Although so much of our world has shut down, wildlife, water, air and climate never stop — and neither do the threats to them. See Page 8 for actions you can take from home to protect our health and our planet, and for resources we can all use as we navigate the challenges of the restrictions the COVID-19 pandemic has imposed.

Our endorsements for the New Mexico primary are ready — make sure to vote by mail: Pages 6 and 7

The count of Mexican wolves in the wild went up, but so did killing by Fish and Wildlife: Page 9

See tips for enjoying and exploring the outdoors safely — and seeing wildlife like this blue grosbeak: Page 12

Inside:

BLM refuses to postpone May auctions
After allowing just a 10-day protest period, agency schedules thousands of acres in Permian to be leased for oil and gas fracking. Page 3.

Commission approves PNM coal exit
Financing will allow transition funds for coal workers, lower rate for electric customers. Page 3.

Gila National Forest plan falls short
Groups are providing technical comments to improve first draft update since last management plan in 1986. Page 5.

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San Juan coal exit, relief funds OK’d

By Mona Blaber

Chapter communications manager

Public Regulation Commission

Commission chair told the nation April 1 unanimously approved Public Service Company of New Mexico’s request to exit the coal-fired San Juan Generating Station and use low-interest bonds to finance the stranded costs of the plant.

The low-rate financing authorized by the Energy Transition Act will reduce customer utility bills, provide millions of dollars of support to coal-dependent communities and create new clean-energy jobs. The financing will lower the average PNM customers’ rates by $6-$7 a month.

“As PNM transitions to cleaner energy, the closing of San Juan Generating Station provides an opportunity to fundamentally redefine economic development to incorporate renewable energy in the Four Corners Region. This decision by the PRC is progressive in identifying that coal-impacted communities need transition planning and resources now,” said San Juan Citizens Alliance Energy and Climate Program Manager Mike Eisenfeld.

PRC staff was the only party that recommended against PNM’s San Juan exit, claiming the utility hadn’t sufficiently considered retiring San Juan for carbon capture, a risky and expensive technology that is running at only one, much smaller, power plant in the U.S.

But the PRC and its hearing examiners noted that carbon capture is speculative and expensive: “The modeling conducted by PNM also shows that the abandonment will cost substantially less than PNM’s continued operation of the plant remoted with carbon capture technology, and no party has presented contrary evidence.”

Another encouraging development for the climate came March 27, when PRC hearing examiners recommended expired approval of the Arroyo Solar Project, which is 300 MW of solar and 40 MW of battery storage, and the Jicarilla Project, with 50 MW solar and 20 MW battery storage.

Approval of these projects would preclude the gas-heavy replacement portfolio that some stakeholders favored. In recommending the renewable projects, the hearing examiners cited the Energy Transition Act’s requirement to favor renewable energy with the least environmental impact.

Commissioners must approve the two projects by April 30 because of expiring bids.

The two projects fill only part of the gap left by abandonment of San Juan, however, so the examiners will issue a separate recommendation on the balance of the resources needed to replace San Juan. For that recommendation, they will choose among portfolios that include the Arroyo and Jicarilla projects, including the proposals by Sierra Club and Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy.

But the Sierra Club, after doing extensive modeling, has submitted a cost-effective portfolio consisting of 100% renewable energy and storage, and we will continue to advocate for 100% renewables and battery to replace the coal power.

The hearing examiners also firmly rejected a PRC staff proposal to delay approval of a full replacement scenario to allow a bid by Enchant, the corporation that will attempt to keep burning coal at San Juan and capture some of the CO2 to either sell for enhanced oil recovery or sequester.

The commissioners’ decision to allow PNM to exit San Juan Generating Station and to finance the exit using low-rate bonds means that surrounding communities and San Juan mine and plant workers will receive $40 million in severance, training and reinvestment funding.

“Closing the San Juan Generating Station provides a critical opportunity to embark on a clean-energy future—one that invests in our communities, protects our environment, and will lead to a healthier climate for ourselves and future generations,” said Wendy Atcitty, Diné CARE New Mexico energy organizer. “We applaud the PRC, for making the right decision for Navajo communities and workers, who are depending on the just-transition funding and economic opportunities the Energy Transition Act provides.”

“This decision to move on from our coal-fired past will lead to cleaner air, cleaner water, and healthier lands. It will also help tribal communities, especially Navajo communities, to diversify our economies and create new clean-energy jobs,” said Joseph Hernandez, Diné Energy organizer for Native American Voters Alliance Education Project.

BLM charges ahead with oil, gas leasing

By Miya King-Flaherty

Our Wild New Mexico organizer

As the country weathered the current crisis, and as state and national guidelines are ever evolving to curb the spread of coronavirus, the Bureau of Land Management has charged ahead with a minimal 10-day protest period for its planned May lease sale of thousands of acres of public land in southeast New Mexico.

The protest period started on March 25 and ended April 1. The BLM has already minimized public participation by reducing protest periods from 30 to 10 days, but the 10-day period is especially egregious when our daily lives and routine have been disrupted.

While several parcels in the Greater Chaco region were spared from the May lease sale, more than 45,000 acres of public lands in southeastern New Mexico’s Permian Basin are still up for sale for more fracking.

The BLM only allows for protests to be hand-delivered or mailed; however, they made an exception and allowed for comments to be emailed.

Many people, including those most directly impacted by fracking, do not have Internet access to email comments, and most people are restricted from physically leaving their homes.

Even so, several groups, including the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter, managed to collect thousands of protests opposing the May lease sale. The Rio Grande Chapter has also signed on to WildEarth Guardians’ technical comment.

