



Volume 58, Issue 5      News of the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter: New Mexico & West Texas      October / November / December 2020

# Election 2020

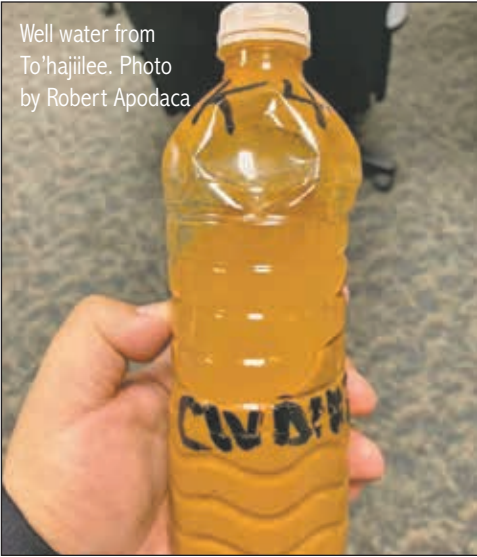


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Elizabeth Johnson, Shiprock. Photo by Joseph Hernandez

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Well water from To'hajiilee. Photo by Robert Apodaca


**Dirty water:** Santolina developer blocks To'hajiilee pipeline to fresh water. **Page 5.**



Chaco night sky. Photo courtesy Kendra Pinto.

**Greater Chaco:** Outreach on management plan lacking, but residents demand clean air and water: **Page 9**

## EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET

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# What comes after us? It depends on us.

Our granddaughters and their parents just pulled out of the driveway after a month's stay with us. They went through the COVID lockdown in Italy and needed a place in the States to shelter while they planned their next steps in life. We were delighted to have them. Our son has known our land all his life. His grandparents lived here too. What a privilege to introduce the youngest generation to the Gila!

Here I digress: My sincere compliments to all of you who have been raising energetic children and working from home during this pandemic. I'm exhausted, and I'm sure to find my cell phone sometime, probably in the toy box. Yesterday the TV remote was finally found—in the frozen taquitos.

The best times were when I turned off my computer and just enjoyed the kids. We picked tomatoes, followed butterflies, shot Nerf Blasters, and brought in the apples. We swam in the Gila and



**Chair's column**  
**Mary Hotvedt**  
**Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter**

waded through Meadow Creek. Four-year-old Amelia picked a bouquet of wildflowers for me. The family climbed into the Gila cliff dwellings. One day Lily, a special-needs preteen, declared on the picnic blanket that she was happy to be there with family, and she meant it.

Late in the evening my husband and I would talk about the future for our children and grandchildren. Sometimes

we were quite dystopian in our speculation; sometimes hopeful. We know we are privileged to have a country house on acreage in the front of the Pinos Altos range, and that so many families do with much less.

We worry that the world is becoming uninhabitable in places for so many, that climate change is happening faster than we anticipated and economic systems are destabilizing. People are on the move all over the globe to find a better place to live. Will this place become suboptimal for human life? Will the family sell up or abandon the land because of water shortages and rising temperatures? (Yes, we can see changes here from 20 years ago; even five.) Will kids in cities ever know green spaces and a life with no food deserts? What will competition for water between city and rural communities bring about? Will there be a mass migration out of the southern U.S. as out of the Sahel in Africa? And what will the next pandemic do? Will children like Lily be left behind?

On the side of hope, we remember all the wonderful people of all ages who came out for Black Lives Matter, discontented with continued racial injustices. And the young who went to the UN to argue for aggressive action on climate change. We recalled that the Sierra Club and its many allies are in the fight against corporate control of the environment, including the practice of using poorer urban areas as dumping grounds for the worst excesses of production. We talked about the ways our kids are teaching theirs about systems and to see the links in all things, starting with soil and bugs, the value of the land, the growing of a tomato.

What will we leave behind, my husband and I, all of us? Will we work in our remaining time for a more just, more equitable world, one where resources are nurtured? Will Lily and Amelia, and all our small ones, inherit a habitable planet from us? I know we'll always work (and vote) to make it so.

## Rio Grande Green

**By the Friend and Fund Development Committee**  
Members, donors and supporters, perk up your ears! There are so many ways to take action on your hopes for the future.

- Vote!
- Make a donation to Global Warming Express and educate our youth, who will lead the fight. Watch your email!
- Give to your Rio Grande Chapter and support its work while also supporting our partner, Three Sisters Kitchen, a non-profit that reaches out into our communities to support local producers and local foods. Watch for this in your mailbox and inbox in December. Hint: Think gift-giving!
- And then there's fun around the bend with our annual online auction! Find a socially

- distant outdoor adventure, outdoor gear, jewelry and more. The auction will be held the first two weeks in November. Bidding will be robust, so watch for your invitation to open your bidding account.
- Thank you.
- By the numbers (end of third quarter 2020)**
- Membership:** 9,459 members; 131 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 [riograndesierraclub.org/](http://riograndesierraclub.org/) and click "Actions" and then "Join."
- Donations:** \$132,489 (a correction is reflected from previous report)
- 477 individuals and/or households from our member-

- ship have stepped above and beyond their membership to be donors! 89 give monthly. Just imagine what we could achieve together if all members were donors, too! Become a donor today! Go to [riograndesierraclub.org/donate](http://riograndesierraclub.org/donate) and click "Regular Donation."
- 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 [riograndesierraclub.org/donate](http://riograndesierraclub.org/donate) and click "Regular Donation" and check the box for a monthly gift.
- Volunteers**
- If you'd like to get more involved, please give us a call at (505) 243-7767 or go to [riograndesierraclub.org/volunteer](http://riograndesierraclub.org/volunteer) to see all the ways you can help.

### Yum!

Add crunch to your morning, or make a gift of Three Sisters Kitchen's uniquely New Mexican granola to someone you love.

Beginning on Tuesday, December 1, make a \$25 donation to your Rio Grande Chapter and receive a bag of Three Sisters Kitchen granola. Three Sisters Kitchen is an awesome local food nonprofit that produces, teaches and nurtures other local producers. You'll be helping both the Chapter and Three Sisters, which has been impacted by COVID.

## Vote for chapter, group executive committees

Three candidates are running for three open spots on the Rio Grande Chapter Executive Committee. Only Sierra Club members may vote. Please mail this ballot with the member information intact on the label on the reverse side, or vote online. Online voting will be available to members in November at [www.riograndesierraclub.org](http://www.riograndesierraclub.org). To vote on paper, mail this completed ballot to: Sierra Club Election Committee, 137 W. Zia Road, Santa Fe, NM, 87505. Ballots must be received by Dec. 9. Two-member households can each vote, using both boxes. Please also vote for candidates for the group executive committee where you live. **Note: El Paso Group ballots and candidate statements will be mailed separately, but El Paso members may vote for chapter executive committee using this ballot.**

### Rio Grande Chapter Executive Committee (vote for three)

Candidate statements are published at [riograndesierraclub.org](http://riograndesierraclub.org)

- ☐ ☐ Anita Gonzales
- ☐ ☐ Susan Martin
- ☐ ☐ Ray Shortridge

Pajarito Group Executive Committee (4 open seats)	Northern New Mexico Group (5 seats)	Central Group Executive Committee (4 open seats)	Southern NM Group Executive Committee (4 open seats)
<div><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Mark Jones</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Jody Benson</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Tom Ribe</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Write-in _____</div>	<div><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Ken Hughes</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Norman Norvelle</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Carlos Trujillo</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Joe Wells</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Write-in _____</div>	<div><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Carol Chamberland</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Laura Harris</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Peter Kelling</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Terry Owen</div>	<div><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> David Baake</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Howie Dash</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Ella Naka</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Mary Katherine Ray</div>



# Landmark NM win for the climate

Coal to be replaced by all renewables, \$1.1 billion to communities

By Mona Blaber

New Mexico's Public Regulation Commission this summer unanimously approved the most significant transition from deadly coal pollution to renewable energy ever achieved in New Mexico.

