Covering all the bases

2019 was full of victories and setbacks in our campaigns to protect our climate, wildlife, water and public lands. Your energy keeps us moving toward a safer, healthier, more beautiful future.

Clockwise from top left: New Mexico finally outlawed coyote-killing contests in 2019. But the state still allows trapping, and our wildlife is regulated by an all-hunter commission. See Page 6. Gila River advocates got a year-end gift from the Department of Interior, but Gila National Forest is still targeted for Air Force training flights. See Pages 3 and 12. All year, Sierra Club volunteers typed, called, planned and advocated. See trainings, Page 8. Passage of the Energy Transition Act accelerates our path from coal to clean, but the community benefits of the law — and now even the retirement of the San Juan coal plant — are in jeopardy. See Page 7. Year in Review: See Page 9

Inside:

New Mexico gains second national park
White Sands draws more than 500,000 visitors a year. Page 3.

Terrero Mine threatens Pecos River system
Local activists and elected officials organize in opposition to proposed mine close to site of reclaimed El Molino mine. Page 5.

Court victories on border wall
Sierra Club and other groups are making legal progress in our efforts to stop construction of the border wall. Page 11

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Activism Teams

Chaco Protection Act passes House

By Miya King-Flaherty
Our Wild New Mexico

In December, Congress passed an appropriations package that bans new oil and gas leasing for a year within 10 miles of Chaco. Congress protected Chaco National Historical Park until an ethnographic study for the region is completed. The Navajo Nation and pueblo leaders will have significant control over the study, so this is a great step in the right direction. Additionally, passage of the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act in the U.S. House in October brings the region already beset by over 40,000 oil and gas wells. The bill withdraws leased federal minerals from new oil and gas leasing within a 10-mile buffer around Chaco Culture National Historical Park. The next hurdle will be passage in the U.S. Senate. Although the bill has received broad support and incorporates recommendations provided by the Greater Chaco Coalition, including the need for additional studies on public health impacts of oil and gas development in the area, it has its fair share of opposition, including from industry.

If passed, the federal Chaco bill would prevent oil and gas drilling and leasing on more than 300,000 acres of a 909,000-acre area. The bill, however, does not prevent new drilling on already leased lands in the buffer, nor does it prohibit the Navajo Nation allottees from developing their mineral rights within the buffer should they wish.

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Public blasts Air Force proposal on test flights

By John E. Wilks
Life member, activist

A decision by the U.S. Air Force to permanently expand the airspace for F-16 flight training in Southern New Mexico is imminent. The Pentagon will choose one of four options in the draft environmental impact statement published in October, as New Mexicans have voiced vehement opposition to the option of sorties over Gila National Forest.

Hundreds of people attended December public hearings held by the Air Force in Socorro, T or C, Silver City and Las Cruces — all in opposition to military training over the Gila.

Although the hearing process has concluded, the Air Force will accept written comments from the public until Jan. 31. Unless a “No Action” option is adopted, depending on which of the three other alternatives are elected, the military could gain access to the skies above into 9 million acres of largely public lands for military training. Although the Air Force has acknowledged that current airspace is adequate for F-16 combat training, it would like to add more and desires a “backyard” training area that it exclusively controls. Apparently, asking the Army for use of White Sands Missile Range and a portion of Fort Bliss is no longer ideal. The Air Force plans to use the expanded airspace to fly no fewer than 10,000 sorties annually, while dropping 15,360 magnesium/teflon flares and 15,360 bundles of metallic chaff on areas containing four national forests, one wilderness area, one wildlife refuge, designated critical habitats for threatened species and innumerable sacred Native American sites. Flying at 500 feet to 51,000 feet from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Friday, F-16 fighter jets would practice combat maneuvers, occasionally breaking the sound barrier.

Not a single job would be created by this expansion, though nine counties in New Mexico and two counties in Arizona would suffer the effects of noise, pollution, litter, fire, reduced quality of life and diminished recreation opportunities. Additionally, the adverse impact on wildlife and grazing herds, including threatened species like the Mexican spotted owl, which depends on its hearing for hunting, has not been quantified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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As federal legislation to protect the immediate vicinity of the Park is pending, the Bureau of Land Management still approves drilling permits and is gearing up to lease up to 1,300 acres at a Feb. 6 lease sale. Over 90% percent of public lands managed by the BLM in southwestern New Mexico are already leased. The formal 10-day protest period to oppose the February lease sale was Dec. 9-18, and more than 600 of you answered our call to lodge a protest comment.

Just recently, the BLM finally responded to public protests submitted opposing the December lease sale. It took nearly a year for the BLM to respond to a high volume of comments the public submitted, demonstrating that our tactics are having an impact. The BLM must resolve all protests before it can release lands for actual development. Some groups are challenging the BLM’s decision to resolve protests, further delaying oil and gas development on the leased parcels. Until the BLM imposes an immediate moratorium on all fracking-related activities, engages in meaningful tribal consultation, initiates a full environmental, social and health impact assessment, and provides communities with alternative economic development opportunities, we’ll continue to prioritize environmental justice and protection of ancestral tribal and public lands.

The Air Force plans to use the expanded airspace to fly at least 10,000 sorties annually on areas containing four national forests. The Air Force plans to use the expanded airspace to fly at least 10,000 sorties annually on areas containing four national forests.

White Sands to be NM’s second national park

By Mona Blaber
Communications director


The provision was included in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, which passed the Senate by a vote of 86 to 8 and was slated to be signed into law.

“For the first time since 1930, New Mexico will be home to our newest national park. This prestigious recognition of one of our state’s most remarkable natural wonders is an enormous victory for nearby communities and for all New Mexicans,” said Heinrich.

“White Sands National Park will put southern New Mexico squarely on the map as a must-see destination for park-seeking travelers and will be a major boon to the whole region’s economy,” Torres Small furthered.

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It's your chance to make the legislation

What do hot dogs and really good climate laws have in common? If you like them, don't go watch 'em be made — although it's probably better for society that we witness the process. Watching hot-dog production should be enough to convince the hardest meat eaters to go vegetarian as the climate crisis requires. But what do we get out of the sometimes difficult and fraught legislative and regulatory processes? To start, this year, thanks to Gov. Lujan Grisham's leadership, we got nation-leading climate legislation.

The legislative process went as it should, with lots of meetings with stakeholders, public hearings, debates on the floor of each chamber and on the editorial pages, changes based on public input and ultimately a vote of both the state house and senate in favor of the Energy Transition Act. There were amendments and clarifications and ultimately what there always has been: legislative guidance to the Public Regulation Commission about how to regulate the state's utilities.

One little-known fact about the Energy Transition Act is that it removed previously legislated loopholes for utilities on complying with their renewables requirements. Indigenous communities and labor wanted amendments to the bill, and legislators made the changes. Now it's time for the PRC to implement the law, and we very much hope to see their leadership here.

In December, the PRC heard the case for PNMs closing San Juan Generating Station and is considering the use of lower costs to make clean energy cheaper for ratepayers while providing $40 million in worker and community recovery funding.

The Sierra Club is a party to the case and are working hard to communicate the complexities of utility regulations to our members and the public to show that despite the technical details being worked out at the commission, there is a clear and obvious goal that we all need to keep our eye on: moving from coal to clean energy, supporting communities' transition from old technologies to new opportunities, and ultimately moving from the question of clean energy produced here to the next big question of how to wean our state off oil and gas income.

Next year we will continue to advocate for innovative solutions to move our state off oil and gas. A key part of that will be electing a president willing to drastically reduce the access of oil and gas companies on public lands. It will require Restrictively regulating the use of fresh and "produced" water for oil and gas. It will require diversifying our economy and uncoupling our education system from the very fossil fuels that put our kids' future at risk.

While I won't encourage you to eat hot dogs or see them made, I will invite you into the legislative and administrative sausage-maker. We all have to do our reading, do our homework and participate. (One place to start, by the way, is at our upcoming grassroots lobby trainings. See Page 8 for details!)

Rio Grande Green: Our numbers

By the Friend and Fund Development Committee

Winter is upon us, and New Mexico sparkles with crisp blue skies and snow on the mountain peaks.

The new year holds promise and challenges for us all. We will be working together on critical elections to support our endorsed candidates, continuing to advocate for legislation that will tackle the challenge of the climate crisis, and reaching out to educate youth and adults and to engage more people in the outdoors.

We hope you'll renew your membership in the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club through the Chapter's website to achieve all this together.

In March, our annual appeal will offer an opportunity for you to become a donor or to increase your gift. Your generosity goes a long way in the fight to protect and preserve the landscape and resources right here in New Mexico and West Texas.

