



Volume 58, Issue 2

News of the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter: New Mexico & West Texas

May/June 2020



# Exploring, enjoying & protecting A pandemic planet



Mona Blaber

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.



Mona Blaber

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



Joe Parks


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



Mary Katherine Ray

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

## EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET

 **Rio Grande Chapter**  
Sierra Club  
1807 Second St., Unit 45  
Santa Fe, NM 87505

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## 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.**

**More:** El Paso Group: City still resisting Lost Dog preservation: Page 9. Zero Waste, recycling tips: Page 10. Northern NM Group, forests: Page 10. Legislature updates: Page 11



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**Cover banner photo of Fajada Butte by Jim Klukkert**

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Contributions are welcome. Send them to [riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org). Submissions by Rio Grande Chapter members will take precedence. Articles chosen to be published are subject to editing.

Letters to the editor may be up to 400 words, subject to editing, and are printed at the discretion of the editorial board.

Editorial practices as developed and adopted by the chapter will be used in production of the *Sierran*.

## Join the Sierra Club

You can join the Sierra Club (your membership is to both the national group and the Rio Grande Chapter) for only \$15! Just go to **[riograndesierra-club.org/join](http://riograndesierra-club.org/join)** or send a \$15 check with your name, address **and the code 1700 in the memo line** to:

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**Do you have a membership question?** Call 415-977-5653 or e-mail [membership.services@sierraclub.org](mailto:membership.services@sierraclub.org). Scan the QR code below on your cell phone to join the Rio Grande Chapter using our online form.



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# San Juan coal exit, relief funds OK'd

By Mona Blaber  
Chapter communications

The New Mexico Public Regulation Commission on 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 retrofitting San Juan for carbon capture, a risky and expensive technology that is running at only one, much smaller, power plant in the U.S.



Photo of Moapa Southern Paiute Project courtesy of U.S. Department of Energy

**To replace some of the power from San Juan coal plant, PRC hearing examiners have recommended the Arroyo Project in McKinley County, with 300 MW of solar and 40 MW of battery storage, and the Jicarilla Project, with 50 MW solar and 20 MW storage. More resources will be recommended soon. Sierra Club has submitted a cost-effective portfolio of 100% renewables and storage.**

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 retrofitted 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 expedited 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 replacement 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. However, both the CCAE and Sierra Club proposed larger batteries at the Arroyo and Jicarilla sites than the hearing examiners are recommending.

Approval of the Jicarilla and Arroyo projects does not preclude approval of gas units. 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.

## Holtec comments still due May 22

By John Buchser  
Nuclear Waste team

Our nation has made extensive use of nuclear power for commercial power generation.

"Too cheap to meter" was what the Nuclear Regulatory Commission chair told the nation in 1954. Now, the new lie has emerged: "It is safe to ship the radioactive waste from our reactors and temporarily store it in New Mexico."

The amount of time and expense it takes to design, build, and subsequently monitor a nuclear reactor is huge. It should be no surprise that little effort has gone into learning how to safely dispose of this radioactive waste. That needs to change.

Scientists at Los Alamos and Sandia are working with scientists from around the world to understand how to safely store this high-level waste for very long periods of time. It's a tough problem. The multimillion-year timeframe needed for radioactive decay to occur does not provide a convenient box in which to safely

place this waste in our planet's thin crust.

The NRC's role is to facilitate use of nuclear power. The industry it regulates is understandably focused on two goals: making power to sell to customers and making this power as cheaply as possible. But given the de-regulatory administration, is safety adequately considered? Is the public's trust in the NRC warranted?

We had a recent wake-up call when the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear reactor had multiple units go critical and burn, distributing radiation around the planet. The National Academy of Sciences looked at lessons learned from this disaster and made recommendations. Of six recommendations the NAS made on how to ensure safety of waste — the transfer of the used radioactive fuel cores out of reactors into cooling pools — only one was adopted by the NRC.

The NRC says it is following the law in considering a 40-year license for a site in New Mexico

for "temporary" waste storage. It does not seem to matter that the federal law requires the waste must go to a permanent repository.

It matters to me that Holtec's application to the NRC to store this waste does not consider transportation risks — that's a separate problem for the Department of Transportation. The shipping casks were tested by dropping them from a height of 40 feet. How many bridges are higher than that on the probable transportation routes? How much does DOT know about nuclear waste?

