



# Rio Grande Sierran

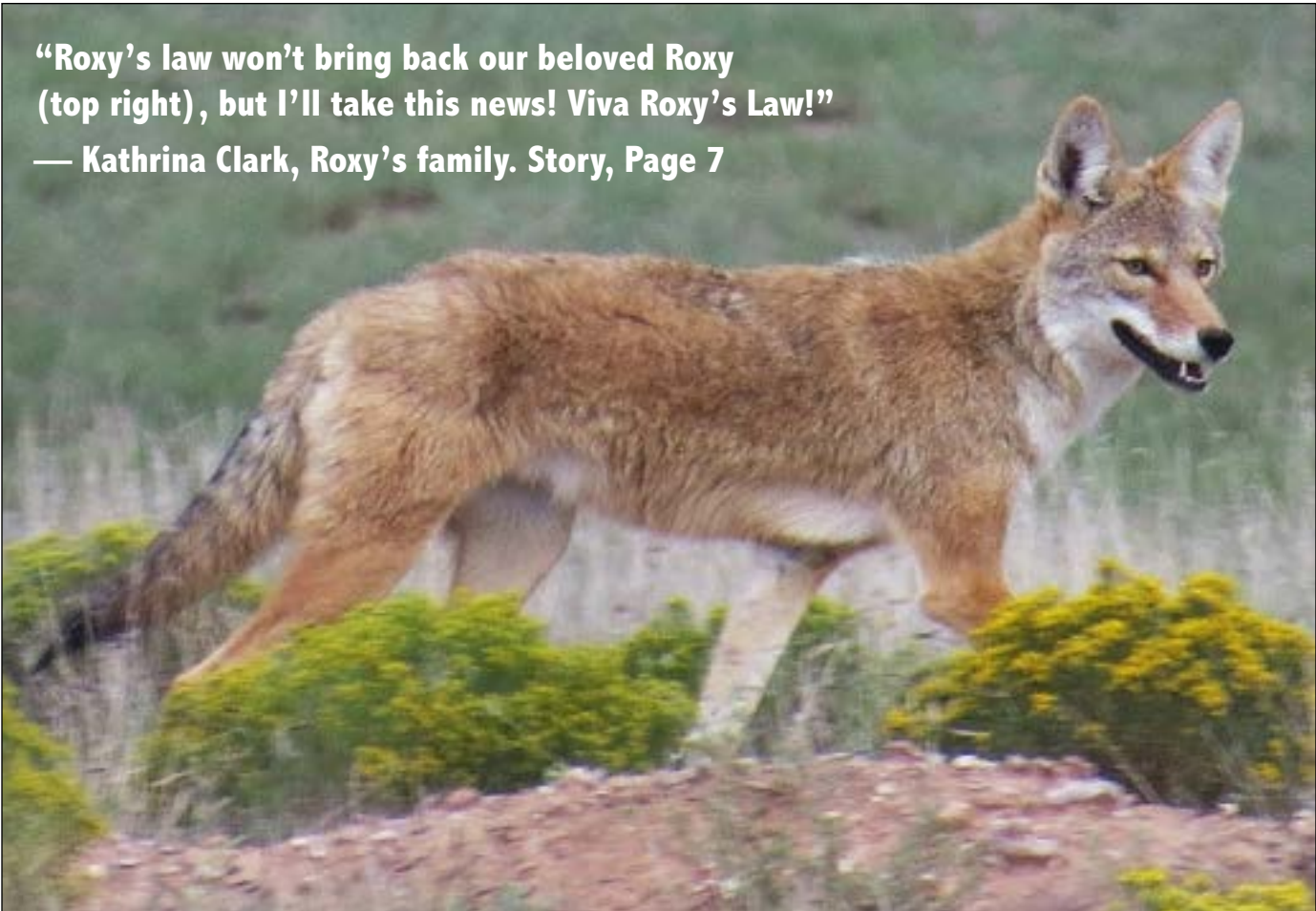
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News of the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter: New Mexico & West Texas

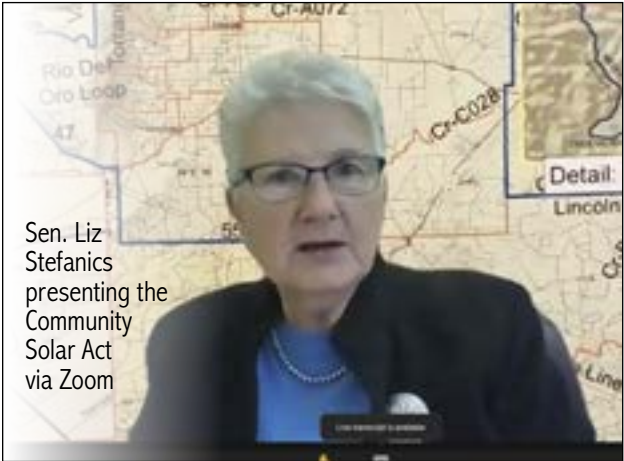
April/May/June 2021

## Trap-free

### N.M. Legislature bans traps and poisons on public lands



“Roxy’s law won’t bring back our beloved Roxy (top right), but I’ll take this news! Viva Roxy’s Law!”  
— Kathrina Clark, Roxy’s family. Story, Page 7



**N.M. Legislature 2021:** Community solar and just-transition legislation survived a busy remote session. **Page 6**




**Keeping coal alive:** PNM’s deal to exit Four Corners coal plant would keep the plant polluting longer: **Page 5**



**Good news in Holtec fight:** New Mexico Attorney General Hector Balderas sues to stop radioactive-waste storage site: **Page 9**

#### EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET

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#### Inside:

**Leasing pause could lead to oil and gas reforms**  
Industry has stockpiled enough permits to drill for years in N.M.; fundamental reforms are needed in the leasing program. **Page 3.**

**Navajo chapters get air monitors**  
Ojo Encino Chapter House, in the greater Chaco Canyon area, is the first to go online with continuous local air-quality monitoring. **Page 9**

**Global Warming Express expands online**  
Trilingual GWE curriculum app will be available across North America. **Page 9.**  
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# Working on being better together

I'm honored to be elected as your Rio Grande Chapter chair. It's been a few years since my last stint, so let me reintroduce myself.

My folks were tradespeople working seven days a week, so vacations for our family consisted of one-night camping trips in the backcountry of Southern California.

**Chair's column**  
**Susan Martin**

Memories of stunning desert wildflowers of spring, poppies especially, are part of my history. My paternal grandfather grew up in the Rockies of Colorado and explored the Sierras as an adult. My mother's family left South Dakota for San Diego in the 1930s for a better (and warmer) life.

A summer volunteer program in Olympic National Park, in the amazing Hoh rainforest, inspired my career choice to protect our national public treasures via the law. After Berkeley



Law School, my first position was as Counsel to the US House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee. Al Gore, Ed Markey and Ron Wyden, all to become senators, were committee members dedicated to addressing the blow to national confidence in government after the crimes of the Nixon Administration.

The same task confronts us now after the travesty and destruction of the administration of "that former guy."

Last July, Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune penned a missive on our organization's problematic history — from founder John Muir's racist statements about Black and Indigenous people to its current, predominantly white membership and sentimentality.

"Willful ignorance is what allows some people to shut their eyes to the reality that the wild places we love are also the ancestral homelands of Native peoples, forced off their lands in

the decades or centuries before they became national parks," Brune wrote. It "allows them to overlook, too, the fact that only people insulated from systemic racism and brutality can afford to focus solely on preserving wilderness."

In 1996, 40 people met in Jemez, N.M., for the Working Group Meeting on Globalization and Trade, hosted by the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice to hammer out common understandings between participants from different cultures, politics and organizations. The Sierra Club Board of Directors adopted them in 2014. They are:

- Be Inclusive
- Emphasis on bottom-up organizing
- Let people speak for themselves
- Work together in solidarity and mutuality
- Build just relationships among ourselves; and
- Commitment to self-trans-

formation. My last stint as Rio Grande Chapter chair was in 2009, when Barack Obama was president, trying to pick up the pieces of an economy in crisis. Now the chapter is dedicated to diversity, equity and inclusion and to working with many more allies than just the traditional "green" groups. This is only possible with the work of our volunteers and staff.

The Rio Grande Chapter contains an amazing number of heroes and heroines, from bookkeepers who assure our solvency to our Water Sentinels testing rivers to a chapter secretary whose detailed notes maintain our history to an wildlife chair whose persistence resulted in Roxy's Law 17 years after her dog got caught in a leghold trap.

