

Rio Grande Sierran

Volume 60, Issue 1

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

January / February / March 2022

Persevering, remotely

Grassroots activists continued progress toward justice and a safe climate in 2021



Chaco outing by Terry Owen, Winston Benally by Joseph Hernandez; Kayley Shoup courtesy Citizens Caring for the Future; Badger by Mary Katherine Ray

Clockwise from top left: The Sierra Club resumed outings in July; See Year in Review, **Page 7**. Winston Benally worked at Four Corners coal plant for 28 years. He and other Navajo elders made statements opposing PNM's transfer of its Four Corners share to mine owner NTEC. Regulators denied the transaction; **Page 3**. Kayley Shoup of Carlsbad and other community members testified for strong oil and gas safeguards in 2021; **Pages 6-7**. A new law banning traps on NM public lands will help protect this badger and other wildlife; **Page 7**.

EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET



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

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Inside:

Ozone ruling a win for El Paso

EPA's designation for El Paso County means Texas will have to clean up air-quality violations for community health. **Page 4.**

New Mexico legislative preview

Comprehensive climate legislation, low-income energy efficiency and utility relief among the bills Sierra Club will advocate for. **Page 6**

Comment on new wolf-recovery plan

U.S. Fish and Wildlife's court-ordered plan for bringing endangered wolves back from the brink still needs improvement. **Page 11.**

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Executive Committee

Susan Martin, chair, 505-670-3279, smartin317@gmail.com
Diane Reese, vice chair, Central New Mexico Group representative: DianeAbqNM@gmail.com
Laurence Gibson, secretary, El Paso Group representative, 915-309-5419, lgibson@utep.edu
Ray Shortridge, 505-604-3908
Karl Braithwaite, 505-850-3369, karl@braith.net
Derrick Toledo, 505-401-7932, derrick.toledo@gmail.com

Dale Doremus, 505-795-5987, ddoremus@q.com,
Shannon Romeling, 575-758-3874, sromeling73@gmail.com
Anita Gonzales, 505-425-9581, anita4newmexico@gmail.com
Mayane Barudin, mayanebarudin@gmail.com
Consuelo Walker, consueloowalker@yahoo.com
Ken Hughes, Northern New Mexico Group representative: 505-474-0550, b1family@icloud.com
Jody Benson, Pajarito Group representative, 505-662-4782, anteaterjrb@gmail.com,
Kurt Anderson, Southern New Mexico Group representative, 575-646-1032, kurt@nmsu.edu

Offices and Staff

Albuquerque office
 2215 Lead Ave. SE, Albuquerque, que, 87106, 505-243-7767
Camilla Feibelman, Rio Grande Chapter director, 505-715-8388, camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org
Miya King-Flaherty, Our Wild New Mexico organizing representative, 505-243-7767, miya.king-flaherty@sierraclub.org
Roddy Hughes, Beyond Dirty Fuels Campaign senior campaign representative, 202-271-5881, roddy.hughes@sierraclub.org
 Treasurer: **Connie Huffmire**, 505-382-5769
Northern New Mexico Office
 1807 Second St., Unit 45

‘Sierran’ publication information

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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*.

New Executive Committee members

Rio Grande Chapter members elected new Executive Committee members to represent the chapter and the five regional groups.
 Read full bios at riograndesierraclub.org/excom-candidates/
 Elected to three-year terms on the Rio Grande Chapter Executive Committee starting in January are:
Karl Braithwaite is an energy-policy expert with experience on Capital Hill and at both New Mexico national labs. Karl has been an active

volunteer leader and our chapter Conservation chair for the past several years.
Mayane Barudin advocates for inclusive renewable energy policy development and implementation. She is a Tribal member of Kewa Pueblo and led advocacy for the Community Solar Act at New Mexico legislative session; and
Consuelo Walker has been a teacher and volunteer in Guatemala, the Dominican Republic and the United States and is co-director of El Cuerpo de Paz Guatemalaeco,

working with the US Peace Corps in Guatemala.
 Elected to two-year terms on group ExComs:
 Central N.M. Group: elected **David Bouquin, Patrick Burton, Diane Reese, Ray Shortridge** and **David Ther.**
 Pajarito Group: **Jody Benson, Iris Chung, Jessie Emmerson.**
 Northern New Mexico Group: **John Buchser, Richard Mark Glover, Susan Martin, Shannon Romeling**
 Southern New Mexico: **Kurt Anderson, Cheryl Blevins, Dan Lorimier.**

