument that would also rule out similar fees from PNM and El Paso Electric. The appeals court has not yet heard the case.

NM: Worst on methane

By Camilla Feibelman
Chapter director

With the election of both a governor and a state land commissioner committed to curbing oil and gas waste and pollution through state methane rules and leasing changes came the news that New Mexico has among the worst methane protections in the country.

The Wilderness Society and Taxpayers for Common Sense published a report providing a comprehensive analysis of state regulations for managing natural-gas waste across the eight states with the most federal oil and gas leasing and production. Each state's guidelines are compared to nine major provisions of the 2016 Bureau of Land Management Waste Rule.

The 2016 rule established a complete suite of safeguards that would substantially reduce gas waste and methane emissions from public lands. It was repealed by the Trump administration and replaced with a rule that relies almost entirely on any state regulations that already exist. But in New Mexico, and most states, we don't have any state regulations.

Meanwhile the EPA took a final step to gut their own methane-reducing

rule. The Clean Air Act at least required them to hold a public hearing, which took place in November in Denver. Our coalition sent eight New Mexicans to testify at the hearing. Lori, 10 years old and an active member of Global Warming Express (see Page 11) traveled with her mom, along with Rev. Jim Therrien of the Lybrook Community Ministries from the TriChapter area of the Navajo Nation. Robyn Jackson represented DinéCare. Gloria Lehmer, a Farmington-area resident, testified as a resident on the front lines. And Sierra Club's Clean Energy Fellow Derrick Toledo and UNM Sierra Student Coalition President Keely Scheffler brought both the Native American and youth perspectives.

If you can believe it, we're expecting a third, bigger methane rollback at the federal level, where the EPA would essentially argue that it doesn't have the authority to regulate methane. More to come in the new year...and of course this leaves us back where this article started, which is the very deep need for state methane protections.

A recent USGS report showed vast untapped resources larger than anything the agency has seen in recent history that will likely continue to feed the oil boom in Southern New

600 million

cubic feet of gas expected to be flared (and wasted) in 2019 in the Permian Basin.

The oil industry flared a record amount of gas in the Permian boom this year, new research shows, and is on track to flare even more. Oil companies have turned to flaring in many shale fields because production has grown too fast for pipelines and processing plants that carry gas to market.

The methane flared is about 80 times more powerful than carbon dioxide as a global-warming gas. Producers burned off 407 million cubic feet of gas a day in the third quarter of 2018, about 3.5 percent of the total gas produced.

Mexico's Permian Basin, making it and the state one of the largest oil producers in the country and the world.

State rules will likely be developed administratively but will require important legislation to restore the Oil Conservation Division's authority to fine oil and gas violators. To help on this, please join our grassroots lobby effort (see Page 8).

Decommissioning causes nuclear conundrum

By Patricia Cardona
Nuclear-Waste Team

The Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter has intervened with the Federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission to prevent Holtec International from obtaining a license to construct and manage a consolidated interim storage site between Hobbs and Carlsbad, N.M., for "high level" spent fuel rods from uranium-powered plants.

The concerns are the presence of excess radiation in the area and that, once established, the storage site will be permanent and possibly forgotten.

There are approximately 100 uranium-powered plants in the United States. They are located in urban centers near water-

ways that are used to cool the operation of the power plants.

Utility owners and these communities' elected officials are "decommissioning" aged-out uranium-powered plants. They want to find a place to store all the irradiated materials from the plants away from their original locations. There is no technology capable of removing radiation, which lasts 10,000 years or more. Communities where the power plants are located want to reclaim the land for economic development. Investors are reluctant to finance areas where radiation is present.

During "decommissioning," the concrete, equipment, structures, reactor vessels, steam generators, large pumping systems, workers' clothing,

and surrounding soil that have become infused with radiation also need to be stored at isolated storage sites. These are generally referred to as "low-level" waste.

Companies like Holtec that specialize in storing irradiated waste begin to look for "unpopulated" rural areas. On a map, southeastern New Mexico looks like it is just

empty space. Yet it is rich in organic food products from pecans, dairy farms, cattle raising and other economic activity like gas and oil operations.

There are deep concerns that excess radiation will contaminate natural resources like soil, air and water used by these businesses — as well as negatively impact human health and other

natural life, including wildlife and native plants.

Another company, Waste Control Specialists, is requesting licensing for additional storage of low-level radiation waste and more high-level waste in the same area, but on the Texas side. This would concentrate all the radiation from all the power plants in the United States into one area of the country.

At Atomic Safety and Licensing Board hearings Jan. 23, the Sierra Club attorney will make the case to prevent this from happening. Attendance at the hearing will provide the opportunity to understand additional issues. Please attend and show support for Sierra Club's position. Our attorneys need your support in protecting New Mexico.

Now the real work begins

You probably saw the front page of our last *Sierran*. It was covered with the faces of New Mexicans who've offered their time and energy to help steer our state toward a cleaner, safer future.

And guess what? Thanks to you and your efforts, every one of them won, bringing our state a green tsunami that promises a changed landscape for our air, land, water and communities.

But it's worth remembering what else happened this fall. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change announced that we have 12 years to take profound action to stop the very worst consequences of climate change. Meanwhile, in New Mexico, the Permian Basin is exploding with oil extraction by the biggest companies in the world, proclaiming the southern part of our state the new Saudi Arabia. \$1.1 billion flooding into state coffers can't help but give people hope that we can solve the state's intractable problems on poverty and education. But we forget that massive, ill-advised tax cuts in 2003 and 2013 made us much more dependent as a state on oil and gas income and also more vulnerable to the boom-and-bust fossil-fuel economy (and the fluctuating surplus estimates over the last several weeks demonstrate



Camilla Feibelman
Rio Grande
Chapter director

closing window to create meaningful action with true allies.

This leads me to our priorities for the legislative session:

1. You. You are our top priority. You brought the green electoral wave. Now we need your help on taking delivery to pass the bills that will make a difference on climate, wolves and others. See Page 8 for how you can get involved.
2. The budget. The Martinez Administration gutted environmental agency budgets between 20 and 30%, not to mention leaving large numbers of vacancies, especially in key inspector positions. We'll be working to get agencies fully funded to properly hold

the ephemeral nature of those royalties).

The urgency described by the UN, the utter lack of attention to December's Paris 2.0 meetings and our unhealthy dependence on oil and gas makes clear we must take advantage of this

accountable all oil and gas operators.

3. Restored authority to fine. The Oil Conservation Division does not have the authority to enforce environmental violations. So fines went from \$800,000 in 2010 to 0 this year. We'll work to restore the division's authority to hold bad actors accountable.

4. Increase renewable-energy requirements for utilities. New Mexicans think our utilities use a lot more renewables than they really do (and it's because any reasonable person can see that our state has the sun and wind and smarts to do it the right way). This bill will increase those requirements significantly, getting our electricity to 80% renewable energy by 2040.

A lot of work will take place at the administrative level, too. We'll work to enact state methane safeguards to reduce oil and gas waste and pollution as well as money-saving energy-efficient building codes.

The list goes on, but the main thing is again: You.

We'll get you where you feel comfortable advocating for this important legislation so that on March 17, when the legislative session ends, we have made this a safer place for future generations.

New chapter leaders elected

Every year, Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter members elect several positions on our group and chapter executive committees.

Sierra Club chapters are run by volunteers, and our Rio Grande Chapter is divided into five regional groups: El Paso, Southern New Mexico, Central New Mexico, Northern New Mexico and Pajarito. Those groups are led by elected executive committees. Group committee members serve two-year terms and chapter ExCom members serve three-year terms. Congratulations to the winners and thanks for their service for the next few years:

Chapter Executive Committee: John Buchser, Laurence Gibson and Karl Braithwaite

Northern N.M. Group: Sandrine Gaillard, Tom Gorman, Paul Paryski and Teresa Seamster.

Central N.M. Group: Carol Chamberland, Odile de la Beaujardiere, Fred Houdek and Peter Kelling.

Southern N.M. Group: Howie Dash, Mary Hotvedt and Mary Katherine Ray.

Pajarito Group: Howard Barnum, Jody Benson, Nona Girardi, Michael Di Rosa.

El Paso Group: Ann Falknor, Neysa Hardin and Laurence Gibson.

Lifetime member: Madeline Aron

In our 55th-anniversary year, we've been featuring profiles of some of our Life Members, who make the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter what it is.

In the last Sierran, we featured Madeline Aron, but unfortunately didn't show her the caption we wrote for her photo, and got our facts wrong. The caption also gave an impression of her parents as being wealthy, which they were not, as Madeline explains below.

We want to honor Madeline's story and her parents' wonderful legacy, especially as it has special relevance in the current atmosphere of increasing anti-Semitism and racism. Below is a note by Madeline with a fuller version of the history of the hotel and arts center her parents ran.

—Camilla Feibelman

The first 10 years of my life were spent in the Berkshire Hills in Lenox, Massachusetts. My parents were 1st-generation Eastern European Jewish-Americans. They established a culturally and racially inclusive hotel and arts center that helped change the discriminatory practices of the area.

My love of nature, the arts and social justice were inextricably entwined in my being. I joined the Sierra Club because of its dedication to Nature, and its willingness to support environmental justice causes and the need for diversity in grassroots environmental activism.

Camilla wanted more information about the hotel to be shared, and so included a caption under the picture that unfortunately had inaccuracies and needed more context to provide a realistic understanding of it.

It read: "Madeline Aron and friends at the Festival House, built by J.P. Morgan in 1893, which her parents purchased and ran." It was actually built by JP's distant cousin George Morgan, as a private residence called Ventfort Hall. My parents purchased it from one of the subsequent owners when it was under foreclosure, unoccupied and in need of repair. A friend provided the down payment.

It was the least-expensive property in the area appropriate for their purposes: to provide an affordable and inclusive inn where anyone



Madeline sitting behind friends at the hotel pool.

could enjoy the Berkshire Hills and the Boston Symphony Orchestra concerts at Tanglewood.

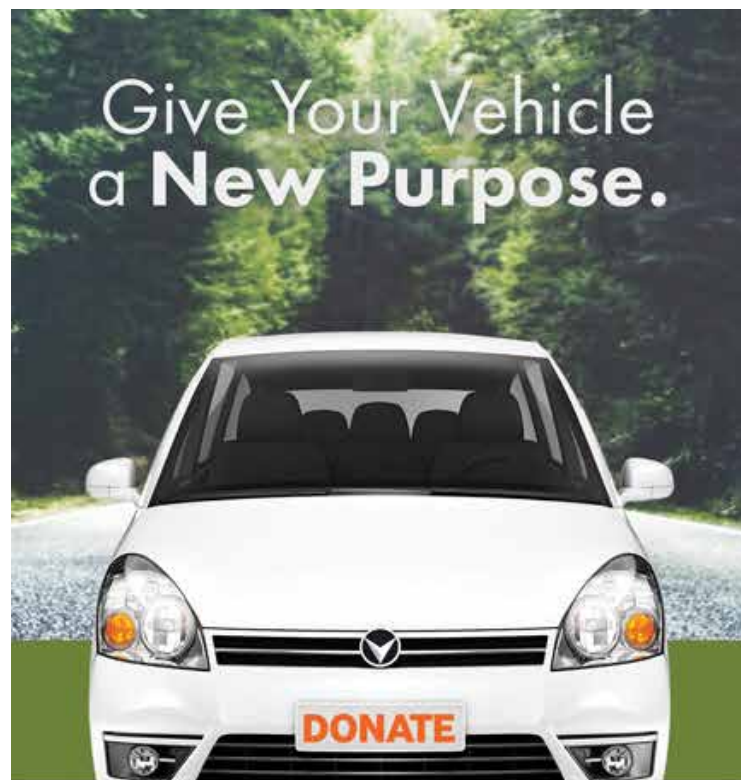
They named the hotel Festival House. The ornate architecture and historical significance of the property was appreciated and cared for, and included in their marketing to attract guests, but it was not core to our values or purpose. They worked very hard and made many sacrifices to create an open inn and arts center, in an atmosphere of anti-Semitism, racism and provincialism.

