**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

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**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

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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 GWEE curriculum app will be available across North America. Page 9

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.

Memories of stunning desert wildflowers of spring, poppies especially, are part of my history. My paternal grandfa- ther grew up in the Rockies of Colorado and explored the Sierras as an adult. My moth- er’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 treas- ury 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 sena- tors, 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 administra- tion 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 partic- ipants 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 mutualiy
■ 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 inclu- sion 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 secre- tary whose detailed notes main- tain our history to an wildlife biologists whose persistence resulted in Rony’s Law 17 years after her dog got caught in a leghold trap.

As we move forward protect- ing the wild places, communi- ties and creatures we treasure, we must ensure that equity and inclusion are at the forefront of our work.

Don’t know how to help? We can help!

The sandhill crane at left was photographed by David Mceachry, 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 equi- table, safe and beautiful, email us at 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 akisantafe@gmail.com). Fill out the form at riograndesierraclub.org/volun- teer-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 envi- ronmental justice. Your donations help maintain our staff and all of the Chapter’s ongoing work and resources. As we save the potential of this time to bring change, your financial help is crucial.

To donate online, please go to riogrande.sierraclub.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 our turn of the Sierran, Sierra Club. May everyone have a safe and wonderful summer, knowing our work is making a difference.

Letter to the editor
On the climate crisis & future of humanity

As Texans recover from the effects of an unprecedented pseudo “free market” electric system, others are understand- ingly 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 behavior) to prepare for and prevent costly and deadly disasters tomorrow – the biggest issue front and center politically.

Non-profits are keeping the climate of the Sierra Club and other climate groups alive, even relevant, and preventing the planet from acting like the supposedly intelli- gent species we claim to be.

We are pretty much a “Me today and tomorrow bring what it brings” society. Capitalism and the marketing that accompanies it inun- dates 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 intelli- gent 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 Chapter Executive Committee Member in the late 1990s.
Pause brings hope in N.M.

By Miyia King-Flaherty

Our Wild New Mexico organizer
In most 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 state coffers.

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 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 consultation, with impacted communities; 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 D.C. 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

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 Alizia 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 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 Fechman, 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.”

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 frontlines 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 the next 25 years 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 our smaller ones and cut local workers’ pay and jobs to maximize profits.

We need to build an economy where our families have safe, 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.
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 ratemaking 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’s “selling” its share by giving NTEC $75 million and agreeing to make $73 million in plant improve-

ments (at ratemaking 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 adjourn or reject both. The Sierra Club is intervening in both cases, as are allied groups, including San Juan Citizens Alliance, Diné CARE, To Nizhoni Ani, and NAVA Education Project.

To Nizhoni Ani, an Arizona-based Navajo group that advocates for a just transition for coal-impacted communities, filed testimony in the NTEC case from organizer Jessica Keesto:

“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,” Keesto 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.”

Solar, battery to replace nuclear

There are a lot of moving pieces in PNM’s energy portfolio, and some developments are quite helpful 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!

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 will now 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 reverse 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 find-

ing 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 a hearing before the board in September.

Thanks to all of you who commented on both these resolutions!
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 the Legislature signed into law.

We achieved especially gratifying hard-fought victories with the Community Solar Act and Rosy’s Law (see Page 7), two issues that have been top Sierra Club priorities for many years. Our partner organizations and sponsors helped build the last-minute support and margin needed for the bills to pass.

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Communication Director

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The best part of these sessions is working together and hearing from 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.

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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 Felibelman

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 or (575)653-3554.

In solidarity,
Luis Guerrero
New Mexico files suit to stop Holtec nuke dump

By John Buchser

Coalition members fighting to stop Holtec’s proposed nuclear-waste storage site in SE New Mexico are grateful that Attorney General Hector Balderas has filed suit in federal district court against the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, requesting denial of Holtec’s permit.

This suit complements the Sierra Club’s own legal challenges against the NRC’s plans. The substantial list of violations of law outlined by Balderas (read the opinion at rgiograndasiersclub.org/holtec) addresses all the issues that have been raised by a wide diversity of citizens from across the country.

In the opinion announced in early April, the attorney general strongly points out the numerous problems, many of them violations of existing laws. The U.S. has not developed any permanent repositories, and the casks that store the waste will degrade with time. The excessive risk of transporting the waste a second time could result in the used nuclear-fuel casks being stranded in New Mexico.

The response to accidents will be the responsibility of local entities. These are small fire departments, many of them volunteer-based, that do not have the skills to deal with possible accidents. Training of local emergency responders for WIPP, which holds low-level waste, is inadequate for high-level waste.

The proposed site near the border is an insult to Mexico and the largely Latinx population of the region.

The proposed high-level waste will remain dangerous for a million years or more. Yucca Mountain is the only designated location that has been studied extensively, but it is technologically and geologically flawed. The hope was that the dry Nevada desert would prevent groundwater from being contaminated. Deep underground disposal is a requirement for long-term disposal, as the cask system falls apart over time, and the fusion process that begins after about 10,000 years is contained only by the rocks surrounding the casks of waste. This fusion goes through cycles of about 10,000 years, thus perpetuating the generation of radioactive decay products.