As we move forward protecting the wild places, communities and creatures we treasure, we must ensure that equity and inclusion are at the forefront of our work.

## Letter to the editor

### On the climate crisis & future of humanity

As Texans recover from the effects of an unregulated pseudo "free market" electric system, others are understandably pointing the finger at the Lone Star State as an example of the dangers of promoting a "keep costs as low as possible and maximize profits today" mentality. Tragically, not just Texans but all Americans are not very disciplined at taking measures today (which require us to spend some money upfront and to change a few of our behaviors) to prepare for and prevent costly and deadly disasters tomorrow - the biggest disaster being the impending global Climate Crisis, a taste of which Texans have recently been enduring.

We are pretty much a "Me today and let tomorrow bring what it brings" society. Capitalism and the marketing that accompanies it inundates us, mostly subliminally, with that "only today matters and let the future be damned" message. Frankly I'm not real clear on how to turn that ingrained ship around, so we start behaving like the supposedly intelligent species we claim to be.

Gratefully, however, the hard work of the Sierra Club and other climate non-profits are keeping the climate issue front and center politically and legislatively allowing us all to maintain some degree of hope that we can prevent the worst of global climate change. We must continue the struggle because the ultimate victims, if our society continues our collective myopia, are our children and the future we are handing to them.

— Craig O'Hare, Sierra Club member since 1981, Rio Grande Chapter Executive Committee Member in the late 1990s.



## Don't know how to help? We can help!

The sandhill crane at left was photographed by David McGahey, a Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter volunteer who answered a *Sierran* call for photographers. Documenting events when they resume is just one volunteer activity you might not have realized existed.

If you like what the Sierra Club does but aren't sure how you can help make our world more equitable, safe and beautiful, email us at [riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org) or fill out our form. Activities range from data entry, addressing envelopes and videography to pitching in on social media or writing letters to the editor.

Right now, we especially need volunteers for data entry as well as volunteers to help with the latest edition of the hiking book (see Page 9 or email [akusantafe@gmail.com](mailto:akusantafe@gmail.com)). Fill out the form at [riograndesierraclub.org/volunteer-form](http://riograndesierraclub.org/volunteer-form), share your talents and join our team!

## Open that mail! Our success depends on you

**By David Coss**  
**Chapter Fundraising chair**

Make sure to check your mail for our spring fundraising letter from the Rio Grande Chapter!

I hope all are well and getting some well-deserved rest after an historic year. 2020 was such a difficult year, but 2021 has brought great victories for New Mexico and our country. You can see some of the progress we made together in your letter, the only fundraising letter we send each year.

Rio Grande Chapter Sierra Club

volunteers and staff just finished an unbelievable legislative session. We are excited about the confirmation of New Mexico's Debra Haaland as Interior secretary. The work ahead is even more important, as this issue of *The Sierran* demonstrates.

Our Rio Grande Chapter is all in on the struggle for human and environmental justice. Your donations helps maintain our staff and all of the Chapter's ongoing work and resources. As we savor the potential of this time to bring change, your financial help is

crucial. To donate online, please go to [riograndesierraclub.org/donate](http://riograndesierraclub.org/donate). You can also send a check to 1807 Second St., Unit 45, Santa Fe, NM 87505, care of Claire McKnight, and write "Rio Grande Chapter donation" in the memo line.

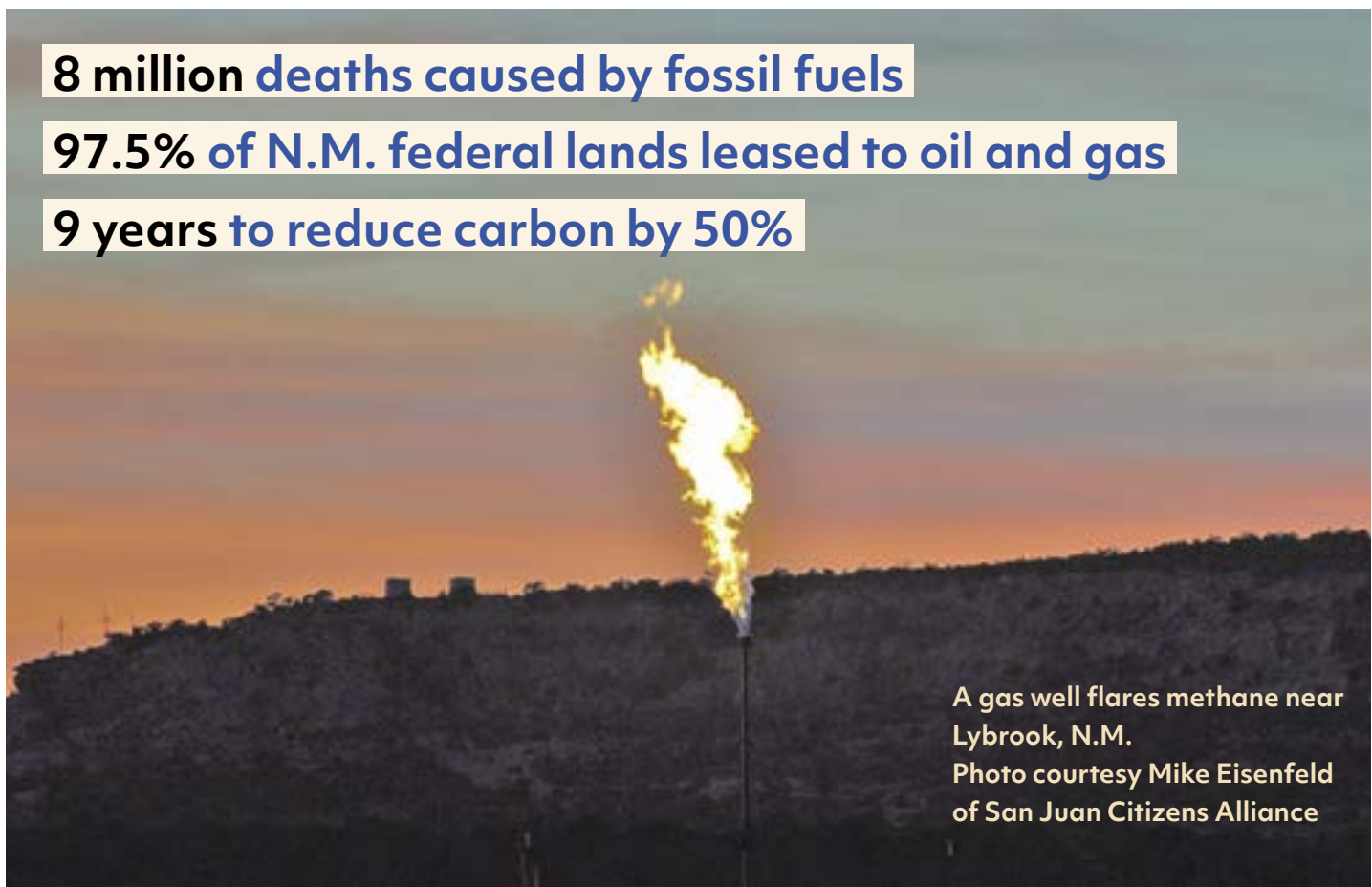
I want to thank all the Chapter and National folks who helped us get out this spring fundraising letter. May everyone have a safe and wonderful summer, knowing our work is making a difference.



8 million deaths caused by fossil fuels

97.5% of N.M. federal lands leased to oil and gas

9 years to reduce carbon by 50%



A gas well flares methane near Lybrook, N.M.  
Photo courtesy Mike Eisenfeld of San Juan Citizens Alliance

# Time to diversify is now

By Don Schreiber

The oil and gas industry is ringing alarm bells about President Joe Biden's executive orders to address the climate crisis. But the alarm we should be heeding is for our families and our climate, not oil and gas CEOs.

Those of us who live on the front-lines of oil and gas development in New Mexico know the truth: State and federal economic transition measures are long overdue. We must recognize that the current system is broken. We need an economy that works for all New Mexicans.

More than 115,000 members of New Mexico's most vulnerable communities — including kids under 5, Latinos, and Native Americans — live within 1 mile of an oil and gas well. As new wells continue to be drilled, toxic chemicals are released alongside climate-heating gases like methane. Benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene (BTEX) cause cancer, birth defects, nerve damage and asthma. The evidence mounts every day: A recent Harvard study found that 18 percent of all deaths worldwide come from fossil-fuel emissions.