The variety of people and activities there, both indoors and outdoors, made it the colorful and rich place it was. See the *Berkshire Eagle* website at bit.ly/festivalhouse for a fuller story.

Because of financial and family strain, they eventually had to give it up. It's also so relevant today with the rise of anti-Semitic attacks. Anti-semitism is just one more -ism that the powerful use to divide us from uniting to save the planet.

I want to thank Camilla and Mona for being willing to make a correction.

—Madeline Aron



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Photos by David McGahey

Hundreds turned out at Santa Fe BLM headquarters in December to protest the online auction of thousands of acres of Greater Chaco land for oil and gas fracking.

More Chaco selloff

By Miya King-Flaherty
Our Wild New Mexico

New Mexico is now the third-biggest oil and gas producer in the nation, as the Permian Basin in southeastern New Mexico is touted as having some of the largest oil and gas reserves in the world.

But as the climate and health risks of oil and gas consumption grow more and more perilous, the Land of Enchantment continues to build a strong force of resistance against the Trump Administration's old-energy agenda, and it will only get stronger.

In October, the New Mexico Bureau of Land Management held a short 10-day formal protest period for its December online auction of nearly 89,000 acres of public and ancestral tribal lands for oil and gas development, including more than 44,000 acres in the Greater Chaco region in northwest New Mexico. Environmental, citizen and indigenous grassroots groups collected and hand-delivered to the BLM state headquarters in Santa Fe more than 10,000 protest comments opposing the lease sales.

Both the BLM Farmington and Rio Puerco Field offices manage lands in northwestern New Mexico's Greater Chaco region. Neither agency has completed its process to thoroughly analyze and put in place plans that mitigate the impacts of fracking, which combines multi-stage horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing (unconventional fracking).

The Farmington Field Office Resource Management Plan Amendment and the Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan



Terry Sloan of Southwest Native Cultures spoke at the BLM protest.

7 parcels totalling 2,500 acres pulled back from December lease sale by BLM at the last minute for undisclosed reasons, but the agency hadn't conducted the ethnographic or cultural studies it promised.

10,000 protest comments opposing Dec. 5-6 lease sale

93 percentage of public land that's leased for oil and gas in San Juan Basin/ Northwest New Mexico

revision processes are still ongoing. These plans are meant to ensure that community health and environmental protections are in place before any more drilling occurs.

The controversial December lease sale drew widespread condemnation from Navajo chapter houses, including the Eastern Navajo Agency Council and Tri-Chapter Council — comprising Ojo Encino, Torreon/Starlake, and Counselor chapters in the Greater Chaco region — the All Pueblo Council of Governors, the Navajo Nation, U.S. Rep. Michelle Lujan-Grisham, hundreds of thousands of public

citizens, and more than 100 organizations.

Even in the face of such great opposition, the BLM moved forward with the Dec. 5 and 6 online selloff of public lands that resulted in bids of more than \$39 million. However, the BLM Farmington field office did withdraw all parcels that were nominated for the lease sale, a small victory, but all 30 parcels nominated by the Rio Puerco Field office were sold.

We remain hopeful and will continue to fight for greater protections of the Greater Chaco region, for the health and safety of impacted communities, for a moratorium until management plans are complete and thorough, and for tribal consultation to take place with all tribes. We have a fighting chance with a new governor and state land commissioner, the unwavering support from our congressional delegates, and the growing momentum we have built through your support, as showcased by the BLM Dec. 5 protest that was attended by nearly 200 clean-air and water advocates.

We'll need your support, because our next battle will be the March 2019 lease sale.

Another surprising Sandoval plot twist

By Miya King-Flaherty
Our Wild New Mexico

Nearly 200 people attended the Sandoval County Commission meeting on Nov. 29 expecting the commission to adopt an oil and gas ordinance that had serious flaws.

What started out as a relatively protective measure drafted by the citizen "Science Team" was stripped of decent safeguards by the commission.

After a series of revisions, the final draft did not require baseline water testing and ongoing monitoring near private wells anywhere in the county, allowed for an exemption to permit unconventional fracking in the Rio Rancho Estates area, did not provide for adequate public notice or for local public hearings in the San Juan Basin, and ignored the needs and requests by tribes for consultation.

The commission was likely concerned that the New Mexico Oil and Gas Association had threatened to sue the county if the ordinance passed.

By the time the agenda item to discuss oil and gas came up at the meeting, the commission did not have the second vote needed to advance the motion, which prevented a final vote. Since the motion failed, Chairman David Heil tabled the oil and gas ordinance for the year.

In closing, Heil noted that the commission received various comments opposing the ordinance from the public, industry, environmental groups and tribes. The All Pueblo Council of Governors also sent the commission a resolution requesting tribal protections, adequate tribal notification, and consultation that were lacking throughout the ordinance and the drafting process.

Commissioner Kenneth

41,000 acres leased for oil and gas fracking by the BLM Dec. 5-6 in the Greater Chaco region in Sandoval County.

Eichwald also gave a closing comment noting that in the end, the commission did what the citizens wanted and waited for the results of the New Mexico Tech Study before voting on a final ordinance and appointed a citizens working group to develop an ordinance.

Eichwald also cited a recent comment by current State Land Commissioner Aubrey Dunn that oil and gas operators have committed hundreds of violations in New Mexico. He went on to say that it is incumbent upon the state government to deal with oil and gas development issues in New Mexico.

For now, the process of applying for drilling permits reverts to the current "special use" permitting under the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance. Any drilling application received by the county must go before the Planning and Zoning Commission for a public hearing and input. Then the Planning and Zoning Commission must make recommendations to the County Commission, where the application is subject to another public hearing and input before a decision is made by the County Commission.

The county still needs an ordinance to protect it against abuses and liabilities from companies that want to drill in Sandoval County. Please stay tuned for how you can help. If you would like to receive updates and action alerts, please email Miya King-Flaherty at miya.king-flaherty@sierraclub.org to be added to the Sandoval Ordinance Issue listserv.



By Miya King-Flaherty

Sandoval County citizens continue to pack County Commission meetings to oppose drilling ordinances that endanger water and safety. Another flawed ordinance was rejected Nov. 29.

Support the environmental journalists of the future

Sponsor a student intern through the New Mexico Fund for Public Interest Journalism. The program, open to high school and college students, includes six weeks of training and mentorship and culminates with publication of the work in the *Santa Fe Reporter*. The next cohort will focus on reporting about the environment. Donate at www.nmjjournalism.org.

Trapping wrongs continue in NM

By Mary Katherine Ray
Chapter Wildlife Chair

The New Mexico Game and Fish Department has recently offered a few minor changes to the trapping rules as a disappointing result of trapping stakeholder meetings held last winter. Though we are grateful to state Sen. Pete Campos, who sponsored the bill to ban traps on public land in the 2017 Legislature and who urged Game and Fish to bring trappers and conservation interests together, the proposed changes won't address the cruelty that traps inflict, how indiscriminate traps are by nature and the lack of even basic scientific population information about the species trappers seek.

The Game and Fish Department has proposed increasing the distance that a trap can be hidden from a road or trail from 25 to 50 yards. However, some paths don't even qualify as trails because they aren't on agency maps. Trappers oppose this increased distance because it will take them longer to check their traps and they won't be able to set as many. This will eat into their profits. Still, no matter how far the setback distance, the public should not be required to be confined to narrow trail corridors when the vast expanses of our wild places beckon. The public is granted free access to all of it, on and off trail.

Game and Fish has offered to place warning signs at trailheads where traps might be present. Beyond the enormous expense to do this for thousands of trailheads across the state, the effect will doubtless be a chilling one for people who use these trails. While tourism is one of New Mexico's top industries, such signs will surely discourage tourists and residents alike from using our public lands at all. Trappers oppose signs at specific trap locations because they fear trap tampering and theft.

The Department proposes to allow its director, in consultation with the Game Commission chair, to close some areas to trapping, though there is no guarantee that any closure would ever be enacted.

In any event, at the latest Game Commission meeting in Roswell on Nov. 30, the commission did not indicate that they are seriously considering adopting any of these rule changes. No motions were made and no votes were taken. The chair of the commission has repeatedly assured trappers they want to protect trapping.

In addition to opposing these changes, some trappers

have gone as far as to say that public land should be closed to dogs completely during the 4.5-month trapping season and that the public should be required to learn how traps work and become comfortable with trapping. Trappers even offered an egregious proposal of their own: that the trap check time should be increased from one to three days, allowing a trapped animal to linger in pain and suffering for 72 long hours.

Clearly, the Martinez Administration Game Commission and Game and Fish Department have viewed themselves as the guardians of trapping, not the broader public interest. The new Legislature will be convening in January, and this offers the path where outdoor enthusiasts and wildlife can find relief from trapping on our public lands. The urgency is only growing given that a trap has now resulted in a dog's death (see page 7). Contact your legislators and urge them to support the bill to end the use of traps and poisons on our public lands. (see www.nmlegis.gov for contact information.) Attend a Sierra Club lobby training. Watch for the scheduling of bill hearings so you can attend. "Like" our Rio Grande Chapter Sierra Club Facebook page so you can get updates. Sign the petition at www.TrapFreeNM.org. The status quo is entrenched and powerful, but together, bringing the pressure of our voices to bear, maybe this year, a TrapFree New Mexico can become a reality.

Reforming the Game Commission

The Game Commission is a seven-member board appointed by the governor. Appointees are not required to have any background in wildlife science or any qualification that ensures competent, rational wildlife policy-making.

The Game Commission was established in the 1920s, and since then, interest in wildlife has expanded beyond hunting to viewing, photography and general appreciation. The Game Commission should be representative and inclusive of this much wider constituency.

A bill will be introduced to require commissioner qualifications and better representation, making this commission less reliant on the whims (and campaign donations) of whoever is governor at the time.

See Page 9 for another important bill, ending coyote-killing contests.



In 2017, Mexican wolf M1486 was photographed by a trail cam near the Cibola National Forest in southwest Socorro County. He was one of five found dead in November. Causes of death are unknown. Last winter four wolves were inadvertently captured in traps, and two later perished.

Five Mexican wolves dead in November

By Mary Katherine Ray
Chapter Wildlife chair

In a staggering blow, five Mexican wolves were found dead in November. The causes of death have not yet been released for these apparent separate incidents.

This brings the total loss for the year to 17, more than any year since reintroduction began in 1998 and a significant toll for this population that last year numbered only 114. We have been told that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working to understand and stop these losses. Not all will have been caused by malicious humans, but the population cannot withstand this level of mortality and be sustained.