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Dear friends,
First, I hope all of you, your family and loved ones are safe and healthy. These weeks have been a joint struggle — albeit at a distance — for all of us. It drives home how we are all connected in one world.

This is my first opportunity to write to you as the new Chair of the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club. A brief introduction: My husband and I have the good fortune to live on the edge of the Gila National Forest in Pinos Altos, and every day we are treated to wildlife walkthroughs and an abundance of birds. I’m a cultural anthropologist and family therapist, now giving time to politics and board service. This is my first term on the Executive Committee for the Chapter.

My sense of the Sierra Club has been significantly changed by the experience of being on the ExCom. My husband was always the environmentalist and I was the politician, focused more on “people issues.” What I found when joining the ExCom was a big group of dedicated volunteers who made absolutely no distinction between social and environmental issues. Environmental changes, including this virus, affect us all and will do so even more in the future, sharpening the choices of where we live and how we earn a living.

This is the year when none

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: 670.5 hours
Sierra Club is a grassroots organization! Many volunteers don’t yet report their hours, so the true total is likely double or triple the above number. We volunteer to make the world work better and to support leadership in our outstanding staff. Just to put these hours in perspective, the IRS values volunteer time at $25.43/hour.

The hours donated this quarter were worth $17,051.

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

Fred Houdek

Fred Houdek has Sierra Club in the veins. His son is the Land Use and Transportation Manager for the North Star Chapter in Minnesota. So when Fred and his wife, Marlene, moved to Albuquerque to be closer to their kids, one of Fred’s first actions was to reach out to the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter’s Central New Mexico Group.

He quickly started coming to meetings, listening, learning, injecting curious questions with his midwestern life. He humbly offered his help as a member of the Bosque Action Team, then as the tabling coordinator, then coordinating our office move to our Lead Avenue location, working with Don Meaders (a union carpenter and volunteer extraordinaire) to turn the oil boiler building into a shed, and finally becoming our Central Group Chair.

Fred has carefully cultivated the volunteer team that is taking over as Fred passes the torch. Fred gets to know people, takes the time to get to know their interests, meets with them one on one and works with them to take ownership of work on the issues they’re interested in. Fred has owned his own businesses and even been a large hospital administrator.

The Sierra Club has been a grassroots movement from the start. Fred believes that the incredible leadership skills that Fred developed from that experience. We’re so lucky to have had him for all these years as our Central Group Chair. Now welcome to Diane Reese

Volunteer hero: Fred Houdek

Fred Houdek who brings her leadership skills from being a lead volunteer at St. Mark’s Episcopal and board chair at the Hubbell House.

We also want to wish our outgoing Chapter Lobbyist Brittany Fallon well.

Brittany is headed to NM Wild, where she’ll be the Political Director. Brittany brought all of the smarts of her doctorate in psychology and anthropology, all the passion of an animal conservationist and all the savvy of a politician who took time off from her academic work to work at Si.

William Tallman’s legislative aide before becoming our Sierra Club lobbyist in 2018.

Brittany helped to lead our efforts to pass the Energy Transition Act and moved our efforts forward on electric vehicles, energy efficiency, and grid modernization.

Brittany has also helped develop the Chapter’s political program to a new level. Brittany is a wiz, and we will miss her!
Gila Forest draft falls short

Donna Stevens
Upper Gila Watershed Alliance

F orest plans, while admittedly not very exciting, are extremely important, as they guide the Forest Service’s policies, projects, and actions for years to come. The Gila National Forest’s “current” plan is from 1986, and many conditions have changed since then. In March, the Forest Service released a draft forest plan, kicking off a 90-day public comment period that ends April 16. Accompanying the draft plan is a draft Environmental Impact Statement. Conservation groups are dividing the immense task of evaluating more than 1,000 pages and writing comments in response. We respectfully request that you read this article (not the entire plan!) for information on writing comments, since input from individuals is very important.

While the draft forest plan contains much with which we agree, including desired conditions of forest and watershed health and sustainability, the plan falls short in many respects. Following are some of the issues that are inadequately addressed.

Climate: The plan states clearly that climate change is happening here and now, but fails to incorporate this acknowledgement in its proposed actions. While we agree that climate is outside the purview of the Gila National Forest, there are measures within its authority that could lessen the impacts of our climate emergency. One such activity is an honest assessment of the destructive impacts of livestock grazing. As the forest gets hotter and drier, livestock numbers should be reduced to improve forest conditions and to allow regeneration of carbon-sequestering grass that provides fine fuels to carry low-severity wildfires. Riparian areas, the most productive habitat in the forest, must be off-limits to livestock. The Gila River in the Gila Wilderness Area, a vital climate refuge, has been heavily damaged by dozens of feral cattle, which need to be removed immediately.

Wilderness: In today’s climate emergency, the designation of new wilderness areas that function as climate refugia is crucial. While only Congress has the authority to designate wilderness areas, the Forest Service’s wilderness recommendations are influential. The five alternatives in the draft Environmental Impact Statement have a range of recommended new wilderness areas ranging from zero to 750,000 acres; the preferred alternative recommends just 110,000 acres. The Forest Service’s “preferred” alternative recommends wilderness for only 46,685 acres out of almost 150,000 total acres rated as Outstanding by the Forest Service itself, or just 31%.

Wild and Scenic Rivers: As with wilderness areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers can only be designated by Congress; the Forest Service’s mandate is to determine eligibility. While a coalition of conservation groups has proposed almost 450 miles of rivers and streams, largely in the Gila National Forest, for Wild and Scenic River status, the Forest Service has found eligible just half that number, 224 miles.