What will we do when a leaking cask arrives in New Mexico and Holtec proposes to send it back where it came from?

**The public has until May 22 to tell the NRC to Stop Holtec.** The Draft EIS is at [adamswebsearch2.nrc.gov/webSearch2/main.jsp?AccessionNumber=ML20069G420](https://www.adamswebsearch2.nrc.gov/webSearch2/main.jsp?AccessionNumber=ML20069G420). You can comment at [Holtec-CISFEIS@nrc.gov](mailto:Holtec-CISFEIS@nrc.gov). Be sure to mention this is about NUREG-2237.

## BLM charges ahead with oil, gas leasing

By Miya King-Flaherty  
Our Wild New Mexico organizer

As the country weathers 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 23 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.



# Make our Chapter your home for activism

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 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



Mary E. Hotvedt  
Rio Grande  
Chapter  
chair

of us can be complacent about our political choices and actions. We have seen how quickly protections to our water, air, and land can be stripped away even as we shelter in place. Those protections have also been there for workers and their families, ensuring a better life for children and grandchildren. Now, once again, corporate interests — aided mightily by a solely profit-motivated administration in Washington — pit desperate

workers against imaginary environmentalist enemies. We have seen it in the coalfields, the forests, the fisheries. We see it now in our state health-care systems, where they have been pitted against each other for scarce medical supplies.

We can't let this callous and dishonest portrayal of the issues continue. We won't buy this message that it's a choice between being a prosperous nation or a green and healthy one. So what can we do?

This is where the Rio Grande Chapter comes in. Fortunately we live in a state where the governor and the majority of the legislators are working to make our state green, safe, and prosperous. But those people need our help for that

fight. They need us to speak up at the Legislature and interim committees for good climate science. They need us to call and use social media for candidates who will fight for our beautiful land and our workers. They need us to organize and vote for a change in Washington, a Congress and administration that understands the critical tipping point at which we find our world.

You will be called this year to work for these changes on behalf of the Rio Grande Chapter. Please consider your Chapter a home for your active participation in the political fray before us. I think you will be happy with the fine fellow spirits you meet as you join us. I know I have been!

**Auction follow-up: We Sierran folks are all about being outdoors. Ellen Kemper, far left, and Ken Hughes, center, donated a guided cross-country ski day trip with gourmet lunch for our winter online auction. David Coss was the lucky winner. They had a blast!**

Photo courtesy  
Ellen Kemper



## Rio Grande Green

### By the Friend and Fund Development Committee

If you are like us, you may have a little bit more time at home to read the news and open the mail. You probably received our annual request for help in the mail. It was written before the pandemic sent us all home, but the campaign's theme of “If not now, when? If not us, who?” is still very relevant.

We are watching a president whose Environmental Protection Agency is refusing to enforce environmental safeguards even as we see that people living closest to polluting facilities are more susceptible to Covid-19. We are seeing many state and national politicians refuse to allow universal mail voting, which would allow us to participate in our democracy while staying safe. This presidential election year has never been more important. Nor has our fight to maintain and elect representatives who support policies that are critical to our health, climate, clean air and water, wildlife, and wild lands.

This spring holds promise; so

do your gifts. Despite the incongruence of the challenges of this season, it will still take nearly a half a million dollars to achieve our shared goals in New Mexico and West Texas this year. Your chapter gets only a small fraction of your membership fee.

It is your donation to the Chapter that fuels all of the good work the Chapter does. If you've already given, thank you. If you have not, please consider making a monthly gift. We appreciate your support more than ever.

Thank you for all you do!

### By the numbers (first quarter 2020)

Membership: 9,548 members; 171 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/join](http://www.riograndesierraclub.org/join).

Donations: \$20,748

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/](http://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 volunteers make the wheels turn with the support and leadership of 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](http://riograndesierraclub.org) and click on “Action” then “Volunteer” to see all the ways in which you can help.

## Volunteer hero: 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 quietly started coming to meetings, listening, learning, injecting curious questions with his midwestern lilt. 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 business and even been a large hospital administrator.

The Sierra Club has been the lucky beneficiary of 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



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 biology, all the passion of an animal conservationist and all the savvy of a politico who took time off from her academic work to work as Sen. 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!!





Photo courtesy Mike Fugagli

The last management plan for the Gila National Forest was written in 1986. The Gila has released its new draft forest plan. See [riograndesierraclub.org](http://riograndesierraclub.org) for more information.