Santa Fe, NM 87505, 505-983-2703
Mona Blaber, communications, 505-660-5905, monablaber@gmail.com
Claire McKnight, PAC treasurer, 646-864-0209, claire.mcknight@gmail.com
Brintha Nathan, bookkeeper, 505-310-0595, brintha2709@yahoo.com
Southern New Mexico Antoinette Reyes, Southern New Mexico organizer, 575-342-1727, antoinette.reyes@sierraclub.org
Luis Guerrero, legislative and political organizer, luis.guerrero@sierraclub.org or 575-635-3354.
Sierra Club National
 2101 Webster St., Suite 1300, Oakland, CA, 94612. 415-977-5500

Local Groups

Central New Mexico Group, 2215 Lead Ave. SE, Albuquerque, 87106 Chair: Diane Reese, 505-507-6416, DianeAbqNM@gmail.com
El Paso Group, P.O. Box 9191, El Paso, TX 79995, Chair: Laurence Gibson, 915-309-5419, lgibson@utep.edu.
Northern New Mexico Group, 1807 Second St., Unit 45, Santa Fe, NM 87505, 505-983-2703, Chair: John Buchser, jbuchser@comcast.net, (505) 820-0201.
Pajarito Group, 520 Navajo Road, Los Alamos, NM, 87544. Chair: Jody Benson, anteaterjrb@gmail.com, 505-662-4782.
Southern New Mexico Group, P.O. Box 735, Mesilla, NM, 88046; Chair: Howie Dash, howiedash@aol.com,

575-652-7550.
Outings
Chapter Outings chair: Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, tbowen@comcast.net
Central New Mexico: Terry Owen
El Paso: Laurence Gibson, lgibson@utep.edu
Northern New Mexico: Alan Shapiro, nm5s@yahoo.com
Southern New Mexico: Howie Dash, 575-652-7550, howiedash@aol.com,
Inspiring Connections Outdoors:
 Santa Fe: Raymond Greenwell, 516-312-5751, matrng@hofstra.edu
 El Paso: Ted Mertig, 915-852-3011, tcmertig@sbcglobal.net
Military Outdoors Program:Terry Owen

Conservation Issues

Conservation Chair: Karl Braithwaite, 505-850-3369, karl@braith.net
Energy/Climate Change: Chair: Karl Braithwaite
Water: Dale Doremus
Dairy: Dan Lorimier, dlorimier1948@gmail.com
Water Sentinels: Shannon Romeling
Public Lands: Chair: Derrick Toledo
Bosque Issues: Richard Barish, 505-232-3013, richard.barish@gmail.com,
Nuclear-Waste Storage: Chair: John Buchser
Wildlife: Chair: Mary Katherine Ray, mkrscrim@gmail.com, 575-537-1095
Four Corners: Miya King-Flaherty, miya.king-flaherty@sierraclub.org
Methane: Camilla Feibelman,

camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org
Mining, Sand & Gravel: Allyson Siwik, allysonsiwik@gmail.com; Teresa Seamster, ctc.seamster@gmail.com
Transportation: Ken Hughes.
Zero Waste: Central NM Group: Carol Chamberland, pictografix@comcast.net, 505-341-1027
 Pajarito Group: Jody Benson
Bag-Free Team: Jody Benson, 505-662-4782, anteaterjrb@gmail.com