Species of Conservation Concern: We are experiencing a mass extinction event, but you wouldn’t know that from reading the draft forest plan, which is largely business as usual. For example, while the draft plan acknowledges the vulnerability of high-elevation spruce-fir forests, its list of Species of Conservation Concern fails to include plants and animals that live only in this ecosystem. The plan exhibits a disconnect between ecosystem vulnerability and the actions required to mitigate the resultant loss of biodiversity.

Herbicides: The Forest Service has inappropriately approved a complete herbicide plan in its forest plan draft Environmental Impact Statement. This proposed plan approves the use of 21 different herbicides across the Forest for use on non-native species and a few native trees such as oak and alligator juniper. A programmatic herbicide plan should not be nested into the draft forest plan. The Forest Service needs to focus on the revised forest plan, and proceed with the herbicide EIS in a separate process after the forest plan comment period has ended. Not doing so denies the public ample time to respond. The public was not informed during the scoping period that the herbicide plan should be included as a separate DEIS within the forest plan analysis.

Please use the information above to write comments on the Gila National Forest’s draft plan. The Gila National Forest website has a wealth of information on forest planning, as well as the draft plan and draft Environmental Impact Statement. On the home page, click on “How to comments.” The comment deadline is April 16.

Groups ask state to protect Albuquerque Basin aquifer

By Mike Neas
Central NM Group Groundwater Issues

Efforts are underway to better protect the entire Albuquerque Basin aquifer at the state level with an Executive Order. We are asking all local governments and Pueblos, as well as organizations, to send letters and resolutions to Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham asking for an Executive Order for special rules and protections for the Albuquerque Basin. Concerned citizens can call your elected officials and candidates and make known the need for an assured clean-water supply now and in the future.

Citizens dependent on the Albuquerque Basin aquifer got a real wake-up call when SandRidge Energy Inc. secured a fracking permit from the New Mexico Oil Conservation Division in 2015. It took more than two years of concerted effort by a group of concerned citizens, meetings in front of the Sandoval County Commission to defeat a couple of very bad, industry-driven ordinances. But the county has not passed any sort of protective oil and gas ordinance. What was accomplished was an awakening of the people of the Albuquerque Basin to the realities of their water protections in place now.

Roughly 24 local governments and Pueblos are dependent on the water of the Albuquerque Basin. These local governments represent more than three-quarters of a million people. Sandoval County still has no oil and gas ordinance in place and relies solely on the same Special Use permitting system that was architecturally administered in the SandRidge matter. In the entire Albuquerque Basin area, there are no local government oil and gas ordinances. At best most local governments, including the City of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County, rely on the Special Use permitting process.

Sandoval County residents’ efforts to assure protections for the air, water, environment and public safety from the pollution potential of oil and gas taught us some very important facts. The Albuquerque Basin or Middle Rio Grande rift is one of only four active rifts in the world. As an active rift, it is heavily faulted and fractured. It is unstable. Horizontal drilling and fracking have inevitable potential to do serious and irreversible damage to the Albuquerque Basin aquifer.

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Our choice for Congress: Leger Fernandez

By Susan Martin
Chapter vice chair

We are so proud to endorse Teresa Leger Fernandez for New Mexico’s 3rd Congressional District seat. From attending Head Start as a little girl in Las Vegas, N.M., to her outstanding professional and educational achievements, Teresa understands the challenges and opportunities of her district. Growing up as one of 8 siblings, she exemplifies the best of Northern New Mexico — rooted in the land that nourishes us, but dreaming of and achieving social-justice victories for poor and under-served communities, including pueblos.

Her long history of community involvement includes such diverse issues as voting rights, housing, immigration, women’s issues and environmental matters. She was a commissioner of Las Acequias de Chuapeco.

President Barack Obama appointed her to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Her vision for the Green New Deal for New Mexico includes investing in small farmers and ranchers who can do regenerative agriculture.

To achieve our endorsement, Teresa went through a rigorous process. We interviewed candidates, reviewed candidate standings, and require a two-thirds vote of two Club entities. Teresa stood out as a passionate and committed environmentalist who understands the urgency of this moment and the need to act to ensure the health of our planet for generations to follow.

Paid for by Sierra Club Political Committee, www.sierrclub.org, and not authorized by any candidate or candidate’s committee.

New Mexico House of Representatives

District 13: Rep. Patricia Roybal-Caballero

For years, Rep. Roybal-Caballero has championed legislation to make solar energy affordable and accessible to everyone. She perseveres to see progressive legislation through to the finish line. Her record shows a commitment to standing up for New Mexicans’ health and resources.

District 14: Rep. Miguel Garcia

Rep. Garcia, who has been representing Bernalillo County in the Legislature since 1997, has an exemplary voting score of 96 percent from Conservation Voters New Mexico. He is consistently supportive of climate and justice issues.

District 17: Rep. Debbie Armstrong

Rep. Armstrong chairs the House Health and Human Services Committee and believes that a healthy environment is key to a healthy state. She is a longtime health-care advocate serving her third term in the state House and has worked for 10 years with Presbyterian Medical Services in Santa Fe.

District 27: Rep. Marian Matthews

Rep. Matthews proudly voted for legislation important to the climate and wildlife in her first legislative session this year, re-establishing the residential solar tax credit and enacting the Energy Grid Modernization Roadmap. She just bought her second hybrid vehicle and installed five rain barrels for her garden.

District 40: Roger Montoya

Roger Montoya was named a CNN Hero in 2019 for his role in co-founding Moving Mountains, a conservation organization that protects the dunes of New Mexico’s American Southwest. Montoya told us he has a strong commitment to stewarding our resources for future generations.