During the Trump administration, the industry swallowed up more than 250,000 acres of New Mexico public lands in just four years and hoarded federal leases on 4.3 million acres of our New Mexico public lands. More than 1 million acres haven't even been used yet.

In fact, oil and gas companies have stockpiled more than 6,000 drilling permits in New Mexico — enough for drilling for years even if no new permits were issued. Our Legislative Finance Committee says about 97% of federal lands in New Mexico have already been leased.

There's not much more for them to take. The climate crisis is already taking a toll on our farming and ranching with drought and extreme weather. It's time to face the reality that we need to look elsewhere for revenues.

Growing up in Farmington and now with 122 gas wells on and around our ranch, I can tell you that the No. 1 reason for loss of jobs in the oil and gas industry is not regulations or executive orders. It's not even the market. It's automation and new systems. It used to take 16 workers to run a drilling rig; now it can take as few as four. On top of that, bigger companies have bought out smaller ones and cut local workers' pay and jobs to maximize profits.

We need to build an economy where our families have safe and healthy jobs that are centered around building up local communities instead of tearing them down.

*Schreiber is a rancher and federal grazing permittee in New Mexico's San Juan Basin.*

## Pause brings hope in N.M.

By Miya King-Flaherty

Our Wild New Mexico organizer

Almost immediately after assuming office in January, the Biden administration issued an order to temporarily suspend new oil and gas leasing on public lands. The pause does not affect existing leases or drilling permits, and revenue from royalties will keep flowing into the state.

In New Mexico, oil and gas companies can continue their current development, and in addition to current leases and permits, operators have stockpiled more than 6,000 unused drilling permits — a sign that fundamental reforms are needed in the federal oil and gas leasing program.

Our public and ancestral tribal lands are under assault from oil and gas drilling, and we must urgently transition away from fossil-fuel extraction and burning, which threatens New Mexicans' health and degrades lands

and waters for communities and wildlife and threatens future generations.

Pausing new leasing and permitting will not jeopardize jobs or revenue, but it will give the Biden administration the time and resources to plan critical transitioning with communities, stakeholders, and advocates to comprehensively review the federal oil and gas leasing program, which is overseen by the Department of the Interior.

Shortly after U.S. Rep. Deb Haaland was confirmed as Interior Department secretary, the department held a virtual forum on March 25 with several panels to highlight perspectives from Indigenous organizations, labor and environmental justice organizations, community advocates and industry representatives to discuss what should comprehensively be reviewed in the current oil and gas leasing system.

The panelists highlighted various issues: the need for more tribal consultation, including local level consul-

tation with impacted communities; understanding the value of sacred lands; impacts to rural and poor communities; poor air quality and frack-wastewater concerns; reforming antiquated leasing policies; and impacts to the economy and jobs to name a few.

The Department of Interior is accepting public comments through April 15 (<https://bit.ly/3s0q3rT>) and plans to develop an interim report this summer. The report will include initial findings on the federal oil and gas leasing program and outline next steps and recommendations for the Department and Congress to take.

This bold action is what we need from our leaders in Washington DC and here in New Mexico. Our state has been held hostage to the oil and gas industry long enough. It's time to make a just transition away from fossil fuels and toward a sustainable economy that puts New Mexicans first.

## Haaland leadership can transform DOI

By Mona Blaber

Chapter communications

Vice President Kamala Harris swore in former U.S. Rep. Deb Haaland to lead the Department of the Interior on March 18, ushering in a new era for the agency that manages the country's national parks and 450 million acres of public lands and upholds federal trust responsibilities to Indigenous communities.

"For far too long there has been an undeniable lack of representation for Native Americans in the highest levels of the U.S. government, but today, Native Americans and especially Native American women can rejoice that one of us, a woman and citizen of the

Pueblo of Laguna, has been elevated to such a crucial position," said Ahtza Chavez, executive director of NAVA Education Project and NM Native Vote.

"Secretary Haaland will lead with care and the utmost consideration of Tribal Nations and the preservation of our lands, natural resources and sacred sites. She will be a critical leader in the battle to mitigate and avert the worst effects of the climate crisis. We will look to her leadership to uphold and guide the principles of a just transition so that Native American communities nationwide may have a voice and seat at the table as many more local, state, and tribal governments begin to



Photo courtesy Department of Interior

Deb Haaland, surrounded by family, is sworn in on March 18.

invest in a renewable energy economy."

"New Mexicans are bursting with pride to see our own Deb Haaland leading the Department of the Interior," said Camilla Feibelman, Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter director. "She understands the bold, meaningful progress we need

to heal our climate, our lands and people's connection to them. The collaborative spirit she brought to safeguarding the region around Chaco Culture National Historical Park from encroaching extraction will serve her well as steward of our nation's public lands,"



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**Cover banner photo by Jim Klukkert**

**‘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*.

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You can join the Sierra Club (your membership is to both the national group and the Rio Grande Chapter) for only \$15! 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.  
Scan the QR code below on your cell phone to join the Rio Grande Chapter using our online form.



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Photo courtesy San Juan Citizens Alliance

**PNM wants out of Four Corners coal plant so badly it’s willing to pay about \$75 million to Navajo Transitional Energy Company to take it. PNM has also vowed to veto any closure attempt while it retains ownership.**

# PNM’s disingenuous ‘coal-free’ boast

**By Mona Blaber**  
**Communications director**

Coal is costly, deadly, and increasingly doomed. Nearly every New Mexico coal plant has either been retired or slated for closure by 2022. But there’s one big exception, and PNM’s effort to exit Four Corners Coal Plant could cause it to keep polluting indefinitely.

PNM, New Mexico’s biggest utility, wants to offload its 13% share of Four Corners so badly, it’s willing to pay \$75 million of shareholder funds and \$73 million in ratepayer money to do so.

A few factors motivated PNM’s odd deal. First, coal is expensive. Second, no one wants to buy coal plants anymore — no one except the operator of the coal mine that feeds Four Corners. Navajo Transitional Energy Company, owned by Navajo Nation but run by non-Navajo executives, was formed for the purpose of purchasing Navajo Mine to keep it open, and Four Corners Coal Plant is the only customer for Navajo Mine.

Third, utility and energy giant Avangrid has proposed to buy PNM. One of the conditions of the merger is that PNM make every effort to rid its portfolio of coal, because Avangrid is a renewable-energy developer and doesn’t want its companies selling outdated dirty energy.

But Avangrid’s condition and PNM’s deal are bad for the climate and the people who have lived with Four Corners’ pollution for decades.

Worse than PNM “selling” its share by giving NTEC \$75 million and agreeing to make \$73 million in plant improve-

### Solar, battery to replace nuclear

There are a lot of moving pieces in PNM’s energy portfolio, and some developments are quite hopeful for the climate. The utility last year announced it was dropping one of its leases in Palo Verde Nuclear plant, and in April it proposed replacement resources: 100% solar and battery.

In support of its proposal, PNM cited the Energy Transition Act’s requirements and the Public Regulation Commission’s decision last year to choose a 100% solar/storage proposal rather than PNM’s favored gas-inclusive replacement scenario for San Juan Generating Station coal.

The replacement proposal will need to be approved by the commission. Stay tuned!

ments (at ratepayer cost) before it offloads Four Corners is another condition of the deal: PNM has agreed to veto any attempt by other owners to close the plant while it still owns it — until Jan. 1, 2025. The ownership agreement requires closure decisions to be unanimous, along with two years’ notice before closure, so PNM is agreeing to a deal that would guarantee Four Corners continues to burn coal until at least 2027.

If PNM kept its share in the plant, it is possible, and perhaps likely, that it would come to an agreement with majority owner Arizona Public Service in the next few years to close the plant before its 2031 scheduled retirement date.

Neither the transfer agreement for Four Corners nor the merger agreement is a done deal. Both must be approved by the Public Regulation Commission, and the PRC can adjust or reject both.

The Sierra Club is intervening in both cases, as are allied groups, including San Juan Citizens Alliance, Diné CARE, Tó Nizhóní Ání, and NAVA Education Project.

Tó Nizhóní Ání, an Arizona-based Navajo group that

advocates for a just transition for coal-impacted communities, filed testimony in the NTEC case from organizer Jessica Keetso:

“The proposed acquisition is burdened by a number of potential risks that far outweigh any of the claimed benefits of NTEC increasing its ownership stake in FCPP. There is little economic rationale for NTEC to nearly triple its ownership share in a coal plant that is already uneconomic to operate, and in the face of a coal industry that is in permanent, irreversible decline,” Keetso said.