In the meantime, hope you're going outside to hike, snowshoe or ski. 'Tis the season!

By the numbers

(January–November 2019)

Membership: 890 new members

Remember that when you join or renew your Sierra Club membership through the Chapter's donation page, it brings more money back to New Mexico! Go to www.riograndesierraclub.org and click "Donate" and then "Join."

Donations: $58,496

These are gifts above and beyond annual membership. If you aren't already a monthly donor, consider becoming one. A gift of $10 or more each month, which is about the cost of a fancy coffee twice a month, can make a real difference. Go to www.riograndesierraclub.org and click "Donate" and then "Regular Donation." Be sure to check the box for monthly donations.

Volunteers: 1,394 hours/fourth quarter

Sierra Club is a grassroots organization! We turn with the support and leadership of our outstanding staff. Just to put these hours in perspective, the IRS values volunteer time at $25.45/hour. The hours donated this quarter were worth $35,450. Wow!

If you'd like to get more involved, please give us a call at (505) 243-7767 or go to our website at www.riograndesierraclub.org and click on "Action" and then "Volunteer" to see all the ways in which you can help.

Update on recent campaigns

Thanks to your support, here are the results of our Autumn 2019 fund raising efforts.

César Guill "Kabobs for Cash" (Central Group) $ 505

Global Warming Express "Back to School" Appeal: $1,100

Saving Our Enchanted Lands — photo incentive with a $150 or more donation: $2,500

On-line Auction: $4,597

Volunteer Hero: David Coss

I'd just moved back to New Mexico to be the chapter director of the Rio Grande Chapter when I heard that former Santa Fe Mayor David Coss would be running for our board. David's experience leading a city, bringing its river back to life, and prioritizing the environmental legacy of the nation's oldest capital city was just what our chapter needed to clarify our priorities.

David takes the care and calm he uses as an outdoorsman to the work he does with the Sierra Club and the community. He is thoughtful and deeply dedicated to social justice. He has helped guide our chapter in its values of justice for immigrants and workers.

David isn't just dedicated to his beliefs and his causes — he's also such a caring family person. He lost both of his dear parents last year all while caring, with his wife Carol, for their most, his family. Thank you David!

— Camilla Feibelman

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— Camilla Feibelman

New chapter, group board members elected

By Mona Blaber

Chapter communications director

E ach year, Rio Grande Chapter members vote for members of the chapter’s volunteer Executive Committee as well as for the executive committees for the groups where they live.

One third of the members of the chapter board are up for election for every year. Chapter “ExCom” members serve three-year terms, and group members serve two-year terms.

Voting is held by mail ballot and online. Thanks to all of the excellent candidates who ran and to everyone who voted! The Rio Grande Chapter ExCom welcomes two new members — Dale Doremus, a former Environment Department water expert, and former chapter staffer Derrick Toleda. Winners are listed below.

Congratulations to all!

Chapter Executive Committee: Dale Doremus, Shannon Romeling, Derrick Toleda

Northern New Mexico Group: John Bucher, Alice Cox, Susan Martin, Shannon Romeling

Central New Mexico Group: Hearburt Kline, Diane Reese, Mark Rudd, Ray Shorrrede, David Ther

Southern New Mexico Group: Kurt Anderson, Cheryllyl Blevins, Dan Lorimier

Pajarito Group: Howard Barnum, Iris Chung

January/February/March 2020
Mining

Toxic Pecos past could repeat itself

How many potential Superfund sites can Pecos River Canyon sustain?

By Teresa Seamster
Northern NM Group Chair

Pecos River Canyon is a priceless natural gem. Clear rushing water in a narrow canyon is surrounded by steep slopes and feeding into tranquil Monastery Lake a few miles north of the town of Pecos.

It’s a fisherman’s dream spot, with rare cutthroat trout and undisturbed sections of river to cast into. It’s a cabin-dweller’s dream of quiet trails and green mountains and soaring hawks and owls at dusk. It is a place that attracts thousands of out-of-state tourists who find what they cannot easily find in Texas, California or Ohio — solitude, natural beauty unchanged in places since time began, and freedom from the developed world.

Unbeknownst to visitors is that one of the strangely barren but vegetated mountain slopes that rises above Willow Creek is actually the reclaimed site of El Molino. This huge mill operated for decades in the first half of the 20th century and processed more than 1.2 million tons of zinc, lead, copper, silver and gold from the nearby Tererro Mine, becoming the largest employer in New Mexico.

Today, El Molino’s 34-acre reclamation site, on Highway 63 beside the Pecos River, is fenced and still toxic.

Fast forward to the 1990s. The old abandoned El Molino mine — halfway up the Pecos River between Pecos and Cowles — experiences an unusually high spring runoff event. Floodwaters pulse down the Pecos River washing across waste containment ponds holding contaminated mill tailings along Alamitos Creek and sending it downstream into the fish hatchery, killing more than 90,000 fish.

The massive fish kill of 1991 brought attention to the ongoing contamination draining from the mine and mill sites, creating “a perfect storm” of media attention.

A US Fish and Wildlife report found high levels of zinc and aluminum in Pecos fish, macro invertebrates and small mammals. Toxic waste rock was deposited in Willow Creek and in the Pecos River floodplain creating fears for farmers and fishermen. Suddenly, concerns about human health surfaced about the long-term use of mine waste as fill material for roads, campgrounds, camping pads, trailheads and at the Lobos Springs Fish Hatchery.

The concentration of metals into the fish and agricultural food web was starting to be documented.

“The extent of the contamination was enormous. Discussions between industry, government agencies and community stakeholders concluded that corrective actions were mandatory but that Superfund listing should be avoided. In a description from one 1995 report (Robinson) — the community wanted “a Superfund level of cleanup without the perceived cost and delay problems of a Superfund.”

The corrective actions were extensive, eventually going through the steps of a Health and Environmental Risk Assessment; a community-relations plan, a Natural Resources Damage Assessment, Feasibility Study for remediation, and cleanup design and ongoing mitigation that continues to this day.

The cost-sharing agreement between AMAX Resource Conservation Company and the state of New Mexico eventually cost the state 20% of the $7 million in cleanup and mitigation.

Today, this same scenario could be repeated. The entire Pecos River system of water-sheds, river, tributaries and floodplain could be re-contaminated due to a recent application by the Australia-based New World Cobalt Mining Company that has a small limited-liability group, Comexico, LLC, filing for exploratory rights in the old Tererro Mine area.

This exploratory permit requests Santa Fe National Forest to allow primitive road access to a large area of old bore holes for Comexico to conduct exploration drilling of 30 or more wells to test for additional ore deposits that may be commercially profitable for a mining company to purchase from New World Cobalt. If mine leases are sold, some 4,700 acres of Jones Hill area above the Pecos River would be restripped and developed.

Opposition from the residents and county governments of Santa Fe and San Miguel has been swift and widespread.

At the December public scoping meeting, Gov. Robert A. Mora Sr. of the Pueblo of Tesuque stated, “We support the community over here in opposition.”

San Miguel’s Board of County Commissioners has passed a resolution asking for a moratorium on new mining until a hard-rock mining ordinance similar to the one recently passed by Santa Fe County can be drafted and passed. Much higher levels of land-use protection and financial assurance are part of the new requirements in the Santa Fe County ordinance.

Residents, Upper Pecos Watershed Association, Pueblo leaders and Jemez, NM Aquequia Association, farmers, fishermen, outdoor enthusiasts, hunters, bikers, conservation organizations and local business owners have all attended community meetings and contacted elected officials and Santa Fe National Forest with their concerns.

Gov. Michelle Lujan-Grisham has written a letter of opposition to the Forest Service that this project is unsuitable for this location, for this recreation-based economy and for this critical watershed.

A repeat of the 1991 disaster would be unconscionable. The cost of ruined natural resources and livelihoods in Santa Fe and San Miguel Counties is too high a price to pay.

Copper Flat a step closer to reopening

By Max Yeh and Allyson Siwik

Community groups continue to try to fend off New Mexico Copper's attempts to reopen its Copper Flat Mine near Hillsboro, N.M.

Gila Resources Information Project, Turner Ranch Properties and Hillboro Pitchfork Ranch have appealed the water-quality discharge permit for reopening the mine at the NM Court of Appeals. Represented by NM Environmental Law Center, the appellants disagree with the Water Quality Control Commission's decision that the mine does not pose an undue risk to property and that the pit lake that will form at the mine is not a "surface water of the state" and therefore surface-water quality standards do not apply.

At the same time, the litigation over the mine’s claimed ownership of water rights is proceeding through the Court of Appeals. The Sierra Club’s friend-of-the-court argument on the negative social impacts of mining have been accepted.

