

Rio Grande Sierran

Volume 59, Issue 1 News of the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter: New Mexico & West Texas January / February / March 2021

It's a new day



New Mexico’s Deb Haaland nominated for Interior Secretary. Page 3



Silver City Black Lives Matter march/Jay Hemphill



Sierra Club Election Night Zoom party/Camilla Feibelman




Sunrise El Paso protest in September

Year in review: Unprecedented events shaped our environment and beyond: **Page 8**

Elections: New Mexicans elected promising new legislators — and a majority-female state House — committed to our people and planet. **Page 6.**

EPE’s gas gambit: El Paso and Southern N.M. speak out to stop Newman Gas expansion. **Page 5**

EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET

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Light at end of the tunnel almost here

Sandra Lindsay, a Queens Hospital nurse and the first person in the United States to get the COVID-19 vaccine, is an inspiration. #ITrustScience was her hashtag. She said she wanted “to inspire people who look like me, who are skeptical in general about taking vaccines.”

Lindsay was on the front lines of the virus, putting herself at risk to save the lives of others, turning them, bathing them, meeting the needs that their families couldn't. Then she listened and helped lead us out of this difficult year, and for that matter a difficult four years.

The call to trust science is key to addressing the climate crisis, too. The Biden-Harris win was a relief (and watching the Trump campaign's desperate attempt



Director's column
Camilla Feibelman
Sierra Club
Rio Grande Chapter

to overturn the election results has been at best comic relief). But some of our most inspiring elections took place right here at home. New Mexicans elected a fantastic slate of progressive women of color to herald real transformation for our environment and our communities. Now we “just” have to navigate an unprecedented legislative session to bring bold transformative change.

On the electricity side of our climate work, this year was a true breakthrough. The results

of the 2019 Energy Transition Act are beyond anything we could have imagined. PNM's exit from San Juan coal and the PRC choice to replace it with 100% renewable energy and batteries will save the average customer \$7.46 per month. The solar/battery replacement power will infuse \$1.1 billion into Four Corners counties. And a committee is now considering community proposals for projects to be funded by \$20 million of transition funds. Now we have to build on these massive climate victories and pass comprehensive carbon reduction in other sectors.

We will need the Biden Administration to restore oil and gas methane safeguards that are even stronger than the Obama rules, reducing emis-

sions 65% from 2015 levels by 2025. And in December, the NM Environment Department announced that due to unexpectedly large methane leakage rates, their rules to prevent smog and other air pollution must be strengthened. This will protect us from future federal reversals and to prepare the state for compliance with strong Biden rules.

To build our communities' trust in science, to protect our communities and climate, to create racial justice and equity, we must continue to act boldly.

We need you at the legislative session, if only virtually. We need you talking to your elected officials, if only through text and messenger. We need you to keep on writing, speaking and acting to turn the real

crisis we are living through into the impetus for change. We need to follow Sandra Lindsay and lead by example.

This is a light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel moment. Together we've held the tunnel open. We're so close to vaccination of the general public but not there yet. We're so close to nation-leading state oil and gas methane-reduction rules, but not quite there yet. We're so close to a new administration and yet there's so much damage for Trump and his cronies to do. But that's why we have to stay the course, be calm as we wait our turn for vaccines. We need to work to close loopholes in our state pollution safeguards. And we need to keep standing strong against last-minute Trump damage.



Top row from left: New Chapter Executive Committee member Anita Gonzales, Central NM Group ExCom members Laura Harris and Terry Owen; and Northern New Mexico's Carlos Trujillo, Joe Wells, Chris Calvert and Norman Norvelle. Bottom row: Southern NM Group's David Baake and Ellie Naka; and Peg Froehlich and Tom Ribe of the Pajarito Group.



New Executive Committee members

By Mona Blaber

The Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter is governed by volunteer chapter and group executive committees, elected to staggered three-year (chapter) or two-year (groups) terms by chapter members.

This year's incoming ExCom members include many familiar and new faces, bringing a wealth of experience and commitment to organizing to protect our climate, land, wildlife, water and people.

Elected to three-year terms on our chapter Executive Committee this year are incumbents Susan Martin and Ray Shortridge, as well as new ExCom member Anita Gonzales, a mom and 2020 candidate for state representative

who lives in Las Vegas, N.M.

Our Central New Mexico Group members re-elected Zero Waste Chair Carol Chamberland and Peter Kelling as well as new members Terry Owen, our Outings chair, and Americans for Indian Opportunity Executive Director Laura Harris.

In the Northern New Mexico Group, new ExCom members Norman Norvelle, a former environmental scientist who worked in the coal plants; political consultant Carlos Trujillo of Chimayó; Taos Land Trust Land Conservation Committee member Joe Wells; and former Santa Fe City Councilor Chris Calvert join longtime volunteer leader and former

Conservation Chair Ken Hughes.

Southern New Mexico Group members re-elected Chair Howie Dash, Wildlife Chair Mary Katherine Ray and welcomed environmental attorney David Baake and environmental consultant Ellie Naka.

Caldera Action co-founder Tom Ribe will join longtime members Jody Benson and Mark Jones on the Pajarito Group Executive Committee. Jemez Springs Zero Waste chair Peggy Froehlich has been appointed to an open seat.

Congratulations to all the new Executive Committee members, welcome, and thank you for dedicating your time and skills to creating a more equitable, just and healthy world!

Rio Grande Green fundraising

By the Friends and Funds Committee

Goodbye, 2020!

While it was a bear of a year, Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter donors, members, and supporters worked hard and had a huge impact on our communities!

You also stepped up to support the work through your membership, donations and time. Thank you for being a part of this great team. We can now look forward to 2021 with hope in our hearts!

A special thank-you to all who participated in the online auction in November, whether as an item donor or bidder. More than \$5,000 was raised, including donations from those who decided not to bid but showed their support. Hope everyone had fun, and congratulations to those with winning bids!

Three Sisters Kitchen, our partner in our end-of-year appeal, was thrilled that their first customers were Rio Grande Chapter supporters. As we write this, we don't yet know the tally, but the donations are flowing in and the granola is flowing out! Thanks from your Chapter and Three Sisters Kitchen!

By the numbers

Membership: 10,150 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 to join!

Donations: \$226,463

This represents individuals and/or households who have stepped above and beyond their membership to be donors!

Just imagine what we could achieve together, if all members were donors, too. Become a donor today! Go to riograndesierraclub.org/donate and click “Regular Donation” or “Charitable Gift.”

If you aren't 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, “Regular Donation,” and check the box for a monthly gift!

Volunteers: We see the results of hundreds of volunteer hours in our 2020 elections, as well as in the many successes apparent in these pages. If you'd like to get more involved, call us at (505) 243-7767 or fill out the form at riograndesierraclub.org/volunteer!

Yum!

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

Donate \$25 to your Rio Grande Chapter through Dec. 31 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 the pandemic.



Haaland a historic Interior choice

New Mexico Congressional rep has demonstrated a deep commitment to our land and climate

By **Mona Blaber**
Chapter communications

Cheers rang through New Mexico when President-elect Joe Biden on Dec. 17 nominated U.S. Rep. Deb Haaland to serve as the nation's first Native American Secretary of the Interior.

The Department of the Interior manages the country's national parks and roughly 450 million acres of public lands, oversees wildlife and other conservation efforts, and upholds Federal trust responsibilities to Indigenous communities.

Rep. Haaland has championed the environment and public lands during her tenure in Congress and has introduced legislation to make parks and monuments more welcoming by removing racist, anti-Indigenous and offensive names from public spaces.

As Interior secretary, Haaland would be uniquely positioned to build on her efforts to strengthen nation-to-nation relationships with



Photo courtesy Genie Stevens

U.S. Rep. Deb Haaland doesn't just walk the walk; she took a seat with Global Warming Express kids to listen to GWEer Sierra speak during a 350 New Mexico climate town hall last year.