“The proposed merger between Avangrid and PNM should open opportunities for energy-related economic development in the Four Corners region, not foreclose that potential by allowing FCPP to operate through at least 2031, thus putting up a roadblock to the development of clean-energy projects that directly benefit both tribal and nontribal communities near the plant. ... It is not in the public interest or in the Navajo people’s best interest for PNM to sell its share of FCPP to NTEC.”

# Methane rising; rules coming

**By Camilla Feibelman**  
**Chapter director**

First the Paris Climate Agreement was axed, and then the legs of its stool, the Clean Power Plan and the BLM and EPA methane rules, were chopped. It’s hard to even discuss because it brings back the recent memories of the worst times for our country and our climate.

But hope glimmers as the Biden administration makes bold first steps on climate action and as state methane rules take shape.

## New federal safeguards needed

Four years is a lot when it comes to the climate, and the actions we needed our federal government to take to stem the worst consequences of climate change were the opposition of what it did.

Even with the economic slowdown resulting from the pandemic, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported that carbon and methane emissions both rose in 2020, and methane surged to record levels.

It won’t be enough to simply restore the Obama administration’s methane reductions. We’ll need to do more. For that reason the Sierra Club has joined more than 100 groups in calling on the Biden Administration to use the Clean Air Act to reduce methane air pollution from new and existing sources of oil and gas development by 65% by 2025.

While the best and most just solution to the climate crisis is to transition away from fossil fuels and embrace a clean-energy economy, utilizing the full power of the Clean Air Act now will reduce harm to front-line communities impacted by oil and gas development and help curb further global warming. We’ll keep you posted on how to watch and engage in the President’s Climate Summit on April 22 and 23.

## Congressional action can help

Some of you may remember a key but wonky success we had in the Senate at the very beginning of the Trump administration. Senate Republicans tried to use a tool called the Congressional Review Act to permanently revoke the Obama administration’s BLM methane safeguards. This effort failed with the vote of Sen. John McCain and was one of our

first wins against the Trump Administration.

Now, Sen. Martin Heinrich and others have introduced a resolution in the U.S. Senate and several representatives introduced a resolution in the House that would reinstate the Environmental Protection Agency’s 2016 methane pollution safeguards.

By passing this resolution, Congress can ensure that no future administration could strip standards on methane pollution from oil and gas operations.

Once this resolution passes, the Biden administration can build on these standards by cutting methane pollution from new and existing oil and gas operations by 65 percent below 2012 levels in the next five years.

## N.M. rule finalized; one more coming

At the end of March, the New Mexico Oil Conservation Commission finalized a new rule proposed by the state’s Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department to limit venting and flaring of methane by the oil and gas industry.

David Baake and Western Environmental Law Center represented the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter and a host of environmental and community groups in the hearings and successfully advocated for an effective framework to control venting and flaring by achieving two important goals:

1. banning venting and flaring of gas except in limited circumstances and
2. requiring all oil and gas companies to capture 98 percent of methane emissions by 2026.

Importantly, the Oil Conservation Commission rule does not mandate finding and fixing methane leaks, a huge source of methane emissions, and leaks are not covered by the rule’s 98 percent capture target. Instead, a separate rule from the New Mexico Environment Department will target emissions and leaks of methane, volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and nitrogen oxides from oil and gas activities.

The Environment Department is expected to propose its rule to the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Board in May and request a hearing before the board in September. Thanks to all of you who commented on both these rules!



# Long-fought wins, Big Oil roadblocks

By Mona Blaber  
Communications director

The 2021 New Mexico legislative session brought notable victories and frustrating disappointments.

The oil and gas industry asserted its influence in a big way, killing some of the most transformational climate and equity legislation. But over the final days, more and more powerfully beneficial bills emerged in the winner's circle, and all of the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter's priority bills that passed the Legislature were signed into law by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham.

We achieved especially gratifying, hard-fought victories with the Community Solar Act and Roxy's Law (see Page 7), two issues that have been top Sierra Club priorities for many years. Creative partner organizations and sponsors helped the just-transition aspects of the Climate Solutions Act survive as part of the forward-looking Sustainable Economy Task Force (SB112). HB200, ending the Gila River diversion scheme for good and investing \$80 million into local water projects, is another watershed victory (pun intended).

In notable legislation led by partner organizations, the Early Childhood Amendment passed, allowing voters to decide whether to invest 1.25% yearly from New Mexico's massive Land Grant Permanent Fund into early childhood programs. The Healthy Workplaces Act, HB20, greatly expanding paid sick leave for workers, also passed, though a bill that would have reduced the 175% cap rate on predatory payday loans died in conference committee.

And while we all witnessed (or experienced) too much arrogant, infuriating behavior by lawmakers, many more legislators threw their hearts into making life better for our state and our people. Check their names in the sponsor listings below and thank them. Thanks also to legislators who helped with our lobbying trainings, including Sens. Bill Soules and Antoinette Sedillo Lopez and Reps. Melanie Stansbury, Matthew McQueen and Tara Luján. Many New Mexico organizations built these victories, and our work supports their leadership. Rio Grande Chapter legislative chairs Melinda Smith and Patricia Cardona expertly led the crack Sierra Club grassroots lobbying team of more than 1,500 activists (Email [camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org](mailto:camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org) to join our lobby team).

The best part of these sessions is working together and hearing from you. Thanks for showing up at Zoom committee hearings and remote trainings and for emailing, calling and posting. The real power the Sierra Club has is you, and the considerable victories out of this session are products of your action.

A few of the major wins and losses of 2021:

## VICTORIES

### Budgets

Budget and junior money (HB2, SB377) to increase budgets for the New Mexico Environment Department and Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department. See [riograndesierraclub.org](http://riograndesierraclub.org)

### 6 Rio Grande Sierran



**Legislative champions:** Top row, from left: **Rep. Angelica Rubio** sponsored key climate and just-transition bills. **Reps. Kristina Ortiz and Tara Luján** co-sponsored energy-efficiency and low-income utility legislation. **Rep. Patricia Roybal Caballero** worked tirelessly for years to make solar more accessible and affordable. Bottom row: **Rep. Matthew McQueen** eloquently advocated for Roxy's Law, HB200 and other environmental legislation. Wildlife advocate **Sen. Brenda McKenna** made her Senate debut by sponsoring Roxy's Law. **Sen. Siah Correa Hemphill** helped defend the Gila River, and **Sen. Carrie Hamblen** prioritized frontline communities and sponsored an effort to monitor dairy-industry pollution.

for more information.

## Climate & just transition

**SB112, Sustainable Economy Task Force** (Sen. Mimi Stewart, Reps. Angelica Rubio, Melanie Stansbury, Patricia Roybal Caballero, Javier Martinez): Power4NM, a coalition of community organizing groups like OLÉ and CAFÉ, and 350 New Mexico championed this legislation, which will recommend diversification opportunities for New Mexico's economy. It also requires implementation of recommendations from a Department of Workforce Solutions survey of 1,800 New Mexico frontline workers. Rep. Rubio used her allotted capital money in 2019 to fund the survey. This legislation gives impacted communities a seat at the table in creating a clean-energy economy.

**SB84, Community Solar** (Sens. Liz Stefanics and Linda López, Reps. Roybal Caballero and Andrea Romero). This legislation, years in the works, will make solar energy more affordable and accessible to all New Mexicans. It allows individuals, school districts, municipalities and tribal governments to subscribe to solar energy without having to install solar panels on site. Thanks to Chapter Executive Committee member Ken Hughes, who led our advocacy and worked with Vote Solar and Rep. Roybal Caballero to champion this legislation.

**HB15, Sustainable Buildings Tax Credits** (Reps. Kristina Ortiz, Tara Luján, Javier Martínez, Linda Serrato; Sen. Peter Wirth): This legislation updates the tax credits for energy-efficient buildings. The state has updated its standards to the most recent international building codes, so this bill creates stronger efficiency standards so tax credits are not awarded for simply complying with the law. The bill gives increased credits for low-income families. Southwest Energy Efficiency Project guided this bill and the Utility Affordability and Relief Act.

## Wildlife and wildlands:

**SB32, Roxy's Law** (Sens. Gonzalez,

McKenna, Reps. McQueen, Chandler): Roxy's Law outlaws traps and poisons on public lands, with exemptions for Native religious and ceremonial practices and for health and human safety. See opposite page for our Wildlife chair's article!