The Sierra Club has also been notified that Copper Flat Mine’s application for transferring leased water rights for operational use at the mine is being processed by the State Engineer.

If approved, the mine will have enough water to begin construction and start operation in a year or two, even if it loses the litigation over its claimed water rights. Formal protests, however, will be considered in a hearing by the State Engineer to determine whether the proposed transfer will damage other water-right holders, will injure public interest, or will contravene water conservation.

The pit where the former Copper Flat Mine hit groundwater and water filled the pit.
Commission does little to reform trapping

By Mary Katherine Ray
Chapter Wildlife Chair

A s expected, the New Mexico Game Commission voted to approve the rules for hunting bears and cougars for the next four years at the Roswell meeting on Nov. 21.

The number of bears that can be legally killed each year remains at 804, as it has been for the last four years despite questions about the size of the bear population, what constitutes primary bear habitat and whether the bear population is dwindling. Forty percent of the kill can be female.

At the September Game Commission meeting, there was an unusual moment of debate about the proposal to disallow cougar trapping for sport. One of the commission members voted to continue to allow it on private land. A disappointing three commission members voted in support of this motion, but three voted no, leaving a tie to be broken by the commission chair, who thankfully voted no. So the proposal barring cougar trapping stood.

In addition to disallowing cougar trapping, the cougar kill quotas have also been slightly reduced. So, beginning with next year’s trapping season, while cougars will undoubtedly continue to be trapped and potentially injured by the devices, trappers will not be allowed to purposefully kill them.

While this change for cougars is welcome, it nevertheless places the commission in a strange moral and ethical position about trapping in general. The commission decided that the trapping of cougars is not acceptable, yet the trapping of smaller animals such as bobcats, foxes, and badgers by the thousands every year for recreation and profit is fine. The presentation about the proposed trapping rule changes by New Mexico Game and Fish has repeatedly claimed that trapping is humane (despite the direct experiences the public has had with traps that tell a different story), that trapping comport with the North American Model of Coexistence against commercial exploitation of wildlife because it is regulated (despite the tenor of the model calling for the elimination of markets for game, not their regulation), and that the trapping rules are democratically decided (despite every single member of the Game Commission being a hunter, which is representative of only 4% of the New Mexico population). Moreover, while the commission sought out public comment, comments seem to have been given little consideration by either the Game and Fish Department or the commission. More than 2,400 New Mexicans commented on trapping rules alone, but no analysis or response beyond counting them was offered or discussed. This reason-defying dichotomy between cougar trapping and furbearer trapping is nothing short of bewildering.

At the November Commission meeting, there were no motions to alter the proposed changes to the trapping rule as presented by the department. This means that in January, it is very likely that trapping will be approved to continue on most public land. The Sandia Mountains, the Organ Mountains, buffer areas around official trail heads and two short segments of roadway, one near Taos and one near Santa Fe, will be closed to trapping. These small changes are welcome but don’t go near far enough to protect the public and wildlife. Except for the Sandia Mountains, where conflict with trapping is common, it is unclear why these specific areas were chosen for closure while leaving other places with common trapping incidents involving the public open as usual.

Please note that the current trapping season is underway now with no modification. New rules will not take effect until November 2020. In fact, the TrapFree NM coalition, with which our Rio Grande Chapter participates, has already recorded the trapping of two dogs, neither of them in areas that will be subject to closure, and the trapping of two endangered wolves in the Gila region, where traps will also continue to be allowed. One of the wolves was taken into captivity to treat the trap injury; the other escaped with the trap still on her leg. Attempts at capture as of this writing have not been successful, though she has been observed missing part of her foot and no longer dragging the trap.

You are invited to visit www.trapfreemn.org for information on how to open a trap if your dog is caught and how to report trap inci- 
cidents.

Roxy’s trapper goes free

By Mary Katherine Ray

In October, a court dismissed the case against the trapper whose illegally placed snare captured and killed the dog Roxy while she was walking with her person. New Mexico Game and Fish law enforcement booted the gathering of evidence, resulting in this unjust and crushing outcome. In total, the trapper had 34 counts of illegal trapping filed against him, but all have been dismissed. When such a clear case of law-breaking cannot be enforced, the claim that trapping is well regulated seems to ring very hollow.

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Club-endorsed candidates win 9 of 11 city races

By Richard Barish
Chapter Political Chair

M ayoral and City Council candidates endorsed by the Sierra Club were winners in 9 of the 11 races where we endorsed.

In Santa Fe and Las Cruces, our endorsed candidates won every race. In Santa Fe, Renee Villarreal was unopposed for re-election, and newcomers Michael J. Garcia and Jamie Cassutt-Sanchez prevailed in their races. In Las Cruces, Mayor Ken Miyagishima was re-elected, and Kasandra Gandara, Tessa Stuve, and Johana Bencomo were elected or re-elected to City Council.

In Albuquerque, incumbent Pat Davis was easily re-elected, and incumbent Pete Bento also prevailed after a hard-fought race that needed a runoff to finally settle. The Sierra Club also endorsed in races in two traditionally Republican bastions, but we were unable to break through in either of those districts despite valiant efforts by the candidates and the volunteers supporting them.

Maureen Skowron lost to incumbent Teddy Jones in a Four Hills/far Northeast Heights district, and Ane Romero lost after a runoff election in another far north- east district.

In the races for Doña Ana Soil and Water Conservation District supervisor, Sierra Club volunteer and Executive Committee Member Kurt Anderson beat the incumbent chairman, an ideologue who had moved the district’s focus to conspiracy theories and resolutions denouncing the designation of Organ Mountains Desert Peaks as a national monument. Christopher Cardenas, also endorsed by the Club, lost in his race.

Thanks to everyone who donated their time to help in these races and to everyone who voted for these candidates!
Will San Juan continue burning coal?

By Mona Blaber

Chapter communications director

Since July, New Mexico’s Public Regulation Commission has been questioning whether it should apply an energy law that would ease retirement costs for PNM’s San Juan coal plant, and now the commission’s staff is questioning whether PNM should be allowed to stop using the plant’s coal power at all.

The city of Farmington and a corporation called Enchant Energy have proposed to keep the aging San Juan plant running as a carbon-capture facility, an expensive and risky scheme. Carbon capture at a power plant has been done at only two power plants in the world, and the owners of those two projects have said they never will do another carbon-capture project because of the large costs. This summer, the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis released a report saying Enchant Energy’s carbon-capture pitch offers false hope to Farmington — as well as major fiscal risk.

Now, staff at New Mexico’s regulatory authority is opposing PNM’s plan to get out of San Juan by saying that PNM should have evaluated carbon capture in more detail.

If the Commission agrees with staff and denies PNM’s abandonment application, PNM would be forced to continue running San Juan — meaning ratepayers would lose out on the nearly $400 million in savings from abandoning San Juan and replacing it with low-cost renewables and batteries. And denying abandonment could mean that PNM is forced to spend billions of ratepayer dollars to fund a risky carbon-capture project at San Juan.

Denying PNM’s request to exit the plant would also delay cleanup of San Juan’s pollution, deprive plant and mine workers of the funding and transition support offered by the Energy Transition Act and stymie New Mexico’s transition from dirty coal to renewable energy.

The other major ques- tion the Public Regulation Commission is considering, whether it will apply the Energy Transition Act law to the San Juan case, brought many New Mexicans out to a public hearing Dec. 9 to give heartfelt testimony on providing an equitable transition and putting an end to the plant’s deadly emissions.

Many New Mexicans spoke of the benefits of the ETA not just its renewable-energy mandates but also the refrigeration it authorizes that will reduce ratepayers’ current costs and create severance and reinvestment funding for San Juan plant and mine workers and Four Corners communities.

Nearly every person who testified spoke in support of closing and cleaning up the plant and ending its deadly emissions.

Some opponents of the Energy Transition Act spoke about the pollution created by the plant, but it’s important to note that the Energy Transition Act does not limit PNM’s responsibility to clean up pollution at the plant.

PNM’s cleanup responsi- bilities will be determined separately by the Environment Department and EPA. The utility will still decide how much of those costs will be borne by PNM shareholders or by ratepayers. The ETA does not limit PNM’s liability for those costs in any way.

It allows PNM to sell bonds for $30 million in additional decommissioning funds, but that is a limit on what custom- ers, not PNM, are responsible for. PNM already has a larger fund for decommissioning expenses, and if that fund and the additional $30 million are not sufficient to remediate the plant, PNM will continue to be liable for the EPA and Environment Department are satisfied.

Sierra Club and other groups have forced PNM through litigation to reduce its emissions and to remove coal-ash and other pollution around the plant. We will continue to hold the utility accountable for its messes.