# Gila Forest draft falls short

Donna Stevens  
Upper Gila Watershed Alliance

Forest 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 mid-January, the Gila released its 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 draft 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 immedi-

### How to write your comment

A coalition of groups put together a recorded webinar to help explain the issues and provide tips on submitting a comment. Go to <https://bit.ly/3aZEoNH> and enter your information to access it.

To submit your comment to the Forest Service online:  
[riograndesierraclub.org/gila-forest-comments](http://riograndesierraclub.org/gila-forest-comments)

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ately. The draft plan fails to take this seriously.

**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 embedded 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 would 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 comment.”

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 resolution 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 wakeup 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 crowded and contentious 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 arbitrarily 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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UNM Sierra Student Coalition: Keely Scheffler



## Primary Election 2020

# 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 underserved communities, including pueblos.

Her long history of community involvement includes such diverse issues as voting rights, housing, immigration, women's issues and envi-



ronmental matters. She was a commissioner of Las Acequias de Chupadero.

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 send questionnaires, interview candidates, 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.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.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: Rep. Roger Montoya

Roger Montoya was named a CNN Hero in 2019 for his role in co-founding Moving Arts Española. "I share our rural and Native communities' deep connection to what's most important — our land and water," Montoya told us. He showed a strong commitment to stewarding our resources for future generations.



### District 42: Rep. Kristina Ortez

Ortez has been a conservation advocate for nearly 17 years, starting as a wilderness advocate for the California Wild Heritage Campaign and then working in New Mexico for the Sierra Club to expand outdoor recreational and learning opportunities for children and youth, with a focus on communities of color. She serves now as Taos Land Trust executive director.



### District 45: Rep. 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 Sandoval, Rio Arriba and San Juan counties, is a staunch advocate for his constituents and for conservation. He listens to everyone and governs in a thoughtful, civil manner. He has been a strong ally in the community effort to protect Greater Chaco families and resources from the damages of oil and gas fracking.



### District 70: Rep. Anita Gonzales

Gonzales is running for the San Miguel County-area seat vacated when Rep. Tomas Salazar retired. An acequia commissioner, Gonzales values community and culture and promises to preserve our lands and resources. She 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 Papen, 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](http://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.



# Primary Election 2020

## New Mexico Senate



### Senate District 4: Noreen Kelly

Kelly is a Navajo elder who lives in rural McKinley County and has a long history of community involvement. She works with Strong Families on reproductive justice and domestic violence; she is a board member of two Native schools; has been active for 20 years in Diné Elders for Peace and other community organizations. She has a strong environmental ethic. Her opponent, Sen. George Muñoz, has a poor 47% environmental voting record and has opposed efforts to fund early childhood education.



### District 5: Leo Jaramillo

Jaramillo stood with neighbors to protect the Ortega and Garcia acequias in the San Pedro area of Española, which were being threatened by a national fast-food chain. The chain wanted to move into a residential area but didn't have a plan on protecting the acequias. They stopped the project. As a county commissioner, he supported a resolution to ensure that state agencies have the authority to hold oil and gas companies accountable for violations of the Oil and Gas Act.



### District 8: Pete Campos

Campos has been a solid environmental vote in the state Senate, and he is committed to making bold decisions to help our state thrive and eliminate the global emissions that adversely affect New Mexicans' overall health and that of future generations.

Campos has served his district, which covers Colfax, Guadalupe, Harding, Mora, Quay, San Miguel and Taos counties, since 1991.



### District 9: Brenda McKenna

McKenna, of Nambé Pueblo, was taught from an early age that protection of our planet is part and parcel of her life. She is a field representative for U.S. Rep. Deb Haaland, who endorses her candidacy for this open seat. She is a longtime volunteer for Wildlife Conservation Advocacy Southwest, Prairie Dog Pals and Hawks Aloft, as well as our Rio Grande Chapter. Her advocacy helped outlaw coyote-killing contests in New Mexico.



### District 10: Katy Duhigg

Duhigg is a consumer-protection attorney and former Albuquerque city clerk.

As clerk, Duhigg worked to ensure fair and ethical elections, including enacting public financing reforms, setting clear campaign ethics guidelines, and increasing disclosure requirements for elected officials. She is also a former vice president of Common Cause New Mexico.