From the New Mexico taxpayer’s perspective, Holtec will go bankrupt in time, leaving us to pay for what might be an impossible cleanup task.

Research by many nations on how to deal with nuclear waste continues. In the meantime, the volume of waste already exceeds what Yucca Mountain was designed to hold. Giving a private company, or this case two (WCS/ISP in Texas near Eunice is the other), permission to put the citizens of SE NM at risk of the most dangerous waste in the world, is an irresponsible action of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

In November, the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission rejected the expansion of a gas plant that powers the Las Cruces area — approximately a fifth of El Paso Electric’s customers. But the company can still build the large new unit; the New Mexico rejection just means that El Paso customers will have to foot the entire bill.

This area is already heavily impacted by poor air quality — thanks to the existing gas facility, overwhelming dairy and manure fumes, industrial air pollution in El Paso and Juarez, and conventional sources such as the nearby interstate highway. In 2019, New Mexico residents with the help of the Sierra Club sued the EPA for not accurately reviewing El Paso’s air-quality data. The residents received a favorable ruling from a judge last summer requiring the EPA to review its designation. Despite this, the Trump EPA failed to review El Paso’s designation and whether the area is in violation of the Clean Air Act.

The Biden EPA may help get this issue moving, but even if the agency starts now, a final decision would likely not come until February 2022. Our communities can’t wait that long.

If you are an El Paso Electric customer, please go to rgiograndasiersclub.org/ Newman to tell elected officials you want clean power, not expensive, polluting gas.

Join star-mapping project on border

By Antoinette Reyes

As part of a 60-day review process, President Joe Biden has temporarily halted border-wall construction that was illegally funded without congressional appropriation.

While we continue to work with partners to advocate for restoring much of the land that was desecrated under President Trump as well as the rights taken from indigenous communities along the US-Mexico border, we are also working to identify priority areas of border lands that are important for ecological and cultural reasons. Many of these areas are still threatened by “virtual walls” currently being proposed that rely on technology and lighting as opposed to physical barriers.

We would like to invite volunteers interested in travel ing to the Southern border to help with a fun project. Our partners are trying to document sky quality along the border, in order to shine light on where the sky is darkest, so our coalition can better work to protect the nighttime environment and minimize further border lighting. You do not need to be an expert or have any prior experience with constellations.

A pen, paper, and a simple star-watching guide that helps every step of the way are all that is needed for those who are interested in visiting the border at least one hour after sunset.

Volunteers will then look for a specific constellation according to the guide’s instructions and then will note how bright it is according to the guide’s examples. This star-mapping project can be done for every 0.5 miles that a person is interested in mapping for us.

To participate in this project or for more information, please contact Antoinette at Antoinette.Reyes@sierraclub.org or 575-342-1727.

April/May/June 2021
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, including 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 R. Luján and Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez. The THRIVE Act authorizes investments of at least $1 trillion per year for 2022 to 2033. 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 curing 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.

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 Bag, and thank Greg for all the work he did on the maps for it. Contact Aku at akusantafe@gmail.com for more info.

GWE: There’s an app for that

By Genie Stevens  
Global Warming Express

A few years ago, the pandemic ground the Global WCE/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是最小的文本部分。
Quick tips for less waste

By Carol P. Chamberland
Central Group Zero Waste chair

People often send me their tips for minimizing garbage. Here I’m sharing some simple and ingenious ideas in case, like me, you hadn’t thought of them yourself. These go a step beyond reusable bags and water bottles.

If reducing consumption seems futile when it’s corporations and policymakers who control the major impact, consider the persuasive effect of our collective purchasing power — or the absence of that power. With thoughtful selections, we can support companies that operate with the health of the planet in mind.

Food and cooking

• Get their ice cream in a cone rather than in disposable cups with plastic spoons.
• Drink organic beer.
• Skip red meat once a week — or maybe forever.
• Make your own veggie stock from scraps like onion peels, celery bits, etc. Put the scraps in a pot, cover with water, cook 3 hours or so. Use the stock to make rice or soup — or freeze it for later use.
• Use cloth napkins and tea towels instead of paper.
• No K-Cup coffee! Use loose leaf tea instead of bags.
• Choose glass or cardboard packaging over plastic when given the choice.
• Try to avoid palm oil in processed foods.

Personal grooming

• Buy lip balm and deodorant in cardboard tubes. Really, it’s a thing.
• Get a bamboo toothbrush.
• Switch to an all-steel safety razor and ditch your disposable plastic model.
• Use 100% recycled toilet paper and eliminate disposable ballpoint pens. Avoid the plastic cartrigdes and get one that uses a converter. Buy ink in glass jars and recycle them when empty.
• Professional car washes use less water than doing it yourself.

Lifestyle

• Switch to a refillable fountain pen and eliminate disposable ballpoint pens. Avoid the plastic cartrigdes and get one that uses a converter. Buy ink in glass jars and recycle them when empty.
• Stop junk mail by unsubscribing from catalogs.
• Buy recycled paper for your printer.
• Repair electronics instead of replacing them.