Native tribes. She would be the first Native American to hold any cabinet position.

Biden has committed to prioritizing climate action, including setting a national goal to protect 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030 and action to halt new fossil-fuel leasing on public lands. Haaland has been a House sponsor of the 30x30 effort.

"Rep. Haaland is eminently qualified to lead the Department of the Interior, and the Sierra Club celebrates her historic nomination," said

Chris Hill, acting director of Sierra Club's Our Wild America campaign. "Over the last four years, the department's exclusive focus on polluter profits and deeply embedded culture of corruption has left much to repair, both within the agency and on the ground. We're confident Rep. Haaland can reset the Department of the Interior. We look forward to a transformation in how our country's lands and waters are used and managed — prioritizing Indigenous-led conservation, making public lands a

part of the climate solution, and integrating equity into decision-making at every level."

"Rep. Haaland has New Mexico's emphatic support as she embarks on this historic leadership role," said Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter Director Camilla Feibelman. "Her heartfelt and passionate commitment to protecting our air, water, communities, and sacred landscapes from the Trump Administration's destruction make her uniquely qualified to lead the Department of the Interior.

Haaland supports the bold, meaningful progress we need to heal our climate. She has worked in coordination with our New Mexico delegation to protect Chaco Culture National Historical Park and the broader Chacoan landscape from encroaching extraction, and has collaborated with an array of constituencies to fulfil that mission."

Haaland was responsible for arranging a tour of Greater Chaco, led by community members, for House Natural Resource Committee members in April 2019. The committee then held a special hearing in Santa Fe to discuss fracking and its impacts on communities like Greater Chaco.

Haaland spoke eloquently of the many dangers of continuing to sacrifice our treasured lands to extraction. She co-sponsored the legislation to put a moratorium on drilling leases within 10 miles of Chaco Park, and she is a supporter of our Global Warming Express education program for elementary students.

Haaland's commitment to protecting our natural resources and our families has been apparent throughout her career, and the Rio Grande Chapter enthusiastically supports her nomination.

What can Biden do?

Denise Fort
UNM Law professor emeritus

Every Sierra Club member knows the damage that the Trump administration has done to our environment in its four years. Indeed they are working feverishly up until Inauguration Day to continue inflicting harm.

There's a lot President Biden will be able to do without going to Congress. New Mexicans are on the receiving end of many of Trump's actions, such as the rollback of Obama-era methane rules, the attempt to eviscerate the Clean Water Act through regulatory action, the declaration of open season on migratory birds, the roll back of auto efficiency standards, the rushed leasing of federal lands, and so much more. (The *New York Times* has kept a running list of the damage at www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/climate/trump-environment-rollbacks-list.html)

But, if there's any good news about the Trump administration it must be that they were massively incompetent in pursuing the dismantlement of environmental regulation. Environmental lawyers have stopped many of these efforts, or held them up in courts, so that the new Administration can now reverse the legal positions of the Trump/Barr lawyers. Each of Trump's actions has to be approached carefully, especially with a Supreme Court that we can presume to be hostile to environmental regulation.

The Biden administration will also need to rebuild the federal agencies that administer our environmental laws. EPA

If there's any good news about the Trump administration, it is that it was massively incompetent in dismantling environmental regulation.

has lost scores of dedicated staff, because what professional would want to work for an administration that discredited science and discounted public health? Environmental justice will need to be at the heart of a rebuilt EPA. The Fish and Wildlife Service, The Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, NOAA, need to be rebuilt and shaped to meet the environmental challenges that we well understand.

Unfortunately, undoing the damage will only take us so far. If we are to really make progress on climate, for example, Congress needs to appropriate funding for new transportation infrastructure, including rail upgrades, enact bold legislation to reduce fossil fuel subsidies, provide for a just transition for workers and communities, and advance other initiatives that require legislation.

For this, President Biden will need to appeal to the slender House majority and will need the support of the Senate. That's where we come in, of course, as we work through the Sierra Club and other organizations to flip those seats!

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Science is not a core curriculum subject in many elementary schools

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GWE has gone online, making the curriculum available for schools across New Mexico. This is a huge — and expensive — undertaking.

Go to riograndesierraclub.org/donate and click on Global Warming Express to help meet the goal!

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‘Rio Grande Sierran’ publication

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

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

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

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:

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Oakland, CA 94612

Do you have a membership question? Call 415-977-5653 or e-mail membership.services@sierraclub.org.

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Earthworks used its optical imaging cameras at Newman Gas Plant in northeast El Paso, above, to make visible the normally invisible pollution of volatile organic compounds escaping and traveling to surrounding communities.

PRC rejects new gas

By Mona Blaber
Rio Grande Chapter
communications

In a year-ending victory for grassroots community organizers, New Mexico’s Public Regulation Commission unanimously denied El Paso Electric’s request to build a 228-mega-watt gas generator, citing EPE’s failure to consider the requirements of the Energy Transition Act.

The denial doesn’t mean that the generator, which would expand the existing Newman Gas Plant in northeast El Paso, won’t be built. But it makes the path much more difficult for El Paso Electric, which serves both Texas and New Mexico electricity customers.

The air quality in communities around the plant, including Chaparral, N.M., and northern El Paso, already violates federal standards for ozone and other dangerous pollutants, and Newman is a major contributor to that pollution already.

The additional generator would increase those dangerous levels. EPE will have to decide whether it still makes sense to go forward with the project for only its Texas customers. A coalition of local groups and residents is urging the El Paso City Council to use its legal authority to reject the plant entirely on a municipal level.

More than 1,200 New Mexicans submitted comments to the PRC opposing the polluting generator. A broad community coalition, including Chaparral residents, Sunrise El Paso, neighborhood faith leaders of Interfaith Power and Light, Earthworks, Vote Solar and Sierra Club

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Rio Grande Chapter, worked to raise the voices of families who want to breathe clean air and see the region move to clean-energy development.

“The NMPRC saw right through El Paso Electric’s bad-faith arguments. As El Pasoans, we appreciate the Commission’s decision to prioritize clean energy over dirty fossil fuels in this time of climate crisis. We hope to see the similar decisions being made by our leaders here in El Paso,” said Sunrise El Paso organizer Angel Ulloa.

“The Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy demonstrated that had El Paso Electric properly evaluated its proposed resource in light of the ETA, it could have selected a better, cheaper and greener alternative. We commend the PRC for protecting its ratepayers from higher costs and more pollution by requiring compliance with the Energy Transition Act,” said CCAE attorney Stephanie Dzur. CCAE was one of the intervenors in the PRC case.

“El Paso Electric’s Newman 6 fracked-gas fueled power plant proposal disregards widespread community opposition, local health impacts, and the worsening climate crisis. Hopefully the El Paso City Council will follow NMPRC’s lead and act to block it as

well,” said Earthworks West Texas Field Associate Miguel Escoto.

The El Paso City Council has expressed opposition to the new unit, but councilors suggested they don’t have the authority to stop it. However, advocates have proposed several avenues the council could take to delay or stop the expansion.

“Rejecting this polluting plant would be a win for our community, especially for the colonias in southern Doña Ana County and northern El Paso County, as they are most impacted by this dirty generating station,” said Rio Grande Chapter Southern New Mexico organizer Antoinette Reyes.

“We need to continue to consider our communities’ health and care of God’s creation and climate change that affects the most vulnerable and future generations as we make decisions about energy production,” said Sister Joan Brown, osf, New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light executive director.

In light of the PRC decision, the Texas Public Utilities Commission could potentially reconsider its approval, given that Texas customers will now have to foot the entire bill for the generator.