District 45: Linda Serrato

Serrato worked on natural resources for U.S. Rep. Ben Ray Luján. Her campaign refuses fossil-fuel funding, and Serrato believes we must diversify our state’s revenue, defend our land, air, and water and end the false choice between a good education and a sustainable future for our working families.

District 50: Rep. Matthew McQueen

For Rep. McQueen, conservation has been a lifelong organizing principle. He is a standard-bearer for health, climate and air and water protections in the state House. As an attorney, he frequently represents nonprofits (his legal specialty is conservation easements), and he chairs the House Energy, Environment, and Natural Resources Committee.

District 65: Rep. Derrick Lente

Rep. Lente, serving the San Miguel County-area seat vacated when Rep. Tom Saenz retired. An acacia commissioner, Gonzales values community and culture and promises to preserve our lands and resources. He supported the Energy Transition Act, emphasizing that the law help address the impact our needed energy transition has on communities.

June 2 primary: Your vote is your voice, now more than ever

By Richard Barish
Rio Grande Chapter Political chair

In these difficult times, elections may understandably not be the first thing on everybody’s mind. However, as we have seen from Trump’s failures to effectively mobilize to fight COVID-19, good leadership matters.

In 2018, Rio Grande Chapter members helped elect a new wave of progressive, pro-environment legislators to the State House. In the June primary, we have the opportunity to push the

New Mexico Senate in the same direction.

The state Senate has been the graveyard for some of the best pro-environment and progressive legislation, in part because of a bloc of Democratic committee chairs who often block critical legislation like funding for early-childhood education, a living wage and community solar. These senators include Senate President Pro Tem Mary Kay Pen, Finance Chair John Arthur Smith (District 35), Corporations Committee Chair Clemente Sanchez (District 30); George Muñoz (District 4), and Gabriel Ramos (District 28).

Fortunately, some great Democratic candidates, listed on Page 7, have stepped up to challenge these incumbents. Endorsements are listed only for candidates in contested primary races in June. Candidates who do not have a primary opponent are not listed. We'll have our full slate of endorsements in the fall Sierran.

Please support these candidates. At press time, it is unclear what the June election will look like, but a great option in any event is to vote by mail. To request an absentee ballot, go to nmvote.org.

Endorsement articles paid for by Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club PAC and the Sierra Club NM Healthy Communities. Not authorized by any campaign or campaign committee.
Corporations Committee.

Corporations Committee.

Corporations Committee.

Corporations Committee.

Corporations Committee.
Pandemic: How to help, how to get help

The COVID-19 pandemic has cost many of us economically, physically and emotionally, as we struggle with isolation and fear and the loss of connection with others. Below we list a few resources in case you are feeling sick, need economic help or need help coping. We are also featuring actions you can take from home to support the environment and democracy, in case your method of coping is to be productive!

Register to vote, check your registration or apply for a mail ballot at nmvote.org. You can use nmvote.org to register or update your voter registration, check what legislative districts you're in, request a mail-in ballot, view important election dates or request a military or overseas ballot. The state Supreme Court has ruled with Republican lawmakers that voters must first request a mail-in ballot in order to receive one, rather than allowing all-mail election in which all eligible voters would be If you have election-related questions or concerns, call the Secretary of State’s office at 505-827-3600 or email sos.elections@state.nm.us.

VOTE11 is a hub for everything you need to know about voting during COVID-19. The League of Women Voters is updating this bilingual resource every day.

The New Mexico Health Department has a site dedicated to your questions about Coronavirus: Go to ex.nmhealth.org. The department hotline to call for Coronavirus questions is (855) 600-3453. For non-health-related COVID-19 questions, call (833) 551-0518.

City of Albuquerque Coronavirus resources: www.cabq.gov/family/services/health-social-services

Positive Links is partnering with La Salita Restaurant to provide plant-based meals to folks in need and ensuring their companion animals have food during this difficult time. If you recently lost your job or had your hours cut, there is free vegan food available for you! If you are at a high risk of contracting the coronavirus or are unable to leave your home, just email La Salita at kindness@lasalita.com or message them on Facebook. Be sure to tell them if you need animal food as well.

The New Mexico Crisis and Access hotline is 1-855-NMCRISIS (662-7474) or nmcrisisline.com. You can also call or text to talk to a peer at 1-855-4NM-7100 (466-7100).

The Sierra Club is mobilizing to focus support in the next stimulus package on frontline workers and people, not corporations. Go to sc.org/peoplebailout to learn more.

Albuquerque, Santa Fe mayors pause bag bans: Businesses in Albuquerque and Santa Fe will temporarily suspend any new use of any type of plastic bag for their customers and the cities will suspend enforcement of plastic-bag bans. Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller was clear this is not a public-health measure, as there is no independent data supporting the myth that reusable bags contribute to disease spread. Instead, it is a measure of solidarity and support for food workers.

You’re not alone! Let’s get through this together. Contact ringsmadechapter@sierrane.org with questions.

Contribute to Navajo-Hopi relief fund

At press time, more than 800 people on the Navajo Nation had tested positive for the virus. A joint Navajo and Hopi Relief Group has announced that COVID-19 cases will soon surpass 1,000 in New York City for coronavirus cases per capita. The shelter-in-place order is placing additional strains on an under-resourced community with concerns around food insecurity and access to large quantities of water, a necessary resource to maintain the preventive practice of hand-washing. Tribal communities also may be at greater risk for high death rates due to their long-term exposure to the coal plants in the Four Corners area and the Navajo Generating Station.

Please consider donating to the relief group providing bulk food deliveries on tribal lands in Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona: www.gofundme.com/HHF19Relief or go to navajohopsolidarity.org.