During the year, a total of eight wolf pups were cross-fostered from captive to wild dens. At least one is known to be alive, but hopefully the annual count will turn up more. Cross-fostering helps to increase the genetic diversity of the wild wolf population, which has become dangerously inbred because wolves in the small wild population are so closely related to one another. Wolf pairs will also have had their own pups as well and we fervently hope that there will be survivors among them.

Gov. Susana Martinez's Game Commission has approved the cross-fostering of up to a dozen wolf pups into wild dens this coming spring. Cross-fostering pups requires that the wild recipients have their own litter within days of the birth of the captive litter. This narrow window is why the goal of 12 cross-fosters

114 the number of Mexican gray wolves counted at the end of 2017

? the number of wolves that will be found in the official 2018 end-of-year tally.

8 wolf pups cross-fostered into wild families in 2018

12 wolf-pup cross-fosters called for each year in the recovery plan.

is difficult to meet. Allowing an entire captive family with parents and pups to be released into the wild would greatly boost the wolf population much more quickly, but so far, even as the wolf numbers fall further and further behind the goals in the recovery plan, the Game and Fish agencies of both Arizona and New Mexico have refused to allow adult wolves to be released from captivity into the wild. Yet we are ever more certain that Nature needs wolves and that it is essential for the wrong of their extirpation to be set right.

But two wolves killed illegally in previous years get justice: In 2015, a young male Mexican wolf was deliberately trapped and bludgeoned to death with a shovel by public-land livestock permittee, Craig Thiessen. We learned of this incident when the Fish and Wildlife Service put out a press release reporting his guilty plea and sentence of a small fine and probation.

However, Forest Service grazing rules allow the agency to revoke the grazing permit when the permittee is convicted of failing to comply with federal wildlife-protection laws such as, in this case, the Endangered Species Act. Thirty-three organizations (including your Rio Grande Sierra Club chapter) and 20 individuals signed a letter to

the Gila National Forest calling for Thiessen's grazing permit to be cancelled. Thank you to all of you who were among the senders of hundreds of emails and phone calls urging this action. In late November, the Forest Service agreed this action was warranted and served notice to rancher Thiessen that it was cancelling his grazing permit.

An Arizona man, Donald Davis, has pled guilty to knowingly shooting a female Mexican wolf while on a hunting trip in December 2017. Another hunter saw cell-phone pictures of Davis posing with the dead wolf and reported the incident to an Arizona Game and Fish officer. Davis was ordered to pay a \$7,500 fine, to surrender his rifle (worth around \$400), and sentenced to five years probation, during which he may not hunt at all nor enter any Arizona National Forest except to pass through on a federal, state or local highway.

Another man also involved in the shooting will have a court hearing later in December.

Both of these cases send the important message that wolves have value and that intentionally harming one has consequences that can be significant.

Elections and consequences

We walked; we talked; we won

By Richard Barish
Central N.M. Political Chair

As most of you know by now, it was an extraordinarily successful election season for the Sierra Club here in New Mexico. The icing on the cake was, after going to bed on Tuesday feeling really good about the results but resigned to a loss by Xochitl Torres Small after the race was called for her opponent, waking up on Wednesday to find out that the race had been uncalled and, later, that Xochitl was our new congressperson from the 2nd Congressional District! What an election!

All three of our endorsed federal candidates won. Martin Heinrich scored a big Senate victory and Deb Haaland joins Sharice David as the first Native American women in the U.S. House. In statewide races, all six of our endorsed candidates won, led, of course, by Michelle Lujan Grisham for governor. In the critical Public Regulation Commission, progressive Steve Fischmann won his race. Nineteen of the 25 candidates for the state Legislature that we endorsed in contested races won. In county races, all six candidates we endorsed won.

In order to win all of these races, our candidates had to win in normally conservative districts where our candidates have rarely if ever won before. In addition to the 2nd Congressional District, our candidates won in several Albuquerque far Northeast- and Southeast Heights districts formerly thought to conservative bastions.



Chapter Political Chair Susan Martin, right, organized Sierra Club volunteers (including Ken Hughes and Chris Calvert, back row) to canvass every weekend for Congressional candidate Xochitl Torres Small, who won by less than 1 point. Laura Comer, left, is a national Sierra Club staffer assigned to the race. Jessica Velasquez, center, came within .5 percent of a shocking win in a legislative race.

85 percentage of candidates endorsed by Rio Grande Chapter who won their Nov. 8 New Mexico elections. Chapter volunteers knocked on more than 1,000 doors and called hundreds of voters to support candidates, and the chapter sent emails, digital ads and mailers.

Among the many great new candidates who got elected:

Melanie Stansbury, who won one of those legislative races in Albuquerque's far Northeast Heights, brings to her new job a keen intelligence and a wealth of experience in the legislative process from her former position as the water and science staffer for the Ranking Member in the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural

Resources. She is an expert on water resources and truly shares our priorities and perspectives.

Abbas Akhil, who won another of those legislative races in Albuquerque's far heights districts, is a retired Sandia Labs engineer with an expertise in energy storage systems in the electric grid to improve its efficiency and facilitate use of wind and solar energy.

These candidates were able to win because groups like the Sierra Club and volunteers like you got involved. Now we need to help get good legislation enacted when the legislative session starts in January.

Onward!

Results of races the Rio Grande Chapter endorsed in:

Federal races:

U.S. Senator: Martin Heinrich **WON**

Congressional District 1: Deb Haaland **WON**

Congressional District 2: Xochitl Torres Small **WON**

Congressional District 3: Ben Ray Luján **WON**

Statewide:

Governor: Michelle Lujan Grisham **WON**

Land Commissioner: Stephanie Garcia Richard **WON**

Secretary of State: Maggie Toulouse Oliver **WON**

Attorney General: Hector Balderas **WON**

Auditor: Brian Colón **WON**

Treasurer: Tim Eichenberg **WON**

Public Regulation Commission

District 5: Stephen Fischmann **WON**

State House of Representatives

District 8: Mary Jo Jaramillo **LOST**

15: Dayan (Day) Hochman-

Vigil **WON**

17: Debbie Armstrong **WON**

20: Abbas Akhil **WON**

22: Jessica Velasquez **LOST**

23: Daymon Ely **WON**

24: Liz Thomson **WON**

25: Christine Trujillo **WON**

28: Melanie Stansbury **WON**

29: Joy Garratt **WON**

30: Natalie Figueroa **WON**

33: Micaela Cadena **WON**

35: Angelica Rubio **WON**

36: Nathan Small **WON**

37: Joanne Ferrary **WON**

38: Karen Whitlock **LOST**

39: Rudy Martinez **WON**

43: Christine Chandler **WON**

44: Benton Howell **LOST**

50: Matthew McQueen **WON**

52: Doreen Gallegos **WON**

53: Willie Madrid **WON**

57: Billie Helean **LOST**

60: Alexis Jimenez **LOST**

68: Karen Bash **WON**

County Commissions:

Bernalillo: Charlene Pyskoty **WON**

Sandoval County: Katherine Bruch **WON**

Doña Ana County:

District 1: Lynn Ellins **WON**

3: Shannon Reynolds **WON**

5: Karen Trujillo **WON**

Doña Ana County Sheriff:

Kim Stewart **WON**

A note on El Paso candidates: Sierra Club's Lone Star Chapter makes Texas endorsements, including for the El Paso area, which is included in the Rio Grande Chapter, with the El Paso Group's consent. While Sierra Club-endorsed Lupe Valdez lost and Beto O'Rourke narrowly missed defeating Ted Cruz, O'Rourke's candidacy helped produce a progressive wave in down-ballot races in Texas.

Trap kills dog on walk with her human

By Mary Katherine Ray
Rio Grande Chapter/TrapFree NM

TrapFree New Mexico has learned that a dog has died as a result of being caught in a snare trap.

The incident happened last month at Santa Cruz Lake, a BLM recreation area in northwest New Mexico. The dog, Roxy, was the cherished companion of Dave Clark and his wife, Katrina, of Española.

Mr. Clark and Roxy were on their way back to his vehicle when he heard Roxy, behind him, make a strange sound. When he turned to see why, he saw that she was struggling in the neck snare.

Wire cable snares are set to tighten only one way around the neck of the captured animal. They are meant to fatally strangle. And indeed, Mr. Clark was unable to loosen the snare before Roxy succumbed. Trapping is not allowed in this recreation area, and the snare had no trapper identification, as required by law. But there are millions of acres of public land where snares and other traps may be legally set with only a 25-yard setback from roads and trails. The distance only

applies if certain descriptive requirements are met. In order to qualify as a road to keep traps off, it must be maintained annually with public funds. For a trail to qualify, it must be on an agency map.

Trappers seek to profit from the fur of trapped wildlife such as bobcats, foxes, coyotes and badgers. And indeed, Mr. Clark says that as he carried Roxy's lifeless body back to his vehicle, a bobcat caught in a leg-hold trap, lashed out at him as he walked by. He said he was not hurt because the trap was chained to a juniper tree restraining the bobcat out of reach. But the experience added even more distress to an already terrible situation.

When law enforcement from NM Game and Fish found the location, the bobcat was still present and alive but was in such terrible condition that euthanasia was the only option. The investigation of this case is still ongoing.

Mr. Clark rescued Roxy 8 years ago, and they were close companions. The two walked at least a couple of miles together almost every day. Mr. Clark attributes these walks to improving his health and lowering his blood pres-



Courtesy Dave Clark

Roxy was the cherished companion of Dave Clark and his wife, Katrina.

sure after he retired. He has expressed a reluctance to go back to the place where this happened and even to walk anywhere given that it is impossible to know where traps are hidden.

In a separate incident in November, a dog named Kekoa was rescued in Valencia

county with such terrible injuries from a leg-hold trap that his hind leg had to be amputated. He is recovering slowly from the procedure, which cost \$3,000.

Trapping season continues until March 15. Even New Mexico Game and Fish, which sells the license to in-state trappers for \$20, does not know the location or number of traps that are set. There is no bag limit on the animals that trappers seek and no way to know how many unintended animals are also harmed. Because trapping is so poorly monitored, hikers can help by reporting trapping incidents to www.TrapFreeNM.org.

TrapFree New Mexico plans to strongly support the bill to prohibit traps and poisons from public land in the legislative session that begins in January (see trapping article on facing page). The election results (see article above) are heartening, but take nothing for granted. If you care about ending trapping on public lands in New Mexico, please contact your legislators and urge their support. No one should have to endure their dog being injured or killed by a trap on our public lands.

Renewable energy, coyotes on tap

By Brittany Fallon
Rio Grande Chapter
lobbyist

Thrillingly, New Mexico is riding a green wave, electing a pro-environment governor and significant state House majority in November. This impressive lineup means our state is poised for us to take advantage of a number of big environmental opportunities during the 2019 legislative session.

As we look toward the session's start on Jan. 15, one buzzy topic you'll hear a lot about is the so-called "rocket docket," a suite of state bills that passed within the last two years by an overwhelming majority, only to be vetoed by Gov. Susana Martinez. Senate and House leaders have agreed to expedite these bills in an effort to make substantial legislative progress, hopefully within the first few weeks of the session. This is good news for us, because it will push through a large number of bills that otherwise might have taken up committee time.

The Rio Grande Chapter's primary focus this year is passing an improved Renewable Portfolio Standard to expand our current requirement for utilities to provide 20% of their electricity from renewable energy by 2020. Our goal is to pass a standard requiring that big New Mexico utilities provide 80% of their electricity from clean sources such as wind, solar, or battery storage by 2040. We are also working on multiple fronts to ensure that New Mexicans have the opportunity for job training and registered apprenticeships for renewable-energy career paths.