If the commission decides not to apply the ETA law, the danger is that plant and mine workers will lose the severance and job-training funds the law’s securitization allows. The commission doesn’t have a way to require fund- ing for mine workers or for the community. Sierra Club will continue to advocate for implementation of the ETA to ensure an equitable transition to a safer climate for our kids.

Testimony in favor of the ETA

“The ETA brought together labor unions, environmental activists, the Navajo Nation, community organizations, businesses, and utilities in support of this landmark legislation. Like the innovative and forward-thinking ancestors of this land ... we modern people are called to the same extraordinary vision of being deeply connected with all of creation.”

— The Rev. Vincent Chavez, St. Therese Catholic Parish, Albuquerque

“The closure of San Juan is a small but critical step in the right direction. Delaying that for any reason is folly.”

— George Weston

“Is it way past time to act boldly and put things right? ... By using securitization, the San Juan Generating Station can be closed, the site can be cleaned up, workers retrained for jobs in renewable energy, local school districts supported, and ratepay- ers’ electricity bills reduced. This is amazing. Everyone wins in this scenario.”

— Ruth Striegle, Interfaith Power and Light

“Have been talking and listening to communities throughout the Navajo Nation, and there are a lot of needs being raised, things like healthier communi- ties, job security. We know that the ETAs not perfect, but it’s a step forward. We can use the $40 million to help our Diné communities start the transition. ... The community truly wants to make sure that we get it right and we do the right thing. We support the ETA to ensure a healthier community.”

— Joseph Hernandez, Diné energy organizer, Native American Voters Alliance

“I support the Energy Transition Act as it is written. It is revolutionary, practical and urgent. The ETA, I believe, is our best hope moving forward.”

— Carla Lanting Shibuya

“The thoroughness of the process created a bill that provides a path which is realistic, doable, and just.”

— Deborah Richels

ETA was debated with great pain and compassion by the Legislature and passed with great difficulty. We should not be debating San Juan emitting CO2 again. We must move forward.

— Marlene Perrit, Sister of Mercy

“It’s right to help our neigh- bors. And as New Mexicans, we have to be there for each other more now than ever.”

— Derrick Toledo

Renewables offer best price to replace coal

By Mona Blaber

Communications director

Separate from the case concerning retirement of San Juan coal plant and how remaining debt will be financed is the case for replacement power — how PNM will replace the coal power it will lose.

The Sierra Club is participating in both cases, and our attorneys and experts have been analyzing which energy scenarios would provide the best climate benefits at the lowest cost to consumers.

When it filed to retire the San Juan power plant in June, PNM proposed four scenarios with varying amounts of renew- able energy and gas. Its preferred scenario included gas and renewables.

After months of analysis, Sierra Club on Dec. 13 filed testimony by Michael Goggin, a utility and clean-energy consultant who found that the cheapest replacement for the 497 MW of San Juan coal is a mix of renewable energy and battery storage.

There is some dispute over whether the Energy Transition Act requires 450 MW of replacement resources to be located in the same school district as the coal plant (to help replace the plant’s tax contributions). Goggin recommended one portfolio if the ETA is interpreted as requiring 450 MW in the school district and another if the location restriction is not imposed.

In both cases, Goggin’s top recommen- dation contained no new gas. One of Goggin’s recommended scenarios cost less than PNM’s favored gas-and-renewables portfolio. And across most reliability metrics, Goggin’s top scenario is actually more reliable than PNM’s preferred portfolio.

Goggin’s alternate recommendation is more reliable than PNM’s preferred option across some reliability metrics.

The Coalition Clean Air Energy also recommended two replacement scenarios, neither of which included gas.

This is all very good news for our climate, but in order for any of these clean scenarios to come to fruition, the Public Regulation Commission must allow the retirement of San Juan Generating Station to move forward.

Image 177x614 to 451x789

Nicole Horsheeder of Tō Nizhíhí Áni (top) testified at a Dec. 9 PRC hearing about the lack of on-the-ground transition support when other coal plants have closed. Jim Mackenzie, 350NM advocate and retired IBEW electrical contractor, also stressed the need for worker support like that the ETA provides.

Image 179x797 to 451x1102

By the Energy Transition Act, PNM is required to file a “capital plan” with the Public Regulation Commission to show how it will finance its costs for San Juan. PNM proposed two plans:

1. A “linked plan” that includes gas and renewables.

2. An “unlinked plan” that is all-clean.

The commission has said it can’t mandate a plan, but PNM’s request includes funding for decommissioning. That means ratepayers would lose about $30 million, the cost of decommissioning. PNM has also proposed to pay for the cost of closing the plant.

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Hundreds attend meetings on reuse of fracked water

By Brittany Fallon
Chapter Conservation organizer

We have been working hard on the issue of “produced water,” which is fracking wastewater, in New Mexico. Last time we wrote, the New Mexico Environment Department had just begun hosting listening sessions around the state prior to considering treatment standards for possible uses of fracking wastewater outside of the oilfield. Thanks so much to the hundreds of you who attended the meetings or submitted comments. I heard from many of you!

As we wait for the agency to announce next steps, we continue to advocate for industry to keep its wastewater in the oilfield.

In the listening sessions, the Environment Department discussed its plans as a two-phase process. Phase I includes “public meetings, tribal engagement, and collaboration with technical experts to fill science and technology gaps.” Phase II is to “propose draft regulations for formal rulemaking before the Water Quality Control Commission, including public notice and comment period and opportunity for tribal consultation.”

The department laid out its path as follows: 1) Develop rules that prohibit untreated produced water use(s) outside of the oil and gas industry; 2) Develop rules that require companies to analyze and disclose the chemical constituents in produced water intended for treatment and use outside the oil and natural gas industry; and 3) Over time and as the science dictates, develop rules for the “discharge, handling, transport, storage, and recycling or treatment of produced water or byproduct thereof outside the oilfield.”

In 2019, the Legislature passed a bill that removed disinfectants for oil companies to reuse wastewater when fracking rather than using fresh water. This will reduce the amount of freshwater used in environmental-harming extraction. The bill also clarified that any use of fracking wastewater outside the oilfield would have to be permitted by the Environment Department. The bill requires the Water Quality Control Commission to set treatment standards for things like agriculture or livestock watering.

Finally, the legislation restored the Oil Conservation Division’s ability to fine oil and gas companies for violations. A previous court case under the Martinez administration had stripped the division’s ability to fine bad-neighbor companies.

The Sierra Club’s position is that not enough is known about fracking wastewater to determine if it is safe for outside use, even after it is treated. Along with high levels of salt, there are many hundreds of potential chemicals, heavy metals, and even radionuclides in produced water. Before even considering treatment standards, we need more peer-reviewed research testing how the contents of the wastewater might impact crops, soil quality, or surface and groundwater.

For now, industry should focus on reusing wastewater within oilfields to stop using freshwater. We will continue to advocate for ending fracking entirely in the face of the climate crisis.
**January**

- **Joined by Global Warming Express kids, New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signs a Climate Executive Order requiring robust rules to reduce oil and gas methane pollution; a 45% reduction in statewide greenhouse emissions from 2005 levels by 2030; directing a Climate Change Task Force to develop a state climate strategy; ordering state agencies to evaluate climate impacts and integrate mitigation tactics; and ordering development of legislation to increase the state’s renewable portfolio standard and energy efficiency standards.**

**February**

- **Representatives of a small mining company called Comexico meet with Santa Fe National Forest officials to discuss their proposal to explore for precious metals in the Upper Pecos Watershed. The project area is on Jones Hill close to the Superfund site of the old Terreiro Mine on Pecos Canyon.**

**The Energy Transition Act is introduced in the New Mexico Senate by Sens. Jacob Candelaria and Martin Silva. The bill raises the state’s renewable-electricity requirement to 50% by 2030, 80% by 2040 and 100% carbon-free by 2045 and authorizes low-rate financing to utilities and ratepayers and fund transportation support for workers and communities.**

**Public-lands package championed by Sen. Martin Heinrich passes Congress, establishing 13 new wilderness areas in New Mexico and permanently reauthorizing the Land and Water Conservation Fund.**

**March**

- **Energy Transition Act is signed into law by Gov. Lujan Grisham.**
- **Other victories for lands, wildlife and the climate from the legislative session include:**
  - The Energy Transition Act passes, clearing the way for companies to install EV-charging stations across New Mexico.
  - Energy Efficiency Act becomes law, removing disincentives for utilities to invest in energy efficiency, the cheapest and most effective way to reduce carbon pollution.
  - Outdoor Recreation Act creates an Office of Outdoor Recreation and Recycling Equity Fund.