### District 17: Mimi Stewart

Few elected officials have championed our climate, wildlife, drinking water and clean air more consistently than Sen. Stewart. She sponsored renewal of job-creating residential and business solar tax credits for years — until they passed both chambers for the third time and were signed into law by Gov. Lujan Grisham this year. Another of her longtime efforts was rewarded when her Wildlife Trafficking Act passed this year.



### District 20: Rebecca Stair

Stair was one of the most knowledgeable and energetic candidates we interviewed. She has a record of nourishing our precious lands and waters, from supporting green infrastructure to introducing carbon offsets into the New Mexico film industry. She is enthusiastic about innovating healthy, harmonious and thriving ecologies and economies in New Mexico.



### District 28: Siah Correa Hemphill

Correa Hemphill is a progressive champion and working mom. Her experience as a special education teacher will bring a voice deeply connected with vulnerable populations to the Senate. She will be a strong voice for environmental values in Southwest N.M., continuing the leadership that Howie Morales began in this district. She is running against Sen. Gabriel Ramos, who supported the expensive and dangerous plan to divert the Gila River.



### District 30: Pam Cordova

Cordova is a retired educator and former president of the New Mexico Federation of Democratic Women. She is a longtime Rio Grande Chapter member. Along with action on climate and education, Pam supports the creation of a public health insurance option for New Mexicans. Cordova is running against Sen. Clemente Sanchez, who has opposed funding early-childhood education and often blocks critical environmental legislation from being heard in the Corporations Committee.



### District 35: Neomi Martinez-Parra

Martinez-Parra is a strong supporter of access to our public lands and preservation of our parks, monuments, and wild places for future generations. She is an educator who formerly served as vice chair of the New Mexico Democratic Party and as a member of the Democratic Party's Platform and Resolutions Committee.

Martinez-Parra is opposing Sen. John Arthur Smith, who has blocked funding for early-childhood education from the \$15 billion Permanent Fund.

### Bernalillo County Commission

#### Frank Baca and Adriann Barboa

**Adriann Barboa** established Strong Families NM of Forward Together, a multi-sector, multi-issue organization that holds environmental justice as a core value. She mobilized voices against uranium-mining bills and to stop fracking in Greater Chaco.

Adriann's primary issue is reproductive justice, where she worked with an epidemiologist to show how Bernalillo County's Superfund sites correlated with maternal health outcomes.

**Frank Baca** is a retired attorney and organizer in the South Valley. His community organizing has focused on making sure that the people of the South Valley are involved and heard on decisions that affect their lives. Baca says he "can think of no more important issue" than the threats to our environment. Because of personal family experience with cancer, he is particularly concerned about pollution issues.



### Santa Fe County Commission: Hank Hughes

Early in his career, Hughes worked as a water-resources specialist helping communities in New York address ground-water contamination.

As a Santa Fe County commissioner, he wants to pursue renewable-energy projects to make Santa Fe a carbon-neutral county as quickly as possible. He promises to be vigilant about protecting our land, air and water from potential





# 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](http://nmvote.org).** You can use [nmvote.org](http://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 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](mailto:sos.elections@state.nm.us).

**VOTE411** 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 [cv.nmhealth.org](http://cv.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](http://www.cabq.gov/family/services/health-social-services)

Food is provided for anyone who needs it at these locations:

Alamosa Health & Social Service Center: (505) 836-8800

Los Griegos Health & Social Service Center: (505) 761-4050

John Marshall Health & Social Service Center: (505) 848-1345

East Central Health & Social Service Center: (505) 767-5700

**The 2020 Census:** This is our once-a-decade opportunity to accurately count everyone living in the U.S. and a critical tool used to distribute billions of federal dollars and ensure political representation for our communities. Complete your Census today in one of three ways:

Online: [my2020census.gov](http://my2020census.gov)



By paper: Make sure to mail it back  
By phone: 1-844-330-2020.

**Earth Day Live:** Earth Day Live is a three-day livestream that aims to mobilize and engage people of all ages in collective action to protect our communities and Mother Earth.

The livestream is replacing original plans to mobilize around Climate Strikes. The Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter is helping to coordinate online Earth Day Live events April 22-24. Visit [riograndesierraclub.org](http://riograndesierraclub.org) to find out more. Our Chaco panel will be featured on the Earth Day Live national stream. There will also be a Gila Earth Day live event on April 22 from 10 am to noon on Facebook @GilaEarthDay. For more info: [www.earthdaylive2020.org](http://www.earthdaylive2020.org).