Other priority legislation:
Securitization of San Juan



Generating Station debt: Securitization is a progressive tool used to retire aging coal plants with less financial burden on ratepayers than other closure methods. This bill puts the remaining money owed ("stranded assets") on San Juan coal plant into AAA-rated bonds, allowing ratepayers to pay back the debt they still owe on the plant at a low interest rate over time. The bill also includes funding for investment and community rebuilding in the Four Corners area, and

requires replacement energy to come from clean energy sources.
End coyote-killing contests, once and for all: Competitions for prizes that include cash and firearms for killing the most coyotes, and sometimes the biggest and smallest coyotes, are going on almost every weekend in New Mexico during the winter months. The bill to prohibit these events has passed both houses of the legislature in previous sessions, but not yet in the same session. Now we have a governor we

Above: Each year, Renewable Energy Day draws hundreds to the Roundhouse for a news conference, speakers and visits to elected officials. Renewable Energy Day 2019 is Jan. 29. At left: Is this the year New Mexico stops the cruel practice of coyote-killing contests?

Coyote photo: Mary Katherine Ray
Legislature photo: Evalyn Bemis @ebemisphoto

hope will sign this bill. With a 46-24 majority in the House, we have high hopes that this will be our year to ban these senseless contests, where coyotes are lured and killed en masse. Trapping and Game Commission bills will also be considered — see Page 6.

Restore the Oil Conservation Division's authority to fine: Currently, our oil and gas enforcement agency, meant to protect us from leaks and spills, does not have the authority to impose fines or penalties

on bad actors without going through the attorney general. This bill would restore the Oil Conservation Division's enforcement authority, holding violators accountable and providing increased revenue for our state.

State Land Office royalty rates: This bill would provide the land commissioner with the authority to increase revenue from gas produced on state trust lands, most of which goes toward New Mexico's public schools. The current royalty rate cap is 20%, and this bill would increase the possible royalty rate to 25%, bringing New Mexico in line with Texas. The bill would also allow the Land Office to collect royalties on waste gas.

Electric-vehicle infrastructure and tax credit: The first bill moves us toward an electric future by investing in infrastructure and allowing utility cost recovery for electrification so long as the investments are good for customers. The second bill is a tax rebate for New Mexicans who make under \$50,000 per year when purchasing an electric vehicle.

Energy Efficiency: Efficiency measures, like better lighting or appliances, are one of the best ways to save money and electricity, reducing carbon pollution. This bill updates the Efficient Use of Energy Act to include updated goals and cost recovery, as well as measures like home weatherization for low-income New Mexicans.

If this list seems overwhelming, don't worry; during the January lobbyist trainings around the state (see below), we'll be breaking down the bills in detail to help you make your voice heard at the Legislature. See you there!

Grassroots lobby events: The world is in your hands

By Brittany Fallon

This new year, resolve to make an impact at our state legislature. Now that we have turned our state government green, we have before us the most promising opportunity in over a decade to pass bold, humanity- and wildlife-saving policies.

Every year, our wonderful members put their advocacy skills to work at the Roundhouse. This year, as your new staff lobbyist, I would like to suggest that each of us make a New Year's resolution to do what we can to enact state-level protections for the environment that counteract those being stripped at the federal level. In 2019, we are hosting a Clean Energy Conference on Jan. 28 and Clean Energy Day on Jan. 29, plus Land, Water and Wildlife Day on Feb. 13. We will also host a "Bring It Home Day" toward the end of the session as a final push to get our



Destiny Watford



Laura Paskus

priority bills passed. Before the session, which runs from Jan. 15 to March 17, the Sierra Club and our allied organizations are hosting advocacy trainings around the state to help you effectively engage with your legislators. The morning of each legislative day will start with a short refresher training, so don't fret if you cannot attend a training. Our legislative advocacy days are one of the best ways for our members to show our state government the power of Sierra Club members for environmental policy in New Mexico. This

year, we are partnering with allies to host the Clean Energy Conference at Temple Beth Shalom Jan. 28 to prep for the next day's Clean Energy Day at the Legislature. The conference will offer an in-depth look at the energy-related legislation up for a vote this session and will feature panels made up of bill sponsors, activists and energy experts. All New Mexicans are invited. We will break for dinner and networking followed by two terrific keynote speakers: New Mexico environmental journalist Laura Paskus and Destiny Watford, a Goldman Environmental Prize winner who in high school led the fight to stop a trash-burning incinerator in her community. The first half of the conference will cover legislative priorities, but the second half will be purely educational to give you inspiration for your work and activism. Go to www.riograndesierraclub.org to learn more and register!

Take Action

- Clean Energy Conference:** 3-9 p.m. Jan. 28, featuring legislative briefing, lobby training, and speakers: New Mexico journalist Laura Paskus and Goldman Prize winner Destiny Watford.
- Register:** www.riograndesierraclub.org/lobby-training.
- Clean Energy Day at the Roundhouse:** Jan. 29
- Lands, Water, and Wildlife Day at the Roundhouse:** Feb. 13
- Lobby trainings**
- Santa Fe:** 6-8 p.m. Jan. 9, Jaguar Road Library
- Silver City:** 6:30-8:30 p.m. Jan. 9, WNMU
- Las Cruces:** 6-8 p.m. Jan. 9, Southwest Environmental Center
- Albuquerque:** 6-8 p.m. Jan. 17, St. Mark's Episcopal
- Gallup:** 6-8 p.m. Jan. 8, Work In Beauty House
- Aztec:** 6-8 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 10, The Step Back Inn
- Taos:** Date and location to be announced.

Rio Grande Chapter Year in Review

January

- Participants in Global Warming Express, the Sierra Club science and civics education program by and for kids, speak at the New Mexico Legislature. In February, some of the GWEers in Albuquerque meet with new Mayor Tim Keller, who promised them he would ban plastic straws from Albuquerque city buildings.

March

- In a surprising move, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke cancelled a March BLM lease auction of 4,454 acres in Greater Chaco to oil and gas companies. After protests from New Mexico's congressional delegates, the Frack Off Chaco Coalition, the Navajo Nation and All Pueblo Council of Governors, National Congress of American Indians, 15 Navajo chapter houses, the Legislature and thousands of concerned citizens, Zinke instructed the BLM to defer the sale pending analysis of cultural resources in the lease area.

- The Sandoval County Commission approves a Citizens Working Group composed of 14 county residents and led by geologist Don Phillips. Members were responsible for developing an oil and gas ordinance that included meaningful tribal consultation and water protections. The working group ended up splitting; only one committee's proposal was recommended to the commission, and that proposal was significantly altered. See article, Page 3.

- The New Mexico Public Regulation Commission approves Southwestern Public Service's 1.2-gigawatt wind-energy project in New Mexico and west Texas. Rio Grande Chapter activists called and emailed commissioners to urge passage of the proposal, which included prioritized hiring of local contractors on construction workers.

- The New Mexico Supreme Court issued a stunning decision, allowing New Mexico's industry-written Copper Rule to stand. The court's decision came despite the fact – acknowledged by the industry, the Environment Department, and the court – that copper mines will “inevitably” pollute large areas of groundwater that will become increasingly important in our arid climate.

- The Albuquerque City Council passes a resolution to condemn coyote-killing contests.

- Despite less than two days' notice, more than 400 residents around the Gila National Forest attend a meeting with the Air Force and protest rally opposing a possible plan by Holloman Air Force Base to run 10,000 test flights a year



David McGahey

March: Leona Morgan speaks during a tour of the state with a mock radioactive canister to highlight the risks of shipping high-level radioactive waste to Southern New Mexico by rail.

over Gila National Forest. Not one person spoke in favor of the Holloman proposal.

- Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke proposes to eliminate Bureau of Land Management rules that would reduce methane pollution on public lands.

- 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 pesticide-drift regulations, died in committee. Many grassroots activists contacted their legislators to stop the bill.

- The House passes a bill renewing the 10% tax credit for residents and small businesses who install solar panels. Gov. Susana Martinez failed to sign it by the deadline (also called a pocket veto).



Wolf Conservation Center

April: Fish and Wildlife cross-fostered this wolf pup and others with wild families.

April

- The Counselor Health Impact Committee installs monitors to measure indoor and outdoor air quality within 1 mile of oil and gas wells in Navajo Nation Counselor Chapter. Sierra Club funded the 20 monitors the team installed April 15 and paid for lab analysis and reports to each household, church and chapter house being monitored.

- U.S. District Judge James Browning, presiding over a 2015 lawsuit against the BLM Farmington Field Office, ruled that the BLM did not violate the National Historic Preservation Act and National Environmental Policy Act by opening Greater Chaco to hori-



Melanie Stansbury

September-October: Sierrans worked nonstop to elect good candidates. Many Albuquerque volunteers knocked on doors with Melanie Stansbury, above, a water-policy expert in a difficult district. She'll be sworn in Jan. 15.

zontal fracking under a 2003 management plan that doesn't analyze the impacts of horizontal fracking.

- Eight wolf pups are cross-fostered from captive litters into wild ones this past spring. In late April, two pups were placed into a wild den in Arizona and two into a wild den in New Mexico. In May, four more were placed with another New Mexico pack. The purpose is to increase the genetic diversity of the wild population. The hope is their wild families will teach them what they need to know about avoiding humans.

- 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.

- Global Warming Express kids meet with the mayors of Las Cruces, Albuquerque and Santa Fe to talk plastic straws, climate and solar-powered cities.

- In reaction to a proposal by Holtec to build a storage site for high-level nuclear waste between Carlsbad and Hobbs and ship all the nation's radioactive waste there, activists tour the state with a mock radioactive-waste canister to highlight how risky the shipment and storage of the nuclear waste is. Rio Grande Chapter volunteers organized opposition among community members in southeast New Mexico

May

- Thanks to citizen lobbying, 30 legislators signed on to

letters objecting 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 NRC held public meetings in southeast New Mexico. At every location, the overwhelming majority of commenters expressed concern about the risk to New Mexicans and West Texans. The attendance in Roswell was so high, the fire marshal would not allow all members of the public to attend.

June

- To protect the communities and environment of the border Southwest, more than 400 people gathered to protest at All Against the Wall on June 2, at the construction site of the newest border wall at Santa Teresa, just west of El Paso.

- Groups including San Juan Citizens Alliance, Diné C.A.R.E., Amigos Bravos, WildEarth Guardians and Sierra Club win a legal challenge against the BLM Farmington Office's attempt to lease minerals on 19,788 acres of Santa Fe National Forest land encompassing Greater Chaco region.

August

- Results from air monitors placed at homes and schools near oil and gas wells on Counselor Chapter, Navajo Nation, show that the open air is widely contaminated with chemical-laden particulate matter and formaldehyde, a known carcinogen.

- The El Paso Group of the Rio Grande Chapter delivers more than 10,000 letters and 5,000 petition signatures to the Texas Parks and Wildlife executive director to support a plan to return endangered gray wolves to the wilds of Texas.

September

- Installing solar gets a lot more affordable for Eastern New Mexico residents when the Public Regulation Commission kills a monthly fee that Southwestern Public Service had imposed for years on homes and businesses that invested in solar.

- President Trump reverses two of the key promises the U.S. made to comply with the Paris Climate Agreement that would drastically reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, revoking two methane-reducing rules.