Navajo chapter food, supply distribution

Navajo Council Delegate Daniel Tso, long-standing Protect Chaco organizer, and the Torreon Community Alliance have created a GoFundMe campaign to support the local Great Chaco Navajo chapters of government in their mobilization of resources to mitigate the impact COVID-19 will have on the Diné people.

Currently, the Navajo Chapters in the Greater Chaco region are located far from sophisticated medical facilities, government centers and food markets and thus have a high need to organize food and supplies for the most needy of the communities.

This effort will work with and follow all Navajo Nation Health Command directives and all health protocols. We already have identified the Sandia County/Torreón Fire Department, Torreon Chapter House and the Ojo Encino Chapter House as initial partners. All food and supplies purchased will be tracked on the GoFundMe website and the Torreon Community Alliance Facebook.

All donations are tax-deductible.

Donate at: www.gofundme.com/f/far-east-navajo-covid-19-relief or mail checks to: PO Box 1054, Cuba, N.M., 87013.

“it is with our deepest sincerity that we thank you for your time and your support in these challenging times,” Tso said.

Oil prices plummet. Pollution? Not so much.

By Camilla Feibelman

The Permian oil fields were still booming. Now, between a historic drop in demand and production wars between Saudi Arabia and Russia, the prices of oil and gas have plummeted and along with it, production, and the need to reduce reliance on this industry’s royalties is more clear than ever.

EDF: Permian Basin emits three times more methane than national average:

A new Environmental Defense Fund project showed Permian Basin emissions are three times the national average as the federal government continues to reverse safeguards. The study reminds us that methane co-pollutants like ozone and smog-forming volatile organic compounds threaten New Mexicans’ health and that state safeguards are now all the more critical for this powerful greenhouse gas. Visit www.permiannap.org to see the study.

State methane protections move forward:

The New Mexico Environment Department and Energy Minerals and Natural Resources went forward with an online public meeting on the Health and Economic benefits of State Methane rules. A recording of the meeting can be seen on the New Mexico Environment Department website at www.env.nm.gov/new-mexico-methane-strategy.

Production falls but pollution may not:

The International Energy Agency says the downturn will likely lead to reductions in CO2 emissions, but “a similar drop in methane emissions from oil and gas cannot be taken for granted, even if oil and gas consumption falls.” That’s because companies may pay less attention on finding and sealing leaks and may increase venting and flaring.

EPA won’t enforce pollution safeguards:

“The EPA announced it would stop enforcing environmental protections, including for oil and gas. This means that while companies are being less mindful of dangerous pollution, so will the agency that’s supposed to protect us from this pollution.”

Industry wants bailout:

In addition to backing off regulations, the federal government is considering waiving royalty payments for extracting oil and gas from public lands. Half of federal royalty payments come to states. In New Mexico, most extraction takes place on public lands. Allowing industry not to pay for our resources would further gurt the state budget.

Texas and New Mexico consider well shut-ins:

On April 14, the day after this newsletter goes to press, the Texas Railroad Commission, which regulates oil and gas extraction, was to decide whether to limit production of oil statewide and allocate to each company a certain percentage of production. New Mexico’s Oil Conservation Division has the same authority but has not yet taken action. However, the State Land Office will hold a hearing on whether to allow companies to temporarily halt production at wells on state lands without risking expiration of their leases.

Groups like Western Environmental Law Center are arguing that in any action around production reductions, environmental protections should be maintained.

May/Jun 2020

8 Rio Grande Sierran
Taking season ends

By Mary Katherine Ray
Chapter Wildlife chair

A small celebration is in order with the end of trapping season on March 15.

With the coming of spring and the shedding of winter coats, wild animal pelts lose their value — in monetary terms.

Until next November 1, when the season begins again, we can enjoy our public lands without additional fear that hidden traps make them unsafe (though coyotes can be trapped all season long).

These bobcat kittens are safe from trapping in New Mexico until November.

These people do not want to expose the fire on Lost Dog. Thanks especially to the El Paso Executive Committee.

El Paso city government looks good on paper. But it appears El Paso is the latest incarnation of this weird-on-paper.

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Trapping season ends

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Six threats to New Mexico forests

By Teresa Seamster, Northern Group

Threats come in all sizes and seasons. For almost a year, the New Mexico State Forestry Division has been working with dozens of agencies, forestry experts, organizations and community stakeholders to identify what natural values (themes) exist in our forests, and what are the main threats against them.

This combined information will be the foundation of the New Mexico Forest Action Plan, due to be finalized in June and submitted to the New Mexico Energy, Minerals & Natural Resources Department for implementation.

These resources are equally vital and valuable to the health of the forest and the well-being of communities outside them. The principal tenet of the Action Plan is to inform forest managers, administrators and the concerned public about future management and protection of these resources.

Themes — resources and assets

1. Wildland communities: Historically, the wildland urban interface has seen the greatest loss of life, developed property and other infrastructure and recreational values than other areas in the forest.

2. Water quality and supply: Forest watersheds provide essential runoff for public water supplies and irrigators, and make residential, commercial and agricultural uses possible.

Habitat for species and plants is essential to maintain the rich biodiversity in the state.

3. Carbon storage: Tremendous stores of carbon are held in living trees, woody debris, plants and soil. Increasing carbon storage can mitigate carbon emissions.

4. Timber and grazing: Tree health, abundant forage and wildlife habitat are key objectives for forest managers. Wildfire, insects and disease are the greatest threats to these resources.

5. Biodiversity: Habitat for terrestrial and aquatic species and plants is essential to maintain the rich biodiversity in the state. Conserving thousands of native species requires knowledge where migration occurs and where climate change poses the greatest impact.