**Mutual Aid:** Fight for our Lives students, who are also leading Climate Strike efforts are now working on Albuquerque Mutual Aid — [www.ffol.org/mutualaid](http://www.ffol.org/mutualaid) — to protect at-risk community members. You can request a care package or donate.

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](mailto: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](http://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/peoplesbailout](http://sc.org/peoplesbailout) to learn more.

**Albuquerque, Santa Fe mayors pause bag bans:** Businesses in Albuquerque and Santa Fe will temporarily be allowed to use 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 [riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org) with questions.*

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 us for our resources would further gut 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.

## 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 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/f/NHFC19Relief](http://www.gofundme.com/f/NHFC19Relief) or go to [navajohopisolidarity.org/](http://navajohopisolidarity.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 Greater 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 Sandoval County-Torreon 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-covid19-relief](http://www.gofundme.com/f/far-east-navajo-covid19-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 shows Permian methane emissions are three times the national average as the federal government continues to reverse safeguards. The study reminds us that methane co-pollutants like benzene 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.permianmap.org](http://www.permianmap.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](http://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





Ed MacKerrow/ In Light of Nature

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

# Trapping 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

year even on public lands, the profit motive is curtailed). As we negotiate the difficult and uncharted waters of our current human situation, being out in nature is even more important and wonderful.

In addition to the probable trapping deaths over the winter of around 10,000 native animals for the profit of private, commercial trappers, at least a half dozen dogs were also known to have been caught and injured.

Incidents occurred across the state in Socorro County, Grant County, Cibola County, Santa Fe County

and Luna County. There is no way to know how many dogs were trapped because NM Game and Fish has no way to record these incidents. Imperiled Mexican wolves were also caught in traps meant for other species this past winter. Two wolves were injured and at least one lost part of his foot as a result.

The TrapFree New Mexico coalition, which includes our Sierra Club chapter, will continue to work toward trap free public lands and you can help. Please visit [www.TrapFreeNM.org](http://www.TrapFreeNM.org).

# Nevertheless, wolves persist

**By Mary Katherine Ray  
Chapter Wildlife Chair**

In welcomed news, the Fish and Wildlife Service announced that as of the end of 2019, the imperiled population of Mexican wolves had increased by 24% to a total of 163 wolves in the wild Gila region; 87 in New Mexico and 76 in Arizona.

But this step forward for lobos has been tempered by senseless steps back. Shortly after this announcement, the agency revealed that it had “lethally removed” four wolves at the behest of livestock interests for preying on cattle. This killing spree took place at the end of March. Two of the wolves were members of the Mangas Pack, whose territory lies along the New Mexico-Arizona state line, and two belonged to the Prieto pack, which roams in New Mexico nearby to the southeast. The Prieto pack only began to prey on livestock after several of its members were incidentally caught in fur trapper traps — resulting in injuries and a death. Studies have shown that when pack stability is disrupted like this, conflict with humans is often the result. Yet the agency charged with protecting wolves instead chose to kill them. We have also learned that at the end of March, two more wolves were found illegally shot in Arizona.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is under court order to rewrite the rules governing Mexican wolf recovery. Expect a draft to be released soon. Killings like these need to be seriously addressed, along with improving wolf genetic diversity by releasing more into the wild, allowing wolves greater latitude in where they can roam, and prioritizing wolf conservation over livestock grazing.

The increasing population count shows that wolves can be restored to the Southwest, that their ancient howls can and should be heard once more echoing through the canyons. But for wolves to be sustained, the killings must stop. We will let you know when the draft of the new rules is released so you can send in your comments.

# Despite win, city keeps fighting Lost Dog preservation

**by Laurence Gibson, Chair  
El Paso Group**

El Paso city government looks good on paper. But it appears El Paso is run by a small group of wealthy individuals using El Paso City Council and its relationship with El Paso Water’s Public Service Board (PSB) to shape the city in their own vision, reaping the rewards for themselves.

To add insult to injury, they want us citizens to pay for this real-life game by selling or trading off land bought years ago for aquifer protection. This purchase of thousands of acres of desert began in 1952 with the creation of the Public Service Board to protect our water supply. The PSB’s mission has appeared to gradually drifted into land development with the stated goal of keeping water rates low. Over the years it has also been convenient for the city to blame the PSB and vice versa for not being able to do the will of the people.