- The Mexican government announces that there are 30 Mexican wolves in the wild in Mexico. This is in addition to the 114 in the U.S. as of 2017.

November

- In Nov. 6 elections, Sierra Club-endorsed candidates sweep statewide offices, including governor, secretary of state, land commissioner and attorney general, as well as 19 of 25 legislative races and every local race. See facing page for how you can use this opportunity to create environmental progress.



Cecilia Chávez Beltán

All year: Our chapter led more than 100 free hikes and outings, including Sierra Student Coalition, Spanish-language, accessible and military outings.

- After more than 1,100 Rio Grande Chapter supporters emailed the agency, the U.S. Forest Service revokes the grazing permit of a rancher who trapped an endangered Mexican gray wolf and bludgeoned it with a shovel. Also in November, an Arizona man is sentenced to five years probation and revocation of his rifle for intentionally shooting a gray wolf (see Page 6).

- Sandoval County Commission rejects a weak oil and gas ordinance with insufficient protections (see Page 3).

December

- El Paso Group collaborates with El Paso Environmental Services Department on informational decals for recycling bins to reduce city's contamination rate, 10 times that of neighboring Las Cruces.



Photo by Dennis O’Keefe

New Mexico Gov.-Elect Michelle Lujan Grisham has said that she will end efforts for a diversion project on the Gila River, above, given that “there is little to show for the millions of dollars spent on staff, lawyers and studies.”

No more boondoggle?

Governor-Elect Michelle Lujan Grisham pledges to end work on Gila diversion

Allyson Siwik, Executive Director, Gila Conservation Coalition
For the past eight years, Gila River diversion planning has moved full steam ahead under Gov. Susana Martinez. But the result of the 2018 gubernatorial election may grant New Mexico’s last wild river a second chance.
In her plan for managing and conserving the state’s water, Governor-Elect Michelle Lujan Grisham states that she will “end work on the Gila River Diversion Project,”

given that “there is little to show for the millions of dollars spent on staff, lawyers and studies” with only one year left to secure approval of the project under the Arizona Water Settlements Act (AWSA).
Grisham goes on to say “we need to use the [AWSA] settlement money more efficiently on other projects that could help more of southwestern New Mexico.” GCC looks forward to working with our new Governor to protect the wild Gila River.
Meanwhile, it’s been a race against time for the NM CAP Entity, the local group charged with planning for and construction of the Gila diversion project.
The Entity has been trying to get through the environmental compliance process under the National

Environmental Policy Act before the December 31, 2019, Arizona Water Settlements Act deadline but still has no viable plan and little information on costs, yield of water, and who will actually use the water.
The Draft Environmental Impact Statement is expected early spring of 2019, kicking off another round of public comment.
That all said, it’s not over ’til it’s over. The Gila Conservation Coalition will keep pushing on all fronts to ensure that the wild Gila continues to run free. While we are optimistic that this long battle may be coming to an end, we will continue to need your strong support to make sure that our beloved river is protected forever!

Residents have united against flyovers

By Gila Resources Information Project
The Holloman Air Force Base proposal to establish a new military training area over the Gila region has galvanized strong community opposition over the past year. Although our elected officials are listening and have followed the public’s lead with their expressions of opposition, this will not be enough. Continued public pressure will be a crucial element in ensuring that the Air Force ultimately drops this harmful idea.
As it plans to expand Special Use Airspace at Holloman, the Air Force is considering creation of a new Military Operations Area for F-16 fighter jets over southwestern New Mexico. Potentially, 10,000 test flights a year — 30 a day — would fly over the Gila, with a thousand of those flights supersonic and a thousand at night. Many of the fighter jets will be flying very fast at very low altitudes. Others will drop flares and a radar-deflecting metal material called chaff from above 2,000 feet.

30 flights daily proposed by Holloman Air Force Base for testing runs over Gila National Forest

The proposal puts the health of the Gila National Forest, Gila and Aldo Wilderness Areas, and nearby communities like Silver City at risk from extreme noise, wildfire, and environmental contamination. Our rural economy, trying to wean itself off the boom-and-bust cycle of extractive industries, has relied on our natural amenities to attract tourism, outdoor recreation and retirees. This economic development strategy is severely threatened by Holloman’s proposal.
The Gila is an inappropriate location for the Air Force’s military training. Other locations and existing military installations are available to Holloman that won’t cause impacts to the nation’s first Wilderness area and fragile local economies.

Southern Group celebrates successes

Howie Dash Southern Group Chair
2018 was a quite a year in the Southern Group territory. The Sierra Club worked on the Gila River Diversion, the proposed Holtec nuclear waste site, opposition of the Border Wall, opposition of transition of the Mesilla Valley State Park to New Mexico Game and Fish, Gila overflight training missions, the Copper Flat Mine in Sierra County and Otero Mesa.
Accomplishments included a Las Cruces City Council commitment to 100 percent renewable energy. Another exciting development was the 2018 elections. Every Sierra Club-endorsed candidate won election in Doña Ana County, supported by Southern New Mexico Group volunteer efforts.
The Southern Group finished the year with a holiday party.
Among the things we will work for in 2019 are the passage of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Conservation Act, which would convert wilderness study

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areas in the Monument to full wilderness, reinstatement of the solar tax credit, passage of an electric-vehicle tax credit, ending of coyote-killing contests, transfer of state trust lands within OMDP boundaries to the BLM in exchange for less environmentally sensitive lands and legislation allowing Tesla to sell and maintain electric cars in New Mexico.



Photo courtesy Gila Resources Information Project

New Mexico Copper began to mine this pit before Copper Flat Mine was shut in the ‘80s, and the pit has been filling with water.

No Copper Flat Mine permit issues — yet

By Max Yeh
The New Mexico Environment Department has not yet issued a Permit to Discharge Wastewater to New Mexico Copper Corporation at the Copper Flat Mine outside Hillsboro after an extended public hearing in September.
The hearing officer determined that the state’s Copper Rule was satisfied by the mining company but sought clarification on weighing the issue of risk before submitting a recommendation to the Secretary of Environment in a final report. Similarly, after a public hearing in October, the New Mexico Mining and Minerals Division has not issued a Permit to Mine to NMCC and is still engaged in studying the structuring of a financial assurance bond.
The permit for Copper Flat Mine outside Hillsboro would allow New Mexico Copper Corp. to discharge 24 million

gallons per day of contaminated wastewater that “may move directly or indirectly into the groundwater” and “may contain water contaminants or toxic pollutants elevated above the standards” of New Mexico’s Clean Water Act.
Since parts of the mine are on public federal land administered by the Bureau of Land Management, the BLM must also permit the operation. BLM says it will publish a Final Environmental Impact Statement forming the basis of its permit in January. After that is issued, the public will have 30 days to submit comments. The Sierra Club will keep you posted.
Litigation over the water rights available for the mine continues in appellate court after a determination in the Lower Rio Grande Water Adjudication that left the mine with only about 900 acre-feet per year, insufficient for mining.



Neysa Hardin

America’s High School students read Terry Tempest Williams’ ‘Red’ on a visit to White Sands.

‘Red’ and White Sands

By Neysa Hardin
El Paso Sierra Student Coalition

On a cold evening in December, the Sierra Student Coalition from Americas High School in El Paso, Texas, spent the day exploring White Sands National Monument.

As the sun set behind the mountains, the students read from Terry Tempest Williams’ *Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert* and shared passages from the book that resonated with them. The students used

this opportunity to connect to our national parks and monuments as young naturalists by experiencing the desert through a “quartet” of earth, water, wind, and air as representing in Tempest Williams’ *Red*. This was the first time for many of the SSC students to visit White Sands, and they all left feeling renewed and restored by nature’s awesome beauty.

The trip was made possible by generous donors of the El Paso Sierra Club. The students were appreciative and gratefully have this opportunity provided to them, for this group of teens truly care and love their public

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GWE kids testify, plant trees

By Genie Stevens, Global Warming Express

As usual, The Global Warming Express has been extremely active this fall. Continuing our partnership with Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller, GWEers in four Albuquerque schools planted trees recently with the city.

In conjunction with their science training, students at Inez Elementary, Mitchell Elementary, Mountain Mahogany School and Lowell Elementary all planted trees in their nearby city park. The students will continue to incorporate “their” tree into their studies and have committed to water and monitor the trees. Of course, each tree has a been given a name.

On Nov. 17, GWEer Lori, 10, traveled with her mom and the Sierra Club to Denver to testify at EPA hearings on methane pollution (See Page 5). Here is an excerpt from her excellent speech:

I am a member of the Global Warming Express in Albuquerque. We are concerned about the environment and climate change, about fracking and methane waste and pollution. We’re not seeing the actions that we need from our government. If grownups won’t take action, we will. ... Why would you weaken rules for oil and gas companies? We cannot go on like we are mindless people,



Global Warming Express member Lori traveled to Denver with Sierra Club to testify on

doing nothing about what is happening.

A number of TV news outlets interviewed Lori after her speech. As usual, the journalists were surprised to find a young person with such a breadth of knowledge.

On Dec. 5, Lori and fellow GWEer Emily (age 9) asked their moms to take them to the Oil and Gas Lease Sale Protest at BLM Santa Fe.

An excerpt from Emily’s speech:
“I believe that it is our job to protect the planet from the effects of climate change that we are causing. Why would people be allowed to do something like fracking that wastes water, that releases methane, that pollutes groundwater, that ruins wilderness? For us to die? Why don’t they care about

Albuquerque announces roadmap to 100% renewables

Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller announced in December plans to move the City of Albuquerque to 100% renewable energy within four years.

The plan includes a partnership with PNM for the company to build a 50-MW solar field as part of the PNM

Solar Direct Program. The program provides an opportunity for large electric customers like the city to achieve their clean energy and carbon reduction goals.

With the completion of this large-scale solar, the city will be getting about 58% of its electricity from solar within two

years (compared with 4% today), the city said. The roadmap also includes continuing to add solar to city facilities, installing more energy-efficient street lighting and putting in place other measures to reduce energy consumption.

Once fully implemented by 2022,

these efforts will amount to removing the equivalent of 93,000 metric tons of CO2 emissions every year, according to the city. Sierra Club, Global Warming Express and allies have been working with Keller to implement climate solutions and clean-energy goals.



Derrick Toledo

The Sierra Club and 350NM had a float in the Albuquerque Marigold Parade featuring climate impacts on the Bosque.

Central N.M. in brief

The Bosque Action Team revived its Big Bosque Bash on Dec. 8 after a two-year hiatus.

The Bash took place at Tortuga Gallery, which this year had a bosque mural painted on its walls as part of MuralFest 2018 (check it out!) We included an election celebration, too, in light of the green tsunami in November. Land Commissioner-elect Stephanie Garcia Richard graced us with her presence all the way from Los Alamos, along with legislators-elect Abbas Akhil, Natalie Figueroa, Joy Garrett, and Karen Bash, and soon-to-be County Commissioners Charlene Pyscoty and Kathy Bruch.

Albuquerque poet laureate Michelle Otero read a wonderful piece with a bosque connection. We had the Bosquitos tell us about their adventures, music from the Laughing Remains, a potluck (aka the potlatch), a silent auction, and a good time was had by all!