Call to artists: Juried recycled-art exhibit

The Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club Art Exhibits is organizing an online recycled-art exhibit, opening Sept. 15 and continuing through Nov. 15. Details of the exhibit: specifications, eligibility, awards and judging will be sent to the list of chapter members in the coming weeks.

If you are not on that list and would like to submit to the exhibit, please contact: Peter Kelling at cloudsandwater@juno.com.

Submissions will be accepted beginning July 1 with a Sept. 1 deadline, so there’s time to create new work!

Central New Mexico Group gets new Conservation chair

By David Bouquin

Hi. I am David Bouquin, the newly elected volunteer conservation chair of the Central New Mexico Group. My goal is to start up a conservation committee for our group to work together on important environmental issues in Albuquerque and the central New Mexico region. Myself, other Sierra volunteers, and staff are here to provide support and scaffold your efforts. There are an exciting diversity of conservation opportunities going on right now. I am excited to tell you about some of them. And I am interested to know what issues you want to participate in.

When my wife Erin and I moved to Albuquerque from California in 1989, she had dreams of being accepted to the UNM School of Medicine and I was ready to work as an elementary school teacher. I was passionate about learning and getting involved in my new and frankly for me a pretty exotic community. In a year or two, I began as the conservation chair at what was then Albuquerque Group.

There was a dizzying array of environmental issues that needed attention locally. Some examples were: passing an Albuquerque curbside recycling ordinance; planning, protecting the lands of the future Petroglyph National Monument; stopping road construction of the fragile Las Huertas Creek in the Sandias; and protecting wildlife habitat from overzealous timber sales on Mount Taylor and in the Ziani Mountains. I spoke at countless government meetings, wrote testimony/comments on a rich variety of environmental issues to agencies, elected bodies, concerned groups and, probably the most fun, hung out with some great people on outdoor field trips to wildlands that we were working to protect. The whole way I got assistance from some generous people that usually knew more about the intricacies of the issues than I did.

Jump to the present, since I started again as group conservation chair in January, the local/ regional issues we have partnered with other groups about include stopping the increased taking of Rio Grande water by the Niagara Bottling plant in Los Lunas, commenting on the scoping of the Mountain Cougar project in the Sandias, exploring ways to protect the largely untouched Crest of Montezuma also in the Sandias, commenting on the local Hazard Mitigation Plan, and working to stop the permitting of a polluting Asphalt Batch Plant in the South Valley. These are exciting times to get involved in significant efforts such as in support of environmental justice initiatives in support of low income and underserved people of color, along with climate crisis actions.

If you want to join a conservation committee for the Central New Mexico group and work on meaningful local conservation issues, please send me an email at dbouquin5@gmail.com. I look forward to meeting you.

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Treasurer: David Ther, gnelbik@gmail.com
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Carol Chamberland, pictograft@comcast.net
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Other Responsibilities
Richard Barish, richardbarish@gmail.com

UNM Sierra Student Coalition: Keely Scheffler
Los Alamos should look beyond weapons universe

By Jody Benson
Pajarito Group chair

I f 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 and 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 Tel Aviv University’s Lilach Frederick’s research explores how flowering plants react to sound. Her work shows that flowering plants pollinated primarily by bees and butterflies respond to the bees’ buzz by attracting 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 800 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 one that we get when we protest nukes and support LANL climate research: Don't worry. Nobody's going to lecture, demonstrations, and scenarios. Students will have ample opportunity to practice skills in life-like situations, 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 wilderness 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. More information will be provided with firm dates in early June.

Terry Owen

Pajarito Group contacts
riograndesierraclub.org/pajarito

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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 situations, 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. More information will be provided with firm dates in early June.

Terry Owen

Sierra Club outings can be hikes, bike rides, cross-country skiing or walks. Contact teowen@comcast.net to learn more.

- 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.

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 looking for 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 Bosque preservation, youth programs and the Military Outdoors Program. No matter 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

For more information or if you’re interested contact Terry Owen at teowen@comcast.net.

Jane Frederick
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 border while camping at 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 conservation and environmentalists 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 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. The Rio Grande Chapter will be providing input and soliciting volunteers as the trail unfolds. To volunteer, contact Terry Owen at 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. Regathering can be寄送riogrande.chapter@sierrclub.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.sierrclub.org/greenlife/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.sierrclub.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

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/

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 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.riograndesierrachapter.org/donate

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

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 limed over by 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 a provision into 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 4,980 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 honeycomb 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 trails honeycombing the area. At an April 7 meeting, Army Environmental Service Support Manager Mike Bowley expressed regret at the damage recently incurred by an unsupervised contractor who destroyed desert vegetation. Bowley promised to be onsite overseeing the project. In short, stakeholders agreed the meeting was a good example of how things should be done.

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 riograndesierrach.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!

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.riograndesierrachapter.org/donate

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

April/May/June 2021

Outdoors

RIO GRANDE SIERRAN