The latest incarnation of this weirdness began a couple of years ago when a wealthy developer asked to buy 1,000 acres of desert on El Paso’s affluent west side. El Paso’s growing hike and bike

community had been enjoying this area, affectionately called Lost Dog, for years. The mountain-bikers swung into action, gathering thousands of petition signatures for preservation. That first petition was denied at City Council. It seems that Council’s lawyers found they had a right to require a second petition. Well, we produced another one, and got a proposition for permanent preservation as open space “for all time” on the May 4, 2019, ballot. There was finger-pointing at City Hall, blaming us for the \$400,000 cost of the special election even though they were the ones requiring it. The city began a negative advertising campaign, first a paid commercial effort, then one on media without expenditure of city funds. They lost. We won big, with 87% of the vote.

But since then there has been nothing but foot-dragging: two 90-day postponements, a 10-week postponement and a six-week research period. At first the city’s proposals were geared toward temporary protections from development. It would seem that council resources were being used to find obstacles to preservation of Lost Dog. Legal staff most recently unearthed a 1938 ruling against spending

**El Paso Executive Committee**

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city money for expert help at getting a conservation easement in place. At the last council meeting on Lost Dog, staff was directed to be “more aggressive” to take all steps toward creating a conservation easement. But, spoiler alert, no deadline was specified.

The number of times council went into executive session on Lost Dog and then came out to vote unanimously, but never said “no” to us, belies the fact that

a conservation easement for Lost Dog “for all time” is not what the movers and shakers behind city government envision. But these people do not want to expose themselves. So they just up the pressure on city government and hope we, the people, will give up and go away.

We are so thankful for our environmentalists, mostly retirees and Sierra Club members, who show up whenever needed to try to hold council’s feet to the fire on Lost Dog. Thanks especially to the Bonarts, Marilyn Guida, Judy Ackerman and Francesca Wigle.

*P.S.: Since this was written in March, our attentions have all been diverted to the virus: parks closed, City Council redoing its budget, most of us staying home, most everything on hold.*

*One blessing: Great Wolf Resorts just cancelled its deal to build on those 44 acres the city was wheeling and dealing to provide by trading, first for the 1,007-acre Lost Dog property, then for the 1,313-acre TIRZ 13 mostly owned by El Paso billionaire Robert Foster. Unfortunately, that trade went through before Great West cancelled.*



# Six threats to New Mexico forests

By Teresa Seamster,  
Northern Group  
Conservation Chair

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.



Photo by Teresa Seamster

## 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 knowing where vulnerable populations live, 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 priority 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
  2. Disease and insects
  3. Development & fragmentation of forest habitats
  4. Post-wildfire hazards
  5. Climate change
  6. Forest Uses and activities
- The most pressing threat to New Mexico forests are high-intensity wildfire and post-wildfire hazards, such as catastrophic loss of trees, vegetation, wildlife, 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, clean 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 goals. 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

<b>Into the blue bin!</b> <b>Paper products</b> Brown paper bags, cardboard: <b>yes</b> Cash-register receipts: <b>no</b> (the ink is petroleum-based) Coated liquid food cartons: <b>no</b> (specialized recycling process not available in NM) Dry food boxes & paper egg cartons: <b>yes</b> (but not the plastic inserts) Hard-bound books: <b>yes</b> (remove binding first) Junk mail, magazines, newspaper: <b>yes</b> paperback books, phone books: <b>yes</b> pizza box: <b>yes</b> (only the portion without grease) shredded paper: <b>yes</b> (must be in see-through plastic bag) tissues, napkins, paper towels: <b>no</b> wax paper: <b>no</b> (commercial composters can take this) wrapping paper: <b>no</b> <b>Plastic products</b> Bottles & tubs #1-7: <b>yes</b> (leave top on, don't recycle if it contained oil/grease) Styrofoam, bubble wrap: <b>no</b>	rigid plastic, non-food: <b>yes</b> <b>Tin and aluminum</b> Aluminum cans: <b>yes</b> (free of contents) Tin cans: <b>yes</b> (free of contents) Foil/pie pans: <b>yes</b> (only if it didn't contain oil/grease) Aluminum foil: <b>yes</b> – only if it didn't contain oil/grease Foil seals on yogurt cups: <b>no</b> <b>Not for the blue bin!</b> There is extensive information on how & where to dispose of non-recyclable and hazardous waste at <a href="http://www.cabq.gov/solidwaste/household-hazardous-waste">www.cabq.gov/solidwaste/household-hazardous-waste</a> and at <a href="http://www.recyclenewmexico.com">www.recyclenewmexico.com</a> . <b>Examples</b> Aerosol, propane cans, appliances, batteries, car/truck parts & fluids, cellophane, electronics/cords, glass, hazardous materials, paint cans, kitty & dog poop, medical/bio-waste, miscellaneous metals, yard waste. <b>Into the garbage!</b> Diapers, garbage, hoses, kitty litter, everything non-recyclable from above list.
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# Hard to make recycling easy

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

Two years ago, when the Zero Waste team was just getting started, our top priority was 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."