PNM merger impacts are far-reaching

As PNM exits Four Corners plant, NTEC seeks to keep it open

By Mona Blaber
Chapter communications

A surprise merger, New Mexico’s biggest electric utility exiting the state’s biggest coal plant and the potential acquisition of that share by Navajo Transitional Energy Company all have big implications for Four Corners communities, Navajo Nation, ratepayers and the coal plant’s lifespan.

In October, PNM and Avangrid announced plans to merge in what the companies claimed will create “one of biggest clean-energy companies” in the United States. The combined entity would own 10 utilities in six states, with renewable operations in 24 states. Avangrid has two divisions — one that builds utility-scale renewable-energy facilities, including a large New Mexico wind facility, and another that acquires and runs local utilities.

For months before the merger announcement, organizations such as Diné CARE and Western Clean Energy Campaign had expressed concern as rumors swirled that Navajo Transitional Energy Company, or NTEC, was negotiating to take on PNM’s 13% stake in the coal-fired Four Corners Power Plant on Navajo land near Farmington.

The Navajo Nation owns NTEC, creating it eight years

ago to purchase Navajo Mine, which feeds Four Corners. But NTEC is not run by the Nation, which in recent years has expressed its intent to move toward more sustainable renewable development. NTEC, though, has doubled down on coal, buying three struggling coal mines in the Powder River Basin as well as a 7% stake in the Four Corners plant from main owner and operator Arizona Public Service Co.

APS plans to close the plant in 2031. As mine owner, NTEC wants to keep the plant and the mine operating, hence its interest in acquiring PNM’s plant stake. PNM would actually pay NTEC \$75 million to get out of its coal contract, and the stake in the coal plant would be on the house.

According to filings, PNM’s exit from all coal resources by the end of 2024 is a condition of the buyout. But if it means selling to an entity that intends to keep the coal burning and polluting for longer, that’s a problem.

The Avangrid-PNM merger also has big potential implications for rates and community reinvestment. In its filing at the Public Regulation Commission, Avangrid offered a \$25 million credit for ratepayers over three years and a meager \$2.5 million for community investment. Sierra Club has intervened in the case to advocate for a better deal for New Mexicans and the communities that have contributed and sacrificed for PNM profits for decades.

To’hajiilee gets water, but at what price?

By Diane Reese
Central NM Group

On Nov. 19, the Navajo Nation, Western Albuquerque Land Holdings (WAHL) and Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility announced an agreement on a pipeline easement to allow the Village of To’hajiilee to access desperately needed water.

The village’s wells had dried up, and it had to ship clean water in. It already had legal rights to the Albuquerque water and the money to pay for the project through Navajo Nation CARES Act funding, but WAHL had repeatedly dodged requests for an easement through its property until Bernalillo County Commissioner Debbie O’Malley and Friends of

To’jahiilee raised public pressure.

An independent survey valued the easement at \$30,000. The “opening salvo” proposed by state Sen. Daniel Ivey-Soto, who assisted with negotiations, was \$2 million, roughly the amount of the CARES Act federal Coronavirus relief funding received by the Village. Did WAHL get that huge payout? We will never know: A condition of the agreement is that it remain confidential. Remember that WAHL is the company behind the ill-conceived Santolina development — thousands of homes to be built on shifting desert land that lacks water and infrastructure.

In the midst of a pandemic, is a secret deal an ethical solution to a humanitarian crisis?

Election 2020

A whole new ballgame in the Senate

By Richard Barish
Chapter Political Chair

Many of you know that for many years, passage of good environmental and other progressive legislation has been stymied in the New Mexico state Senate. That will change after the election in November.

The problem was not conservative Republicans. The problem was conservative Democrats. Even though Democrats were in the majority in the Senate, a half dozen or so conservative Democrats would band together with Republicans to create a conservative majority. This conservative majority would ensure that one of the conservative Democrats was elected as President Pro Tempore of the Senate.

The President Pro Tem, in recent years Mary Kay Papen, would make sure that the conservative Democrats plus Republicans were a majority on the Committees Committee. The Committees Committee would appoint the conservative Democrats as chairs of key committees. Good legislation was then sent to those committees to be killed.

The Sierra Club and our progressive allies went into this year with the goal of defeating those conservative Democrats in the primary and eliminating their stranglehold on good legislation. We and our allies targeted five conservative Democrats. We defeated four in the primary. We beat Mary Kay Papen, the President Pro Tem; John Arthur Smith, “Dr. No,” the powerful chair of the Finance Committee; and Clemente Sanchez, chair of the Corporations Committee.

In the general election, Democrats held on to two of the four seats we had targeted in the primary. In addition,



A host of progressive newcomers won election to the New Mexico Senate in November. Top row, from left: Brenda McKenna, Katy Duhigg, Martin Hickey and Harold Pope. Bottom row: Carrie Hamblen, Siah Correa Hemphill and Leo Jaramillo. Incumbent Sen. Mimi Stewart, bottom right, is likely to be the new Senate pro tem, replacing Mary Kay Papen, whom Hamblen defeated in the June primary.

Democrats won in three districts that we also targeted that were formerly held by Republicans, all Albuquerque-area seats. In addition, in two other seats, progressive Democrats replaced more centrist, retiring Democrats. The net result is that seven of the 42 seats in the Senate went from conservative to progressive.

Among our new senators are Carrie Hamblen in Las Cruces, who was an important ally of the Chapter in creating the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument; Harold Pope, who will be the first African American in the State Senate; and Dr. Martin Hickey, who in addition to being a dedicated rafter and outdoorsman, will bring his deep expertise as a medical administrator to the effort to expand access to medical care to all New Mexicans.

We anticipate that we will have a

much easier time getting strong environmental legislation through the Senate.

The State House was already quite a progressive body prior to this election. The chamber retained its pro-environment majority and added new Sierra Club-endorsed Reps. Brittney Barreras, Roger Montoya, Linda Serrato and Kristina Ortez.

It is worth noting and celebrating, also, that the New Mexico state House has become the second legislative body in the nation to have a majority of women legislators!

There's quite a bit to celebrate in New Mexico elections, and your votes, volunteering and support are responsible for quite a bit of it. Thank you, and now let's get to work holding these newly elected officials accountable!



Public Regulation Commission

As evidenced by its decisions on replacement power for San Juan Generating Station and Newman Gas Plant, the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission is one of the most powerful and critical decision-making bodies in the West when it comes to climate, energy, and public health.

Both Sierra Club-endorsed PRC candidates won in November: Former Española Mayor and Santa Fe City Councilor Joseph Maestas and incumbent

Commissioner Cynthia Hall. Hall has been a strong advocate for the public in her first term, and Maestas has demonstrated an impressive knowledge of complex commission issues and dedication to a safe climate.

Because a constitutional amendment that will change the PRC to an appointed commission also passed in the November election, these commissioners will serve only two years before the new structure kicks in.



Federal races

U.S. Rep. Ben Ray Luján (above) has been a champion for New Mexicans and climate justice. Luján will bring that commitment, his congressional leadership experience and political acumen to the U.S. Senate after beating Republican Mark Ronchetti in November. Luján fills the seat vacated by another environmental champion, Sen. Tom Udall, who is retiring after a career dedicated to public service.

In U.S. House races, Sierra Club endorsee **Teresa Leger Fernandez** (right) will replace Luján as the representative for Congressional District 3. Sierra Club endorsee Xochitl Torres Small lost her re-election bid, but Club-endorsed **Deb Haaland** won re-election to Albuquerque-area District 1. Now that Haaland has been nominated as Interior secretary, there will be another race for her seat pending her confirmation next year.



Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter volunteers and staff conducted dozens of candidate interviews and put unprecedented resources into supporting 77 endorsed candidates, 63 of whom won. Below are state Senate and House endorsement results in contested races:

N.M. Senate

District 5: Leo Jaramillo won
8: Pete Campos won
9: Brenda McKenna won
10: Katy Duhigg won
11: Linda Lopez won
12: Jerry Ortiz y Pino won
13: Bill O'Neill won
14: Michael Padilla won
15: Daniel Ivey-Soto won
16: Antoinette Sedillo Lopez won
17: Mimi Stewart won
18: Bill Tallman won
19: Claudia Risner lost
20: Martin Hickey won
21: Athena Christodoulou lost
23: Harold Pope won
24: Nancy Rodriguez won
25: Peter Wirth won
26: Jacob Candelaria won
28: Siah Correa Hemphill won
29: Paul Baca lost
30: Pam Corodova lost
31: Joseph Cervantes won
33: Denise Lang-Browne lost
35: Neomi Martinez-Parra lost
36: Jeff Steinborn won
37: William “Bill” Soules won
38: Carrie Hamblen won
39: Liz Stefanics won

N.M. House:

District 10: Andres Romero won
11: Javier Martinez won
12: Brittney Barreras won
13: Patricia Roybal Caballero won
14: Miguel Garcia won
15: Day Hochman-Vigil won
16: Antonio “Moe” Maestas won
17: Debbie Armstrong won
19: Sheryl Williams Stapleton won
21: Debbie Sariñana won
22: Jessica Velasquez lost
23: Daymon Ely won
24: Liz Thomson won
25: Christine Trujillo won
26: Georgene Louis won
27: Marian Matthews won
28: Melanie Stansbury won
29: Joy Garratt won
30: Natalie Figueroa won
31: Julie Brenning lost
33: Micaela Cadena won
35: Angelica Rubio won
36: Nathan Small won
37: Joanne Ferrary won
38: Karen Whitlock lost
39: Rodolpho “Rudy” Martinez lost
40: Roger Montoya won
41: Susan Herrera won
42: Kristina Ortez won
43: Christine Chandler won
44: Gary Tripp lost
45: Linda Serrato won
46: Andrea Romero won
47: Brian Egolf won
50: Matthew McQueen won
52: Doreen Gallegos won
57: Billie Helean lost
59: Kimble Kearns lost
65: Derrick Lente won
68: Karen Bash won

County elections

Sierra Club endorsees had mixed results in county races. In Grant County, Harry Browne won re-election to the County Commission, but in Bernalillo, commission candidate Wende Schwingendorf lost. Adriann Barboa, whom we endorsed in the primary, won an uncontested commission race. In Sandoval, commission candidates Leah Ahkee-Bacziewicz and Alexandria Piland both lost

Doña Ana County Clerk Amanda López Askin was re-elected, but Valencia clerk candidate Aurora Chavez lost.

Legislative outlook



Photo courtesy of NMDOG

Mahlia, who was rescued from a trap on BLM land, required surgery to amputate toes, but she is recovering. We are working to make this the year New Mexico ends trapping on public lands.

Will this be the year we end trapping?

As a new season brings new conflicts, advocates look to legislators to end trapping on New Mexico public land

**By Mary Katherine Ray
Chapter Wildlife Chair**

As we prepare for the 2021 Legislature and the reintroduction of Roxy's Law to prohibit traps and poisons from public land, already three dogs that have been caught in traps and a gruesome discovery of skinned coyote carcasses are indications of the toll ahead for wildlife and pets as the trapping season is underway. Roxy was a dog killed by strangulation in a wire neck snare as her owner could not save her two years ago.

So far this trapping season, a dog hiking with her person on state trust land near Aztec, N.M., was caught in a trap on Nov. 14. Luckily, cell service was available and the dog's owner summoned several other people to come help remove the trap and get the dog to a veterinarian. The dog is OK, but as commonly happens, the owner is now afraid to take the dog hiking and risk a repeat of the ordeal.

A week later on BLM land north of Santa Fe, hikers found

a dog not belonging to them languishing in a trap and near death. It wasn't clear if the dog would survive, but she was rescued and rushed to veterinary care, where after several days stabilizing her condition and rehydrating her, she had surgery to remove two mangled toes. Most of her foot was salvageable. The vet bills are in the thousands of dollars.

On Thanksgiving day, a search-and-rescue volunteer was hiking for pleasure with her dogs, both highly trained, when one was caught in a trap, also on BLM land. Luckily, having had instruction on opening a trap, the volunteer was able to release the dog — though she reported it was not easy to do in real life. And thankfully in this instance, the time spent did not compromise a human rescue situation.

In November, a hiker near Santa Teresa, N.M., came upon the bodies of nearly 40 dead

and skinned coyotes. At first, they were so unrecognizable without their skins that the hiker thought they were greyhounds. But the skin remained on the feet, and close examination of the photographs of the scene clearly show that some of these animals had limb injuries consistent with having been trapped. Aside from the psychological trauma to the person making this discovery, these injuries also belie a common trapper claim that traps are not injurious or inhumane to wildlife.

You can help to end this. Please sign the petition at our coalition website, trapfreenm.org. That way you will be also signed up to get alerts to contact legislators urging the passage of Roxy's Law during the legislative session, whatever form it takes. Let 2021 be the year we stop the cruelty and the exploitation of trapping on New Mexico's public lands and pass Roxy's Law.

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Rep. Melanie Stansbury, left, will sponsor a climate-resilience bill in the upcoming legislative session. Sen. Antoinette Sedillo Lopez plans to sponsor the Green Amendment, and Sen. Liz Stefanics will champion community-solar legislation.

Will a virtual session make real progress?

**By Camilla Feibelman
Chapter director**

This is a complex moment for legislative transformation. On the one hand, New Mexicans are clearly communicating their desire for big, bold change. We demonstrated that in the elections, creating a progressive state Senate to go with our progressive House.

On the other hand, despite the incredible opportunities of the moment, we don't have a great sense of how the legislative process will take place. The House may limit legislators to five bills. The Senate may meet on the floor for a couple of days and then break out for virtual committee hearings for five days and then back for floor sessions. Legislators may hold office hours for constituents and advocates that will try not to conflict with committee times.

But given all that we've already navigated this year, maybe a virtual legislative session isn't so bad. As a working mom, I enjoyed being able to participate during the summer special session and speak out, from home, in a committee at 11:30 p.m. in favor of expanded voting while folding the laundry.

We'll need your support whether from the laundry room or the dining room on a host of environmental bills and other legislation to create equity and better quality of life for all New Mexicans. Our environmental community is working on legislation that will make a real difference for New Mexico. A carbon-reduction and climate-resilience bill being sponsored by Rep. Melanie Stansbury, Sen. Benny Shendo and Sen. Carrie Hamblen will tackle climate change by putting Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's 2019 Executive Order on climate into law.

Stringency legislation, sponsored by Sen. Peter Wirth would allow state rules on air

quality and hazardous waste to be stronger than federal limits. Just transition legislation from Rep. Angelica Rubio would help encourage and develop workforce solutions and diversification as we move away from fossil fuels. Community solar (Sen. Liz Stefanics, Rep. Patricia Roybal Caballero) would allow renters and homeowners without roof access to buy into larger community solar gardens. The Sustainable Buildings Tax Credit would incentivize emissions reductions from buildings and require they be EV-ready.

We are hoping this is the year to pass a ban on trapping on public lands (see article at left). An Environmental Database Law (Sen. Mimi Stewart, Rep. Gail Chasey) would allow agencies and the public to find wildlife, leasing, and air-quality data all in a centralized location. A memorial from Stansbury would create a framework for a 50-year water plan. The Green Amendment (Sen. Antoinette Sedillo Lopez, Sen. Bill Soules, Rep. Joanne Ferrary) would create an actionable environmental protection in the Constitution, while Private Right of Action legislation (Rep. Georgene Louis) would allow impacted individuals to sue for environmental compliance. Another bill would raise penalty caps in an array of environmental sectors. Oil Conservation Commission reform would put the public interest at the heart of state oversight of extractive industries, and amendments to the Produced Water Act would increase protection for human health and freshwater. Other promising bills from Sen. Soules explore solar- and EV-ready buildings, regular updates of energy-efficient building codes, and a 100% electric state vehicle fleet. Another bill would provide relief for those who couldn't pay their electric bills during the pandemic. Thanks to all of the incredible bill sponsors and to the organizers working so hard to make them happen.