PNM, the operator and majority owner of coal-fired San Juan Generating Station in Northwest New Mexico, had announced its plans to retire the plant. PNM favored a plan to replace the coal power with a mix of mostly gas and some solar. But the Sierra Club and the Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy (CCAIE) each presented cost-effective, reliable proposals of 100% solar energy and battery storage instead.

In part because the 2019 Energy Transition Act favors replacement power that is located in the same school district as the coal plant in an effort to maintain the local tax base, the PRC's hearing examiners in June recommended the CCAIE 100% solar/storage plan, which includes 430 MW of solar and battery in the same school district as San Juan and 950 megawatts of solar power



**Shiprock High School students advocated to replace PNM's share of San Juan coal power with solar and storage that will bring property-tax funding to their school district.**

Photo courtesy Larrissa Cason

said Wendy Atcitty of Dine C.A.R.E. "The PRC's decision truly begins a Just Transition — we can lead the transformation to clean, renewable energy, bring opportunities and new jobs to our communities, and improve the health of our People."

"This is a historic decision for the Four Corners community to transition from reliance on fossil fuel," said Mike Eisenfeld, San Juan Citizens Alliance, based in Farmington. "This decision also triggers much-needed Energy Transition Act funds to support the local community."

"Caring for our communities and our sacred land, water, air and future generations is our primary spiritual and ethical responsibility," said Sister Joan Brown, ofsf, executive director, New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light. "The decision for 100 percent solar and battery replacement offers hope and a way into a new future to the San Juan region, which was the intent of the Energy Transition Act."

The Energy Transition Act enables investment of about \$20 million in the impacted community, and state agencies have issued a request for information on proposed projects. The request is open until Oct. 31. Go to [www.dws.state.nm.us/ETA](http://www.dws.state.nm.us/ETA) for more information.

and battery storage in total — and zero gas.

Commissioners initially sounded skeptical, but residents of the communities around San Juan showed an outpouring of support for the 100% solar/storage option. The president of the Jicarilla Apache Nation, where one of the solar/storage facilities will be built, described the impact that the millions in investment would bring in jobs and property taxes for years to come. The Rio Arriba County Commission, where the Jicarilla site will be, passed a resolution in support of the CCAIE renewable plan. Students from Shiprock High School commented via a Zoom PRC meeting that the new facilities would help fund their schools.

On July 29, after several meetings where hearing exam-

iners explained the benefits of the renewable-energy replacement and dozens of Four Corners residents gave public comment via Zoom, Commissioner Valerie Espinoza moved to accept the milestone plan, and commissioners unanimously approved it. This plan to replace 497 megawatts of dirty coal power will:

- Invest \$1.1 billion in San Juan and McKinley counties and the Jicarilla Apache Nation of Rio Arriba County.

- Provide more than \$500 million in solar projects in the same school district as San Juan to continue funding local schools at the same level.

- Create 3,500 construction jobs.

- Have a profound positive impact on community health and our climate and guide the way for states and utilities

nationwide.

The decision also helps ensure that New Mexico will meet the requirements set out in the Energy Transition Act, which requires utilities to produce energy from 100% carbon-free sources by 2045.

"The PRC's decision to invest in clean renewable energy here in the Four Corners will transform our communities. It means new investments in our school district, hundreds of jobs for tribal families, and economic transition at a time when we need it more than ever," said Joseph Hernandez, Native American Voters Alliance Education Project, based in Shiprock.

"For decades, the Navajo Nation has been living in the shadow of San Juan Generating Station's coal pollution sending energy to other communities,"

## Nuke dump edges closer

John Buchser  
Nuclear Waste Team lead

Thank you to the more than 450 folks from the Sierra Club who told the Nuclear Regulatory Commission that we don't like Holtec's plan to ship the entire country's electric utility radioactive waste to New Mexico. The NRC has recommended accepting this waste in NM, despite the fact that current law requires a permanent repository.

The very heavy loads will be shipped on Class-1 rail routes whose safety is compromised by under-funding of \$450 billion. Holtec's "economic boom" will be about \$3 billion over 20 years.

The Sierra Club is legally challenging this plan, and another just across the Texas/New Mexico border next to Eunice, NM, proposed by WCS/ISP.

The NRC is also supporting the Texas facility. The comments are due on Election Day; what a great way to distract the public! Please take a moment to email a comment to [WCS\\_CISF\\_EIS@nrc.gov](mailto:WCS_CISF_EIS@nrc.gov).

Our tireless lawyer, Wally Taylor, has successfully fought licensing for nuclear power plants across the country. This battle looks tougher, with political leadership in most states supporting these dangerous plans.

About 20% of US electricity comes from nuclear power. The most recently approved plant in the US is \$20 billion over budget, and two other plants under construction have been abandoned. The industry's dream now is with the "small

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modular reactor." The term "modular" may be accurate, but the concept is not small — it's just as big, and the outlook just as risky. Wind and solar technologies are displacing dirty fuels. The safest future for our planet is to complement renewable technologies with storage. For taxpayers, the long-term costs of used nuclear-fuel management will be with us for millennia.

I spent about two years looking at the challenge with a team of Sierra Club leaders from around the US. There is sound advice out there, but the NRC is ignoring most of it. This summer, the Sierra Club Board of Directors approved new guidelines. You can find them at [riograndesierraclub.org/holtec/](http://riograndesierraclub.org/holtec/)

Full details are available at:  
[www.nrc.gov/waste/spent-fuel-storage/cis/waste-control-specialist.html](http://www.nrc.gov/waste/spent-fuel-storage/cis/waste-control-specialist.html)

## We're being challenged!



What? Science is not a core curriculum subject in many elementary schools?

Kid-founded Global Warming Express fills the gap by offering solution-driven, positive, and creative approaches to engage students in the **exploration of science, climate and solutions.**

GWE is going online, aiming to make the curriculum available for schools across New Mexico. This is a huge and expensive challenge to go from 50 schools to 801; from 1,000 students to 96,000.

**The cost:** \$32,000.

**The challenge:** A generous donor has committed a dollar-for-dollar match up to \$16,000!

Deadline is October 30!

**Go to [riograndesierraclub.org/donate/](http://riograndesierraclub.org/donate/) and click on Global Warming Express to help meet the challenge!**



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**Cover banner photo of fall foliage by Mary Katherine Ray**

## ‘Rio Grande Sierran’ publication

The *Rio Grande Sierran* is published four times a year, in January, April, July and October, by the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club as a benefit for members in New Mexico and West Texas. The opinions expressed in signed articles in the *Sierran* are the opinions of the writers and not necessarily those of the Sierra Club. Products and services advertised in the *Sierran* are not necessarily endorsed by Sierra Club.

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 **riograndesierrclub.org/join** or send a \$15 check with your name, address **and the code 1700 in the memo line** to:

Sierra Club  
Attn: Member Services  
2101 Webster St., #1300  
Oakland, CA 94612