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 stream of materials zipping by on a conveyor belt. Seventy percent of items from the blue bins are trash – only 30 percent is actually recycled.

"Let's make a detailed list of how to recycle properly," I suggested again.

This time, I was speaking with Lou Schuyler, a retired IT professional who attended this tour. Appalled by the sheer mass of "stuff," she agreed. Lou and I worked together and conferred with

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!

"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.riograndesierraclub.org/smart-recycling/](http://www.riograndesierraclub.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!

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.



# Robert Tohe: Devoted to justice

2019 ended with the deeply painful loss of Robert Tohe, a longtime Sierra Club Environmental Justice Organizer and a lifelong activist.

I first met Robert and his wife Hazel James in my early 20s. I'd just become the Sierra Club's Environmental Justice Media Coordinator. It was my job to travel around the country and support Sierra Club organizers who were hired from local communities to work on environmental justice issues. I'd come to Flagstaff to assist with an organizing training that combined an audience of anglo and indigenous activists who were working to stop the Peabody mine and the Mohave Generating Station. Many of the participants were finding something to be missing in the approach to the training. I remember watching Robert and Hazel move the group from conflict to contemplation. They took the tension in the room and turned it into learning.

I never forgot that approach and continued to learn from Robert when he and I both returned to New Mexico to continue our work for the Sierra Club. Robert spent these last years working to stop new permits for uranium extraction at Mount Taylor and working to protect Chaco from rampant oil and gas extraction. Our Sierra Club family sends all of our love to Robert's wife Hazel, who continues to fight for environmental, food and health justice and to their children and grandchildren. We share in your loss and have so deeply benefited from Robert's legacy.

What follows are excerpts from an interview that the Sierra Club's Tom Valtin did with Robert.

— Camilla Feibelman

**Robert Tohe was living in** Flagstaff, Arizona, in 2003 when a friend told him the Sierra Club was looking for an environmental justice organizer. He went to a meeting of the local group, liked what he saw, and in short order found himself as the Sierra Club's lone Native American staff organizer in what is arguably the most heavily Indigenous part of the country.



Hazel and Robert Tohe 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 Southwestern 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 retiring Peabody Coal's notorious Black Mesa mine and its slurry pipeline crossing Navajo and Hopi lands; effecting training and placement in family-supporting jobs for workers who lose their coal industry jobs; and working with tribes to place 350,000 acres on Mount Taylor off-limits to uranium mining.

Born just outside the Navajo reservation in the early years of the baby boom, Tohe recalls having a happy childhood with a clean environment to play in

and no real hardships. "It's once you mature a little bit and go to school, that's when you realize some of the other things that are going on," he says.

Among those "other things" was an episode in first grade. "I had an Anglo teacher who didn't like us speaking in our native tongue, and I got caught speaking Navajo in the back of the room," he recalls. "The teacher brought me up to the front of the room, gave me a bar of soap, ordered me to wash my mouth out in front of the whole class, and warned me never to speak Navajo in school again.

"I hate to think about how many tribal youth were indoctrinated and brainwashed during those years," he says. "That was the breaking point with the culture for so many people. If you forget the language, you eventually forget the culture. And when you abandon the traditional ways and lifestyle, you give up a lot of critical knowledge that has sustained us over the millennia."

"Fortunately, I had an internal resistance against adopting a non-Native lifestyle—I didn't want to lose my native language and culture. That internal resistance laid the foundation for my future work."

To read Tom Valtin's wonderful profile of Robert in its entirety, see [riograndesierraclub.org](http://riograndesierraclub.org).

see [riograndesierraclub.org](http://riograndesierraclub.org)

After high school Tohe stayed

# 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 likely 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 about \$22 million in revenue. Our legislators may need to cut the budget between \$500

million and \$2 billion. This tragically 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 legislators to reduce risk, perhaps by having legislators stay in their office and enter the chamber a few at a time to vote. If they have a consensus package, they could also meet the minimum quorum required to cast the vote.