Activism Teams

Communications Team: Chair: Shannon Romeling. Members: Laurence Gibson, John Buchser
Rio Grande Sierran Editorial Board: Laurence Gibson, Ken Hughes, Mary Katherine Ray, Jody Benson, David Coss, Shannon Romeling
Sierran Editor: Mona Blaber, 505-660-5905, monablaber@gmail.com
Web Editor: Ellen Loehman, loehman@msn.com, 505-328-2954
Elections: Chair: Claire McKnight, Jan Cohen, Mona Blaber
Nominating: Mona Blaber, Ken Hughes, Derrick Toledo
Finance: Chair: Ray Shortridge, 505-604-3908; Members: Brintha Nathan, Howie Dash, Claire McKnight, Connie Huffmire
Friends and Funds: Chair: Open Members: John Buchser, David Coss, Shannon Romeling
Legal: Richard Barish, 505-232-3013, richard.barish@gmail.com

Join the Sierra Club

You can join the Rio Grande Sierra Club (your membership is to both the national group and for the Rio Grande Chapter) for only \$15!
 Please visit riograndesierraclub.org/join (or scan the QR code at right on your cell phone) or send a \$15 check with your name, address and the code **1700 in the memo line** to Sierra Club,



club.org/donate!
Do you have a membership question? Contact 415-977-5653 or membership.services@sierraclub.org.

Easier, cheaper EV access coming to NM

By Mona Blaber
Chapter communications director
 Climate-friendlier cars are on the way in New Mexico, with results that should show up on roads and in your own garage very soon.

EV charging & home rebates

In 2022, you should start seeing public chargers for electric vehicles along New Mexico roads across the state, and you could be eligible for rebates to install a fast EV charger in your garage, thanks to “transportation-electrification plans” recently passed by the Public Regulation Commission. Recent New Mexico legislation requires PNM, El Paso Electric and SPS to create “transportation

electrification” plans to make driving EVs more accessible. Sierra Club joined Earthjustice, Prosperity Works and Coalition for Clean, Affordable Energy in advocating for equitable incentives, with rebates to upgrade home electrical and install fast EV chargers ranging from \$500 to \$2,000 for lower-income residents (rebates vary by service territory). Your engagement made these plans better. When ChargePoint didn’t want to put traditional credit-card readers on its public chargers, public comments convinced commissioners to require them. When PNM’s plan required residents to have a wireless Internet connection in order to qualify for the installation rebate, you successfully urged

commissioners to rehear the case and allow rebates for low-income residents without WiFi.
Clean Cars standards
 The utilities’ plans were the result of a recent New Mexico EV infrastructure law. Now we need to make it easier for New Mexicans to buy electric vehicles and make use of that infrastructure. In 2019, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced that New Mexico would adopt standards for low- and zero-emission vehicles that would make electric cars much more accessible in the state. The New Mexico Environment Department has now proposed Advanced Clean Cars standards for

possible adoption by May 2022. However, the state’s rules may soon be outdated by updated California rules. A coalition of environment and community groups (including Sierra Club) has suggested interim steps so New Mexico can enjoy the benefits of EV availability as soon as possible and stay up to date on Clean Car Standards. Hundreds of you have sent comments urging the state to implement Advanced Clean Cars standards — and Clean Truck Standards — urgently and offer an early-adoption credit to get automakers sending electric vehicles to New Mexico before they are legally required. Write to riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org to be added to our action listserv.



Photo courtesy Joseph Hernandez
Navajo elders, above, drove through snow-packed roads Dec. 15 to share an Internet connection and make remote comments in opposition to PNM transferring its share of Four Corners coal plant to mine owner NTEC (both plant and mine are on Navajo Nation).