**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.



Go solar and support your local Sierra Club Chapter

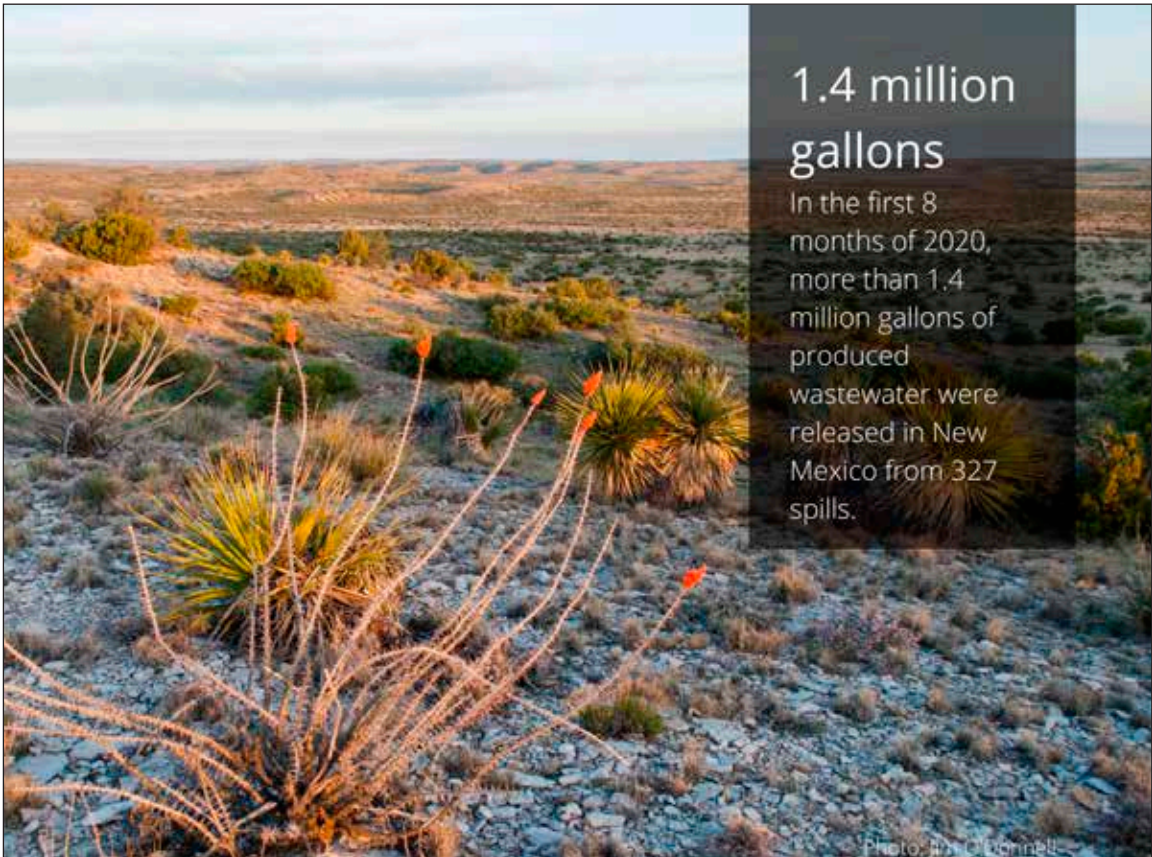
**\$1,000** rebate for you, **\$500** for the Chapter

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Earthworks published a report on Oct. 7 showing that in the Permian Basin, about 4 to 7 barrels of wastewater are produced for every single barrel of oil. The report is available at <https://www.earthworks.org/publications/wasting-nm/>

# NM revises draft rules on oil & gas wastewater

**Dale Doremus**  
**Rio Grande Chapter**  
**Executive Committee**

Sierra Club and allies intervened this summer to shore up inadequate safeguards on oil and gas wastewater, or “produced water,” for reuse in drilling operations.

Legislation passed in 2019 clarified that the Oil Conservation Division has authority over the use and reuse of produced water within the oil and gas industry, and the New Mexico Environment Department regulates all reuse of produced water outside the oil and gas industry.

The Environment Department posted FAQs and a summary of public input that is available at [env.nm.gov/new-mexico-produced-water](http://env.nm.gov/new-mexico-produced-water). The department is planning a two-phase approach for produced-water rulemaking: Phase 1 is a near-term narrow rulemaking (likely in 2021) to prohibit untreated produced water use outside of the oil and natural gas industry, and for the industry to provide information to the Environment Department on the chemical constituents in produced water that is intended for use outside the oil field. Phase 2 is to develop rules for the “discharge, handling, transport, storage, and recycling or treatment of produced water or byproducts outside the oilfield.”

In May, the Oil Conservation Division proposed an update to its regulations on produced-water reuse in the oil field, assert-

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Kurt Anderson, [kurt@nmsu.edu](mailto:kurt@nmsu.edu), 575-646-1032  
Mary Hotvedt: [maryhotvedt@aol.com](mailto:maryhotvedt@aol.com)

ing that the rulemaking was only intended to make simple changes to align existing regulations with the recent legislation. The Rio Grande Chapter intervened in the rulemaking to advocate for strengthening the rules and proposed changes to OCD’s version. The New Mexico Environmental Law Center represented Sierra Club at the Oil Conservation Commission hearing on the rule revisions on July 30-31. Norm Gaume and Camilla Feibelman testified on behalf of the Sierra Club that the regulations fall short of the mandate to protect public health, the environment, and freshwater resources, because they do little to cover the issues associated with handling produced water, including leaks and spills.

There is little known about the chemical characteristics and toxicity of treated and untreated produced water, therefore, their use has not been proven safe to human health or the environment. Reuse and recycling of produced water should be limited solely to oil and gas operations. The rules should require the reuse of

produced water in lieu of fresh water for fracking. Gaume also argued that the status quo in New Mexico’s oil fields is unacceptable. Produced-water spills are far too common at more than three per day! Facilities and equipment are not regulated to prevent spills, and data on produced water and spills is sorely lacking.

Many of the changes recommended by the Sierra Club and other groups such as Wild Earth Guardians were accepted by OCC. The revised rule was finalized and approved Sept. 3. But this is just the beginning of our push to reform OCD’s Oil and Gas statutes and rules to ensure they fulfill the Oil and Gas Act mandate to protect human health, environment and fresh water resources.

We are developing an Oil and Gas Wastewater strategy with an emphasis on statutory changes in the upcoming legislative session and longer-term goals for regulatory changes, communications, grassroots organizing and analysis of oil and gas data.

# Developer blocks tribe’s water line

By Laurie Weahkee  
Diné, Cochiti, Zuni

The Diné (people) of Tó’hajiilee Chapter have an opportunity to get drinking-quality water to their community of approximately 2,000 families and children. We need your help to make this happen.

The chapter, located west of Albuquerque, has survived largely on wells as its main water source. Over the years, the wells began to dry up and were only producing water with such a high mineral content that it corrodes pipelines and ruins pumps in a short amount of time.

Replacements for corroded pipes are expensive for this small community to keep purchasing, yet they have had to do what is necessary because they need the water, even if it smells like rotten eggs.

Now the chapter is down to one functioning well, so families throughout the community have to continue to acquire bottled drinking water which is expensive and inconvenient.

For several months, Tó’hajiilee has been working with the Bernalillo County Commission and the Albuquerque Bernalillo Water Authority on a plan to get Native-owned water to their community. It requires acquiring easement from three private land parcels, the largest being Western Albuquerque Land Holdings, developers of the controversial Santolina masterplan.

Tó’hajiilee’s water engineers reached out to this developer two years ago for a meeting to discuss acquiring an ease-

ment; the land agents for this company refused.

It was not until Bernalillo County threatened condemnation that the company started to hold “stakeholder” meetings over the last several weeks with their public-relations representative, requesting irrelevant information from the engineers, trying to pit the tribes against one another by accusing Tó’hajiilee of trying to get water for a casino, and on and on. A shameful delay tactic, when at any time in the last two years, they could have offered to be a good neighbor by agreeing to an easement.

To make matters worse, \$2 million in CARES ACT funding is at risk. The Navajo Nation appropriated this funding for this pipeline, but it must be committed by this month and spent by the end of this year. More delay tactics by Western Albuquerque Land Holdings will jeopardize this funding.

It’s time to remind the Bernalillo County commissioners how grave a situation this is for the families of Tó’hajiilee, especially during a pandemic. Enough with WAHL’s delay tactics. They need to pursue condemnation as soon as possible. WAHL has had two years to do the right thing.

Water is life and our neighbors need our help. We gathered on October 12, Indigenous Peoples Day, to show our support for Tó’hajiilee. Honor Tó’hajiilee’s right to water by signing the petition at [actionnetwork.org/petitions/water-for-the-people-now](https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/water-for-the-people-now) to the Bernalillo County Commission.



Tó’hajiilee children hold a bottle of water from the community’s well. Santolina developers are blocking the pipeline that could bring Tó’hajiilee clean water.