Want to get involved? Especially this year, when even paid lobbyists won't be roaming Roundhouse halls, your voice makes a real difference at the New Mexico Legislature. The Rio Grande Chapter hosts grassroots lobbying trainings, remote this year, to help you learn how. Contact Camilla Feibelman at camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org to learn when the next trainings will be held or to get on our lobbying listserv to learn where bills are and what you can do to help.

2020 Year in Review

January

■ Thirty-day legislative session wraps up. **Tax credits for rooftop solar** are final renewed after passing the Legislature several times but being killed by former Gov. Martinez. Sen. Mimi Stewart's Prohibiting Wildlife Trafficking bill also passes.

March

■ As COVID-19 rates begin to skyrocket, the Sierra Club cancels all in-person events, including outings, through June.

■ Despite the rest of the country shutting down during an unprecedented pandemic, the BLM forges ahead with oil and gas lease sales and comment periods, despite the public's diverted attention and reduced ability to respond.

April

■ The Bureau of Land Management postponed the May **oil and gas lease sale** of 50,000 acres in New Mexico and ceased leasing more lands in Greater Chaco for the remainder of the year.

May

■ Interior Secretary Bernhardt extends deadline to comment on resource management plan for Greater Chaco after multiple calls from tribal and congressional leaders, environmental and community groups, and state agencies.

■ The Oil Conservation Division proposes an update to its **regulations on reusing "produced water,"** or water produced from the fracking process, in the oil field, asserting that the rulemaking was only intended to make simple changes. The Rio Grande Chapter intervened in the rulemaking to advocate for strengthening the rules.

June

■ After 15 years of persistent effort, the ill-conceived **Gila River diversion project is finally defeated.** The New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission voted in June (after hundreds of calls from activists like you) to defund and stop work on the diversion's Environmental Impact Statement because the project was not economically viable. The victory came after years of work by coalition groups and your attendance at meetings, submission of thousands of comments, and financial support to groups like the Gila Resources Information Project.

■ In **New Mexico's primary election**, pro-environment Senate candidates defeat several right-leaning long-time incumbents, including Senate Pro Tem Mary Kay Papen and Finance Chair John Arthur Smith, who used their power to block much environmental and other critical legislation from advancing.

■ PRC hearing examiners



Photo courtesy Sunrise El Paso

Protests and rallies looked different in 2020, but they are still effective campaign tactics. In September, Sunrise El Paso activists called on the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and El Paso City Council to stop El Paso Electric's plan to expand Newman Gas Plant.



Photo courtesy Larrissa Cason

July: San Juan, Rio Arriba and McKinley residents, including Shiprock High student Larrissa Cason, testified remotely to urge PRC approval of a solar/battery replacement plan for San Juan coal plant.

recommend 100% solar and battery to replace the coal power at San Juan Generating Station, slated to retire in 2022, rather than PNM's preferred plan, which included gas generators. The hearing examiners say the plan is reliable and complies with Energy Transition Act provisions siting replacement power in the same school district as the plant. The plan still must be approved by the commission.

■ The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals rules that Trump's transfer of funds from the Defense Department counter-narcotics and military retirement funds is unconstitutional and illegal in **Sierra Club and Southern Border Communities Coalition v. Trump.** The \$2.5 billion was used to fund construction of 176 miles of border wall. However, a year ago, when a district court issued an injunction against construction, the Supreme Court issued a stay, allowing construction to continue while the case moved through the courts.

July

■ The Public Regulation Commission unanimously approves Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy's proposal for 100% solar power and battery to replace the coal power at San Juan Generating

Call to act against racism

By Miya King-Flaherty
Solidarity Committee

The Black Lives Matter movement to address and dismantle systemic racism and inequity was heard loud and clear after the Memorial Day police killing of George Floyd and other black people and the ensuing uprising this summer.

When institutions treat special places and resources as disposable, the people who live there are treated as disposable and sacrificed too — often communities of color.

No matter the environment we live in and want to protect, whether it's wildlands, river ecosystems or in city and urban settings, every person should have the right to live with full dignity and respect. The Sierra Club believes it is important to demand racial and social justice.

This year, in addition to internal work and support of community protests and other efforts, the Rio Grande Chapter Solidarity Committee hosted two webinars. The first was about the Albuquerque Community Safety Department, a new city department to respond to 911 mental-health crises. The second featured ACLU New Mexico speakers Barron Jones and Elaine Maestas discussing police accountability and legislation that would allow New Mexicans to bring claims for damages in state court against police officers and other public officials who violate their rights. We'll continue to act in support of the movement for racial and social justice in the new year and beyond. Contact miya.king-flaherty@sierraclub.org to get involved.

Department become a responsible, community-friendly department.

September

■ Oil Conservation Division's revised **rule on produced water** is finalized and approved. Many of the changes recommended by the Sierra Club and other groups such as Wild Earth Guardians were accepted. This is just the beginning of our efforts to reform oil and gas statutes and rules to ensure they fulfill the Oil and Gas Act mandate to protect human health, environment and freshwater resources.

■ The nuclear policy that Sierra Club volunteers from across the country spent two years creating, which provides guidelines for management of nuclear high-level waste, is finalized and released (see riograndesierraclub.org/holtec). Meanwhile, hundreds of Sierra Club supporters comment to Nuclear Regulatory Commission in opposition to Holtec nuclear storage site before September deadline.

■ The City of Albuquerque

passes its own **Energy Conservation Code**, an even more energy-efficient building code than the one passed by the state in August. The city also directed \$100,000 to assist with energy-efficiency retrofits for low-income residents.

October

■ Ninth Circuit court places a permanent injunction on \$4 billion taken from the Defense Department military construction fund in 2019 in *State of California v Trump*. However, the Trump administration continues construction, claiming some work needs to be completed before they can stop. The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals allowed construction to continue until mid-November.

November

■ Supreme Court agrees to hear the two cases from the 9th circuit (a combined \$6.5 billion taken from the Department of Defense). Meanwhile, the recent injunction was stayed, allowing construction to continue in the interim.

■ Texas Commission on Environmental Quality holds public meeting on El Paso Electric effort to expand Newman Gas Plant. Every public commenter speaks in opposition to the plan, and 180 comments are submitted against the expansion.