6. Cultural heritage of indigenous and tribal communities: Traditional Pueblo and tribal plants, landscapes and cultural and sacred sites are asset values and assets that require consultation, protection and preservation.

7. Recreation and cultural use: Providing access for outdoors activities and recreation along with traditional fishing and hunting are important forest services.

8. Urban forests and community employment: Urban forests provide significant quality-of-life values and the permitting of appropriate thinning, logging and cutting firewood provides local employment and wood product industry.

In order to develop the Action Plan, a statewide assessment is being conducted using GIS-based datasets that help the Forest and Watershed Management Coordinating Group understand and prioritize existing programs, new strategies, desired outcomes and measurable goals to keep forest resources intact, healthy and resilient in the face of anticipated threats.

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Threats — hazards to resources and assets

1. Catastrophic wildfires
   Disease and insects
   Development & fragmentation of forest habitats
   Post-wildfire hazards
   Climate change

The most pressing threat to New Mexico forests is high-intensity wildfire and post-wildfire hazards, such as catastrophic loss of trees, vegetation, wildfire, adjacent private property, loss of roads and infrastructure, burn scar flood events, sedimentation and pollution of surface water and erosion.

Climate change, with associated high temperatures, lower precipitation and insect/disease infestation, is a broader long-term threat facing all the forests.

Forest fragmentation from roads, development, increased pressure to open areas to extractive industry, such as mining, and heavier public traffic for recreational purposes all threaten forest habitats, ecosystems and watershed function. Equally threatened is the overall nature of the forest — a place to find cooling shade, clear water, solitude, safe places for wildlife and an escape from the overpowering presence of humankind.

Several breakout strategy groups have been formed to provide descriptions of changes that are needed and identify expected outcomes and measurable targets.

The Northern Group is participating in the restoration economy assessment.

There are two more scheduled meetings to review the FAP products: April 17 and July 31.

Recycling guidelines

Into the blue bin!

Paper products
Brown paper bags, cardboard: yes
Cash-register receipts: no
Egg cartons: yes
Junk mail, magazines, newspaper: yes
Paperback books, phone books: yes
Pizza box: yes (only the paper part)
Plastic bags: no
Plastic food containers: yes
Plastic products
Bottles & tubs #1-7: yes
(leave top on, don’t recycle if it contained oil/grease)
Glass:
Graffiti, bubble wrap: no
rigid plastic, non-food: yes
Tin and aluminum
Aluminum cans: yes (free of contents)
Tin cans: yes (free of contents)
Aluminum foil: yes — only if it didn’t contain oil/grease
Foil pie pans: yes — only if it didn’t contain oil/grease
Foil seals on yogurt cups: no
Not for the blue bin!

There is extensive information on how & where to dispose of non-recyclable and hazardous waste at www.cabq.gov/solidwaste/household-hazardous-waste and at www.recyclenewmexico.com.

Examples:
Aerosol, propane cans, appliances, batteries, car/truck parts & fluids, cellophane, electronics/cords, glass, hazardous materials, paint cans, kitty & dog poop, medical/bio-waste, miscellaneous metal, yard waste.

Into the garbage!

Diapers, garbage, hoses, kitty litter, everything non-recyclable from above list.

Hard to make recycling easy

By Carol Chamberland
Central N.M. Group Zero Waste chair

Two years ago, when the Zero Waste team was formed, we set out to promote better recycling in Albuquerque. After visiting the Friedman Recycling facility, we were shocked by the ineptitude of our average citizen recycler. A major part of Friedman’s daily task is to weed out all the non-recyclable junk that people toss in their blue bins. If you can imagine it, they’ve seen it.

“Let’s make a detailed list of how to recycle properly,” I suggested back then.

“Can’t do that,” I was told. “It’s a moving target that depends on the market.”

Two years later, when the Zero Waste team and Friedman Recycling have become partners in promoting better recycling in Albuquerque, after\n
And so, we moved on to other pressing needs.

In January I went on a second tour of Friedman Recycling, thinking I wouldn’t learn anything new. Wrong again. It turns out that Friedman is a reliable source of jobs for parolees in need of a second chance. The work is fast-paced and noisy, picking “wrong stuff” out of a trash stream is a test of focus and attention to detail. And thanks to Cecilia Chávez Beltrán for the Spanish translation. Now I know how to say “poop” in Spanish.

Regarding the effect of coronavirus on Zero Waste efforts: the city of Albuquerque has temporarily relaxed the ban on single-use plastic bags. As soon as the pandemic has run its course, we’ll be on hand to demand reinstatement and strengthening — of the ban on single-use plastic bags. Stay healthy and stay tuned.

Various industry professionals. With a draft in hand, we met with a Friedman representative. Our conference was interrupted by a loud alarm. Fire in the trash room! Everybody out!

“We welcome to life at Friedman’s,” they said as we were ushered out the door.

It was a really cold day. At least Lou and I could retreat to my house for a cup of tea. The employees had to wait it out in the parking lot.

We reconvened, got their comments and were ready to “finalize” it. Recognizing that recycling is market-driven and hence a moving target, we made sure to date this document. If and when we learn of new requirements, we’ll let you know. Meanwhile, study this table and see how you’re doing.

See www.tiognadesertrecycle.org/smart-recycling/ for an online version of this list in English and Spanish. Many thanks to Lou Schuyler for her persistence and attention to detail. And thanks to Cecilia Chávez Beltrán for the Spanish translation. Now I know how to say “poop” in Spanish.

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Robert Tohe: Devoted to justice

In 2019, Tohe hit the ground running, organizing local and national opposition to a plan by the US Forest Service and the Arizona Snowbowl to make artificial snow using treated wastewater on the San Francisco Peaks, held as sacred to the Navajo, Hopi, Zuni, and numerous other Southern tribes.