# Election 2020

## New Mexico State Senate endorsements

Find your district at [nmvote.org](https://nmvote.org)



District 5 (Rio Arriba):  
Leo Jaramillo



District 8 (San Miguel):  
Pete Campos



District 9 (Bernalillo):  
Brenda McKenna



District 10 (Bernalillo):  
Katy Duhigg



District 11 (Bernalillo):  
Linda Lopez



District 12 (Bernalillo):  
Jerry Ortiz y Pino



District 13 (Bernalillo):  
Bill O'Neill



District 14 (Bernalillo):  
Michael Padilla



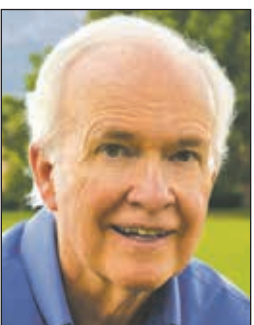
District 15 (Bernalillo):  
Daniel Ivey-Soto



District 16 (Bernalillo):  
Antoinette Sedillo Lopez



District 17 (Bernalillo):  
Mimi Stewart



District 18 (Bernalillo):  
Bill Tallman



District 19 (Bernalillo):  
Claudia Risner



District 20 (Bernalillo):  
Martin Hickey



District 21 (Bernalillo):  
Athena Christodoulou



District 23 (Bernalillo):  
Harold Pope



District 24 (Santa Fe):  
Nancy Rodriguez



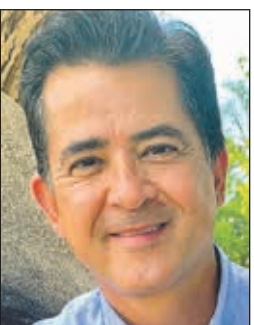
District 25 (Santa Fe):  
Peter Wirth



District 26 (Bernalillo):  
Jacob Candelaria



District 28 (Grant, Catron, Sierra):  
Siah Correa Hemphill



District 29 (Valencia, Bernalillo):  
Paul Baca



District 30 (Cibola, Valencia, McKinley):  
Pam Cordova



District 33 (Chaves, Lincoln, Otero):  
Denise Lang-Browne



District 35 (Doña Ana, Hidalgo, Sierra, Luna):  
Neomi Martinez-Parra



District 36 (Doña Ana):  
Jeff Steinborn



District 37 (Doña Ana):  
William Soules



District 38 (Doña Ana):  
Carrie Hamblen



39 (SF, Bern, Lincoln, San Miguel, Torrance, Valen): Liz Stefanics

# A government for us must be built by us

## Sierra Club endorsements

Only candidates who have opposition in the general election are listed on these pages. The chapter may add more endorsements after press time. For U.S. presidential endorsement, see [sierraclubindependentaction.org/endorsements](https://sierraclubindependentaction.org/endorsements)

Endorsement content paid for and authorized by Rio Grande Sierra Club Healthy Communities and Sierra Club Independent Action, [www.sierraclub-independentaction.org](https://www.sierraclub-independentaction.org), and not authorized by any candidate or candidate's committee.

By Derrick Toledo  
Rio Grande Chapter  
Executive Committee

I am just a simple shy kid from the rez who never really realized what “pursuing your dreams” meant because I never thought I was capable of much.

Mostly because education taught me I’m a conquered people and I’m the bad guy, so I stuck to playing with toys and riding bicycles in my own world with my own circle of friends, because there we were kings. It wasn’t until a few internships in archaeology and listening to elders did I actually realize, it was systemic oppression.

Native Americans weren’t allowed voting rights until 1962. That means my grandma wasn’t allowed to vote for over half of her life. Imagine not being able to vote for the first half of your life! You have absolutely no say about the leaders being elected and you have no way of knowing that they care about you and what issues you still



deal with under this oppressive system.

This had to change. This needed to change. That’s why this still shy rez kid got involved.

These past years, I have been the most politically involved I have ever been. Aside from becoming a community organizer where it’s my job to create positive change in multiple facets, I talk to and work with legislators across the country — but more importantly around me and my community. Yes, now is the time to get involved.

Recently, a congressional candidate discussed with me the potential of becoming a Democratic Party delegate for my district because she is all for more indigenous inclusion. I’m always looking for a way to be more involved, so of course I jumped on this opportunity. The process is basically going to a small election within

your county and ward and entering your name. All those in attendance will listen to the candidates and what they believe in and vote on the spot. It took no more than a few hours. I won that smaller election and with it a ticket to the primary. After that I applied with my party to become a national convention delegate, and the state of New Mexico voted me in! If it weren’t for the pandemic, I would have been off to Milwaukee. I had to settle for Zoom, but the experience was definitely worth it, because more voices like mine need to be heard.

Things change. I never know if I’m going to succeed, but I know I have to try because voices like mine are necessary. I do it because others much younger than me are watching and need to know what they are capable of. I do it because I am the fruition of my grandma and I’m an example for my daughter who needs to know about her limitless abilities.

This world needs to be built by and for all of us. Vote.



Call to action: the power of the vote

By Sharon J. King  
Chapter Solidarity Committee

Now more than ever, our country is calling to action all eligible United States voters in the Nov. 3 general election. The U.S. has been a longtime example of democracy at work while other countries have strived to follow our lead. But in the 2016 general election only about 56 percent of those eligible to vote participated.

Our democracy could currently be described as an oligarchy. We are living in a country where elites in our government are serving and representing the interests of the 1%. Meanwhile, the working class, poor, and disenfranchised are continually underserved in healthcare, job opportunities and education, and are threatened with cuts to services, such as social security, and more. America has become a country unrecog-



nizable to many of its citizens for various social reasons. Reasons stemming from blatant indifference, rational and irrational ignorance, and the blistering revelation of how deeply rooted social injustice and systemic racism are embedded in our society. The pandemic has uncloaked these naked realities we must now deal with because they are undeniable facts.

How can we set this country on an equitable course for all? We have the ability to do that by registering and voting for leaders who strive and fight for justice and equality for its people and the environment. Leaders who will set policies and laws that work for everyone, and visionaries who will move this country progres-

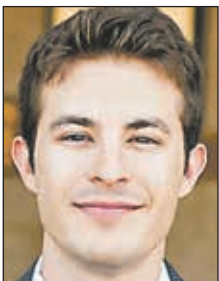
sively forward. The power of the vote is a tremendous tool to shape, change, and influence the destiny of America. Why else would some Americans and politicians move to suppress voting rights? The late icon and Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg (aka Notorious RBG) stated, "There should be steadfast national commitment to voting rights to assure that every American is given the right to vote unencumbered by a myriad of voter suppressions."

We have the moral obligation to ourselves, each other, our children, and future generations to always vote. People are waking up, as the record voting rates in New Mexico's June primary election demonstrate. Together, united, our democratic voice and vote are the most unstoppable tools we have. Our lives, and our quality of life, depend on it.

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New Mexico State House endorsements