Four Corners victory

By Mona Blaber
Communications director

On Dec. 15, New Mexico’s Public Regulation Commission rejected PNM’s application to offload its share of Four Corners coal plant to the owner of the coal mine. Mine owner NTEC had said it was seeking PNM’s 13% share in an effort to keep the plant operating as long as possible to provide a revenue stream for its coal mine, even potentially past the current likely closure date of 2031. Denying PNM’s transfer to the country’s third-largest coal-mining company makes PNM and majority owner Arizona Public Service much more likely to favor early closure of the money-losing plant, which sits on the Navajo Nation and is New Mexico’s biggest single source of climate pollution. Sierra Club and others have found that retiring Four Corners early would save rate-payers considerably. However, the hearing examiner charged to the case had recommended that the commission approve the transfer (and a \$300 million bond purchase

that customers would have been on the hook for). Commissioner Joseph Maestas said the transfer would have been “completely contrary to the intent of the Energy Transition Act” because the coal plant would continue to operate if the abandonment were approved. New Mexicans, including community members who live and work amid the plant’s pollution, submitted dozens of written and spoken comments and objected publicly to the transfer. “This decision has been due for many years to the Navajo community members that live near this modern-day night-glowing monster,” said NAVA EP’s Joseph Hernandez. “For decades our communities’ health and safety has been sacrificed the most to electrify cities like Phoenix. When I notified the surrounding community members about the hearing, no one had ever heard from PNM or NTEC about what is really only another scheme by a Tribal enterprise that is notorious for not being transparent.” On the day of the vote, after many New Mexicans spoke eloquently during public

comment, commissioners went into an hours-long closed session and emerged to unanimously deny the abandonment and financing order. Sierra Club’s arguments and expert testimony were key in the general counsel’s explanation for the decision. The commission did open the door to PNM applying again, but only after a prudence determination as to whether ratepayers should pay \$146 million for investments PNM made when it renewed its participation in the plant in 2013. Commissioners cited Sierra Club expert witness Jeremy Fisher’s testimony that there was too much at stake financially to let PNM bypass a prudence review. The commission also ruled that PNM should have to provide a real replacement scenario before it abandons its share of the plant. And commissioners agreed that PNM was in breach of its 2016 stipulation with Sierra Club and others to analyze an exit from Four Corners without a sale of its interests. PNM filed an appeal of this decision on Dec. 22, but the PRC’s vote is a blow to coal and a victory for the public interest.

DOE taking comments on nuclear ‘consent’

By John Buchser, Nuclear Waste Issues Chair

The Department of Energy is requesting comments on “informed consent” as applied to consolidated interim storage. The Sierra Club has identified lots of problems in the management and oversight of spent nuclear fuel as noted in our recommendations guidance that can be found at riograndesierraclub.org/Holtec. In particular, refer to Section 5, Community Engagement and Informed Consent, pages 93-106. In order for the public to give “informed consent,” extensive details about the project must be available to the public, including information about the inherent hazards and the regulatory requirements that will isolate radioactive materials from humans and the biosphere for millions of years. Finland is the only country to have used a consent-based approach to siting of long-term disposal of high-level commercial nuclear waste. This process could serve as an outline for how to include U.S. governmental structures, as well as state and tribal interests, to enable storage, transportation, and disposal of spent nuclear fuel. Communities need to ensure that plans for movement of spent nuclear fuel are broadly inclusive, transparent, and accessible. The National Environmental Policy Act process must be engaged to address the moving of spent nuclear fuel. Nearly all things nuclear were exempted from federal and state environmental regulatory authorities under the Atomic Energy Act and the Nuclear Waste Policy Act. Weak safeguards for nuclear waste and the

release of radiation in our air and water have resulted in numerous failures. Additionally, the distance that spent nuclear fuel moves should be minimized. Moving highly hazardous radioactive waste to a location away from the reactor site should be pursued only if the reactor site is at excessive risk from natural events like flooding. Such movement should be very limited — the longer the distance the waste moves, the higher the risk of an accident. The history of development of nuclear energy as a commercial electricity source has not included considerations for consent. Communities that host nuclear reactors had minimal to no say in the siting of reactors. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission seems intent on approving any commercial proposals for interim storage like the facility Holtec is proposing in southeast New Mexico. The Department of Energy has a history of poor communication with the public about what it is doing — leaving a great deal of public mistrust. The Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board has made efforts through its quarterly meetings to update the public on research here and in Europe. Ultimately the U.S. Congress must decide how to proceed, but with nuclear waste piling up at 75 reactors in 33 states, there’s a lot of pressure to “move the waste away.” You can email comments to consentbasedsiting@hq.doe.gov by 5 p.m. EST March 4. For more information and to comment using the online form, go to Federal Register at www.federalregister.gov and search for “consent-based siting.”