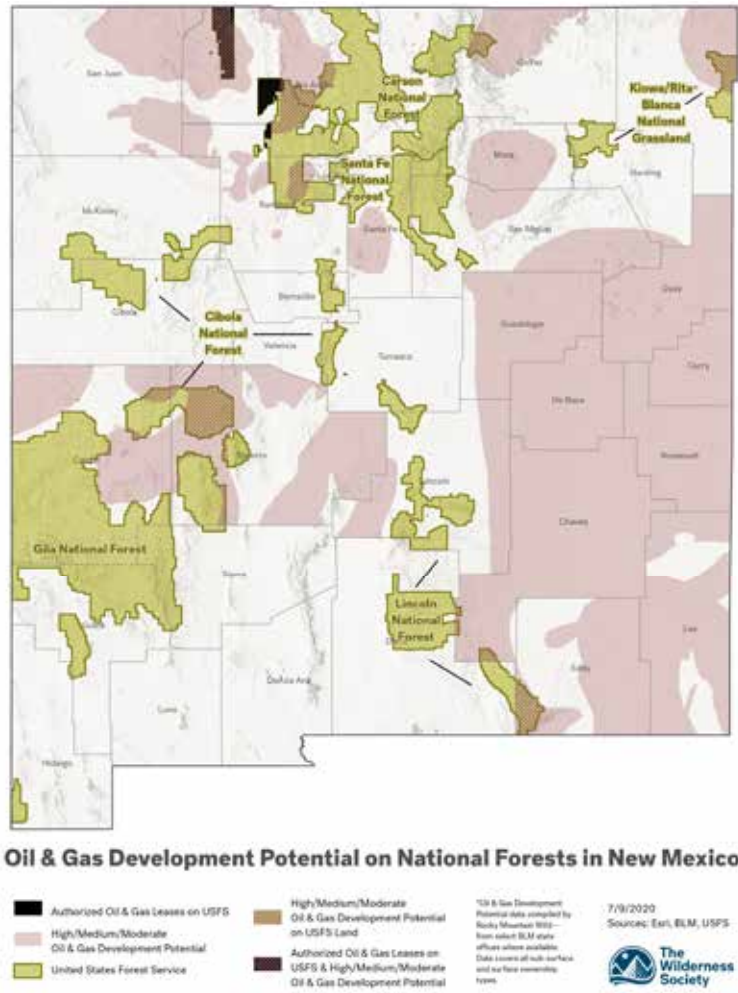
■ To accompany the defeat of our anti-environment president, Sierra Club-endorsed candidates win 63 of 77 races in Nov. 3 general election, and New Mexico House becomes only the second majority-female legislative chamber in the nation. See Page 6.

December

■ Fifth Circuit Court overrules lower federal courts and rejects the City of El Paso and Borderlands Network's standing, throwing the case out and not ruling on the merits. The lower courts had found that Trump's emergency declaration and diversion of funds were illegal after accepting the standing of the City of El Paso.

■ President-elect Joseph Biden nominates **U.S. Rep. Deb Haaland** to the first Native American Interior Secretary. See Page 3.

■ **PRC rejects El Paso Electric's plan to build a 228MW gas generator** at its Newman power plant, just over the border from Chaparral, NM, citing New Mexico's Energy Transition Act. See Page 5.



Forest rule opens door to oil & gas

Teresa Seamster, Northern NM Conservation Chair

The door to extractive industries into our national forests just opened much wider.

The departing Trump Administration at Department of Agriculture has proposed changes to the way the U.S. Forest Service enforces the National Environmental Policy Act in a brief but drastically industry-friendly rule:

The Forest Service's stated intent for the proposed changes is "to streamline and reduce redundancies to improve agency efficiency and better align Forest Service regulations with those used by the Bureau of Land Management." — 85 Fed.Reg. 54,312.

In reply to this parting shot at trying to rewrite the mission of the U.S. Forest Service, the hundreds of conservation and environmental groups that have commented point out that the Forest Service's approach to revising its oil and gas regulations undermines its statutory obligations and its commitment to manage our national forests and grasslands "to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations."

In a public letter last year, Western Environmental Law Center commented that the agency's proposed rule brazenly attempts to remove the public from public land management decisions, and seeks to expand the scope and scale of land management without sufficient environmental analysis. The National Environmental Policy Act requires transpar-

ency, accurate scientific data and analysis, and inclusion of the public — including local communities, Tribes, local governments, scientists, and others who use, enjoy, and rely upon the National Forests for a variety of values — in federal agency decision-making.

The proposed rule will serve the interests of extractive industries above the interests of the public. It ignores the facts:

■ U.S. National forests are owned in common by all Americans, not set aside for private entities to profit from.

■ Public involvement in the management of our national forests is a key component of land management that affects all users at the local and state level.

This rule change would largely eliminate the decision-making role of forest-management districts and their scientific data on climate, wildfire threat, biodiversity, water resources, tree viability, grazing lands and natural habitat in management planning, and turn it over to extractive industry leasing analysts.

Extensive comments were prepared in November by Audubon and allied organizations, including the Rio Grande Chapter, in opposition to this undercutting of the Forest Service mission.

As the outgoing administration seeks to gift critical public resources to private corporations, the incoming Biden team will face a deluge of new rules to remove or undo in order to restore our public-lands agencies.

BLM oil, gas leasing was business as usual in 2020

**By Miya King-Flaherty
Our Wild New Mexico**

This has been an unforgettable year, to say the least, and the collective fight to protect the Greater Chaco region from further oil and gas development was an all-hands-on-deck effort.

On Feb. 28, the Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Indian Affairs released a draft amendment to its Resource Management Plan for the region that allows for more than 3,000 new fracked wells to be drilled. Following the release of the plan, the agencies announced a 90-day public-comment period that resulted in an all-out battle to delay the process in light of the emerging health crisis.

Compounding this move, the BLM proceeded with a 10-day protest period in March after nominating 920 more acres in the Greater Chaco region and more than 50,000 acres in the Greater Carlsbad region to be auctioned off at its online quarterly May lease sale.

The Trump administration showed no signs of easing up on its "Energy Dominance" agenda as COVID-19 emergency plans unfolded and the impacts of the pandemic on Tribal nations grew. In spite of this, Greater Chaco Coalition partners managed to get nearly 1,000 protests submitted while underscoring the fact that daily lives were disrupted, impairing the ability of the general public, issue experts and others to engage in the process. In the end, the BLM postponed the May lease sale and has temporarily stopped offering more public and ancestral Tribal lands in the Greater Chaco region at its quarterly lease sales. Unfortunately, oil and gas leasing continues in southeastern New Mexico's Greater Carlsbad region despite current market conditions.

The next uphill battle was calling on Interior Secretary David Bernhardt to direct the BLM and BIA to extend the May 28 comment deadline on the draft Resource Management Plan for the Greater Chaco region. For months, Bernhardt ignored calls from the entire New Mexico congressional delegation, Tribal leaders and New Mexico state agencies to extend the deadline. Indigenous,

Stronger N.M. methane rules can have major climate impact

**By Camilla Feibelman
Chapter director**

You already know that methane is a powerful climate pollutant, 86 times more potent than carbon dioxide over the critical near-term time frame.

Oil and gas producers leak, vent, and flare enough methane — the primary ingredient in natural gas — to 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 that many New Mexicans suffer from.

This is a problem with a solution, and you are part of it.

Support nation-leading methane rules at the NM Oil Conservation Commission
Jan. 4: The Oil Conservation Commission has written a draft rule under the Oil and Gas Act

to address waste by industry of natural gas. We need your help to make these rules as strong as possible. Email camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org if you want to testify.

A second set of rules will come out next year to address air quality and pollution from the industry, and the New Mexico Environment Department has announced that with recent findings show significantly higher industry leakage than last year, these rules will be strengthened. That's a good thing, because if current loopholes remain, 60-70 percent of methane and VOC pollution would continue to be released into the atmosphere.

We also need federal oil and gas safeguards back — better and stronger. We are calling on the Biden Administration to return to the Paris Climate

Agreement and restore and strengthen BLM and EPA methane rules to reduce this dangerous climate pollution 65% from 2015 levels by 2025.

EPA rules cover extraction on all lands, but should apply to both new and existing sources of methane pollution. BLM rules cover the waste of oil and gas public resources on federal lands by industry.

These rules should stop the widespread leaking, venting, and flaring of natural gas that occurs throughout the industry and wastes resources, pollutes the air, harms communities, and accelerates climate change.

Join us and millions of Americans in urging our legislators and policymakers to swiftly enact policy to solve the climate crisis at actionnetwork.org/petitions/time-to-act/.

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environmental, and community groups urged the agency to suspend its plans, but those pleas were also ignored.

Bernhardt eventually extended the comment deadline to Sept. 25. The BLM and BIA hosted another series of virtual meetings that were sparsely attended by those impacted by the draft plan. Though another extension was not granted, more than 14,000 individuals, groups, and organizations commented.