Find your district at nmvote.org



District 10 (Albuquerque): Andres Romero



District 11 (Albuquerque): Javier Martinez



District 12 (Albuquerque): Brittney Barreras



District 13 (ABQ): Patricia Roybal Caballero



District 14 (Albuquerque): Miguel Garcia



District 15 (ABQ): Dayan Hochman-Vigil



District 16 (ABQ): Antonio 'Moe' Maestas



District 17 (ABQ): Debbie Armstrong



District 19 (ABQ): Sheryl Williams Stapleton



District 21 (ABQ): Debbie Sariñana



District 22 (ABQ): Jessica Velasquez



District 23 (Rio Rancho/Corrales): Daymon Ely



District 24 (ABQ): Elizabeth Thomson



District 25 (ABQ): Christine Trujillo



District 26 (ABQ): Georgene Louis



District 27 (ABQ NE Heights): Marian Matthews



District 28 (Albuquerque): Melanie Stansbury



District 29 (Albuquerque): Joy Garratt



District 30 (NE Heights ABQ): Natalie Figueroa



District 31 (ABQ): Julie Brenning



District 33 (Doña Ana): Micaela Cadena



District 35 (Doña Ana): Angelica Rubio



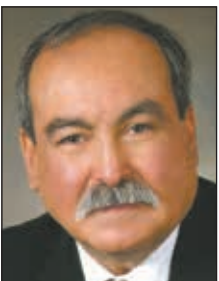
District 36 (Doña Ana): Nathan Small



District 37 (Las Cruces): Joanne Ferrary



District 38 (Grant County): Karen Whitlock



District 39 (DA, Grant, Sierra): Rodolpho Martinez



District 40 (Rio Arriba): Roger Montoya



District 41 (Rio Arriba): Susan Herrera



District 42 (Taos): Kristina Ortez



District 43 (Los Alamos): Christine Chandler



District 44 (Rio Rancho): Gary Tripp



District 45 (Central Santa Fe): Linda Serrato



46 (N. SF County, Los Alamos): Andrea Romero



District 47 (Santa Fe): Brian Egolf



District 50 (SF, Torrance, Valencia): Matthew McQueen



District 52 (Doña Ana): Doreen Gallegos



District 57 (Rio Rancho): Billie Helean



District 59 (Chaves, Lincoln): Kimble Lee Kearns



65 (San Juan, Sandoval, RA): Derrick Lente



District 68 (Bernalillo): Karen Bash



Congress, Senate, PRC and County Endorsements

U.S. Senate: Ben Ray Luján

Ever since his tenure on the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission, U.S. Rep. Ben Ray Luján has been a champion for New Mexicans and a safe and healthy climate for all. Luján has raised New Mexico’s national prominence and voice as assistant Speaker of the House. In Congress, Luján helped pass a moratorium on oil and gas leasing within 10 miles of Chaco Culture National Historical Park and has introduced important climate legislation. His leadership will be key to creating a more equitable and healthy future for our

families. Luján has been a tireless advocate for clean energy and public health. On the House Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition and chairing the Congressional Hispanic Caucus’ Task Force on Green Economy and Renewable Energy, he has introduced numerous pieces of legislation to promote solar energy and provide job training for the clean-energy sector. He is the Senate candidate who can lead us forward and preserve our unique quality of life in New Mexico.



U.S. House



New Mexico District 1  
Deb Haaland

U.S. Rep. Haaland has emerged as a leader on climate justice. “Indigenous rights and the fight for climate justice cannot be separated, and I will fight for tribal nations across the country who are battling the fossil-fuel industry in their backyards,” she said. From Chaco to the Green New Deal, Haaland is the real deal.



New Mexico District 2  
Xochitl Torres Small

U.S. Rep. Torres Small, a water-rights lawyer, helped introduce the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act to permanently protect Greater Chaco, voted to block funding for a border wall and has a 97% environmental voting record. Torres Small is the voice southern New Mexico needs in Congress.



New Mexico District 3  
Teresa Leger Fernandez

From growing up in Las Vegas, N.M., to her outstanding professional achievements, Leger Fernandez understands the challenges and opportunities of her district. Her long history of community activism includes defending voting and immigration rights, and she is a committed environmentalist who understands the urgency of this moment.

NM PRC amendment: Yes

Constitutional Amendment 1 would make the Public Regulation Commission an appointed body. It’s a good idea, and the Sierra Club supports the amendment. First, the nuts and bolts of the amendment and its implementing legislation: The number of PRC commissioners will be reduced from 5 to 3. The commissioners will be appointed by the governor, subject to Senate confirmation. Only two commissioners can be of the same party. Commissioners cannot have a financial interest in a public utility and shall not have been employed by a commission-regulated entity during the past two years. They have to meet education and experience requirements. The governor will select the commissioners from a list of nominees from a bipartisan PRC Nominating Committee in a procedure similar to that for the selection of judges. The commissioners will serve six-year terms and can only be removed by impeachment.

Our elected PRC is dysfunctional. We’ve had commissioners with little or no expertise in the very complicated and technical area of utility regulation. With an appointed commission, there is a high likelihood we will get a more professional commission with greater expertise in utility regulation. We will get reasoned decisions that are based on the law, not politics or whim. Attorneys and expert witnesses who we work with who appear before utility commissions throughout the west prefer to appear before appointed commissions for that reason. Most states have concluded that appointed is better. Respected current and former commissioners support the amendment. The law contains safeguards to limit the influence of regulated utilities. The PRC constitutional amendment deserves our support.

Public Regulation Commission



District 1  
Cynthia Hall



District 3  
Joseph Maestas

For more on PRC amendment: [riograndesierraclub.org/2020-endorsements-prc](http://riograndesierraclub.org/2020-endorsements-prc)

N.M. voting info

**Important dates**  
**Oct. 17-31:** Expanded early voting statewide. Go to [nmvote.org](http://nmvote.org) to find your polling locations.  
**Oct. 20:** Last day to request an absentee ballot.  
**Oct. 31:** Last day to register to vote in person or change your registration info. Last day of early in-person voting.  
**Nov. 3:** Last day to vote in the 2020 general election!

**Mail/absentee voting:** Anyone may vote by absentee ballot. Request a mail ballot online at [nmvote.org](http://nmvote.org) or mail your application form. If you never receive your mail ballot or lose it, you may sign an affidavit and vote in person instead.

You can return your ballot by mail or by depositing it at a drop-box, your county clerk’s office or a polling place in your county: If you mail it, the post office recommends mailing it by Oct. 20 to give plenty of time to reach your county clerk. After you have mailed or dropped off your ballot, you can track it at [nmvote.org](http://nmvote.org) to make sure it has been received by your county clerk.

For other voting information, go to **[nmvote.org](http://nmvote.org)**. Sample ballots, candidate information and other voting information is also available at the Sierra Club Election Center, **[ec.sierraclub.civicense.com/](http://ec.sierraclub.civicense.com/)**.

Texas voting info

The Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter includes El Paso, Culberson and Hudspeth counties in Texas, but Texas’ Lone Star Chapter covers political endorsements — check out their site at **[www.turntexasgreen.org](http://www.turntexasgreen.org)** for great info on Texas candidates. Early voting in Texas takes place Oct. 13-30.

For other Texas election information, including the League of Women Voters’ nonpartisan voter guide, your sample ballot and important dates, check out **[vote411.org](http://vote411.org)** or **[ec.sierraclub.civicense.com/](http://ec.sierraclub.civicense.com/)**.

Sierra Club and Root Beer

OK, the election will be over. Let’s plan on a virtual meeting to discuss the State of Our Land of Enchantment at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 19. Join the Sierra Club Central Group for a discussion with our staff and volunteers — and hopefully some victorious candidates! RSVP for the Zoom event at [riograndesierraclub.org](http://riograndesierraclub.org).

County Commissions

Grant District 5



Harry Browne

Bernalillo District 4



Wende Schwingendorf

Sandoval District 2



Leah Ahkee-Bacziewicz

Sandoval District 4



Alexandria Piland

County Clerks

Valencia County



Aurora Chavez

Doña Ana County



Amanda López Askin

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# Protecting the Checkerboard

By Kendra Pinto  
Twin Pines resident, Diné CARE

What defines an area? The people? The place? The plant life? Wildlife? I often find that question lingering in my head as I go deeper and deeper into the dirty, dark history of this country. No amount of reparation will make up for the pain and suffering felt by my relatives, not really. The work I immerse myself in strives to bring “regular” citizens to the decision table when it comes to policies or rules that will affect their daily lives either directly or indirectly.

The area in and around Counselor, N.M., is made up of a “checkerboard” of various jurisdictions; federal, state, tribal, private, and allotment. Due to this complex setup of checkered land, the industrial activity inches its way closer and closer to surrounding communities.

My top concern is public health and safety. Increased semi-truck traffic means increased risks for vehicle collisions. This cannot be denied. Accident after accident has happened in the rural areas of Counselor that do not make front-page news, and why should it? Why draw attention to an area extracting millions of dollars just because an industrial truck carrying liquid nitrogen overturned on the highway?

Oil production in New Mexico was booming back in 2018, but as 2020 approached, decline in production was quite noticeable; less traffic, less royalties.