**April**

- **Gov. Lujan Grisham signs into law a ban on coyote-killing contests.**
- **Members of the U.S. House Natural Resources Committee, including U.S. Rep. Deb Haaland and Assistant Speaker Ben Ray Lujan, tour oil and gas sites in Greater Chaco and Chaco Park and hold a hearing at the Roundhouse on oil and gas impacts to sacred sites and air quality in New Mexico.**
- **Albuquerque City Council goes bag-free. Councilors banned distribution of single-use plastic bags starting in January 2020.**
- **Gov. Lujan Grisham vetoes $1.69 billion of federal funds to construct a new Environmental Impact Facility for high-level nuclear waste in Lea County, New Mexico.**

**June**

- **After impassioned testimony from Global Warming Express students, Bernalillo County Commission bans distribution of single-use plastic bags.**
- **The American Lung Association’s State of the Lung Report gives San Juan County an F on ozone, which escapes with methane and is a major contributing factor to respiratory disease.**
- **The Doña Ana County Commission prohibits use of the county funds to pay the federal Wildlife Services agency for lethal removal of wildlife.**
- **Wildlife Services, a euphemistically named agency whose main purpose is killing wildlife, often using cruel means, goes on a campaign to reverse the vote.**

**May**

- **After years of effort to save prime land adjoining El Paso’s Franklin Mountains State Park from development, voters overwhelmingly reject taxpay- er-funded development around the Lost Dog Trail, a favored of local outdoors enthusiasts.**
- **Americans High School Sierra Student Coalition members, as well as Sierra Club El Paso Group volunteers, campaigned for the protection, which won with a whopping 85% of the votes.**
- **The Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s Atomic Safety and Licensing Board denies all requests by Sierra Club and other petitioners to conduct a hearing challenging Holtec International’s application to construct an interim storage facility for high-level nuclear waste in Lea County, New Mexico.**
- **Sierra Club Southern New Mexico members are standing declar- ants in the suit.**
- **New Mexico Gov. Lujan Grisham signs a new energy bill directing the Department of Energy and Nuclear Regulatory Commission opposing an “interim” storage facility for high-level nuclear waste in New Mexico.**

**July**

- **Just two weeks after a vote to prohibit Wildlife Services from using cruel leg-hold traps and cyanide bombs to remove wildlife, Grant County commissioners, under pressure from the federal agency, repeals its pro-wildlife amendment.**
- **PNM files application to retire San Juan coal plant and use Energy Transition Act bonds to pay off debt. The Public Regulation Commission filed the financing portion of the case before the legislative session that was then struck down by the state Supreme Court during the session, suggesting commissioners may not want to apply the new law to the coal plant.**
- **Doña Ana County waters down its decision to prohibit payment to Wildlife Services for killing wildlife, allowing lethal action but only after nonlethal methods are attempted.**
- **Supreme Court allows the Trump Administration to, for now, use diverted counter-drug funds to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border while a Sierra Club lawsuit goes through the appeals process. A district court has blocked wall construction using the diverted counter-drug funds.**
- **Newly appointed Game Commission proposes to bar sport trapping of coyotes but also to leave dangerously high bear-killing quotas.**
- **Proponents of a plan to divert the Gila River were given a dose of reality when an Environmental Impact Statement revealed that the project will cost too much and yield too little water.**

**August**

- **U.S. Forest Service announces a 50-year public comment period on draft management plans for the Cibola, Carson, and Santa Fe National forests. The plans have not been updated in over 30 years. New Mexico residents are invited to comment on these plans, encouraging more wilderness designations.**
- **Doña Ana County coves to federal Wildlife Services agency, asking that endangered wildlife and ecosystems are not approved to test non-lethal means before the agency is allowed to kill wildlife.**

**September**

- **Thousands turn out at strikes across New Mexico on Sept. 20 to demand climate action, many inspired by Global Warming Express and Sierra Student Coalition students.**
- **Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signs a new energy bill, authorizing $3.6 billion in military construction funds for the border wall.**

**October**

- **Chaco Heritage Protection Act passes in the U.S. House with bipartisan support 245-174.**
- **Inaugural Rio Grande Chapter Military Outdoors outing in the Four Corners held on Oct. 18-19.**
- **State announces public meetings to discuss regulations on reuse of fracking wastewa- ter (see Page 8).**
- **Sierra Club and coalition partners submit comments from in support of preserving wilderness in Cibola, Carson, and Santa Fe National forests.**

**November**

- **Sierra Club-endorsed candidates win 9 of 11 municipal races and a key spot on the Doña Ana Soil and Water Conservation District (Page 6).**
- **Thousands of New Mexicans and more than 60 elected officials submit comments to the Doña Ana Soil and Water Conservation District on draft management plans for the Cibola, Carson, and Santa Fe National forests.**

**December**

- **Department of the Interior denies extension of funding deadline for proposed Gila River diversion.**
- **A federal court rules in the Sierra Club lawsuit that President Trump’s diversion of $3.6 billion in military construction funds for the border wall is unlawful. (See Page 11).**

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2019 Year in Review

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**January/February/March 2020**
Fix-it clinic makes old stuff new again

By Rachel Zulevi
Central NM Group Zero Waste Team

It happens all too often that when an item becomes damaged, breaks, or otherwise stops serving its purpose: It is banished to the landfill and replaced with a brand-new thing.

The truth is that relatively simple repairs could extend the useful lives of many out-of-commission items, but most of us have no idea how to approach those repairs and don't have the time to figure it out. So into the trash bin broken things go, and off to Target or Amazon we go for replacements. Contractors, toy stores, and globes are addressing this lamentable waste of resources by presenting Fix-It Clinics — pop-up gatherings where folks with broken stuff can get help from folks who know how to fix stuff.

The city of Albuquerque offered its first local Fix-It Clinic at Fuse Maker Space on Nov. 10. Skilled volunteers were available to troubleshoot and repair a wide range of items. As clients walked in toting their things-need-fixing, friendly and enthusiastic Keep Albuquerque Beautiful staff members offered a warm greeting and asked them to sign in.

While the organizers requested advanced registration to help them prepare, walk-ins were welcomed, too. Event staffs escorted new arrivals to the appropriate station, where experts were ready. Stations included: computers/phones, sewing, small appliances, skateboards and bicycles. In my short visit, I saw a DVD player, popcorn air popper and inflatable ball get repaired very quickly, and a ShopVac/electric toothbrush and sewing machine were being examined.

City organizers consulted with the Santa Fe Fix-It Clinic, a quarterly event hosted by Santa Fe County Sustainability Office and Make Santa Fe, to learn and adopt best practices right from the start. With the first hour of the clinic, Solid Waste Department staff were already feeling positive about the response and hopeful that Albuquerque could host a Fix-It Clinic again soon, perhaps even on a regular basis like our neighbor to the north. To express your appreciation and support of this type of community-sponsored service, please reach out to Keep Albuquerque Beautiful, Mayor Tim Keller, and to your City Councilor to congratulate them on the success of the first run and let them know that you want to see more Fix-It Clinics in Albuquerque. This type of program can not only keep useful items out of the landfill, it also empowers and educates community members in the art of repairing versus replacing. If you have a fix-it skill to share, donating a few hours of your time at a future clinic could have a big impact in our community.

Visit Rachel’s Zero Waste Facebook page.

Volunteers help fix broken items at Albuquerque’s first Fix-It Clinic in November.

Photo by Rachel Zulevi

How they do Zero Waste Down Under

By Carol P. Chamberland
Zero Waste Team

Bush fires, earthquakes and terrorist attacks— that’s the news we get from Down Under in the American mainstream media. While working on my Bucket List this fall, I enjoyed a six-week visit to Australia and New Zealand. Even though I was on vacation, my Zero Waste antennae were up. For the good news, Recycle bins are common in public places and most hotels. No plastic bags are visible — in trees, on streets, anywhere. If you don’t bring your own, stores will charge 15 cents for a plastic bag. Some restaurants serve tiny plastic spoons. We often find reusable straws.