Kindness, action in face of darkness

Until I read a Public Citizen action alert, I didn't know that the Moderna vaccine was developed by scientists at the National Institutes for Health. And that despite this investment by taxpayers and the federal government, Moderna is applying for a patent on its own. Meanwhile, global deployment of vaccines has been excruciatingly slow, and the international commitment to dose-sharing has been inefficient.

Here in the states, some refuse life-saving vaccines, while others around the world can't get the inoculations they're desperate to have, and lives are lost. To make matters worse, the virus mutates within the bodies of the unvac-



Camilla Feibelman
Chapter director

whole towns and lives while U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin, a modern-day coal baron, puts his profit over lives, announcing, as I write, his withdrawal of support

inated, sending the world back into lockdown, filling hospitals once again, taxing our health-care providers to the brink and depriving our world of a fair and just path forward.

Meanwhile, unseasonal heat in the Midwest drove tornados to destroy

for federal Build Back Better legislation that would be the largest investment ever in solving the climate crisis. One man says no, millions suffer.

There's part of me that wants to just curl up under the covers and hope someone else can figure out what to do. But then Rafael, my 5-year-old, comes into the room. He is irrepresible in his curiosity and his drive to understand how things work. He opens every drawer, handles every item, loosens every screw, tests each mechanism until he sees how it works. I think this has to be the approach. Be curious about those who've been victimized by misinformation, not judgemental. Take every question and concern at face value. Listen as much as

we talk. Be open to every solution, but hold them up to experimentation and real results. Let the small victories and learnings inspire bigger ones. Let love for one another overcome frustration (that's hard when the supplies drawer has been emptied for the fourth time). Practice empathy and kindness, even when frustration and fatigue reign.

Want to do more? Join our NM ClimateCorps of volunteers who are prioritizing climate action. We meet every other Thursday at noon to learn and take action. Already, dozens of ClimateCorps volunteers have contributed to victories you'll read about in these pages. Email me to join: camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org.

EPA methane standards crucial to climate action

By Camilla Feibelman, Chapter director

In November, more than 50 New Mexicans testified in favor of the strongest EPA oil and gas methane rules possible to protect the climate and health of the 130,000 New Mexicans who live within a half-mile of oil and gas development, not to mention the millions of impacted people around the country.

The rule, which for the first time would regulate both new and existing equipment, will do a lot to reduce this potent greenhouse gas. The rules would set a strong floor for states like Colorado and New Mexico, which are already regulating methane, and would provide minimum protections for states like Texas that haven't taken steps to protect their own communities.

The proposed safeguards would improve on Obama-era rules to require zero-emitting pneumatic controllers, exceeding the current New Mexico rules, include emission-reduction requirements for liquids unloading, regulating methane at storage tanks, and increasing the frequency of leak monitoring at many oil and gas wells.

But the rules must be



Screenshot of EPA public testimony

NAVA EP's Joseph Hernandez, bottom right, testifies for strong methane rules at an EPA remote town hall in November.

strengthened by increasing mandatory leak inspections to monthly for all wells and compressor stations and by eliminating the exemption from regular monitoring for wells that are calculated to emit below three tons per year of methane, a type of exemption that New Mexico regulators seem poised to eliminate in state rules. Flaring is a major nuisance and source of pollution for communities near oil and gas operations. New Mexico moved to prohibit routine venting and flaring in its May methane rule. We also want standards that require owners and operators to plug and control emissions from abandoned and orphaned wells.

New Mexico commenters also encouraged EPA to include a community monitoring program in the rules. People who live near oil and gas operations have already done considerable documenting of flaring, leaks and other pollution that directly harm them.