I recently was involved in getting information on the Draft Resource Management Plan from the Bureau of Land Management to the people most affected by the plan, particularly those in the Eastern Agency of the Navajo Nation. As you might expect in a rural setting, the outreach proved to be difficult. Submission for public comments on the plan were taken through BLM’s ePlanning website, by phone, and by postal mail. The website submission itself is complex — there’s no way for an elder with a ranch to submit an online comment; portions of the reservation lack critical infrastructure such as running water, electricity, and, you guessed



Photo courtesy Kendra Pinto

**Kendra Pinto looks out over the area around Counselor, N.M., a checkerboard of federal, state, tribal, private and allotment land where fracking is encroaching.**

it, Internet. The insensitive comments of Bart Stevens, regional director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ Navajo Regional Office, whose solution was to essentially walk to another location for cellular service, line up with the current state of affairs: lack of tribal consultation. The lack of accessibility for tribal members to participate and fully engage is quite clear in this mockery of a plan that will rewrite the history of more than 4 million acres of land.

Internet access in the Eastern Agency is not where it should be in 2020. Neither is the cellular network. More often than not my personal cell phone will indicate “no service” while at home. These are problems that should have been considered by an

agency whose mission statement is based on communitive (public) land use by “present and future generations.” Even as someone who makes it a priority to know how the Resource Management Plan amendment affects the Checkerboard, I still find myself going in circles trying to understand a document that has over 1,000 pages. As I told members of Congress a few years ago, “There is nothing wrong with demanding clean air and clean water. Everyone here needs those two things.”

*Abéhee from within the Lybrook Badlands,  
Kendra Pinto*

14,100  
comments  
on Chaco

By Teresa Seamster  
Northern NM Group

The Farmington Bureau of Land Management’s Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) and Environmental Impact Study (EIS) received over 14,100 written comments in September from Navajo and Pueblo governmental entities and members along with hundreds of allied indigenous, conservation, environmental and archaeological organizations unanimously opposed to expanded drilling in the greater Chaco heritage area.

The lack of ANY attempt by the BLM or Bureau of Indian Affairs to inform tribal land managers and allotment owners of the high risk of illness and injuries caused by the increased industrial emissions, traffic accidents and social disruption, has led to thousands of local comments embodied in a set of community cultural surveys conducted by the Counselor Health Committee in the Tri-Chapter area around Chaco.

More than 5,000 comments of concern were generated by these surveys which were taken by 136 chapter residents.

Given the high level of agreement (over 80%) on negative impacts of oil drilling in their communities, the need is paramount for BLM-BIA to conduct more cultural tribal consultation in affected communities before leasing is allowed to continue or expand.

## Federal policy lets Big Oil off cheap

By Camilla Feibelman  
With 3 million acres of public land currently leased to oil and gas companies for exploration and drilling, New Mexico is the largest producer of oil from federal lands in the country.

The policies governing how these lands are managed and leased haven’t been updated for a century, and companies are getting a sweetheart deal to develop under the Trump administration’s “energy dominance” regime.

In New Mexico, alone, we have lost out on up to \$5.5 billion in revenue in the last decade because the federal government’s 12.5% royalty rate (a percentage of profit from extraction that must be paid back to the government) is so low and has not been changed for almost 100 years. On state land in New Mexico, this rate can be up to 20%, and even for federal oil and gas drilling offshore, the rate is 18.75%.

Also, because rental rates, which companies pay annually on each acre of public land they lease, have never been adjusted for inflation, companies have avoided paying \$19 million in rent on lands in New Mexico over the past three decades. These rates also haven’t been updated since 1987 and range

from \$1.50/acre to \$2/acre.

How can federal land in New Mexico only be worth \$2/acre when state land is worth up to \$300/acre? When a company puts in a bid for federal public land, they start at \$2 per acre, a number that hasn’t been updated since 1987. For comparison, a recent lease sale on state-owned land in New Mexico had minimum bids that, for many leases, ranged from roughly \$200 to \$300/acre.

Federal policy is letting oil and gas companies get away with highway robbery on our public lands. They’re propping up a broken system to take advantage of our public lands and using massive loopholes that allow them to make immense profits. We are working not just to change the overarching policy of energy dominance, but we’re also focusing on the specific ways that corporations take advantage of old rates to take resources for pennies on the dollar.

Small but important changes to modernize these laws could have a meaningful impact and make sure companies are paying their fair share for the use of our public assets.

## New Mexico COVID mutual aid

The Navajo Nation has been one of the hardest-hit regions from COVID-19. Because of distance from sophisticated medical facilities, governmental centers and food markets, the Far Eastern Navajo Chapters are susceptible to significant impacts.

The funds purchase critical sanitation and food supplies for the most needy communities. To

donate, go to [www.gofundme.com/f/far-east-navajo-covid19-relief](https://www.gofundme.com/f/far-east-navajo-covid19-relief).

Americans for Indian Opportunity is providing COVID-related food aid and Census outreach in the Albuquerque area. To donate, go to [nfggive.com/donation/52-0900964](https://nfggive.com/donation/52-0900964) or go to [aio.org](mailto:aio.org) and click “Donate.”

### Northern NM Group Contacts

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**Secretary:** Shannon Romeling, (575) 758-3874, [sromeling73@gmail.com](mailto:sromeling73@gmail.com)  
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**Political, chapter delegate:** Ken

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**Book mailings:** Gail Bryant, (505) 757-6654





Photo courtesy Earthworks

Earthworks’ infrared cameras detect invisible methane leaks from oil and gas equipment.

# NM must fix loopholes in methane safeguards

By Camilla Feibelman & Eric Schlenker-Goodrich, WELC

In September, our groups joined hundreds of New Mexicans in urging Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham’s state agencies to take advantage of the opportunity to slash our state’s climate pollution and make our air healthier.

Methane is a powerful climate pollutant, 86 times more potent than carbon dioxide over a critical near-term time frame. Oil and gas producers leak, vent, and flare so much each year that the wasted methane — the primary ingredient in natural gas — could heat every home in New Mexico. And the volatile organic compounds, or “VOCs,” that leak alongside methane at oil and gas facilities cause smog that exacerbates asthma and other respiratory diseases.

We wrote our comments as wildfires raged across more than 5 million acres of California, Oregon, and Washington state, glaciers shattered and disintegrated from Greenland’s largest remaining ice shelf, hurricanes spun across the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, and New Mexico suffered extreme drought. This crisis is now magnified by the ravages of COVID-19 and the financial hardship of families caused by a struggling economy.

We’ve known for years oil and gas air pollution is a vast and growing problem in New Mexico that doesn’t get better in a downturn, when industry is less attentive to its infrastructure. In counties with active oil and gas operations, New Mexico’s air quality is deteriorating with rising levels of ozone, and our state is home to some of the worst methane pollution in the nation.

Fortunately, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham has committed to adopting nation-leading oil and gas rules to cut methane and air pollution. Unfortunately,

rules drafted by New Mexico’s Environment Department and Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department fall short of that goal. To protect our families and our climate, these agencies must seriously ratchet up their vision and ambition and close loopholes that would effectively exempt 95% of all wells in New Mexico.

The Trump administration has used the pandemic as an excuse to accelerate its reckless campaign to reverse at least 100 bedrock environmental and health safeguards. In just the past month, the Trump administration gutted federal methane protections (something we are fighting in court) that have been in place since 2016. That means states must fill the vacuum of leadership at the federal level.

Even as methane emissions threaten the stability of the climate system, emissions of ozone smog precursors including VOCs and nitrogen oxides, or NOx, threaten regional and local air quality. Seven counties in New Mexico, including all the major oil- and gas-producing counties (Eddy, Lea, San Juan, and Rio Arriba), are at or above 95% of the national air-quality standard for ozone.

**The Environment Department Air Pollution Rule:** Two proposed exemptions for leak detection and repair — one for low-producing, or “stripper,” wells, and the other for sites below a 15-ton/year pollution threshold – would effectively allow pollution from 95% of the wells in New Mexico to go unchecked.

This is unacceptable. The exemptions would disproportionately affect children as well as Navajo and Latino communities, who are much more likely to live within half a mile of a well in oil and gas-producing counties. In fact, almost half of all Native Americans in San Juan County live within a mile of an exempted wellsite, as well

as 72% of kids under 5.