As with so many other issues, we hope with the Biden administration come opportunities to ensure that a management plan for the region incorporates meaningful Tribal consultation, ethnographic and cultural studies and health and social impact analysis, and brings a reprieve for the remaining 8% of lands in the Greater Chaco landscape. Now is the time to protect communities, our air and water, our climate, and sacred places.



Will you outlive your garbage? Probably not.

Trash decomposition timelines:

- aluminum cans: 80 to 200 years
 - aluminum foil: never
 - apple core/banana peel: 1 to 2 months
 - battery: 100 years
 - cardboard: 2 months
 - canvas: 1 year
 - cigarette butts: 10 to 12 years
 - cotton glove: 3 months
 - cotton t shirt: 2 to 6 months
 - disposable diapers: 550 years
 - foamed plastic cup: 50 years
 - food wrapper/plastic coated paper: 5 years
 - glass: 1 million years to never
 - hair spray bottle: 200 to 500 years
 - ink cartridges: 450 to 1000 years
 - iron: several years
 - latex glove: several months to several years
 - leather shoes: 25 to 40 years
 - lumber: 10 to 15 years
 - milk carton: 5 years
 - monofilament fishing line: 600 years
 - newspaper: 6 weeks
 - nylon fabric: 30 to 40 years
 - nylon fishing nets: 40 years
 - orange peel: 6 months
 - painted wood: 13 years
 - paper: 2 to 6 weeks
 - paper towel: 2 to 4 weeks
 - plastic bag: 10 to 1,000 years
 - plastic bottle: 450 years
 - plastic film container: 20 to 30 years
 - plastic straw: 200 years
 - plastic 6-pack holder: 450 years
 - plywood: 1 to 3 years
 - polyurethane: 1000 years
 - rope: 3 to 14 months
 - rubber band: 1 year
 - rubber boot sole: 50 to 80 years
 - sanitary pads & tampons: 500 to 800 years
 - Styrofoam: never
 - synthetic fabric: 100 years-plus
 - tin can: 50 years
 - tires: 2,000 years
 - train ticket: 2 weeks
 - vegetables: 5 days to 1 month
 - wet wipes: 100 years
 - wool clothing: 1 to 5 years
- Decomposition rates vary depending upon landfill conditions.

Data sources: Peace Corps, The Balance Small Business, ThoughtCo., SaveOn Energy, Ecology Recycling and Transportation Services, WasteAdvantage magazine, Huffpost, NOAA, Leave No Trace, Slate.

By Carol P. Chamberland Central New Mexico Zero Waste

Recently a friend sent me a disturbing chart on the decomposition rates of various types of garbage. I looked further into the matter and found it’s worse than I thought. Way worse.

America is a wasteful country. Daily, we generate four pounds of waste per person. Annually, that’s more than 220 million tons of trash, three times the global average.

We use 1.6 million barrels of oil per year just to produce plastic water bottles that can take up to 1,000 years to decompose. Plastic bags can take up to 500 years.

But how do we know how long it takes to decompose? Plastic hasn’t been around that long, so there’s no firsthand evidence of its decomposition rate. To make long-term estimates, scientists place a solid waste sample — like a newspaper, banana peel, or plastic bag — into a vessel containing microbe-rich compost, then aerate the mixture. Over the course of several days, microorganisms assimilate the sample bit by bit and produce carbon dioxide; the resultant CO2 level serves as an indicator of degradation.

These tests work perfectly for newspapers and banana peels. But when scientists test generic plastic bags, they find no decomposition; microorganisms don’t recognize polyethylene as food any more than we do.

Although plastic doesn’t biodegrade, it does photodegrade when exposed to ultraviolet radiation from sunlight. This suggests that plastic will eventually fragment into microscopic granules. But scientists still aren’t sure how many centuries it will take for the sun to work its magic. That’s why some news sources cite a 500-year estimate for plastic bags, while others prefer a more conservative 1,000-year lifespan. They all agree it’s a really, really

long time.

I looked into some other common trash materials.

Aluminum can be recycled over and over again. It is considered the most sustainable beverage container. The average aluminum can is made from 70% recycled metal. Nevertheless, many aluminum cans make it into landfills where they take 80 to 200 years to completely decompose.

Cigarette butts are the most littered item worldwide. In America, 176 million pounds of cigarette butts are discarded annually.

Disposable diapers: An estimated 90-95% of American babies use disposable diapers, creating 7.6 billion pounds of nonbiodegradable garbage each year. This is enough diapers to stretch to the moon and back nine times — every year.

Food waste: an estimated one third of the world’s food produced for human consumption gets lost or wasted annually. Over 97% of food waste ends up in a landfill, producing methane, a greenhouse gas 21 times more potent than CO2. Landfills account for over 34% of all the methane released into the environment, making them the largest source of methane. Composting would alleviate much of this methane production.

Glass is 100% recyclable and can be recycled over and over again without loss of quality. Despite this, glass still makes its way into landfills. The most shocking aspect of this is that glass takes a MILLION years to decompose. Some sources say it may never break down at all.

Paper is by volume the largest element of American landfills. On average, paper products take two to six weeks to fully decompose. If we recycle paper, we save room in landfills and use far less water and energy. Like food waste, decomposing paper creates methane.



Barbara J. McGuire, “Delicate Doe”

Sierra Club virtual art exhibit

The Sierra Club Central New Mexico Group is teaming up with New Mexico Watercolor Society for the February and March virtual art exhibit.

These expressive works by New Mexico artists take us through Nature’s Winter sleep to the awakening of early Spring.

The exhibit will be posted to the Rio Grande Sierra Club website, riograndesierraclub.org, on February 6.

For more information, contact Peter Kelling at: cloudsandwater@juno.com.

Food aid, COVID aid in New Mexico

The Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice is asking for help for much-needed food donations for the holidays to feed hungry families. Pre-packed food items would be greatly appreciated during the holidays in this time of great need.

Food drop can be done any day in the week until 5 p.m at 202 Harvard Drive SE, Albuquerque. You can drop off your non-perishable food items or the center will pick them up. Their food distribution is 8-11 a.m. every Saturday.

The Navajo Nation has been one of the hardest-hit regions from COVID-19. The Far East Navajo COVID Response Fund continues to distribute critical sanitation and food supplies to the most needy communities. To donate, go to www.gofundme.com/f/far-east-navajo-covid19-relief or send a check to 1001 Marquette, NW, Albuquerque, NM 87102.

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Illegal grazing plagues Valles Caldera

By the Pajarito Group Executive Committee
New Mexico has been profoundly changed by livestock, especially the sheep that grazed here by the millions between 1880 and 1935.

On our hikes, we see the impacts of long-term cattle grazing on National Forest lands, and most of us recognize grazing-related erosion with our forests out of balance as livestock decimate high altitude, arid landscapes and their waterways. We've seen severe wildfires, which are partly a consequence of grazing damage to forests. Rare and endangered species, like the western jumping mouse, lose habitat as cattle cluster near streams. We can only imagine the richness and variety of plants and wildlife that thrived before livestock dominated the region.

Aside from a small legal livestock grazing program in a limited fenced pasture area in Valles de los Posas (Jemez Pueblo has been the winning bidder for several years, paying the National Park Service more than 15 times the going rate for grazing permits outside the Preserve), the Valles Caldera could be a rare livestock-free landscape in our overgrazed West.

Because, unlike National Forest lands, we expect that a National Park will be protected from illegal grazing.

Since 2015, our Valles Caldera National Preserve has been designated one of those protected landscapes dedicated to watershed and wildlife protection, scientific research and public enjoyment.