Several countries have two flush buttons — one full blast and the other half-blast, depending upon your needs. And every electrical outlet comes with an on/off switch. Every single outlet. Some restaurants serve food in cardboard plates with bamboo or compostable utensils. They make shirts and socks from bamboo, too. Some hotels participate in a program to recyc- cle partially used bath soap. One gelato shop even recycled their tiny plastic spoons. We often encountered wayside stations for refilling your own water bottle. On a broader scope, pretty much all major museums and national parks offer free admission. Melbourne has a free public tram that circulates folks around the city. Darwin’s Festival of Lights featured a large installation of plastic water bottles converted into lights along the waterfront. The federal government leases Aboriginal-owned land, and they cooperatively manage it as national parks. Kakadu and Uluru-Kata Tjuta are good examples of this arrangement. And finally, after decades of the questionable practice, tourists at Uluru are permanently banned from climbing the sacred rock. They can still visit; they just can’t climb. Aboriginal folks celebrated this long-awaited victory on Oct. 26. Now the rest of the story. Despite record droughts and bush fires, the government in Canberra seems to be in denial about climate change. Environmental groups are protesting in the streets, blocking traffic and raising a ruckus. Farmers are reduced to selling their stock at low prices because their feed crops have failed. They buy a daily delivery of water just to survive, though they now have no income. Ancient Aboriginal methods of land husbandry have been routinely ignored for 200 years in favor of European crops and livestock incompatible with the Australian terrain.

The livable koala is deemed vulnerable to extinction due to habitat loss, domestic dogs, road accidents, and excessive bush fires. New laws will protect koala trees. New Zealand appears in better condition because they get plenty of rain. Piped-in American oldies music was ubiquitous, music that I grew up with. Now I know where pop music goes when it drops off the charts. It goes Down Under to retire.

Visit Carol’s Zero Waste Facebook page.

By Rachel Zulevi
Zero Waste Team

Waste antennae were up.

Frequently asked questions on Bernalillo/Albuquerque bag ban

Thanks to so many of you, especially kid members of the Global Warming Express, both the city of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County passed plastic bag bans that take effect Jan. 1.

Going bag-free reduces litter and the demand for oil and gas. The city provided us with a list of frequently asked questions that will help you navigate this change.

Which plastic bags are banned?

Any single-use plastic bag including compostable bags, less than 2.25 milli- meters thick. This is equivalent to about two sheets of stacked copy paper.

Can’t we recycle plastic bags?

Plastic bags can’t be recycled in your blue cart. Plastic bags can be recycled in cardboard receptacles located at many local retail stores.

How will I carry my groceries home?

Switch to reusable bags. Some retailers give rebates to customers who bring their own bags. Others will charge a small fee to give you a paper bag.

Can restaurants provide bags?

Yes. The Albuquerque ordinance does not apply to food-service establishments.

I use plastic bags to pick up my pet’s waste. What will I use instead?

Local pet stores can sell waste bags. Existing pet-waste stations on trails and in parks will continue to provide plastic bags for discarding pet waste. (Sierra Club tip: We save our bread and tortilla bags to use for poop collection.)
El Paso students hike, learn, protect

By Neysa Hardin
El Paso Sierra Student Coalition

The Americas High School Sierra Student Coalition of the El Paso Group would like to extend heartfelt gratitude to the El Paso Sierra Club and the Rio Grande Chapter for their continued support. We had a great and productive year:

January: We joined forces with El Paso nonprofits on MLK’s National Day of Service to clean up litter on Transita Mountain Road. The students ended the day by hiking the Lost Dog Trails to see first-hand open-space areas that the city wanted to destroy through development of shopping strips and housing.

February: SSC sledded down the sand dunes at White Sands National Monument. Prior to the trip, we conducted a book study on Red by Terry Tempest Williams and shared passages from the book as we watched the sunset over the mountains.

April-May: SSC students worked diligently on voter registration drives, voter petition drives, social-media blitzing and poll sitting to save wildlife in our Lost Dog Trails in the Franklin Mountains from being bulldozed and encroached. Our efforts paid off with a surprising 49% vote approval! This was a crowning achievement for the community.

May: We hiked to Osha Trail in the Lincoln National Forest; students were assigned an organism found within the forest, and the student represented their organism as an art form from poetry to paintings, music, etc., and presented their pieces in a sharing circle while relaxing in the Osha Trail meadows.

August: We hiked Dripping Springs Trail in the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument and learned about water issues by taking pH, temperature, phosphate/nitrate readings, and measuring dissolved oxygen levels in the Rio Grande at Leasburg Dam State Park.

September: Students investigated the unique geology of Franklin Mountains State Park by exploring the abandoned Prospect Mine, which is dazzled in lapis, malachite, and pyrite.

Students volunteered at an El Paso Zoo lecture on the Black Bear of Big Bend National Park as a community-service project sponsored by the El Paso Group.

October: AHS Sierra Student Coalition was invited to speak at the El Paso Community Foundation’s Cultivate Speaker Series. Three students presented on the impact of connecting young people to nature and the importance of being environmental stewards. Students created an altar for Día de los Muertos on endangered species in Texas and New Mexico. The altar paid homage to endangered animals and plants and was used to inform their peers on the current administration’s attacks on the Endangered Species Act.

November: Students spent the day hiking the amazing fall foliage under big tooth leaf maples in the Guadalupe Mountains National Park. We read “Thinking Like a Mountain” from Aldo Leopold’s A Sand County Almanae and discussed land ethic issues with park rangers.

December: The students have an upcoming trip to

You can help stop nuclear dump

By John Buchser
Rio Grande Chapter
Water chair

Southeast New Mexico has been targeted to become a Chernobyl wasteland! Our nation needs to constructively confront the radioactive waste our nuclear power plants are generating. We need a sound long-term disposal solution. There is no need to ship waste to Southeast NM like Holtec is proposing, potentially getting stranded there forever.

We need your help to insure the strategy the US pursues is sound, and will keep us safe during the 100,000+ years it will take for this waste to become safe.

We need faster deployment of wind and solar. We don’t need nuclear power. Existing plants should be shut down when their licenses expire. New technologies like better battery storage are progressing quickly. Nuclear power plants generate radioactive waste that they do not have the technology to keep safe.

We lost our legal case questioning the legality and safety of Holtec’s near-surface ‘temporary’ storage facility near Carlsbad. We are appealing to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission — but the NRC’s role is to promote nuclear energy. Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and State Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard are objecting to this facility, please extend your thanks to them. Tribal governments in NM object to the movement of waste given the high risk.

There is pressure from citizens to move this radioactive waste away from their communities. The Club is finalizing recommendations to expand our nuclear policies to address the challenges we are facing. Minimizing movement of waste is one important recommendation. Many of the other recommendations mirror the revised Final report of the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board - there’s a lot to be done to insure safety, and we need time and money to do so.

To donate to the Rio Grande Chapter’s Holtec legal fund, please go to riograndesierraclub.org/ donate and choose the option for “Stop the Holtec waste facility.”
Gila Resources Information Project

Gila River advocates received great holiday news Dec. 20 as the Department of Interior denied a deadline extension on the Gila River diversion, cutting off access to more than $50 million in construction funding for the project that would harm New Mexico’s last wild river and divert money from local communities with critical water supply needs.

The Department of Interior letter says “The slow pace of progress by the State since the passage of the Act shows a lack of urgency and priority by the State for delivering water supplies to rural communities that should be served by the project. Even today, a feasible project with necessary funding and contractual commitments has not been identified to enable project success. After careful consideration, I regret to inform you that the court at the middle school in Section 21(20) of the Act will not be granted.”

Planning for a Gila River diversion has gone on for 15 years and wasted $15 million without producing plans for a viable project.

It’s well past time to move on and focus our attention and the tens of millions of dollars in funding available to New Mexico under the Arizona Water Settlement Act on community water projects that can bring real water security to everyone in southwest New Mexico. Sen. Martin Heinrich, Sen. Tom Udall, Gov. Michelle LuJan Grisham and Lt. Gov. Howie Morales all have supported protection of the Gila River and use of Arizona Water Settlement Act funding on cost-effective non-diversion projects. Additionally, they opposed an extension of the deadline for the diversion.

The Interior Department’s Dec. 20 decision means it’s more likely — but not a sure thing — that the Gila River will remain wild.

Los Alamos Youth Earth Team has big plans

Los Alamos Youth Earth Team

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Los Alamos Youth Earth Team has big plans

Funds for Gila River diversion blocked

By Allyson Siwik

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Los Alamos Youth Earth Team has big plans

By members of the Los Alamos Youth Earth Team

You might say “What is the Los Alamos Youth Earth Team?” We are a middle-school group that helps the environment and does projects that help plants and animals around us.

We have many goals in mind and we hope to be able to complete a few this year. We have done many things already to help the environment, but with not a lot of funding, there’s not much we can do.

That is why we would like you to help us! We are planning on making the court at the middle school more eco-friendly by planting grass, trees, and possibly a pond. We also went to the Valles Caldera to test the water. Watershed monitoring is important because it makes sure that water quality, fauna, chemical balance, and volume is sufficient for our wildlife. We have also gone to a recycling fair where they teach about recycling.

We have planned many things, but without your help, we cannot do it.