**HB200, Gila River Water Trust Board** (Reps. Matthew McQueen, Nathan Small, Sens. Mim Stewart, Siah Correa-Hemphill): This legislation will direct the remaining \$80 million in federal funding for Gila River water uses toward local water-conservation projects and would charge the Water Trust Board with disbursing the remaining funds. This legislation essentially prevents more wasted time and money on the infeasible and expensive Gila River diversion scheme. This is the culmination of years of work by Gila Coalition and Gila Resources Information Project to defend New Mexico's last wild river.

**HB57, Prescribed Burning** (Reps. McQueen, Armstrong, Sens. Wirth, Woods) This bill will incentivize prescribed burns on private lands which if untreated can drive and worsen wildfires on surrounding public lands. Thanks to Northern Group leader Teresa Seamster, who helped lead our advocacy for this bill.

**SM1, Outdoor Classrooms** (Sen. Correa Hemphill) establishes a task force to promote outdoor classrooms in NM and requests that the governor declare an "Outdoor Learning Day."

**Environmental Database (HB51, Rep. Chasey):** This legislation creates a central database for environmental reports and statistics that is accessible to the public.

## Oil and gas reforms:

**SB8, Local Air-Quality Regulations** (Sen. Wirth, Reps. Chandler and Small): This legislation, first proposed 15 years ago, would allow New Mexico to create air-quality safeguards that are stronger than federal regulations.

**HB76, Air-Permit Denial for Bad Actors** (Rep. Chris Chandler, Sen. Peter Wirth): This bill allows the state to revoke or deny permits to companies that have lied on their applications or committed environmental felonies.

## Civil rights:

**HB4, Civil Rights Act** (Reps. Egolf, Louis, Sens. Cervantes): Allowing those whose civil rights have been violated to take action in state court. This eliminates qualified immunity.

**HB231, Native American Polling Places** (Sen. Benny Shendo, Rep. Georgene Louis): This legislation would allow tribes and pueblos to set their own polling-place locations and remove obstacles that prevent some Pueblo members from voting in the 2020 primary because of pandemic restrictions.

## LOSSES

**HB9, Climate Solutions Act** (Reps. Melanie Stansbury, Angelica Rubio, Brian Egolf; Sens. Mimi Stewart, Nathan Small): This bill would have codified Gov. Lujan Grisham's climate executive orders into law. It combined strong greenhouse-gas reductions across New Mexico's economy with equity and just-transition components that were later combined into SB112 and passed.

**HB206, Utility Relief and Affordability Act** (Reps. Ortiz and Luján): This bill would have prohibited utility disconnections resulting from the pandemic and authorized the Public Regulation Commission to establish low-income rates. It also created a block grant to distribute federal CARES Act funds for energy-efficiency projects in low-income communities. HB206 passed the House and one Senate committee, never to be heard in the Finance Committee.

**SB86, Produced Water:** This bill, sponsored by Sen. Antoinette Sedillo Lopez, would have prohibited use of freshwater in fracking and made spills of oil and gas waste liquids illegal. The bill was tabled by the Judiciary Committee, where opponents were allowed to comment, but supporters were not. The oil and gas industry showed its influence in the rejection of this bill, but it will be back. Special thanks to the Rio Grande Chapter's Dale Doremus for her expertise in crafting this bill.

**SB82, Radioactive Waste Review:** This bill would have required to the state to review impacts of storing high-level nuclear waste in New Mexico. Thanks to Sen. Jeff Steinborn, who was willing to amend it to indicate that review did not indicate state acceptance of the radioactive waste. Thanks to Nuclear Storage Team chair John Buchser and to Pat Cardona for their advocacy. See Page 8 for the latest on Holtec.

**SB11, Clean Fuels Act** (Sen. Mimi Stewart): Would have created a program to reduce the carbon intensity of fuels.

**HJR1, Green Amendment:** Would have added environmental- and cultural-protection language to the state Constitution Bill of Rights, subject to a ballot resolution in the next general election.

**SB149, Fracking Pause:** Would have paused fracking on state lands to review environmental and fiscal impacts.

**HB50, Private Right of Action:** Would have allowed citizens to sue for enforcement of environmental laws.

**SB114** (formerly HB74): Would have restored voting rights to those formerly incarcerated upon their release.



# Free to hike and play

*Ban on trapping on N.M. public lands finally passes*

By Mary Katherine Ray  
Chapter Wildlife Chair

The New Mexico Legislature has passed and Gov. Lujan Grisham signed SB32 into law, prohibiting traps and poisons from public lands in our state. It is such a short and easy sentence to write, but years of work and activism by thousands of New Mexicans are stacked behind that sentence pushing it to final reality.

The first time I encountered a trap was on National Forest land when it sprang up from under the sand in an arroyo where I'd inadvertently kicked it to slam shut on nothing. My dogs were with me, and I was chilled to discover that I could not have opened this trap by myself had one of the dogs been caught. We came inches away from being harmed and stranded with no cell service or ability to summon rescue. I was shocked to learn that hiding traps like this on public land was legal. Worse, the number of animals a trapper could kill during the months-long winter season was limitless. The purpose of this carnage was private profit from the sale of pelts. No other New Mexico wildlife has been as exploited for profit as the 17 species called "furbearers" (as if bearing fur for human use is the only reason they exist). The year was 2004, and I wrote my first article about this injustice for the *Rio Grande Sierran* titled "Unfair Game."

Pelt prices, always subject to market fluctuations, started to rise. Interest in trapping increased and so did the inevitable number of stories from the public describing trap encounters. My own stories read like a litany of what is wrong with trapping: the dead tassel-eared squirrel, killed outright out of season when a leg-hold trap snapped shut on his back; the dozens of bodies recognizable as bobcats, foxes and coyotes only by their un-skinned cat- and dog-like paws, dumped in a ditch; the coyote I found in a trap on a Sierra Club outing with a leg injury so serious that she finally twisted her foot off entirely to escape; the endangered Mexican wolf who had to be captured and her leg amputated after dragging a trap on one leg; and finally, having to hear the screams of my own dog when she was caught in a trap.

Because NM Game and Fish administers wildlife policy as directed by the State Game Commission, that was the logical place to begin to seek reforms. At first, trapping rules were reviewed every other year. In 2004, 2006 and 2008 we turned out more



**Pets and their people can roam a little more safely now that Roxy's Law will prohibit traps and poisons on public lands in New Mexico.**

and more to Commission meetings, sending hundreds and then thousands of comments asking for traps to be disallowed on public land, but each time we were rebuffed by this board composed entirely of hunters.

The Game and Fish Department has also been disinclined to support reform, painting department trucks with the words "Take a Child Hunting, Fishing and Trapping." In 2010, the Commission voted to make the furbearer rules "permanent," meaning they never needed review again. It was clear that neither the Game Commission nor Game and Fish represented the people of New Mexico, with our much broader interest in wildlife beyond hunting, and that only the state Legislature could address the concerns the public had about traps and trapping on public land.

But like the effort to stop cockfighting, this new idea of prohibiting traps from public land took several tries to take hold. Starting in 2013, each attempt was separated by two years because of the nature of New Mexico's legislative sessions. Yet more and more people had trap encounters. The effort grew to include conservation and animal protection groups besides our Sierra Club chapter and that coalesced to form the TrapFree New Mexico coalition. In 2018, we learned that a dog named Roxy was killed by a strangling neck snare on BLM land meant for some other wild animal. Her owner, Dave Clark, was unable to free Roxy and had to watch her die.

In the 2021 session, the bill that came to be called Roxy's Law passed the Senate floor easily, 23-16. On the House side, it also easily passed the Energy, Environment and Natural Resources Committee. On the House floor, however, the margin was razor thin. I think I had stopped breathing when at the last moment a 34-34 tie

was broken by Rep. Susan Herrera, who represents the district in which Roxy lived. Her vote sent the bill to the governor's desk, and Gov. Lujan Grisham signed it on April 5.

This outcome could not have happened without the support of our Sierra Club chapter leaders and members, who, over the years and now, have written emails and letters to the editor, called decision-makers, signed petitions, shared social-media posts and attended rallies and hearings. My thanks go out to each and every one of you for making this long journey bearable and its success possible.