— Richard Barish

UNM Sierra Student Coalition

This semester has seen great movement for the Sierra Student Coalition of University of New Mexico. We began the semester with wanting to repass last year’s resolution of support for our renewable campaign — to bring UNM to 100% renewable energy by 2050 — with the Student Senate. All senators voted to support it once again. This helped us gain traction in gathering more than 1,500 signatures on the petition we share with a coalition of environmental groups on our campus.

During the semester, we also started on a few other projects. These projects include showing a series of environmental-activism documentaries, advocating for more recycling bins on campus, and more. We hope to develop these projects more in the coming semester.

At the end of the semester, we

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held a press event to present our petitions to the university president’s office to show her the great support we have from students, staff, and community members of UNM. We hope this will help us move faster in our efforts and establish our presence on campus and in the community.

We are looking forward to another great year and will continue to work on creating lasting change.

— Keely Scheffler, UNM SSC President

Central Group meetings

Remember our events on the first Friday of every month: On Jan. 4 it’s Sierra Club and Root Beer at Albuquerque’s Peace and Justice Center. On Feb. 1, we will host a First Friday Art event at the Sierra Club office, 2215 Lead Ave. SE, Albuquerque. Contact fhoudek@gmail.com for more information.

Testing water in greater Chaco

By Teresa Seamster,
member of Counselor HIA-
HNDA Committee

Author's Note: The Counselor Health Impact Assessment — Hozhogo'na'ada Committee — has been working for three years to collect information on the health, air and water quality and traditional perspective on the impacts of oil drilling on the Navajo communities of Counselor, Torreon-Star Lake and Ojo Encino adjacent to Chaco Culture National Historical Park. The combined HIA-HNDA report will be completed in early 2019.

Late October brings out bright yellow and green leaves on the trees and bushes that mark the winding courses of small rivers, springs and ponds of the high desert. This is a good time, before winter arrives, to walk up canyons to check tiny seeps and to pile brush on the deep mud that lines the ponds in order to get close enough to dip a sampling bottle into the unfrozen water.

Surface water on the Navajo Nation is scarce, fugitive and declining in volume. In the Counselor Chapter, the presence of more than 150 active oil and gas wells means that residents also worry about their water quality and if it is still free of volatile organic compounds and diesel.

Finding the water depends on the local landowners, who know and protect their water sources for agriculture and raising livestock. Once you have permission to do a water test, you hike in to see if the water is still flowing or has gathered enough volume in small pools to sample.

Even the smallest seep or hidden spring has the ability to attract countless birds and other wildlife, and bring life to the dusty arroyos below. Evidence of full flood events is present with tumbled boulders, tall trees, lush foliage on the slopes and torn water hoses and piping.

On one private property, a deep cistern and cattle trough built in the 1940s by the U.S. Public Health Service were found empty but in good condition and only needing new tubing to reconnect them (see photo above). In recent drought years and with the water table dropping, the natural water from the nearby spring is no longer plentiful enough to fill the cistern.

Closer to the residents' homes are livestock ponds and the increasing presence of industrial wastewater pits filled with flowback water from drilling rigs. One of the largest ponds in Counselor is a few hundred feet from a large



At left: Samuel Sage, Kendra Pinto and Marlene Thomas of Counselor check a now-dry cattle trough on family property.



Below: Shannon Romeling, Samuel Sage, Kendra Pinto and Eric Patterson sample a private well.



Bottom: A migrating lazuli bunting visiting Pinto Springs.

Photos by Teresa Seamster

tank site. The site is used for storage rather than production, but because of the pond's use by cattle and wildlife and its proximity to stored gasoline and diesel, we have tested it for the past two years.

Total metals (calcium, magnesium, potassium and sodium) were detected in the pond but not at levels that the EPA considers to be a health

risk. Concentrations of metals and other toxins vary in water depending on precipitation or excessive drying that can either dilute or intensify the toxic effect. At the time of the sampling, the water was OK!

The volatile chemicals of most concern: Benzene and ethyl benzene. Toluene and xylene were not detected at this time.

These chemicals are released into the air and water at the wellhead, at compressor stations and at processing facilities. They cause serious health symptoms and need to be routinely monitored.

Acute symptoms due to short-term exposure are:

Benzene: headaches and dizziness

Ethyl benzene: Eye and throat irritation

Toluene: Headaches, sleepiness and confusion

Xylenes: Eye, nose, throat and skin irritation

Chronic symptoms due to long-term exposure are:

Benzene: Aplastic anemia, leukemia, birth defects

Ethyl benzene: Possible cancer, depending on dose

Toluene: Possible permanent neurological problems

Xylenes: Possible permanent neurological effects

Private wells are also crucial sources of domestic use. One private well showed the presence of E. coli that makes it unfit for drinking or bathing. To remedy the contamination, the water will need to be chlorinated and retested before used for any human consumption.

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Arroyos endangered under Trump change

By John Buchser
Chapter Water chair

The Trump administration has proposed gutting the “Waters of the U.S.” rule to remove protections for all of New Mexico’s arroyos.

Arroyos carry a lot of pollution into our streams, which provide water to farms and a number of cities in our region.

The Clean Water Act has been in place in its current form since 1972. In 2015, President Barack Obama’s EPA proposed and later finalized the Clean-Water Rule to refine the definition of

the “Waters of the U.S.”: rivers, streams and lakes that fall under the jurisdiction of the Clean Water Act. The rule clarified that seasonal waterways were always subject to the clean-water law.

Earlier this year, the Trump administration tried to suspend the rule, but a federal district judge overturned the suspension, ruling that the Trump administration had overstepped its bounds by suspending the rule without taking public comment first.

However, the Trump EPA’s new change would mean that in order to fall under the Clean Air Act, streams must

flow “predictably and continuously,” which basically excludes all our arroyos in New Mexico.

Arroyo protection is particularly critical in regions where mining wastes and over-application of animal waste to fields from concentrated animal feeding operations enter into the waterway. One big rainstorm and the polluted water runs into our rivers.

Wetlands that are not directly connected to streams will also be removed from protection. Wetlands are important natural ecosystems that help to remove small amounts of pollutants

from storm runoff. Our thunderstorms carry a lot of debris and pollutants, which can exceed the ability of wetlands to clean the water. The free service of wetlands is very important in the Southwest.

We need your voice in opposition to this reversal that will endanger so many of our critical waterways. Federal register notice: <https://www.epa.gov/wotus-rule/revised-definition-waters-united-states-proposed-rule>

Please comment before Feb 9 at www.regulations.gov, Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OW-2018-0149.

Northern New Mexico Group

Northern New Mexico member party



Zero Waste Chair Joe Eigner chats with state Rep. Matthew McQueen and former Santa Fe County Commissioner Kathy Holian and her husband, Brad, at the Rio Grande Chapter Northern Group’s member Holiday Party on Museum Hill.

Working to avoid climate chaos

By Shane Woolbright
Northern NM Group Energy Committee

A National Audubon Society staffer was asked about the problem of electric power wind turbines killing some birds and whether the windmills were part of a good policy. The staffer noted that some birds hit towers in some areas, but he noted, “there won’t be any birds if we don’t stop climate change.”

After a great election in November, New Mexicans have a chance to do their share in trying to set an example on reversing carbon emissions. The new governor states that she can set rules to stop oil and gas operators from emitting so much methane and reduce that pollution problem by a substantial margin. We have legislation that you can follow on riograndesierraclub.org that will push for more energy efficiency in buildings, give low-income people a method

to use solar, increase incentives for homeowners to add solar power, establish a required increase in renewable energy every year for private power companies, provide incentives for people buying electric vehicles, as well as a few dozen other bills your Sierra Club staff and volunteers will work on each and every day.

I assure you, no bill will go to a legislative committee without a Sierra Club member there ready to provide information for elected officials. And we have a fine chance to make a difference, and that chance is because many Club members worked hard and gave greatly to give us this chance.

I’m disappointed that we don’t have legislation to require solar panels on new buildings and homes. Solar is far less costly than buying from the power company. I recently did an analysis on a building using \$4,000 per month in power from PNM at 13 cents per kwh. A \$500,000 solar system

would save this building owner \$175,000 over 16 years if energy costs rise 1% per year. But we have trouble getting folks to make the move. We make them buy energy-efficient appliances, but we don’t make them buy energy that is efficiently produced. Nuts!

But it’s worse than that. Because when new people build new structures, PNM has to build more lines, more transmission, more generation, and PNM consumers have to pay for that, not the new energy consumer. When a new consumer builds his own solar needs, he does so at less cost than a re-fit, saves money, and saves the other consumers by not requiring PNM to add thousands of dollars of investment for each 1,000 square feet.

So while supporting the many bills that Sierra Club supports, put in a word that we need to continue to require conservation in many ways from many folks, including the

Taos Water Sentinels were busy in 2018

By Shannon Romeling
Executive Committee

Water Sentinels Rios de Taos had another (our 12th!) busy year sampling the waters of Taos County. In June, September and October, 15 volunteers sampled four rivers — the Red River, the Rio Hondo, the Rio Pueblo, and the Rio Fernando. Rivers were sampled for temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, conductivity, E. coli, aluminum, nitrates, phosphates, and ammonia. Over the year, we sampled about 17 locations three times each. Sangre de Cristo Laboratories analyzed a total of 84 parameters, and E. coli levels were tested in-house on every sample. Results will be synthesized and given to the New Mexico Environment Department to be used in policy decisions on surface-water quality impairment.

Results of this sampling and those from previous years have resulted in follow-ups concerning aluminum on the Red River and E. coli on the Rio Fernando. Over 12 years, Water Sentinels data has: advised upgrades to the Taos Wastewater Treatment

Plant, informed negotiations regarding the effects of Taos Ski Valley construction, confirmed continuing aluminum issues on the Red River, leveraged a watershed-based plan to address E. coli concerns on the Rio Fernando, and provided the ability to check on specific locations when the public has concerns. For more information on results, please visit www.amigosbravos.org.

In 2018, Water Sentinels Rios de Taos also assisted in the development of the newly formed Taos Academy Environmental Club, sent four young people to the Sierra Club’s summer training workshop for youth environmental activists, gave 12 students Sierra Club memberships, and presented about the Water Sentinels program to state Sen. Carlos Cisneros and state Rep. Bobby Gonzales at the Taos United meeting in December. We look forward to continuing this program into 2019. Please contact sromeling@amigosbravos.org if you would like to become a water-sampling volunteer for this exciting program next year!

‘John Muir’ coming to the Four Corners

By Gordon Glass

It is not often that good news on the environmental front comes out of Farmington, but thanks to the San Juan College Chautauqua Series, the San Juan College Foundation, and local Sierra Club member Martia Glass, Lee Stetson, aka John Muir, will appear for two presentations on April 1 and 2.

Says Martia, “Each summer we volunteer with the Sierra Club in Yosemite Valley, and we always attend Lee Stetson’s wonderful presentations on John Muir. It just seemed that our home region needed his inspiration about caring for our natural world.”



Lee Stetson as John Muir

Chautauqua coordinators Jimmy and Sylvia Miller secured Stetson’s enthusiastic response to visit the Four Corners.

If you would like to support this effort, please consider a donation to The San Juan College Foundation, Attention: John Muir Chautauqua, 4601 College Blvd., Farmington, 87402, or www.sjcfoundation.org/?page=donation_form.asp



You can be a climate leader, too

By Jody Benson
Pajarito Group chair

Climate Reality Leadership Corps comes to Los Alamos. Julia Ying is a certified Climate Reality Leader trained by Al Gore and the Climate Reality Project to present the latest findings about the climate crisis and its solutions.