You can help in many ways: Anyone can spread the word about the right way to recycle and what you can recycle. Anyone can also help in their community and do things like pick up trash. You can help the environment if you do simple things. If you’re interested in donating to our projects, we are always in need of funding. You can donate at gofundme.com/los-alamos-youth-earth-team-fundraiser.

Los Alamos residents send nearly 2 TONS of edible food to the landfill EVERY DAY

Reducing wasted food is a great way to...

Help our environment!

5,000 TONS

Food waste prevention could reduce our community’s carbon footprint by 5,000 TONS of greenhouse gases.

Buying and using food wisely can preserve the 25% of our freshwater, 80 million acres of productive land (larger than the area of New Mexico!), and 300 million barrels of oil that are used every year in the US to produce food that is never eaten.

Let’s waste less food!

DID YOU KNOW?

2 TONS

Los Alamos residents send nearly 2 TONS of edible food to the landfill EVERY DAY

Reducing wasted food is a great way to...

Save money!

2,600,000 pounds of food are thrown away in Los Alamos each year

Food waste prevention could reduce our community’s carbon footprint by 5,000 TONS of greenhouse gases.

Buying and using food wisely can preserve the 25% of our freshwater, 80 million acres of productive land (larger than the area of New Mexico!), and 300 million barrels of oil that are used every year in the US to produce food that is never eaten.

Save the County (that’s YOU) $65,000 per year currently spent to take food to the landfill.

Let’s waste less food!

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Let’s waste less food!
Network watches out for public health

By Teresa Seamster, Northern New Mexico Group Chair

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n the past two years, state environmental organizations and medical practitioners and researchers have found a common sector of growing concern — the impacts of environmental pollution on public health.

Northern New Mexico Group members Denise Fort and Teresa Seamster are members of the Environmental Public Health Network, with projects in water quality and community impacts planned for 2020.

At a recent network gathering in Albuquerque, keynote speaker Ruth A. Ezel M.D., Ph.D., presented a number of tragic examples of toxic environmental exposure affecting New Mexico children. Possibly the most shocking case was the accidental poisoning of a large rural family given some unlabeled grain, tainted with mercury, which they fed to hogs that were also their family’s food supply.

After three months, the three youngest children fell gravely ill — all became weak and were unable to walk or talk. The young children became permanently blind.

This cautionary tale from Alamogordo decades ago, is being repeated in varying degrees today throughout New Mexico.

Oil and gas methane emissions are at an all-time high in the Permian and San Juan Basins. Childhood asthma has doubled since 201! to almost 50,000 cases in the state, and billions of gallons of radioactive waste water from fracking operations are being injected into wells and held in impoundment ponds while the New Mexico Environment Department studies how to safely dispose of this new hazardous fluid.

New Mexico has a long history of legacy waste from the mining industry, the contamination from two national laboratories, the Air Force bases, and the oil and gas fields. Rural communities are often the most impacted and the least served by medical facilities equipped to provide testing, diagnosis or treatment to residents exposed to toxic emissions or contaminated water or soil.

As the Trump administration seeks to reverse Environmental Protection Agency climate safeguards, health impacts from climate disruption are another common concern for medical practitioners and environmental groups.

Srikanth Paladugu, chief of the Environment Department’s Environmental Health Epidemiology Bureau, spoke to the Environmental Public Health Network gathering about new climate-related illnesses that are also on the rise. Heat stroke, dehydration and accidental death due to outdoor occupations of firefighting, forestry, agriculture, ranching, pipeline and highway construction are affecting greater numbers of employees in these areas.

The body of research tying public health impacts to the still growing oil and gas development in New Mexico is also increasing. The use of FLIR (optical gas imaging) cameras by thermographers working for environmental groups such as Earthworks now is able to document specific venting and gas leaks from well equipment and provide accurate emission violations when filing complaints with the state Environment Department.

In one day in October, certified thermographers filmed seven well locations in Rio Arriba and Sandoval counties that violated operational standards.

The rural Navajo chapters of Counselor, Navajo City and Nageezi were all areas being polluted with these illegal well emissions that are invisible to the eye. Routine well inspectors, who rely on smell and visible emissions, could not have detected these violations.

The Environmental Health Network makes a difference by urging professionals and practitioners who are working to document and mitigate the impacts of environmental pollutants on New Mexicans. The network seeks to protect public health through educational advocacy for environmental

Northern NM Group Holiday celebration

By Teresa Seamster Northern NM chair

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his has been a year of constant ups and downs. In January, we were elated over the signing of the Wildlife Corridor Act; the next month we heard of a poorly crafted trapping rule at the state Game Commission. Mid-year we celebrated the State Land Office’s drilling moratorium on trust lands in the Chaco buffer, followed by the Santa Fe National Forest announcing an exploratory drill permit for a new mine on the Pecos River.

This has also been a year that has seen many serious illnesses within our Executive Committee “family.” Our end-of-the-year holiday party mirrored that cycle, first celebrating some landmark legislation and progress in protecting some of the most vulnerable people and places in New Mexico, followed by our announcement of the sudden passing of long-time group leader and ExCom member, Paul Paryski. Paul was a great Sierra Club colleague and friend whose lifelong involvement in water and climate issues continued until his death on Nov. 25. He will be greatly missed.

The highlight of the evening was the tag-team discussion by our two keynote speakers, state Rep. Matthew McQueen and Senate Majority Leader Peter Wirth. They discussed legislation and answered questions from an informed and engaged audience. Examples of successes and failures were given that showed their different strategies and consensus-building needed to get bills through the Legislature and signed by the governor.

Since members often attend committee hearings at the state capitol as well as city and county meetings, the topics they raised covered the spectrum. Our legislators showed their deep local connections, knowledge and possible solutions to pending developments such as the Tererro Mine project in nearby Pecos, a proposed asphalt plant in western Santa Fe County and Santa Fe’s drafted 2100 Water Plan.

Attendance and spirits were

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Rino Grande Sierran
Excursiones: creciendo en el 2019

By Cecilia Chávez Beltrán

Excursiones establecido en Julio 2017, nuestra program está dirigido a promover el disfrute de la naturaleza entre la comunidad de habla hispana. Podemos decir que la respuesta ha sido bastante satisfactoria. Tocand puertas de organizaciones no-lucrativas que trabajan con la comunidad hispanohablante en ABQ, continuamos ofreciendo Excursiones a la Naturaleza de Nuevo Mexico.

Las Excursiones es variadas respecto al país de origen, y el esfuerzo físico y nivel de experiencia de los participantes. Indudablemente, más emocionante que los números o estadísticas son las reacciones de nuestros excursionistas, quienes mientras caminamos recuerdan un lugar de su niñez/niñez en tierras lejanas, o se alegran de haber logrado más de lo que pensaron les sería posible, platican de sentirse a gusto en el grupo. La naturaleza al alcance de todos. Entre las 25 excursiones del 2019 tuvimos:

Paseos en el bosque del Río Grande

De un punto de vista de las organizaciones que trabajan con y para la comunidad hispanohablante en la educación para adultos, desarrollo de liderazgo, transformación de las vidas de sobrevivientes de violencia doméstica, y/o conocedores de aves e historia.

Un educativo y entretenido día en el Rio Grande Nature Center con niños y niños de una guardería. Coordinado con Paulina Díaz, nuestra voluntaria líder bilingüe.

Un relajante paseo en el bosque, con madres de una escuela elemental localizada en un barrio de bajos recursos económico.

Dos paseos especiales: Los participantes estuvieron encantados, aunque era un lluvioso día del Salinas Pueblo Mission National Monument, meses más tarde, un glorioso día de un agradable día de sol al Acoma Pueblo Sky City. Educativas y activas, en estas excursiones hemos aprendido un poco de la historia según los españoles conquistadores y los Nativos Americanos, queriendo de alguna manera balancear nuestro poco conocimiento sobre la tierra que pisamos.

Varias excursiones locales a las Montañas Sandia, áreas del Monumento Nacional de Petróglifos, y los volcanes. En total hemos tenido 176 participantes yendo desde los 3 a los 71 años de edad. Hemos coadyuvado con el apoyo de guías expertas voluntarias bilingües/estar conscientes de aves y historia de Nuevo Mexico.

Continuamos entonces, queriendo inspirar a la comunidad a sentirse seguros disfrutando nuestros espacios al aire libre. Aunque no tienen mucho tiempo libre para estar en la naturaleza, el comentario que siempre recibo al llegar al estacionamiento luego de nuestras aventuras es el deseo de seguir explorando la naturaleza en grupo, en convivio. Se agradece infinitamente el tener Excursiones como instrumento de integración. Las paisajes en Nuevo Mexico son hermosos y eso es celebrado en todas nuestras Excursiones.