EPA should study the relevant considerations to establish a program where third parties, citizen groups, and others could identify leaking equipment to ensure rapid repairs.

Please join us in calling for the strongest rules possible at www.sc.org/methane. The deadline to comment is Jan. 31.

Oil, gas leasing defy climate promise

By Miya King-Flaherty, Our Wild New Mexico Organizer

While there is hope to protect lands in the Greater Chaco region from expanded oil and gas development, the same cannot be said for public lands in southeast New Mexico's Permian Basin and eight other states that have lands up for sale for more fracking in February.

A federal judge this summer revoked the Biden administration's pause on oil and gas leasing pending review of the leasing program as directed by Biden's Executive Order to tackle the climate crisis. Now, more than 700,000 acres of public and ancestral tribal lands are up for auction by the Bureau of Land Management.

The *Guardian* recently reported on a Department of Justice memo that said that, while the court's order lifted Biden's pause on new drilling permits, it did not force the government to issue any new ones. The Interior Department, which oversees drilling on public lands and waters, has full discretion over whether to offer lands for lease.

New Mexico parcels are still on the chopping block, though some acreage was reduced. The BLM's Pecos District Office in southern New Mexico has nominated more than 500 acres

for sale in Lea and Chaves counties, where the fracking boom has surpassed pre-pandemic levels and drilling has more than quadrupled in the last decade.

The climate executive order also directed the Interior Department to comprehensively review the climate harms and potential reforms of the federal oil and gas leasing program. The report was supposed to be released in early summer, but the agency finally released it the day after Thanksgiving. To our disappointment, the "comprehensive" review simply acknowledged that taxpayers are not getting their fair share of revenue generated from oil and gas development, that bonding levels the companies are required to post are insufficient to clean up and remediate retired/non-producing wells, and that meaningful tribal consultation and public input should be taken into consideration in the leasing process. The report only mentions climate twice and does not address the climate impacts of the leasing program.

There will be opportunities to comment on the lease sales, and the Interior Department can still reduce parcel acreage or even defer or cancel the sale. We'll keep you posted so you can participate in the public-comment process. Contact miya.king-flaherty@sierraclub.org to join our action listservs or learn how you can help.

EPA ozone ruling a win for El Paso

By Antoinette Reyes
Southern New Mexico organizer

In November, a three-year legal challenge by the Sierra Club and community group Familias Unidas del Chamizal resulted in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency changing El Paso from "compliance" to "nonattainment" for ozone, which will require Texas to address the unsafe pollution levels in the area.

El Paso's emissions also contribute to ozone nonattainment in Sunland Park and other southern New Mexico areas.

The American Lung Association ranked

the El Paso-Las Cruces region 13th on its list of most smog-polluted metropolitan areas in the United States. This means more industrial sources of pollution will need to meet higher standards. This designation paves the way for cleaner air, so stay tuned for the next chapter in this battle, which will focus on trying to get the EPA to regulate existing sources of pollution, not just new sources. According to an analysis by New York University and the American Thoracic Society, ozone levels in El Paso-Las Cruces cause about 18 premature deaths, 53 emergency-room visits, and almost 60,000

missed work or school days per year.

Air pollution disproportionately hurts marginalized communities. "The Chamizal neighborhood, which is predominantly low-income and Hispanic, experiences some of the worst air pollution in El Paso," Familias Unidas Del Chamizal member Hilda Villegas said. "Our kids have trouble breathing when they go outside. People get respiratory infections and have to call in sick at work. This EPA designation should be a wake-up call for our community leaders to fight for clean air and a more sustainable future."

Central New Mexico Group

Grassroots pressure ends bag loophole

By Anni Hanna,
NM Climate Justice

We are celebrating a victory in Albuquerque where Mayor Keller fixed the "thick plastic bag" loophole. A big thank-you to everyone who called and emailed, and to the coalition of 26 local organizations who came together to urge the Keller administration to fix the description of a plastic bag and thereby the loophole.