We also thank the stalwart sponsors of the bill, starting with Bobby Gonzales of Taos, who sponsored it as a House member and then as a senator. Reps. Matthew McQueen and Christine Chandler picked up the bill on the House side, and this year, newly elected Sen. Brenda McKenna became a co-sponsor as well. Each learned the intricacies and injustices of the trapping rules and defended the bill brilliantly. Senate Majority Leader Peter Wirth ensured that the bill was quickly heard on the Senate floor after passing committees. Speaker Brian Egolf did the same on the House floor with three days left in the session.

Please thank the legislators and governor for creating a more welcoming and compassionate New Mexico.

Roxy's Law will go into full effect in April 2022, and traps, snares, and poisons will no longer be allowed on New Mexico public lands, including national forests, BLM, national parks, monuments and reserves, national wildlife refuges, state trust land and state parks. This took all of us standing up over and over for wildlife, for compassion, for safe public lands, and for the integrity of ecosystems. Well done, New Mexico!

## Guerrero joins chapter staff team

*Luis Guerrero joined us just a few weeks before the New Mexico legislative session started in January and hit the ground running, helping us advocate and engage supporters on nearly 60 bills. We're glad to have him on the team. Welcome Luis!*

— Camilla Feibelman

My name is Luis Guerrero, and I am the new Legislative and Political Organizer with the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter. I live in Las Cruces with my wife Danielle, our cat Cali and dog Thor. One of my favorite things about living here is having such close access to places like White Sands and the Organ Mountains Desert-Peaks National Monument. I am very passionate about wildlife in natural areas and look forward to being a part of the fight to protect them.

I worked for the Democratic Party of New Mexico from 2017-18, where I got to work hard on turning New Mexico from red to blue, including electing Xochitl Torres-Small as well as Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and keeping Sen. Martin Heinrich. I then opened my own political consulting firm, Guerrero Political Solutions. In this role, I got to work with great candidates such as Las Cruces Mayor Ken Miyagishima, Judge Joy Goldbaum, Neomi Martinez-Parra, Rosie Garcia and more. I also had the privilege of doing some contract work with America Votes during the 2020 cycle and the National Educators Association of New Mexico.

Outside of work I enjoy hanging out with my wife and pets, watching TV and movies, playing video games, and I also have been a performing musician for the last couple of years, but the pandemic forced me to get creative, so I like to live-stream shows on occasion. I also really enjoy cooking and eating the food I cook. I am very passionate about the history of food and how that connects to cultures and heritage.

I look forward to working with the Sierra Club and our amazing volunteers, and getting to know you all well. Please feel free to reach out to me at [luis.guerrero@sierraclub.org](mailto:luis.guerrero@sierraclub.org) or (575)635-3354.

*In solidarity,  
Luis Guerrero*



## Testimony for Roxy's Law

**"I was nearly killed by unwittingly picking up an old and rusty M-44 cyanide device.** I knew then why my grandfather never allowed any kind of traps on our ranch that would cause suffering or needless death to any animal, including our own protector dogs that watched our cattle."

— Bill Guerra-Addington,  
Guerra Farm & Ranch

"Canine Search and Rescue volunteers face many perils. But **we have little ability to protect ourselves and our animal partners from traps and snares** hidden in these areas. I personally know humans and search dogs who have been caught in these traps."

— Delinda VanneBrightyn,  
president, Taos Search and Rescue

**"My best friend was a husky named Robin** who meant everything to me. We'd play together every day like the Native Calvin & Hobbs. Then she went missing. My family and I searched for days. She was caught in a deadly cage for 3 or 4 days. She was more dead than alive when we found her. If she was here today, she would make sure I spoke up for her."

— Derrick Toledo, Rio Grande Chapter  
Sierra Club executive committee

**"46 endangered Mexican gray wolves have been trapped** over the last two decades in New Mexico. In Arizona, where traps are already illegal on public lands, only four wolves have been trapped."

— Eddie Estrada,  
Endangered Species Coalition







# THRIVE agenda can revitalize economy

**By Luis Guerrero**  
**Chapter legislative organizer**  
The Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter is proud to be a part of “Nuevo Mexico Prospera,” the New Mexico initiative of the THRIVE Act.

We have a once-in-a-generation chance for Congress to pass a transformational economic-recovery package that puts more than 15 million people to work in family-sustaining, union jobs across the economy to cut climate pollution in half by 2030 and advance gender, environmental, Indigenous, economic, and racial justice, with particular attention to Black and Indigenous people. This bill offers a blueprint for economic renewal backed by a movement of movements, includ-



**New Mexico muralist Nani Chacon created this piece depicting the state’s transition to a diverse, sustainable and equitable economy for the THRIVE campaign.**

ing unions, racial justice, climate, and other grassroots groups. The THRIVE Act will be introduced in Congress in April, with supporters including U.S. Sens. Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Lujan and Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez. The THRIVE Act authorizes invest-

ments of at least \$1 trillion per year for 2022-2031. New economic modeling shows that this is the scale of investment we need to create more than 15 million good jobs and end the unemployment crisis, while cutting climate pollution in half by 2030 and confronting systemic

racism and gender, economic, and environmental injustice. The bill includes investments to upgrade our infrastructure for clean water, affordable public transit, and a reliable electric grid (creating 5 million jobs); expand access to wind and solar power, electric vehicles, and healthy buildings (creating 4 million jobs); protect our rural and urban spaces, wetlands, prairies, forests and support family farmers who are embracing regenerative agriculture (creating 4 million jobs); and invest in public institutions and care for children and the elderly (creating 2 million jobs). Learn more about the THRIVE agenda at [www.thriveagenda.com/](http://www.thriveagenda.com/).

## GWE: There’s an app for that

**By Genie Stevens**  
**Global Warming Express**  
As might be expected, one year ago, the pandemic ground the Global W.E./Global Warming Express to a screeching halt. Overnight, the classrooms of New Mexico were closed to teachers, students and our beloved GWE program.

The GWE kids throughout the state were just getting engaged in their Big Goal and Small Goal initiatives for their school, their community or their city/state, when we went into lockdown, and the community became a small screen within the students’ and teachers’ four walls.

Fortunately, the GWE program is used to adapting to new environments. Who knew that the newest environment to explore, for the next year, would become a Chromebook and the mentors would be virtual? As of April 2021, the Global W.E./GWE program has developed an ambitious replication of its in-person, hands-on, indoor/outdoor program for kids ages 8-12.

Narrated by the new GWE Kids Curriculum Committee members (kids ages 11-16, of mixed heritage), the GWE books are audio and visual experiences, with all materials translated into Spanish and French. Why French, you ask? During the pandemic, teachers in Canada contacted us to ask us for materials for their French-speaking students. When the new GWE Online Curriculum App is launched, people in homes and classrooms throughout North America will be able to use it.

Apart from virtual curriculum development, the GWE reached out to some of the Global Warming Express kids to attend the virtual



Photo by David McGahey

**Global Warming Express participants have stayed civically engaged during the pandemic. On April 10, GWE kids joined a rally supporting President Biden’s pause on issuing new oil and gas leases.**

New Mexico Legislature this year. On at least three bills, the GWE kids weighed in to make their voices heard, and all but one of the bills they supported passed. It was a new experience for the kids to be able to attend so many sessions, and it was a learning experience we hope to continue in years to come. Each year for the past 10 years, the GWE kids have attended the Legislature and given speeches or performances on Environment Day, but they rarely have time to sit in on the legislative sessions while bills are being passed.

In 2019, almost 500 GWEers visited the Legislature on Environment Day. May it be possible for that many GWEers to witness the process of hearing and voting on bills in their next legislative experience!

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**Book mailings:** Open

## Navajo chapters get air monitors

**By Teresa Seamster**  
**Tri-Chapter Air-Monitoring Team**  
The remote Ojo Encino Chapter House, west of Cuba and in the greater Chaco Canyon area, is the first Navajo chapter to go online with continuous local air-quality monitoring using the national PurpleAir network.

In early February, one outdoor PA11 monitor with an indoor sensor was installed to provide the community with 10-minute interval readings of particulate matter from burned hydrocarbons (PM2.5) emitted from any source, including vehicle exhaust, wood stoves and nearby oil and gas wells.

Brandon Velivis, Ojo Encino’s economic-development consultant, climbed a ladder to attach and activate the first monitor, while a small team composed of members of the Tri-Chapter Health Committee, Northern Arizona University environmental professionals from ITEP and a Fort Lewis College student intern watched via Brandon’s cell phone placed on the ground. Due to the travel prohibitions on the Navajo Nation during the pandemic, a virtual meeting was the only option for the team to move ahead with the project.