Excursiones report

Establecido en Julio 2017, Excursiones es nuestro Spanish-language outings program conducted 25 outings this year.

Participants at a Rio Grande Nature Center excursion this summer. Our Spanish-language outings program conducted 25 outings this year.

By Diane Reese

Celebrating our progress together

A large group of volunteers and supporters gathered on December 8 at The Three Sisters Kitchen to celebrate a strong year of environmental action. Joining in the fun were 350 New Mexico and Mom's Clean Air Force — a few of our special partners. Chapter Director Camilla Feibelman thanked volunteers and staff and highlighted a few successes, such as the Energy Transition Act. “None of this could have been accomplished without you!” Special recognition was given to outgoing Central Group Chair Fred Houdek and new chapter Friends and Family.

Global Warming Express: From Congress to the Legislature

By Genie Stevens

Global Warming Express

The Global Warming Express has been busier than ever this fall. By January we will have added new programs in Belen, Taos and Santa Fe and will have recruited five more mentors, in addition to our fall programs.

We will have programs in Los Alamos, Taos, Dixon, Santa Fe, Albuquerque and Belen, while working on a new program in Española.

This fall, the GWE came to the attention of Greta Thunberg and national and international audiences when U.S. Rep. Ben Ray Lujan gave the GWE a shout-out during the congressional meeting with Greta and youth climate activists. Rep. Lujan asked Greta a question posed by GWE founder Marina Weber: “How can we get more youth in America engaged in climate change in public as impactfully as kids do? We look forward to offering similar workshops at other venues. Let us know if you have venues for such events.”

GWEers are now heading in various directions, to plant trees and to observe beavers in the Bosque. Look for our 260-plus GWEers at the Roundhouse at Environment Day on January 28!
Outings, continued from Page 16

Always a good time to get outside

By Terry Owen, Outings chair

Jacques Cousteau famously said, “We only protect the things that we love,” and the Rio Grande chapter provides an abundance of opportunities for our members and non-members alike to fall in love with New Mexico’s wild lands. From snowshoeing and nordic skiing in the central and northern mountains to hiking all across the state, there are lots of options from very easy to very challenging activities.

What’s more, there is the Excursiones a la Naturaleza de Nuevo Mexico program which offers outdoor outings. The Military Outdoors program which encourages military veterans, active duty and reservist to get outside in all of these programs there’s virtually no reason for not joining us on an outing!

Thanks to the chapter’s volunteer outings leaders, 2019 was a great year. With more than 70 outings and over 400 participants, they offered a variety of events and outings that were safe, fun and inspiring. Some of the highlights included a hike near Las Cruces to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Organ Mountain-Desert Peaks Monument, a camp, hike and bike outing at Chaco Canyon, and wilderness first aid training specifically geared for Sierra Club members. All of these activities were at no cost or very low cost to participants.

We began the year with 14 outings leaders across the chapter and added two more to our ranks. Congratulations are in order to June Parson in the Central Group and Hart Pierce in the Northern Group for completing the certification requirements and leading outings in their respective regions. Unfortunately we had to bid farewell to long-time Chapter Chair Terry Owen. Chair of our most active outings leaders, Odile De La Beaujardiere, as she relocated to Colorado.

We invite you to join us in 2020 for more outdoor adventures.

If you’re short on outdoor gear or have too much outdoor gear, we have a Gear Swap tentatively scheduled for mid-April, a service project planned at Chaco Canyon for late April, and Wilderness First Aid training scheduled for September. We’ll also be recognizing the 50th anniversary of Earth Day with some special activities.

That’s in addition to the scores of outings we have planned.

If you or someone you know would like to become a certified outings leader, we’d enjoy having you join us ranks.

Outings Leaders Training (CLT-101) is scheduled for March 7 at Albuquerque. You can register by March 4 at www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar. For more info, contact Rio Grande Chapter Outings Chairman Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, terryy@comcast.net.

Hikers scrambled through the Kasha Katuwe Tent Rocks and Slot Canyon in late October.
On a Dec. 15 Kitchen Mesa hike, participants overcame muddy sections to enjoy fantastic views. Check our Meetup groups or the listings below for more hikes like this.

**January-February-March hikes**

**January**

**Thursday, Jan 9: Zero Waste Tour** to Friedman Recycling Center. 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Contact trip leader to RSVP or if you want to carpool by Jan. 8. Vests, helmets, eye protection and ear plugs will be provided. Dress warm, part of the tour will be outdoors.

Trip leader: Laurie Zunne, 505-440-5337, lmzunne@gmail.com

Location: Meet at Education Bldg. 5049 Edith Blvd. NE, Albuquerque

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

**Saturday, Jan 18: Volcanoes on the West Side Hike** (Excursiones a la Naturaleza): 10 a.m.–1 p.m. Easy hike with beautiful views of the valley, city and Sandia Mountains. About 3.2 miles round trip. The Pueblo people believe the volcanoes and the petroglyphs pecked into the volcanic boulders provide a direct spiritual connection to both their ancestors and to the spirit world, the place where time began.

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

**Saturday, Jan 18: Beat the Snow Shoe Trek**: Sponsored by the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter, Northern Group, Military Outdoors Program. If you can walk, you can snowshoe! 10 a.m. at Chicken Creek Nordic Parking Lot, Trailhead, Mancos Colorado. Rendezvous at Step Back Inn parking lot at 129 Arroyo Blvd., Arroye, NM, at 8 a.m. to carpool or caravanz. Round trip to Chicken Creek Nordic is 150 miles. Trek will cover approximately 3 miles in about 3 hours, depending on route taken. Trek will start at 8,000 feet with approximate elevation gain of 400 feet. Children 14 and over allowed and must be accompanied by parent or legal guardian. Participants must be able to walk one mile uphill in 25 minutes or less. No dogs. Bring your own equipment. Rentals may be obtained at San Juan College Outdoor Rental Center or several locations in Durango. Consult snowshoe sizing-weight charts at Rei.com or backpacking store. Trip leader can also advise on proper equipment. Equipment list available upon registration. If snow conditions are insufficient, venues may change or outings may become hikes. Outings leader will contact confirmed participants in the event of outings changes.

Participants must RSVP by Jan. 15. Outings Leader: Hart Pierce, 505-320-1055, shpierce@q.com

Location: Chicken Creek Nordic, Mancos, CO

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

**Friday, Jan 24: Michael M. Emery Trail and Trail 305 Loop Hike** (Excursiones a la Naturaleza): 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Elevation gain 334 feet, 3-mile loop. Meet at 99999 High Desert St. NE, 87111. To get there, proceed up Academy Road NE, cross Tmanway Boulevard, continue east until it turns into High Desert. Dogs on leash are welcome.

Leader: Cecilia, 505-243-7756, cecilia.chavez.beltran@sierraclub.org

Location: Sandia Foothills

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

**Saturday, Jan 25: Intro to Snowshoeing on Sandia Crest.** If you can walk, you can snowshoe! Meet at 9 a.m. at Hobby Lobby on Juan Tabo to carpool or at Sandia Crest at 9:45 a.m. This three-hour outing is about 2.5 miles round trip with 150 feet of elevation gain. We’ll proceed along the crest trail with stops to enjoy stunning views all the way to the continental divide. We’ll cover tips for safely traversing on snowshoes and winter hiking. Sponsored by the Military Outdoors Program, and everyone is welcome. Appropriate for children over 14 with parent or legal guardian.

No dogs, please. Contact leader by Jan. 22 to RSVP, obtain recommended gear list and other details.

Leader: Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, teowen@comcast.net

Location: East of Albuquerque

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

**February**

**Sunday, Feb 2: Rinconada Canyon Trail, Petroglyph National Monument** (Excursiones a la Naturaleza): 10 a.m.–1 p.m. Elevation gain 114 feet, 2.2 mile-loop. Come for a walk and let’s find them petroglyphs! Sandy paths. There is no shade, so bring your sun hat. Please no dogs. To carpool, please meet at the southeast side of the Lowes parking lot, 2001 12th St. NW, Albuquerque at 9:45 a.m.

Trip leader: Cecilia, 505-243-7756, cecilia.chavez.beltran@sierraclub.org

Location: Off Unser Boulevard, Albuquerque

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

All about Sierra Club outings

Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter outings are free and open to the public. The level of difficulty is listed in hike descriptions. All outings participants must sign a liability waiver. Bring water, lunch, sturdy hiking shoes or boots 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.

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 information such as trail conditions or equipment appears unsuitable.

Leader reserves right to weather. Leader reserves right to 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. See riograndesierraclub.org for up-to-date hike info.

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/.

**January**

Continued on Page 15

January/February/March 2020