Julia came to Los Alamos from Sydney via Los Angeles, and is excited to present a Climate Reality multimedia presentation to groups and schools, and to mentor individuals about how to actualize a rapid and equitable transition to a safe, sustainable future.

As a bonus, the Climate Reality Project is holding another training of Climate Reality Leaders in Atlanta, Ga., March 14 -16. You could become one of more than 17,000 Climate Reality Leaders that Gore has trained around the world. You will meet like-minded climate activists, climate scientists and local and national leaders and learn about climate change and its solutions. And you will learn how to give presentations in order to get others involved in healthy climate behaviors.

Apply on the Climate Reality Project webpage at: www.climate reality project.org/training. For a preview of what you'll learn in Atlanta, you can visit www.24hoursof reality.org. Sign up. Invite a student, Contact Julia: juliaying@yahoo.com. She loves what she does.

Who's got the drill?

Rabbi Gershon Winkler told this story at the Pajarito Group panel on Faith and the Environment:

A man buys passage on a boat crossing to a new land. Because he's rich, he reserves the best cabin and fills it with luxuries he'll need on the other side. The boat leaves one shore sailing for the other, and in the middle of the journey, the rich man decides that, with all his stuff, the cabin is too small.

He goes to the captain and asks for a drill. The captain, believing that because this man is really rich, he must be really smart, asks no question as he gives the man a drill.

Soon, though, other passengers start hearing banging from the cabin. One by one they gather at the door. Soon all the passengers are standing, listening, looking at one another. Finally one asks, "What shall we do?" "We better," said another, "find out what's going on. Perhaps one of his horses is kicking him."

"Yes!" chimes in a third. "And if we protect him and rescue him, perhaps he'll reward us!"

The passengers gather courage, and knock on the door. The rich man answers, his hair damp with sweat, his clothes covered with sawdust.

Meekly, the passengers tell him they



heard noise and were worried.

"Not to worry," he said. "I'm drilling a hole in my floor."

"Drilling a hole in your floor!" they cry. "That's the bottom of the boat!"

The rich man shrugs. "My cabin's too small. I need more space."

"But if you drill a hole in the boat, the boat will sink and we'll all drown!"

The man turns away. "It's my cabin. I can do what I want." And with that, he shuts the door.

Each of us can name our personal rich man sinking the ship. But as for the ship being sunk? There is only one. Without Earth, everything goes down.

Let's look at the story again. First, the Villain. He's the consumer (or political alleged leader) who demands it all without any conscience or consideration for any other body or the Earth and the life it used to support.

We are not he. We are the good people being sunk. Alas!

But wait a minute. Was it not we who heard the drilling, who knocked on the door, who saw what was happening, who recognized the consequences? How many of us are there? How many of him?

If we do nothing, are we not as much

Top: Pajarito Group volunteer Julia Ying with Al Gore (center front) at the Climate Reality Leadership training in Los Angeles, where Julia became a certified Climate Reality Corps leader.

Left: Julia at the conference. Contact her at juliaying@yahoo.com to learn how to become a Climate Reality leader.

Above: Many Pajarito Group members volunteered to elect Los Alamos's Stephanie Garcia Richard, center, and other pro-environment candidates.

to blame for the ship's sinking as is he? Sure, we're busy juggling jobs and family, we have no tools, it takes all our time just to stay afloat, maybe he has a plan to mitigate the effects of the hole because he certainly wouldn't sink the ship with him on it, would he? And besides, we might not even drown since we're so used to treading water to keep from drowning in the overwhelm of daily life, so ...besides, he's the expert. There's nothing we can do.

But here's an alternate ending. It's also true. Since the 2016 election, Pajaritans have been trying to wrench the drill back. Our drill-wrenching efforts have included: lobbying for county conservation efforts, working on energy/water/environment bills at the Roundhouse (with the change of administration this year, many that have failed previously have a chance at future success), joining marches and protests around the state, becoming members of the County's Zero Waste Team, supporting the Los Alamos High School EcoClub's efforts to finally(!) get rid of the single-use plastic shopping bag, educating children about bear safety (for both the kids and the bear), and leading kids to hug — and appreciate — trees.

And in 2018, Pajaritans worked hard to first find candidates who could keep the ship afloat, consult with them on our issues, then knock on doors to get others to vote for candidates supporting survival. We got 'em. Thank you.

Things are definitely shifting in Los Alamos — as well as around the world. Although not yet a happy ending, we've added a happier chapter that keeps the ship — our Mother Earth — afloat. We can actually take a moment to celebrate as long as we know who's got the drill.

Meetings and events

The Pajarito Group is partnering with Pajarito Environmental Education Center, 2600 Canyon Road, for our Sierra Club presentations. Do you have one you'd like to give? We know many of you do amazing science, are exotically traveled, have hiked remarkably or named every New Mexico bird, and have skills that could be shared.

Do you want to tell us about it? Contact Jody Benson. She'll put you on the spring schedule. You can reach her at echidnaejb@gmail.com.

Pajarito Group Directory

<http://pajarito.riograndesierraclub.org/node/13>

Executive Committee

Chair/Secretary: Jody Benson, echidnaejb@gmail.com, 505/662-4782

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Bag Ban; Treasurer: Mark Jones, jonesmm1@comcast.net, 505/662-9443

Conservation: Michael DiRosa, mddbbm@gmail.com

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Opening doors with a new outdoors program

By Sergio Avila

Local Outdoors Coordinator, Sierra Club

Hola! I want to introduce myself as a new staff member at Sierra Club and describe the goals and opportunities in this new position. I will dive deeper into these goals and opportunities in future articles, but for now let me tell you a bit more about myself.

When I was growing up, I dreamed of becoming a big-cat biologist, inspired by books, TV shows and visits to the zoo. I achieved my dream thanks to the support of my parents, my curiosity for science and willingness to move to where big-cat projects were available. As a wildlife biologist, I have studied jaguars, ocelots, and mountain lions both in Mexico and the United States. I have also worked with Cactus-ferruginous pygmy owls, Monarch butterflies, California sea lions, and rattlesnakes.

However, my personal and professional experiences go beyond research of endangered or protected wildlife. In 1997-98 I lived with the largest Indigenous community in Mexico: the Tarahumara people (Raramuri) of the Sierra Madre of Chihuahua, the Mexican state that borders New Mexico. There I learned about the diverse cultural values and stories from Indigenous and Native people, which are not included in scientific, Western education. A new world opened to me.

In 2003 I came to work for The University of Arizona and became aware of the ecological impacts of heightened law enforcement along the international border, in addition to the social-justice issues for migrants and local communities. Since then, I've witnessed the destruction of wildlife habitats and corridors by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, while the national narrative is that of fear and disregard for environmental laws. Around that time I started volunteering with the Sierra Club Grand Canyon Chapter, speaking in support of reintroduction Mexican gray wolves, protection of jaguar corridors across the border, and defending mountain lions the state wildlife agency wanted to eliminate in Sabino Canyon.

I now work for the national Sierra Club in a team called Outdoor Activities, within a section called "Volunteer Engagement." My focus is to support staff and volunteers in New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada and Utah, with the



Photo courtesy Sergio Avila

Sergio Avila will be supporting staff and volunteers in New Mexico and other states as part of the Sierra Club Outdoor Activities team.

mission to connect all people with the natural world and with the Sierra Club, by maintaining and enhancing diversified, superior, volunteer-run outdoor activities that support the Sierra Club's conservation mission.

Sierra Club envisions a just, equitable and sustainable future where all people benefit from a healthy thriving planet and a direct connection to nature. We are on a path to break the paradigm of environmental conservation and social justice as separate issues. I intend to strengthen the connection between conservation advocacy and outdoor recreation in order to dismantle the incomplete and limiting ways that mainstream conservation organizations separate issues.

You may be familiar with the Jemez Principles for democratic organizing — we will make sure everyone knows them and knows how to incorporate them in their work. Similarly, we will integrate the practice of Land Acknowledgements as "a simple, powerful way of showing respect and a step toward correcting the stories and practices that erase Indigenous people's history and culture and toward inviting and honoring the truth."

I am very interested to hear from outings chairs, leaders and advocates on the needs, ideas and practices they'd like to bring into their activities. I look forward to hearing from you and meeting you on the trail.

sergio.avila@sierraclub.org
520-404-9165, @savila2015

A participant view of Excursiones

By Cecilia Chávez Beltrán, Excursiones a la Naturaleza de Nuevo Mexico

On a beautiful November morning we visited the Rio Grande Nature Center State Park. A very informative and mellow walk was led by the Center's volunteer naturalist, Sue Chávez, along with me, both bilingual.

A volunteer friend was invited along, and later asked to write some words about the experience.

From Peter Neils:

I came along with my spotting scope, and our group had 10 people, including children. This bilingual group made a delightfully conspicuous gaggle as we exchanged observations and questions in a mix of Spanish and English.

From the observation room in the visitor center we saw wood ducks, pied-billed Grebes, gadwalls, American coots, Canada geese and American widgeons, as well as a variety of ducks including Northern pintails, shovelers, mallards and one or two canvasbacks.

After this we left the developed part of the park, entered the bosque, and walked down to the Rio Grande, where we glimpsed our first sandhill cranes. Everyone enjoyed the up-close and personal perspective afforded by viewing them through the

spotting scope with 33X magnification. Many members of our party had never seen the exquisite plumage of a sandhill crane in the level of detail that the scope gave them, and their enjoyment was palpable.

As we walked north through the bosque, we were able to get the scope on a great blue heron on a sandbar out in the river. Birds we encountered that many of us saw included white-crowned sparrows, house finches, ruby-crowned kinglets and northern flickers.

Returning to the picnic area adjacent to the Education Building we enjoyed snacks, drinks and some social time. The general consensus was that it was a Saturday morning well spent, with many people expressing their thanks for such a beautiful time. The pleasure was mine; when's the next one?

Back to Cecilia: One incredibly important component of our outings is to continue working on nurturing amazing connections within our community. People and nature, people and people: experiences and abilities to understand and interact with each other is what makes us strong in unity.

Loving New Mexico and the opportunities to keep learning.

Hikes and Events

continued from Page 16

be short work and the return is all downhill. RSVP by Feb. 3 to jcnelson@gilanet.com or 575-854-2259.

Saturday, Feb. 16: Moderate hike to Otowi Peak west of the Santa Fe. This hike has some steep and rocky sections as it climbs Buckman Mesa. Good views from the top and a tiny detour to a large volcanic hole. Total round-trip distance is 5 miles with about 1,100 feet of elevation gain. Alan Shapiro, nm5s@yahoo.com Details, updates and sign-up on our Meetup Site (www.meetup.com/Santa-Fe-Sierra-Club-Outings).

Sunday Feb. 17, Moderate hike to Embudo Spring in Sandia Foothills Open Space Park 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. 2.5 miles. East of Tramway on Jose Drive NE, Albuquerque. Children welcome — please call Cecilia. chavez.beltran@sierraclub.org, 505-319-7556. Find about our Spanish-language outings on Facebook: Excursiones a la Naturaleza de Nuevo Mexico,

Sunday, Feb. 17: Easy hike and tour of a portion of the Army Corps of Engineers' bosque restoration project in the South Valley. Meet at the Valley High Street SW access to the bosque at 9:00 a.m. (1.5 mi. south of Rio Bravo off Second St.) for a tour of an excellent example of successful restoration of our beloved bosque. You'll see revived wetlands, new cottonwoods and desert willows plantings and learn about the value of this unique area to our ecosystem. This outing is approximately three miles and 50 feet of elevation gain over 2 hours. For more information and precise directions, contact Mark Rudd at Mark@markrudd.com or 505-270-5449.