When the first connection with the wi-fi was made and the first emission readings appeared on the screen, there was relief and rejoicing that the long-awaited monitor equipment was working properly and the internet in Ojo was strong enough to support the new connections.

Over the next 10 days, the readings showed hazardous spikes with readings well over 100 micrograms per cubic meter, indicating numerous unhealthy levels of particulate matter.

This project is the continuation of monitoring conducted in nearby Counselor Chapter in 2018 as part of a community Health Impact Assessment. At that time the focus on measuring PM2.5 pollution was intensifying with the publication of findings that even moderate repeated exposure (under 100 mg/m3) leads to serious lung impairment, induced asthma and other debilitating respiratory conditions.

The push for greater access to local air pollution data has grown rapidly with convenient and inexpensive technology available to measure microscopic particulate matter. Chasitty Todacheenie of Fort Lewis College is collecting data and generating weekly reports for the community. She will be completing an updated map of oil-gas wells and structures for the Tri-Chapter this semester and reporting back to the chapters on air quality, implications for resident health impacts and how to use the data effectively.

### Hike Book volunteers needed

The Northern New Mexico Group is working on the next edition of our Hike Book! All the hike descriptions need to be compared to on-the-ground conditions. The planned release is summer of 2022. The focus of our

hiking guide is hikes near Santa Fe. You can obtain a copy of the current edition from the Travel Bug, and thank Greg for all the work he did on the maps for it. Contact Aku at [akusantafe@gmail.com](mailto:akusantafe@gmail.com) for more info.



# Quick tips for less waste

## April/May/June 2021



# Wanted: Chapter outings leaders

**By Terry Owen**  
**Chapter Outings Chair**  
Do you enjoy spending time outside with like-minded people? Do you have a love for a particular area of the Land of Enchantment? Do you have a passion for preserving our rivers and wilderness areas? Even if only one of these is true for you, the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club wants you. We're seeking people just like you to lead Sierra Club outings.

An outing could be a hike, bike ride, cross-country ski, walk along the river or a short walk in an urban park followed by a poetry reading. You design and lead your own outings and it typically averages less than a couple of hours each month. Additionally, we're looking for more leaders for our Spanish language outings program, Bosque preservation, youth programs and the Military Outdoors Program. No matter



Jane Frederick

**Sierra Club outings can be hikes, bike rides, cross-country skiing or walks. Contact [teowen@comcast.net](mailto:teowen@comcast.net) to learn more.**

where you live in New Mexico or west Texas there are outings leadership opportunities available. To become a Sierra Club outings leader:

- Be at least 18 years old
- Possess appropriate skills and abilities for the types of outings you lead
- Complete Outings Leader Training

- Complete a basic first-aid course
  - Complete a provisional hike with a certified outings leader
  - Be approved by the Outings chair
- For more information or if you're interested contact Terry Owen at [teowen@comcast.net](mailto:teowen@comcast.net).

## Wilderness First Aid

**By Terry Owen**  
Coming this fall! The Sierra Club, Rio Grande Chapter and Kirtland Air Force Base Outdoor Recreation are co-sponsoring a Wilderness First Aid course especially geared toward our members.

This course is in high demand and typically fills up months in advance.

The SOLO Wilderness First Aid Course is a 2-day first-aid course that provides training for anyone who spends time hiking, skiing, engaged in other outdoor pursuits, or just wants to know what to do when things go south.

The course is a blend of lecture, demonstrations and scenarios. Students will have ample opportunity to practice skills in lifelike situ-

ations, both as patients and caregivers. At the successful completion of the two-day course you will be certified or recertified in Wilderness First Aid. Attendees must participate in all portions and hours of the course to obtain certification.

The cost of the course will be \$125 and you must be a Sierra Club member to attend. The price is about half of that of comparable courses. Because it's being convened on Kirtland Air Force Base, attendees must be U.S. citizens.

If you're interested and would like to be placed on the attendee list, email Terry Owen, [teowen@comcast.net](mailto:teowen@comcast.net). More information will be provided with firm dates in early June.

Terry Owen

# Los Alamos should look beyond weapons universe

**By Jody Benson**  
**Pajarito Group chair**  
If a tree falls in the forest and there's no one around to hear it, does it make a sound?  
In the quantum state the physical properties of nature at the subatomic level are not what we observe at the macroscopic scale. It's all simply energy. At this scale, foundational to existence, everything depends on, but is changed by, the observer. The observer fixes "the everything" by observing it.  
Therefore everything has its alternative that would have still been energized had the observer not fixed it, so a falling tree both makes a sound and doesn't—since everything depends on the observer, the tree we see falls, but because we fixed only one reality, an alternate-universe tree doesn't fall.  
Furthermore, what exactly is hearing? Can only something with ears hear? Flowering plants are among the most successful life forms on this (so-far) living planet. Tel Aviv University's Lilach Hadany shows that flowering plants

pollinated primarily by bees and other buzzing insects react to the bees' buzz by sweetening their nectar to attract more bees. Plants pollinated primarily by non-buzzers don't have the same strategy.  
When a tree falls and it needs to make a sound, are you responsible for hearing it? Or are there other alternatives?  
The Los Alamos County Council in its Fiscal Year 2022 Federal Priorities "addressing the interdependent needs of LANL and Los Alamos County" chose to support a universe that isn't altogether interested in falling trees or buzzing bees.  
Instead, the universe is one in which the purpose of science is to make weapons of mass destruction.  
It's also an alternate universe where LANL is capable of creating 80 nuclear-weapons triggers per year with no health or safety issues; there will be no health or safety issues despite the fact that LANL continues to have multiple safety violations, the most recent on Feb. 26 when sparks flew from a yet-again poorly packed container; that the County should use every available space to accommodate

the 1,100 new employees every year; and that there will be no consequences to the environment, culture, or quality of life for Northern New Mexico.  
We already have an alternate universe, which is the shrug we get when we protest nukes and support LANL climate research: Don't worry. Nobody's going to use the weapons. And besides, we won't be able to even accomplish the production here. It's just a boondoggle to bring in money.  
We, however, can have another alternate universe: We can write our Los Alamos County Council (who never asked our opinion), to tell them what we want. We can write our state and federal delegation to tell them to use their weapons billions for climate research to save the Earth rather than destroy it.  
Let's hope our leaders hear our pleas and choose to listen.

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# Outdoors

## Envisioning N.M.'s Rio Grande Trail

By Terry Owen  
Chapter Outings chair

In the not-too-distant future it may be possible to hike, bike or ride your horse from Colorado to Texas on a dedicated trail that follows the Rio Grande corridor.