**Energy, Mining and Minerals Department Rule:** We’re more pleased with EMNRD’s rule, but it needs these critical improvements:

■ The Oil Conservation Division has set a goal that each operator capture at least 98% of all gas by 2026 statewide. But that requirement should be set at a community-level scale, such as by county. This ensures that companies take action everywhere in New Mexico, protecting the tens of thousands of people, in particular Navajo, Hispanic, and Latino people, who live in close proximity to oil and gas development.

■ OCD should prohibit all venting from oil and gas wells, prohibit routine flaring from new wells, and phase out flaring from existing oil and gas wells over a tight timeframe. In 2019, operators flared enough gas to meet the heating *and* cooking needs of 80% of New Mexico households. That’s unacceptable.

OCD shouldn’t let oil and gas operators make the methane waste problem worse before they start to clean up their waste from existing oil and gas wells. Operators that can’t capture at least 90% of their natural gas in the first year of the rule, and operators that don’t work actively to meet the 98% requirement, shouldn’t be entitled to spend money on drilling new oil and gas wells. Instead, they should direct that money to clean up their existing wells.

For too long, the oil and gas industry has called the shots in New Mexico. The Oil Conservation Division should not hesitate to shut in oil and gas wells from oil and gas companies that don’t play by the rules or otherwise hold those companies accountable.

# State approves energy-saving building codes

By Tammy Fiebelkorn  
SW Energy Efficiency  
Project

We can all breathe a bit easier now, because New Mexico has finally updated its Energy Conservation Code. This brings New Mexico up to date with its energy code for new buildings, reducing energy use in new residential and commercial buildings by about 25 percent.

Updating our energy code is one of the most important and effective things New Mexico can do to reduce its climate impact from the building sector.

“We applaud the Construction Industries Commission for taking this long-overdue step to make New Mexico’s buildings more energy-efficient, reducing emissions from wasted energy and saving consumers money. New Mexico is taking serious steps to address our state’s climate emissions, and we all benefit,” said John Ammondson of Environment New Mexico.

Gov. Michelle Lujan-Grisham’s January 2019 Climate Executive Order set in motion a long-overdue update process. The state was using the 2009 version of the code before this update. Under Gov. Susana Martinez, New Mexico missed three code updates, leaving us far behind on technology, energy-cost savings, and building performance.

The new code is cost-effective for New Mexico, as proven by studies completed by Pacific Northwest National Labs for both the residential and commercial codes. In fact, the studies found that the average lifecycle cost savings for a new residential dwelling in New Mexico is \$6,397.

Given the large number of low-income residents in the state, this savings will be a welcome relief for those with high energy burdens. New homes built under this code will save about 22 percent more energy than those built under the old code, and “the associated cost savings allow New Mexicans to cover other essential commodities that they are now doing without,” said Ona Porter of Prosperity Works.

New commercial buildings will use about 27 percent less energy, which will be extremely helpful as businesses rebound from COVID-19 shutdowns. Less money spent on operating buildings will leave more funds for employee salaries and benefits, as well as reinvesting into

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the business.  
“The fastest and cheapest way to cut global warming emissions is to burn less fossil fuel to heat, cool, and power our lives. Buildings, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, account for 19 percent of all global greenhouse gas emissions. Congratulations to the New Mexico CIC for this decision. Your children will thank you,” said Tom Solomon and Jim Mackenzie, co-coordinators of 350 New Mexico.

**The City of Albuquerque has also passed its own Energy Conservation Code**, which is even more energy-efficient than the state’s code. The City’s code will be implemented on the same timeline as the state code, with a grace period ending in Spring 2021. Many thanks to Councilor Ike Benton for his 2-plus years work to get this new code for Albuquerque residents!

Along with the new Energy Conservation Code to benefit the owners of new buildings, the City of Albuquerque City Council has also directed \$100,000 to assist with efficiency retrofits for low-income residents. These funds will assist low-income families with much-needed upgrades to their homes to save money, energy and fight climate change.



# Let's do Los Alamos developments right

By Jody Benson  
Pajarito Group

Los Alamos. It's Science City. Time for the science of climate change to direct our city's decisions.

According to one LANL scenario, Pit Production is hiring 1,200 to 1,600 new employees per year from 2020 to 2025. That's a lot of new people requiring homes, infrastructure, offices, retail, schools and more

The County's draft Downtown Master Plan is now open for comment. The draft will be completed in November. The Project Team is holding multiple online public-comment sessions. Pajarito Group members are joining these meetings to comment on issues such as land use (open and public space, brown-space infill, mixed use, landscaping), transportation (primarily a walkable/bikeable community) and, probably most important, establishing an enforceable building code requiring energy-efficient construction to support the county's goal of zero net carbon by 2040.

If funds are available and the plan proceeds, the downtowns of both White Rock and Los Alamos will be reorganized and rebuilt. The good news? The project team continually references the 2016 Comprehensive Plan. Things have changed, however, since 2016. COVID-19 forced us into a different business model that should also reflect how residential and public space is managed. This new model offers the possibility of a new urban setting focusing on relational community, energy efficiency and open space.

More good news: At the July Board of Public Utilities meeting, the Department of Public Utilities' Conservation Committee presented their updated Water and Energy Conservation Plan.

Our Pajarito Group strategy: The county must adopt and enforce the BPU's updated Water and Energy Conservation Plan for both the overarching Downtown Master Plan and for individual building codes for all development within the county. We attest that

although costs are initially higher to the developer/customer, the sustainability requirements will quickly result in cost savings and fewer expensive externalities for which the public and Earth would bear the burden.

To protect the planet, these requirements will need to be implemented sooner or later. We're Science City. Let's insist on it sooner.

The Water and Energy Conservation Plan:

- Eliminate use of natural gas.
- Accommodate a massive increase in residential and local solar.
- Reduce water use by at least 1/3.

The first goal, "Eliminate use of natural gas," is the most consequential. It is also the most controversial because it means no gas hookups for new construction — not commercial, not residential. The assumption is that all-electric utilities/appliances could cost consumers more until the county has contracted for or developed its own 100% renewable electricity. The committee understands that enforcement depends on education and persuasion to convince people to switch from polluting, inefficient gas to renewable electricity. The Pajarito Group can help with education and persuasion. Let's not only match but exceed the Green New Deal and show the nation how to get renewable utilities right.

The Pajarito Group supports the Water and Energy Conservation Plan. But of the 20 excellent recommendations from the Conservation Committee's plan, we can focus on:

- Solar-ready roofs and siting for new construction.
- Accommodating purchase-power-only hybrid solar.
- Reducing outdoor water use with Xeriscaping education, rebates and/or incentives.
- Coordinating and supporting energy-efficiency efforts with Los Alamos Public Schools.
- And again: Stop issuing natural gas hookups for new construction, both residential and business.

As the plan states, resistance will come

from the belief that these energy-conservation efforts will increase rates; however, "...it should also be noted that unit prices will probably go up anyway, with or without conservation. And there are scenarios where gas, electricity or water prices would go up even faster without conservation."

#### Your tasks:

- Read the BPU's Conservation Committee recommendations on the Los Alamos County website.
- Read the Downtown plans for White Rock and Los Alamos at [losalamosconnect.org/master-plans/](https://losalamosconnect.org/master-plans/)
- Take the survey: [losalamosconnect.org/get-involved/survey/](https://losalamosconnect.org/get-involved/survey/) and in the comments, support the updated Water and Energy Conservation Plan.