Yet for the past three years, our preserve has been overrun with illegal-trespass cattle trampling riparian habitat, polluting waters with their waste, damaging wetlands that had been restored to support native species, and mowing meadows still recovering from cattle and



Photo by Tom Ribe

For the past three years, Valles Caldera National Preserve has been overrun with illegal-trespass cattle trampling riparian habitat, damaging wetlands that had been restored to support native species, and mowing meadows still recovering from previous cattle and sheep abuse.

sheep abuse from when the property was private. These trespass cattle access the preserve from legal grazing allotments on the Santa Fe National Forest land north of the preserve through the 44 miles of fence that is often crushed by falling trees, elk, and vandalism. In 2015, federal rangers photographed a rancher cutting a fence and driving cattle through. He was fined \$5,000, and since that incident, the Valles Caldera National Preserve and Santa Fe National Forest have had extensive discussions about keeping cows out of the Preserve.

The National Park Service is paying for a north fence replacement even though that infrastructure serves the US Forest Service grazing leases. National Forest ranchers are required to maintain fences. This fence may take two more years to finish and will be subject to vandalism and natural elements. Taxpayers are paying for the fence.

The Valle San Antonio is closed to grazing, as is a major-

ity of the Valles Caldera NP, but in 2019 staff from the NPS Regional Office counted more than 100 cows in the Valle San Antonio. This September, Sierrans noted 75 cows in the vast meadow. Trespass cattle were also common in riparian areas of Valle Toledo, and Hidden Valley (Jemez River Canyon). Streams in the Valles Caldera violate Clean Water Act standards because of turbidity.

We can bring attention to the problem of illegal trespass cattle. We can help return the Valles Caldera to its pre-grazing state of plant and animal diversity and clean healthy streams.

What we can do: Write to our senators. Sens. Ben Ray Luján and Martin Heinrich are champions of public-lands protection. Ask them to insist that the Park Service and US Forest Service take effective steps to permanently remove trespass cattle from the Valles Caldera National Preserve.

Senator Martin Heinrich: www.heinrich.senate.gov/contact 123 East Marcy St.,

Ste. 103 Santa Fe, N.M. 87501, (505) 988-6647

Senator-Elect Ben Ray Lujan: lujan.house.gov/contact/mail, 1611 Calle Lorca, Suite A, Santa Fe, NM 87505 p: (505) 984-8959 (prior to January 20, 2021).

Pajarito Group and 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. Want more shocking facts? We posted a slide show with everything you need to know at www.riograndesierraclub.org/food-waste.

Pajarito Group

www.riograndesierraclub.org/pajarito

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Outdoors



Photo by Chris Ridgeway

Outings chair Terry Owen in the Cibola Wilderness. Sierra Club outings, always free and open to the public, are paused through February, but we will resume as soon as it's safe! To get on our outings listserv, send an email to Listserv@lists.sierraclub.org with any subject and a message that says SUBSCRIBE RIO-NORTH-OUTINGS. Or check our website at riograndesierraclub.org/pandemic-outings.

A brighter future starts now

By Terry Owen

Chapter Outings chair

2020 was, euphemistically speaking, a challenging year. Sierra Club outings were cancelled from February 2020 through February 2021; the 50th anniversary of Earth Day was overshadowed by the pandemic; and millions of acres of public lands were either threatened or handed over for use by commercial interests. There was a continual stream of chaos pouring from the federal government on an hourly basis. Worse yet, some of those who were closest to us became very ill or perished from a terrible disease, with no end in sight.

For many of us, our outdoor spaces and wild lands were our sanctuary, meditation space and recreation area. It was the only thing that was keeping us anchored to what was important and gave us the ability to socially distance while recreating with our friends and family. It also gave us time to think about where we are now and how we might not only survive, but also make the world a better place for those who come after us.

While you and I may not be here to see it, how do you want our planet to look in 100 years? Would you like to have clean air and water? How about abundant wilderness areas that contain thriving ecosystems of animal and plant life? Imagine, in this thought experiment, humankind will have reduced its addiction to fast fashion, mindless consumption and vulture capitalism. What if there is greater equality and fewer wars? This sounds idealistic, but how do we get to something better?

Where there is chaos, as we've seen over the last four years, there are also opportunities. The Rio Grande Chapter has harnessed some of those opportunities. While we couldn't



Terry Owen

The view over Albuquerque from a hike in the Sandias.

meet in person, we used technology to stay in touch and move environmental initiatives forward. A decade ago, those initiatives would have stalled. As a result of families being quarantined together for weeks or months, they started paying attention to their kids and partners and seeing first-hand the issues with which they were dealing. It caused us to think about what the future might avail if we remain on this current trajectory.

The good news is that a brighter future starts right now with each of us. Thanks to you, we are poised to make a difference for the better. No action that you take is too small, and something is better than nothing. Try reducing, reusing and recycling. Bike or walk to the store and combine trips. Let your elected officials know that you want to work toward a brighter future. The Rio Grande Chapter is always looking for volunteers to call members, organize, lobby legislators and lead outings. Contact the group chair for your area listed at the front of this

newsletter and let them know you'd like to help. We want you!

To paraphrase Jacques Cousteau, "we only protect the things that we love." New Mexico has an abundance of wild lands and open spaces, and I invite you to get out and fall in love with them, and then help us protect them so we can have a brighter future. We'll begin conducting organized outings as soon as it's deemed safe to do so, and I look forward to you joining us. In the meantime, if you'd like to get out and you're not sure where to go, try the Hiking Project app and our very own website, riograndesierraclub.org/pandemic-outings/. We also offer the book *Day Hikes in the Santa Fe Area*, available at REI or from the Northern New Mexico Group. If you'd like to periodically receive ideas for outings and adventures or you have questions, email teowen@comcast.net and you'll be added to our email list. I hope to see you out there!



Eric Metzler, Carolin Scott-Tracey and *sympistis sierrablanca*.

New Mexico moth named for Sierra Club

By Dr. Eric Metzler

A new species of white moth, described from White Sands National Park, was dedicated in part to the Sierra Club.

The moth species, *Sympistis sierrablanca*, was described by New Mexico State University's Eric H. Metzler and student Carolin L. Scott-Tracey. The Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter's Northern New Mexico Group provided two small grants in support of the research, leading to the discovery and description of this new species of moth.

The genus, *Sympistis*, was prescribed by the structure of the female genital organs. The name of the moth, *sierrablanca*, was coined by Scott-Tracey to honor the Sierra Club and the white dunes in White Sands. A scientific paper formally naming the species was published in the open-access online scholarly journal *Insect Systematics and Diversity*.

White Sands National Park is about 40% of the 275 square miles of white gypsum-dune geologic formation in the Tularosa Basin of south-central New Mexico. The New Mexico white gypsum dunes formation in Otero and Doña Ana counties is the largest in the world.

At first glance, the dunes appear to be an inhospitable and desolate habitat. To the contrary, they are home to a wide diversity of plants and animals. Several are endemic in the dunes, thus earning the National Park designation as the Galapagos of North America. In the first 10 years of my study in less than 0.1%, of the dunes, I identified more than 650 species of moths.

I was invited by the National Park Service to conduct a study of moths in White Sands National Park (which was then White Sands National Monument) beginning in 2007. Within the first 10 years, I detected approximately 60 previously unknown species of moths. My co-authors and I have published 13 papers describing 13 new species of moths from the Monument.

In 2017, undergraduate student Carolin L. Scott enrolled in my independent studies course at New Mexico State University. Scott-Tracey collected moths, prepared specimens for scientific study, made dissections, examined DNA barcodes, prepared scientific slides and coauthored the manuscript. Scott-Tracey's sister, Tatiana Scott, created the scientific illustrations used for publication.

The new species is in the family Noctuidae, subfamily Oncocnemidinae. It is a small moth with a wingspan of approximately 1 inch. It varies from nearly pure white to a blue-dusky gray. Because of the moth's small size and unusual shape of the male genital organs, the moth circumscribes a new species group, *sierrablanca*. It occurs in the National Park during the summer months, and the adults are active at night. The larval host and life history are unknown. We thank the Sierra Club for its generous support of this research.