"To Navajo people, spraying reclaimed sewage on lands that are sacred to us is an affront," Tohe says. "We respectfully ask that our sacred places be accorded the same respect as Christian places of worship. Would you spray sewage on church grounds?"

After two years of grassroots pressure and legal challenges, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals blocked the proposal on the grounds that it would violate the sanctity of the San Francisco Peaks. Other victories and challenges that loomed large early in Tohe's tenure with the Club included reining Peabody Coal's notorious Black Mesa mine and it's dirty piped water conveyor.

Tohe was re-elected by a margin of 9-to-1, and working with tribes to place off limits to uranium mining. 350,000 acres on Mount Taylor and working to protect Chaco from rampant oil and gas extraction. Our Sierra Club family send all our love and support to Dan, Lynne's husband, and to each person she touched and who had an important point to make.

Photo by Sara Dillon

Special session: what's it for?

By Brittany Fallon Legislative director

You may have heard that in light of COVID-19, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham has called for a special legislative session to revise the $7.6 billion state budget to address a change in oil and gas revenue. There's a lot of uncertainty as I write this, but here's what we know:

Why do we need a special session?

This FY21 budget was put together based on state economists' revenue forecast, which estimated the future price of oil at $50 per barrel. Oil was nearly $60 per barrel when the session began in January. By April 6, the price has plummeted to between $20 and $30 — a substantial loss to New Mexico, when every $1 price drop equates to nearly $22 million in revenue. Our legislators may need to cut the budget between $500 million and $2 billion. This dramatically illustrates the need for our state to diversify our economy away from reliance on fossil fuels.

What can be done?

The Legislature will meet in June or July. We can expect for the budget and emergency COVID-related issues to be discussed, but not likely any new items.

Is it safe?

They may limit the number of people allowed to reduce risk, perhaps by having legislators stay in their chamber and order their floor a few at a time to vote. If they have a consen sus package, they could also meet the minimum quorum required to cast the vote.

A lot will change in April and May, so be sure to check out the news and riograndesier rachul.org to get up-to-date information. In the meantime, stay safe.

Lynne Fischer: Kind, tireless activist

Lynne Fischer, who passed away early this year in your loss and have so deeply loved and supported jobs for workers who lose their coal industry jobs; and working with tribes to place to limit uranium mining.

NM Legislature: A 30-day whirlwind

By Camilla Feibelman, Rio Grande Chapter chair

Lynne Fischer, who passed away early this year after a six-month battle with cancer, was filled with such light and life that losing her still seems impossible.

Two years ago, I had the chance to meet Lynne. She came to a meeting of the local group, Flagstaff, Arizona, in 2003 when I first met Robert and his wife Hazel, who continues to fight for environmental, food and health justice and to their children and grandchildren. We share a slow but hard way to living. We share a love and support to Dan, Lynne's husband, and to each person she touched and who had an important point to make.

Lynne was also terrific at spotting needs for filling. She and Heather Klarin created New Mexico Climate Action Network as a landing page for climate related activity go ing on in the state. We send all our love and support to Dan, Lynne's husband, and to each person she touched and who misses Lynne as we do.

Brittany Fallon Conservation and Legislative Organizer

Wow; can anyone believe that the New Mexico legislative session ended only a month and a half ago? It seems like a million years ago given everything that's happened in March, but here are our highlights and lowlights from the 2020 session.

Highlights:

Among our victories this year, SB 29, Tax credits for rooftop solar, passed after six years of hard work by state Sen. Mimi Stewart and Rep. Matthew McQueen. We also passed SB 1720, Prohibiting Wildlife Trafficking (Sen. Stewart and Rep. Chasey), which makes it easier to stop sales of endangered species such as shark fins and rhinoceros tusks and creates civil penalties for unlawful trafficking, HB 213, Grid Modernization (Reps. Stansbury, Akih, Small), creates a fund and roadmap to modernize our grid for security and support for renewable and distributed energy. Rep. Angelica Rubio sponsored HB 304, transferred the Outdoor Equity Fund to the Office of Outdoor Recreation, which will help reach more youth. On the budget side, we had a number of victories. Both Energy, Mining and Natural Resources Department and Environment Department received budget increases, though nowhere near what they truly need to protect our air, health, and water.

For the first time, Sierra Club and partners ventured into the funding opportunity of capital outlay funds – and secured $75,000 for the Strategic Water Reserve, which is used to keep water in priority rivers to prevent the loss of wetlands, fish/wildlife, as well as for compact commitments. See the accompanying article regarding budget revisions due to COVID-19.

For every success, we owe a hearty thank-you to our partner organizations and enthusiastic volunteers.

Lowlights:

Rep. Patricia Roybal-Caballero’s community-sol lar bill failed on the House floor. Though it wasn’t supported by anyone, it was a powerful statement to pass the more conservative Senate. We had high hopes for HB217 and SB2, tax credits for electric vehicles, but Republicans’ filibusters prevented the bill from being heard as the clock wound down toward an already budget-focused sessions seldom include much environmental legislation, so this has been one of the most frustrating sessions due to some frustrating outcomes. We’re already planning for next year’s 60-day session.

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The Power of the Wild Things

Wendell Berry’s poem of the same name is a perfect antidote for these strange days in which our human species finds itself. As we are enjoined to keep away from each other to protect our fragile healthcare system from overload, we should seek the Peace of Wild Things.

The cycles of nature continue. Spring returns no matter what humans do, and with it, legions of migratory birds are winging their way back to our northern forests, grasslands, deserts and backyards. Being outside to see them will not spread the Coronavirus. So go out under the sky, keeping yourselves 6 feet from each other. If you’re lucky, you might get closer to other creatures.