### Pajarito Group working on Zero Food Waste

Astonishingly when you add in all the externalities, the Number One greenhouse gas producer is food waste. The Pajarito Group, working with the Environmental Sustainability Board and Zero Waste Team continues to focus on food waste. As we keep saying: 40% of all food produced in America is wasted; 25% of fresh water goes to food that isn't eaten; it takes the water from a five-hour shower to produce a pound of beef. You want more shocking facts? We posted a slide show with everything you need to know at <https://www.riograndesierraclub.org/food-waste/>

#### Michael and Iris retire

Two long-serving Pajarito ExCom members, Michael DiRosa and Iris Chung, have departed Los Alamos for Michael's work assignment in DC. Michael has been the group's high-level strategist who aspired to guide our arguments to be logical, succinct, and sticking with the science. He was also the Pajarito Outings Leader. In fact, it was on one of those outings when Michael met Iris. Iris, on a business trip from sea-level East Coast to Albuquerque, longed to hike the New Mexico mountains, saw his Pajarito hike in the Sierran, called him, joined as

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the only one who signed up, and found herself bushwhacking up Caballo Peak post-Cerro Grande Fire. Now Iris and Michael are returning to the East Coast — to DC where we hope they both can logically, positively, sanely influence the powers in the Capitol as much as they helped influence policy in Los Alamos. Wear a mask, social-distance, stay safe, and keep in touch. We hope the assignment is only temporary.

## Trade deals deter climate progress

By Richard Barish,  
Trade Issues Chair

Trade agreements are long, dry, technical documents. They don't compel our attention like beautiful animals and ancient forests or the blood-chilling threat of human extinction from climate change. As a result, they often fly under the radar of environmentalists. However, trade agreements have a huge effect on the environment. We will not be able to prevent runaway climate disruption or otherwise protect the planet if we don't make trade agreements responsive to environmental concerns.

A new version of NAFTA, now known as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), was passed by Congress and signed into law by Trump. The original NAFTA was terrible on the environment, and the

USMCA, unfortunately, is no better.

The House leadership negotiated a better deal on labor issues, but did not fix the problems of the USMCA on the environment.

Recent research estimates that 25% of global greenhouse gas emissions is from manufacturing that has been off-shored. The United States is the No. 1 exporter of this climate pollution.

The USMCA lacks enforceable environmental standards. Without binding environmental standards, the USMCA will continue to help corporations to evade U.S. environmental laws and regulations by exporting jobs and pollution to Mexico, where many environmental policies are weaker. The USMCA and other trade deals offer cross-border financial protections to corporations that move jobs across borders, but

they don't require corresponding cross-border protections of workers, communities, and the environment.

Another highly alarming part of the USMCA that we can also expect to see in future trade agreements are new provisions that will empower corporations to delay, weaken and even obtain the repeal of environmental, health, safety, and food protections. Once a Democrat returns to the White House, we will urgently need to enact new regulations to replace the regulations that have been weakened or eliminated by Trump. The deregulatory rules of the USMCA will make it much harder to reverse those rollbacks once Trump leaves office, which could extend his polluting legacy for years or even permanently.

We need to ensure that future trade agreements help, not hinder, our ability to regu-

## Time to Lift Your Paddle.

Your bidding paddle, that is.

November 8 through November 22

This is your chance to win a cool socially-distanced adventure, outdoor gear, jewelry and more.

Watch your inbox and visit the auction website after Nov. 6. You'll find the link at [riograndesierraclub.org](https://riograndesierraclub.org).





# Doctor's orders: Get outside

By Terry Owen  
Chapter Outings chair

What if you were told that there's an inexpensive way to improve your mental, emotional and physical health, increase your creativity and help you lose the pandemic 15 pounds that some of us have put on? It turns out that nature has been clinically proven to be the right prescription for many of today's ailments. Spending time in nature, whether you're walking, hiking, biking, kayaking or merely sitting can improve your health in as little as 15 minutes. The good news is that you don't need insurance, and being turned away because you have pre-existing conditions won't be an issue.

Would you like the full-strength prescription? A study by the University of Exeter found that people who spent two hours a week in green spaces such as local parks or other natural environments all at once or over several visits were substantially more likely to report good health and psychological well-being than those who didn't. For many of us, we've always known that getting outdoors in nature was good for us, but this study helped quantify the minimum dosage. The study found that two hours each week is a realistic target and one that allows people to receive optimum benefits. In less than 20 minutes each day, you can improve your life, and there are no co-pays.

Many healthcare providers are embracing the back-to-nature paradigm. Park RX America and Prescription Trails are just two organizations that physicians can use to prescribe time in nature for their patients. Prescription Trails, [prescriptiontrails.org](http://prescriptiontrails.org), which was founded in Albuquerque, can also be used over the counter and without a prescription by anyone looking for trails and walking areas that are tailored to their likes and abilities, including wheelchair rolling routes. These healthcare-related programs are growing all over the U.S. and there are now over 70 provider-based nature prescription programs in more than 30 states, including New Mexico.

Side effects may include euphoria, decreased road rage, peace of mind and a longer life. So, there's no better time to get outside for 20 minutes each day and reap some of these benefits:

**It reduces depression.** Being in Mother Nature heals you in so many ways, including your mental health. Multiple studies have linked nature walks with improved mental and emotional health. A University of Michigan study concluded that the combination of colors, scents, shapes and sensations all combine to lift your spirits.



## These songbirds fly on

By Mary Katherine Ray  
Rio Grande Chapter Wildlife chair

On Sept. 9, an early cold front stormed into New Mexico from the north, bringing record cold temperatures and freezing rain.

Worse, it appears that this weather event played a role in the mass die-off of migratory birds that happened at the same time. Thousands of bird remains have been found in the Southwest by scientists and the public alike. Many have been sent for necropsies to determine why they died.

We won't get the results for a while, but preliminary study indicates these birds weighed 1/3 less than they should have. Birds

need the fuel from their fat stores to make their long migratory journeys and to keep warm. Almost all of the bird remains belonged to species that depend on insects for their food like swallows and warblers. The cold would have made the insects difficult to find. In essence, we may learn that starvation was the root cause.

Happily, after the cold front, these two birds (an adult male Wilson's Warbler, left, and a juvenile Violet-Green Swallow) were photographed still alive and still on their journey south. They'd stopped at a spring in the San Mateo Mountains in Socorro County both for water and flying insects which had re-emerged.

**You feel happier.** According to one Finnish study, spending just 15 minutes sitting in nature helped people feel psychologically restored. Those results were even faster when they spent that time walking. Spending a minimum of 120 minutes each week provided optimum results, and more time spent outdoors incrementally enhanced the effect.

**Nature can literally heal.** A study by Harvard University showed that people exposed

to more natural light healed faster from a spinal surgery and reportedly had less pain than others. It seems nature served as a natural drug for them because they also took fewer pain medications.

**It prompts weight loss.** Being outside may not be a magical diet pill all by itself, but it does tend to make exercise more enjoyable. What's more, some aspects of outdoor exercise like hiking may help you lose weight in an unex-

pected way. Spending time at higher altitudes can speed up your metabolism and lower your appetite.

Your vitamin D supply improves. Spending time in the sun helps your body create vitamin D, a vitamin that studies have shown may help prevent cancer, osteoporosis, and heart attacks.

**Nature limits your stress.** Being in Mother Nature, even if just in your own neighborhood, can reduce stress in the

**This page is normally where we feature our free Sierra Club-led hikes. With the pandemic pausing outings through February 2021, our volunteer leaders found beauty in their own neighborhoods. Top left: Bobcats lounging in Santa Fe County; photo by Teresa Seamster. Top right: A stroll through a Santa Fe arroyo; photo by Susan Martin. Bottom: Cruising San Mateo in Albuquerque; photo by Richard Barish.**

body. Studies show spending time outdoors can lower your heart rate, a symptom of stress.

**You age less painfully.** Want to age gracefully? Going outside every single day may be the key. One study by the National Institutes of Health showed that 70-year-old participants who spent time outside every single day had fewer complaints of common aging pains (e.g., aching bones, not sleeping) at age 77 than those who didn't.

**It strengthens your immune system.** A Japanese study showed women who spent six hours in the woods over a two-day period increased their white blood cells, which fight virus, and the boost lasted about a week after the experiment. As a bonus, these were also found to help fight cancer cells.

Help us fight Nature Deficit Disorder. Although Sierra Club outings have been suspended through February 2021 due to COVID-19, we encourage you to get outside to maintain the appropriate nature levels in your bloodstream.

There are numerous books and websites that provide information on hiking trails,