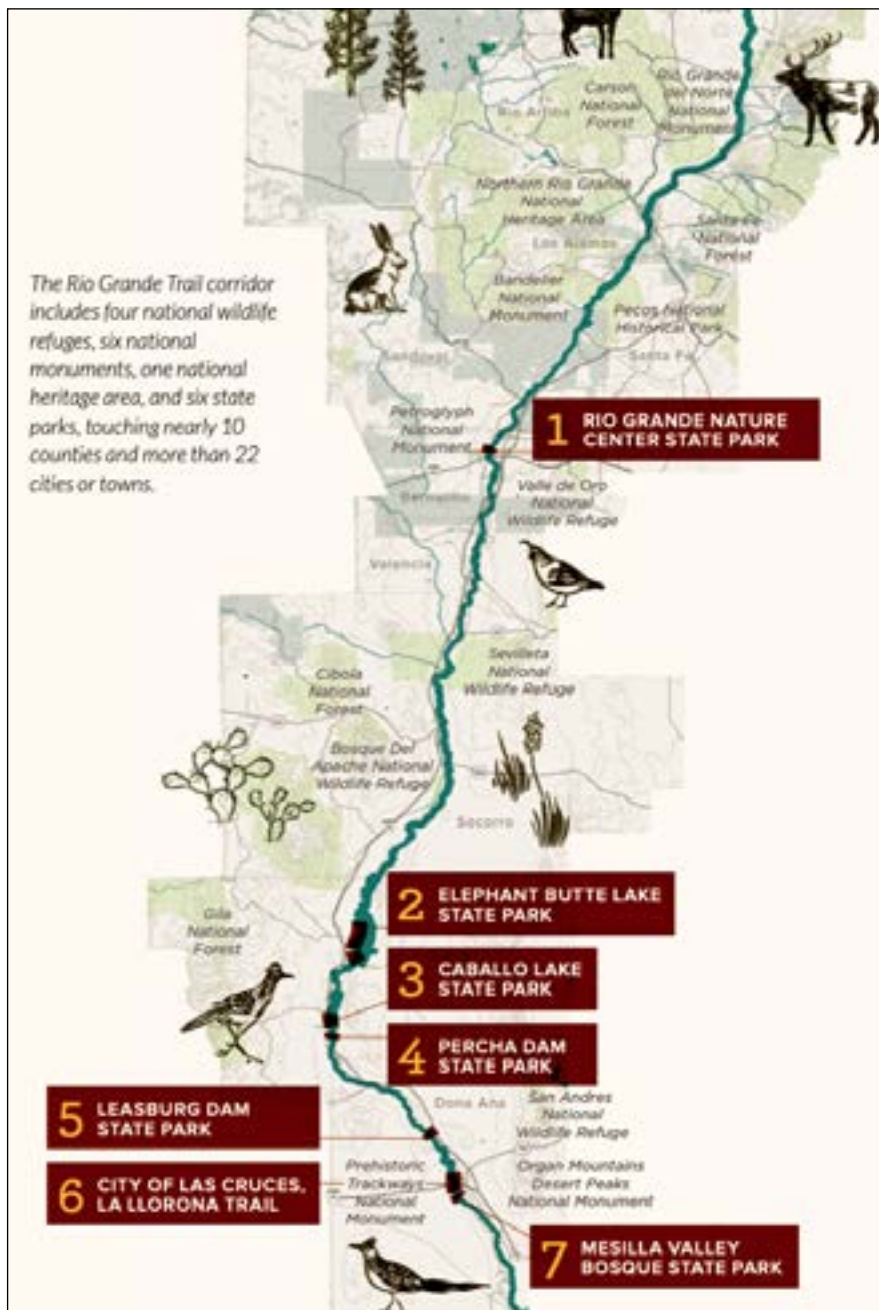
Imagine starting near the origin of the Rio Grande and bike-packing during your summer vacation to the Texas state line while camping each night near the river. Or, taking your kids to day-hike sections of the trail each year during their spring break. Along the way, you would have the ability to explore, learn about, and connect with diverse natural habitats, local history, striking landscapes, and vibrant communities.

It would contribute to cultural and environmental awareness, healthy lifestyles and spiritual growth, and lend itself to the economic prosperity of New Mexico. This is the vision for the Rio Grande Trail.

In 2015, state Rep. (now Sen.) Jeff Steinborn introduced HB563 to create the Rio Grande Trail Commission and provide funding to develop a 500-mile trail system. His legislation passed with an overwhelming majority in both chambers. The final bill includes prohibitions on using eminent domain to obtain land and requirements to minimize environmental impacts. It also requires that a broad cross-section of entities including the secretary of Indian Affairs as well as conservationists and ecologists participate in the development of a route.

The Rio Grande Trail Commission, which is convened by the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, oversees the development of a master plan. They already have the support of more than 100 organizations, agencies, and volunteer groups across the state. While progress has been hampered by world events, the commission is meeting regularly and making progress.

Through Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's executive action, 86.65 miles of existing trail across New Mexico are already designated. Currently, the trail includes Rio Grande Del Norte National Monument, the



The Rio Grande Trail corridor includes four national wildlife refuges, six national monuments, one national heritage area, and six state parks, touching nearly 10 counties and more than 22 cities or towns.

### Where are outings listings?

This page is normally where you'd find our free Sierra Club-led hikes. With the pandemic pausing outings through July, you can check out trails to explore on your own at [riograndesierraclub.org](http://riograndesierraclub.org). And please see Page 11 for info on training to become a Sierra Club outings leader or learning wilderness first aid. See you when it's safe!

Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge, Kasha-Katuwe-Tent Rocks National Monument, Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument and Mesilla Valley State Park.

Eventually, each of these smaller trail systems will be linked to form the Rio Grande Trail and stretch the length of the state. The commission has not adopted a formal timeline for

completion but is developing smaller goals that will lead to trail completion.

More information can be found at [www.riograndetrailnm.com](http://www.riograndetrailnm.com). The Rio Grande Chapter will be providing input and soliciting volunteers as the plan unfolds. To volunteer, contact Terry Owen at [teowen@comcast.net](mailto:teowen@comcast.net).

## Time to celebrate our favorite planet

By Terry Owen

It's almost time to celebrate our favorite planet. Earth Day is coming up on Thursday, April 22, and no pandemic, recession or act of nature is going to stop us.

It's the 51st anniversary of this holiday that began with bipartisan congressional support in the U.S. in 1970 and has grown into an international phenomenon. While the festivals and outings are curtailed this year, there are tons of ways you can celebrate and give back. You can involve the entire family, and there's no need to hurry to a store or jump online to buy presents for everyone. Better yet, why limit the celebration to just one day when you can celebrate Earth Day every day? Here are seven ideas to get you started:

**Take a hike or bike.** And while you're at it, pick up any litter you find. Reward yourself the "clean sweep" award when you return home and bask in your awesomeness. Take a photo of everything you pick up and send it to the Rio Grande Chapter for posting on Instagram. Bragging is encouraged! [riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org).

**Make some seed bombs.** Create your own arsenal and fire away indiscriminately. Or give them to your friends and neighbors as Earth Day gifts: [blogs.sierraclub.org/green-life/2011/12/15/index.html](http://blogs.sierraclub.org/green-life/2011/12/15/index.html)

**Plant a garden, or if space is limited, a terrarium** or window herb garden. This is a great way to get your kids or grandkids interested in nature and teach them where their food really comes from. [www.sierraclub.org/sierra/pandemic-gardening-kids-101](http://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/pandemic-gardening-kids-101)

**Write a letter or email.** Send a note to one of your elected representatives telling them that you would like them to support an environmental topic that's near and dear to you, whether it's plastic pollution or climate change. If you have children, have them include a drawing or crayon masterpiece. Keep it short and positive. [www.usa.gov/elected-officials](http://www.usa.gov/elected-officials)

**Take an Earth Day quiz** on topics such as climate change, endangered animals and clean energy on the Earthday website: [www.earthday.org/earth-day-quizzes/](http://www.earthday.org/earth-day-quizzes/)

**Up your recycling game.** Perhaps you've not been as diligent about recycling as you could be. If you have kids, give one of them the responsibility for ensuring that the right things end up in the appropriate recycling bin each week. Use the Recycle Coach website [www.cabq.gov/solidwaste/recycling/recycle-coach](http://www.cabq.gov/solidwaste/recycling/recycle-coach) or download the Recycle Coach app.

**Donate to the Rio Grande Chapter** in honor of Mother Earth. No amount is too small and you'll be helping to preserve our future. [www.riograndesierraclub.org/donate/](http://www.riograndesierraclub.org/donate/)

From the Rio Grande Chapter to you all, Happy Earth Day to you and yours!

## Army plans warning signs for El Paso trails

By Laurence Gibson, El Paso Group chair

One of the perks of living in El Paso is having the largest urban park in the U.S. right in our "back yard." Franklin Mountains State Park was founded by Sierrans and others 50 years ago.

Much of the land had been off-limits to developers only because it is still littered with unexploded ordnance and munitions from the long-shuttered Castner military firing range. Sierrans have worked for years detailing the slow and expensive process of making this land safe again. Then former U.S. Rep. Beto O'Rourke succeeded in slipping in protection from development for Castner in 2017's National Defense Authorization Act. The Army now designates this 7,000 acres as Closed Castner Range.

Now it appears that the 4,900 acres of desert adjoining Castner on the north are also contaminated. Three 75mm high-explosive shells were recently discovered. Though not federal property, the Army Environmental Command

proposes to place warning signs at trailheads and along the trails honeycombing the area. At an April 7 meeting, Army leaders presented their proposal and graciously took suggestions. Particularly valuable was input from El Paso's well-organized bicycle community. Riders are always protective of their single-track trails and requested use of mules instead of ATVs in transporting signs to the more remote locations. They also noted the visual pollution of signs and requested placement at 2-mile intervals instead of every mile. The 8 large trail-head signs were OK'd. Cyclists will assist in placing the signs in June and July.

Army Environmental Service Support Manager Mike Bowlby expressed regret at the damage recently incurred by an unsupervised contractor who destroyed desert vegetation. Bowlby promised to be onsite overseeing the project. In short, stakeholders agreed the meeting was a good example of how things should be done.