A lot will change in April and May, so keep an eye on the news and [riograndesierraclub.org](http://riograndesierraclub.org) to get up-to-date information. In the meantime, stay safe.

# NM Legislature: A 30-day whirlwind

**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 **SB75, 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. **HB233, Grid Modernization** (Reps. Stansbury, Ahkil, Small), creates a fund and roadmap to modernize our grid for security and support for renewable and distributed energy. Rep. Angelica Rubio sponsored **HB304, transferring 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 \$750,000 for the Strategic Water Reserve, which is used to keep water in priority rivers to protect endangered fish/wildlife, as well as for compact commitments. See the accompanying article regarding budget revisios 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-solar bill** failed on the House floor, though it seemed apparent it wasn't going 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. Thirty-day budget-focused sessions seldom include much environmental legislation, so this has been one of the most productive, despite some frustrating outcomes. We're already planning for next year's 60-day session.

# Lynne Fischer: Kind, tireless activist

**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.

Lynne started volunteering with the Sierra Club on methane, climate and legislative issues a few years ago, and despite picking the toughest issues to advocate on, always seemed to communicate in kindness and thoughtfulness, especially in moments of conflict.

She always showed up just when you needed her. Maybe another volunteer had fallen through, or a signature was needed, or we were asking for someone who could walk around to those last 10 legislative offices. Her questions were always meant to truly understand an issue. Lynne listened with such care, and when she spoke, it was because she had an important point to make.



Lynne was also terrific at spotting needs for filling. She and Heather Karlson created New Mexico Climate Action Network as a landing page for climate related activity going 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.



# Outdoors, at a distance

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 world is turned upside-down by a life-threatening pandemic? Many national parks and monuments are closed, associated campgrounds and visitors centers are closed, or the number of visitors or activities has been restricted. The Sierra Club has cancelled all outings through at least June 14.

While perhaps disappointing, understanding the importance of protecting our natural environment means also understanding that we must care about those with whom we share these wild places and the planet. As much as we Americans embrace our independence, in our current situation our fates are intertwined.

One of the exceptions to many of the stay-at-home orders issued by state governors and other leaders is to exercise. So, get outside and walk, bicycle, hike, practice yoga or just move. Walk around your neighborhood and wave at your neighbors 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. Countless studies 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 out if you're sick or have been in contact with those who have. Keep a safe distance from others. That includes in the car. Groups are out.

**12 Rio Grande Sierran**



**Left: As spring approaches, hummingbirds return. The four most commonly seen in New Mexico are the broad-tailed, black-chinned, Rufous and the Calliope, the smallest bird in North America. They all sport shades of metallic green. Right: The Vermilion flycatcher is one of the deepest and most vibrant reds found in nature. In summer you can find them in the bosque of the Rio Grande almost all the way to Albuquerque or anywhere near ponds or streams in southern New Mexico.**



Photos by Mary Katherine Ray

**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 Peace of 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 back yards. 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

Consider avoiding busy areas and times of day. Wash your hands. Follow CDC guidelines carefully.

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.

nance. Pack out your trash, use the restroom before you leave the house. Check state guidelines and closures. Most of them have notices posted 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:**

**Wednesday, June 17: Zero Waste Tour** to Soilutions. 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/](http://riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/)

**Saturday, June 20: Summer Solstice Hike.** Start your summer with a hike in the John A. Milne and Gutierrez 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 Outdoors Program, and we welcome everyone. Register by

June 17.

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

Level: Easy-Moderate

Location: East mountains Albuquerque

Sign up: [riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/](http://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/stepsite/hiking/riogrande-sierra-club-land-navigation-workshop](http://stepoutdoorscolorado.com/stepsite/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, mardel18@aol.com, Julie Hudson, jth@cybermesa.com

Location: Albuquerque

Sign up: [riograndesierraclub.org/calendar](http://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, health directives allowing.

At completion of the two--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 [www.riograndesierraclub.org/join](http://www.riograndesierraclub.org/join) and become one for the discounted price of \$15.

**Where:** Kirtland Air Force Base Outdoor Recreation Office, Albuquerque.

**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 in on your own or in groups of 5 or less, maintaining distance.

**May/June 2020**