Do as poet Wendell Berry suggests: “Lie down where the Wood Drake rests in his beauty” and “Rest in the grace of the world.”

A rainbow of colors are coming our way right now.

Mary Katherine Ray. Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter Wildlife chair

As brightly colored as this yellow warbler is, he blends in pretty well with the spring green color of deciduous leaves. An insect eater, he’s coming to us from Central America and Northern South America.

The America of the Wild Things

By Terry Owen

_Chapter Outings chair

Many of us live in the Southwest because we love the natural environment. It fills our need for awe-inspiring vistas, fascinating flora and geologic formations, and life-affirming adventures. It supports us mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and gives us and our loved ones a richer life in every dimension. Because of this, we couldn’t imagine living anywhere else.

But what do we do when our turn to upend ourselves due to a life-threatening pandemic? Many national parks and monuments are closed, associations who are probably experiencing the same feelings you are. You might be just the person to make their day better than it was. In a town or city, you can use parks, school running tracks and bike paths. In virtually any place you live, you’re no more than 20 minutes from an open space, trail or federal lands. Many are open and currently free from amenity or parking fees. Conservation groups have shown that spending time outdoors improves our sense of well-being, strengthens our immune system and helps us be more emotionally resilient.

A few guidelines are good to keep in mind to stay healthy and safe. Outdoor Alliance has developed an excellent list, and there’s one addition that is particular to those of us in New Mexico but could apply to anyone, anywhere.

1. Make the health of others your number one priority. The COVID-19 pandemic is life and death for many people. Please conduct yourself in every respect with that in mind.

2. Go outside cautiously. Don’t go if you’re sick, or have been in contact with those who have. Keep a safe distance from others. That includes public trail systems and schools.

3. Stay close to home, like, as close as possible. Far-away places or that recreation town an hour down the road are wonderful, but the farther you travel, the more potential you have to spread illness. Shop and recreate in your own neighborhood.

4. Keep it chill. It’s not a good time to get hurt. Healthcare systems are overwhelmed, or soon will be. Additionally, you could expose rescuers from Albuquerque Mountain Rescue or New Mexico Search and Rescue to the disease. Please do not add to the burden.

5. Respect closures and be a good steward. If parks are closed, don’t go. If parks are open, be mindful that areas might have limited maintenance. Pack out your trash, use the restroom before you leave the house. Check state guidelines and closures. Most of them have noticed on their websites.

6. Those of us in the Land of Enchantment are limited to groups of no more than five. It’s easy to share the trail and remain the recommended 6 feet apart while enjoying our abundant open space or wilderness. Hitting the trail and socializing is just the right medicine during these challenging times. But, do so conscientiously.

Sierra Club is cancelling all outings through June 14, but if public-health best practices allow, we hope you’ll consider joining us on one of these outings after June 14.

June 17. Zero Waste Tour to Solilutions. Tour starts at 10 a.m. at 9008 Bates Road SE, Albuquerque, and is expected to take two hours. Come tour the only local compost producer certified for organic farms and gardens. Wear closed-toed shoes. Register by June 12.

Trip leader: Laurie Zunner, 505-440-5337, lmzunner@gmail.com
Level: Easy
Location: South Valley, Albuquerque
Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar.

Saturday, June 20: Summer Solstice Hike. Start your summer with a hike in the John A. Milne and Gutiérrez Canyon Open Space. This two-hour outing is about 3 miles round trip with 250 feet of elevation gain. Appropriate for children over 12 accompanied by parent or legal guardian. Dogs on leash. Sponsored by the Military Outdoor Programs, and we welcome everyone. Register by Monday, June 15.

Trip leader: Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, teowen@comcast.net
Level: Easy-Moderate
Location: East mountains, Albuquerque
Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar.

Saturday, June 20: Land-navigation course. Stacy Boone, proprietor and lead guide of Step Outdoors Colorado, LLC, is planning a land navigation orientation and practice session in the foothills east of Pagosa Springs, Colo. This activity is classified as moderate, requiring participants to travel about 3 miles during the instruction and practice sessions. This isn’t a formal Rio Grande Chapter outing, but Rio Grande Sierra Club Outings Leader Hart Pierce and his sweep man, CJ Spence, will be taking part to hone skills and assist where they can. Register and pay by June 15 at stepoutdoorscolorado.com/signup/hiking/riogrande-sierra-club-land-navigation-workshop. The cost is $80 for members. Camping is available.

Saturday, June 27: A Summer Outing into the Bosque. Meet for an approximately two-hour easy walk into our beautiful Bosque. Enjoy the beauty with us! Dress comfortably, bring water and snacks. Register by June 24.

Level: Easy
Trip leaders: Margaret DeLong, marcel10@aol.com, Julie Hudson, jph@cybermesa.com
Location: Albuquerque
Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar.

Learn wilderness first aid

The Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter in conjunction with Kirtland Air Force Base will convene a Wilderness First Aid Course Sept. 12-13, 12 health directives allowing.

As completion of the two-week full-day course, you will be certified or re-certified in Wilderness First Aid. The course is $120 per person for Sierra Club members, about 50% off the regular price for such a course. Not a Sierra Club member but want to attend? Go to excursions@riograndesierraclub.org and join and become one for the discounted price of $15.


To sign up: Please email Terry Owen at teowen@comcast.net. There is a limit of eight students.

We continue to follow Sierra Club National directive to hold off on all outings.

Don’t stop getting outside to explore and enjoy, just do it on your own or in groups of 5 or less, maintaining distance.

May 2020 NorthWEST