Saturday, Feb. 23, Moderate/strenuous snowshoe hike in the Sandias. Meet at 8 a.m. at Hobby Lobby on Juan Tabo to carpool. This five-hour outing is about 4 miles round trip with 600 feet of elevation gain. We'll depart from the North 10K Trail parking lot and proceed to the crest with several stops to enjoy stunning views all the way to the continental divide. We'll cover tips for safely traversing on snowshoes and winter hiking. Lunch afterward. Sponsored by the Military Outdoors Program, and everyone is welcome. Contact leader no later than Feb. 16 to RSVP, obtain recommended gear list and additional information. Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, teowen@q.com.

Saturday, March 2: Strenuous hike, Ox Canyon to Manzano Peak, Manzano Mountains. Meet at the Ox Canyon trailhead at 9 a.m. Round trip 11 miles, 2400 feet elevation gain, 5-plus hours. One or two dogs, no kids under 15. Assuming FR 427 is open and there's not much snow in the mountains, we'll hike from the trailhead to the ridge trail. From there it's only 2 mi S and another 400' up to the highest peak in the Manzanos. For variety, we may descend via the Kayser Mill trail. Pine, fir, and aspen groves, views over the plains to the East and valley to the West. Difficulty is only intermediate if you're used to those distances. RSVP by Feb. 25 to jcnelson@gilanet.com or 575-854-2259.

Saturday, March 2: Moderate cross-country ski outing.

Hopefully to the dramatic Brazos Cliffs lookout, but snow conditions may dictate a change. About 6-7 mile round-trip tour off-trail, but over easy terrain with about 650 feet of elevation gain. This is a 110-mile drive each way, so plan on a long day. A snowshoe or hike may be substituted. Alan Shapiro, nm5s@yahoo.com Details, updates and sign-up on our Meetup Site (www.meetup.com/Santa-Fe-Sierra-Club-Outings/)

Sunday, March 3: Easy/moderate hike exploring the hills to the south of Bear Canyon. About 4 miles, and 400 feet change in altitude. Meet at 9:30 a.m. at trail Bear canyon trail-head. Please contact Odile at 505 433 4692 if planning to come. Informal pot-luck lunch after the outing for those interested.

Saturday, March 9: Moderate cross-country ski outing.

Location to be determined depending on snow conditions. A snowshoe or hike may be substituted. Alan Shapiro, nm5s@yahoo.com Details, updates and sign-up on our Meetup Site (www.meetup.com/Santa-Fe-Sierra-Club-Outings/)

Saturday, March 23: Easy hike in the Bosque. Join us for an easy and leisurely walk into our beautiful Bosque. Trail is flat and fairly even and will take between 1-1/2 hours. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at the tree sculpture garden just off the Montañito Bridge on the west side of the Rio Grande (turnoff is just before Coors if you're going west on Montano). Dress for chilly March weather, including hat, gloves, etc., and bring water and snacks. Contact Margaret at mardel18@aol.com for more information.

Outings updates

Northern New Mexico outings Meetup site: www.meetup.com/Santa-Fe-Sierra-Club-Outings/
Albuquerque Meetup: www.meetup.com/Sierra-Club-Rio-Grande-Chapter/.

Know before you go: For status of fire restrictions and burn bans across New Mexico, visit firerestrictions.us/nm. Updates are also in our weekly email; send an email to Listserv@lists.sierraclub.org with any subject and a message that says SUBSCRIBE RIO-NORTH-OUTINGS.

October-December outings

October

Northern Group Outings
Note:

This time of year will see the most shuffling of outings and outing locations due to snow and melted snow/mud. Latest info, updates, and changes available on the Santa Fe Sierra Outings Meetup page (www.meetup.com/Santa-Fe-Sierra-Club-Outings/). We've pretty much gone to a Meetup-based posting and signup process at this point, although it's not absolutely necessary to sign up that way.

Saturday, Jan. 5: Moderate hike of Gallinas Springs Pueblo ruin and Gallinas Mountains. Meet at Magdalena post office at 9 a.m. Round trip 8 miles, 1,000 feet of elevation gain (more if we take a side scramble up Gallinas Peak), 4 hours. One or two dogs, no kids under 15. This is the range northwest of Magdalena, not the one near Corona. In the ruin, which housed several hundred residents in pre-Hispanic times, stonework is visible in several areas. After visiting it, we'll strike down Gallinas Canyon past the spring and head north out of the canyon on old (and sometimes obscured) two-tracks through the rolling Gallinas Mountains and canyons, trying to see the country through Puebloan eyes. RSVP by Jan. 1 to Jim Nelson at jcnelson@gilanet.com or 575-854-2259.

Wednesday, Jan. 9: Easy/moderate hike Tetilla Peak. We'll take a short off-trail route to the top. Generally this Caja del Rio area west of Santa Fe is clear of snow in winter. This 2 mile round-trip hike is 100 percent off-trail with some steep, rocky sections. Although short, it is not for those uncomfortable with off-trail hiking. We climb about 600 feet on this route. We need to approach our starting point with 4WD or AWD vehicles as the access roads are intolerant of any moisture. Alan Shapiro, nm5s@yahoo.com Details, updates and sign-up on our Meetup Site (www.meetup.com/Santa-Fe-Sierra-Club-Outings/)

Saturday, Jan. 12: Moderate cross-country ski outing to the Hopewell Lake area. This will be off-trail rather than track skiing. Skis with metal edges are needed as well as the ability to control them on moderate slopes including narrow snow-covered dirt roads. 4-5 miles with up to 600 feet of elevation gain. Recommend having climbing or kicker skins in your pack. Hopewell Lake is located about 100 miles north of Santa Fe. The driving time of two hours each way makes this a long day. Alan Shapiro, nm5s@yahoo.com Details,



Above: Hikers navigate the rocks on a trip to Tent Rocks.

At left: Participants enjoy an Spanish-language trip to Rio Grande State Park. See Page 15 for more on the trip and our Excursiones program.

Top photo: Alan Shapiro
Photo at left by xxxxx

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 mileages are round-trip.

Participants must sign a liability waiver. Bring water, lunch, sturdy hiking boots or shoes and clothing suitable for the weather. Leader reserves right to turn away anyone whose experience or equipment appears unsuitable.

Leader may alter destination or cancel trip due to weather, 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 riograndesierraclub.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. You can also visit the Northern New Mexico Group Meetup page for updated outings: www.meetup.com/Santa-Fe-Sierra-Club-Outings/.

updates and sign-up on our Meetup Site (www.meetup.com/Santa-Fe-Sierra-Club-Outings/)

Saturday, Jan. 12: Easy walk at the Volcanoes on the west side of Albuquerque. , 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. 3.1 miles. Great views of the valley, the city and the Sandia Mountains. Carpool meetup: parking lot of Lowe's Home Improvement at 2001 12th St NW, Albuquerque 87104 (north of I-40). Children welcome — please call Cecilia.chavez.beltran@sierraclub.org, 505-319-7556.

Find about our Spanish-language outings on Facebook: Excursiones a la Naturaleza de Nuevo Mexico,

Saturday, Jan. 19: Easy introductory snowshoe hike of Sandia Crest. Meet at 8 a.m. at Hobby Lobby on Juan Tabo to carpool. This three-hour outing is approximately 2.5 miles round trip with 150 feet of elevation gain. We'll depart from the Sandia Crest parking lot and proceed along the crest trail with several stops to enjoy stunning views all the way to the continental divide. We'll

cover tips for safely traversing on snowshoes and winter hiking. Lunch afterward. Sponsored by the Military Outdoors Program and everyone is welcome. Contact leader no later than Jan. 17 to RSVP, obtain recommended gear list and additional information. Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, teowen@q.com

Sunday, Jan. 20: Moderate/strenuous night hike under super-blood-moon eclipse in the Sandias. Meet at 6:30 p.m. at Tree Spring Trailhead. This is your last chance to view this amazing celestial light show until 2036. Route is approximately 2.5 miles and 1,000 vertical feet of climbing. Reliable headlamp and very warm clothing are required and participants may require snowshoes and micro-spikes depending upon conditions. Sponsored by the Military Outdoors Program and everyone is welcome. Contact leader no later than Jan. 18 to RSVP, obtain recommended gear list and additional information. Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, teowen@q.com

Saturday, Jan. 26: Moderate hike, Monica Canyon, San Mateo Mountains. Meet at Magdalena post office at 9 a.m. Round trip 9 miles, 1,700 feet of elevation, 4.5 hours. One or two dogs, no kids under 15. The Monica Canyon trail, ascending into the north San Mateos, forks off onto an old,

closed two-track that winds up to the saddle. We'll take one of these routes up to the Mount Withington ridge road and descend on the other. RSVP by Jan. 20 to Jim Nelson at jcnelson@gilanet.com or 575-854-2259.

Saturday, Jan. 26: Easy snowshoe on the Winsor Trail then lunch at the Santa Fe Ski Basin. We will snowshoe a total of 2-2.5 miles along the Winsor trail. My plan is to take the RTD Mountain trail bus up and back. The cost is \$5 each way, but upon arrival they give you a \$5 voucher that can be used in the cafeteria (or elsewhere up there). We will do our snowshoe then have lunch and take the bus back down. Alan Shapiro, nm5s@yahoo.com Details, updates and sign-up on our Meetup site (www.meetup.com/Santa-Fe-Sierra-Club-Outings/)

Sunday, Jan. 27: Easy walk at the Rio Grande Nature Center State Park. 2901 Candelaria NW Albuquerque, NM 87107 (west of Rio Grande Blvd.), 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Will enjoy the area, see and learn about birds with a bilingual volunteer naturalist. Children welcome — please call Cecilia.chavez.beltran@sierraclub.org, 505-319-7556. Find about our Spanish-language outings on Facebook: Excursiones a la Naturaleza de Nuevo Mexico.

Sunday, Feb 3: Easy hike to "The Old Man" above Embudo trail. About 3 miles, and 300 feet change in elevation. We will see the strange rocks above cascade that look like an old man's face. Great views of the Sandias and Albuquerque. Meet at 9:30 a.m. at the Embudo trail-head. Please contact Odile at 505 433 4692 if planning to come. Informal pot-luck lunch after the outing.

Saturday, Feb. 9: Easy walk at Piedras Marcadas Canyon Trail — Petroglyphs. 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Off Golf Course Road NW at Jill Patricia St. NW (Just south of Paradise Blvd.). 1.7 miles. Children welcome — please call Cecilia.chavez.beltran@sierraclub.org, 505-319-7556. Find about our Spanish-language outings on Facebook: Excursiones a la Naturaleza de Nuevo Mexico,

Saturday, Feb. 9: Strenuous hike, Water Canyon to North Baldy, Magdalena Mountains. Meet at the upper Water Canyon campground at 9 a.m. Round trip 10 miles and 3100 feet elevation gain, 5 hours. One or two dogs, no kids under 15. We head up a rough two-track, Fr 39, to the Magdalena Ridge, past many old mines. After we've gone 5 miles and 2900 feet up, the 200 foot scramble up to the top of North Baldy will

Continued on Page 15