This win is a testament to the community raising their voices and being heard! This local victory can be duplicated across the country to

strengthen ordinances and reduce use of plastic bags and perhaps other single-use plastics. The key is to describe an acceptable bag as stitched with handles that are designed for multiple reuse. They can be either: made of cloth or other machine-washable fabric; OR made of plastic and greater than 4 mil thick. Having stitched handles is a key defining characteristic of reusable bags and therefore cuts out use of the thick, 2.25-mil plastic bags. This is a good first step locally, but there is so much more to do to reduce and eventually stop plastic production internationally.

Plastic production, use and disposal are harmful to human health and contaminate plant and animal habitats, air, waterways and soils. Plastic production pollution is also a racial justice issue. In New Mexico, we see first-hand the health consequences of fracking on frontline communities from air pollution, higher rates of childhood asthma and higher rates of cancer. In Louisiana's "Cancer Alley," plastic refineries and petrochemical plants are located in mostly black and brown neighborhoods, where cancer rates are much higher than average.

In spite of all this, companies like

ExxonMobil, Shell, and Saudi Aramco are looking to double their plastic production by 2030.

A good place to start to reverse this toxic trend is the Break Free From Plastic Act, www.breakfreefromplastic.org. Please urge New Mexico's senators to co-sponsor the legislation. Thank you to U.S. Reps. Teresa Leger Fernández and Melanie Stansbury for co-sponsoring the bill federally.

Working on the plastic-bag loophole has taught me coalition-building from the grassroots is essential and that our voices do matter.

Students hold UNM to account

By Raven Alcott, UNM Leaf

The University of New Mexico Leaders for Environmental Action and Foresight (UNM LEAF) is a coalition of students, staff, alumni, faculty and community members who work to hold UNM accountable for its role in the climate crisis. Our primary goals focus on fossil-fuel divestment, becoming a carbon- and waste-free campus, updating the 2009 climate action plan, and investing in environmental education/awareness research.

Inspired by students at other universities, UNM LEAF filed a complaint with New Mexico Attorney General Hector Balderas on Oct. 26 asking him to investigate the UNM Foundation's \$32 million fossil-fuel investments. We allege they violate the Uniform Prudent Management of Institutional Funds Act, which says charities must invest in line with their charitable mission. We identified 28 companies in the Foundation's public equity portfolio whose emissions in New Mexico disproportionately harm the environment and health of Hispanic, Indigenous, and underserved communities. The



Photo by Anni Hanna

UNM LEAF student activists have filed a complaint with New Mexico Attorney General Hector Balderas asking him to investigate the UNM Foundation's \$32 million in fossil-fuel investments.

Foundation's and UNM leadership's lack of action or even curiosity about the effects of climate change in New Mexico contradict their espoused goals of service toward the well-being of New Mexicans and their commitment to students, alumni, faculty, and the state.

New Mexico is one of the fastest warming and water-scarce states in the nation. We can already see the effects of climate change in New Mexico and how it is hurting the most vulnerable among us. Yet some of the same

professors who teach us about climate change and environmental injustice are unwilling to sign our complaint. Our representatives, including Mayor Tim Keller, city councilors, and many state legislators haven't signed on. UNM, the flagship university of New Mexico, has the opportunity to be a leader in transitioning to renewable energy sources but chooses profit over people.

So thank you to the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter for signing on — along with 220



Associated with UNM? Scan the QR code for the sign-on form.

UNM community members, environmental justice and frontline communities, nationally renowned climate scientists and other individuals. If you are associated with UNM, consider signing yourself or your organization on at unmleaf.org.

Volunteer hero: Laurie Zunner

This month's volunteer interview is with Laurie Zunner of Albuquerque. From entering data to making calls to members on critical issues to giving thoughtful public comments on important issues, Laurie has jumped in to contribute when it matters most.

1. What is your role with the Rio Grande Chapter?

Pre-COVID I started out with the Wednesday data-entry group and then started doing tabling at various events. I have been interested in recycling and reducing waste ever since the first Earth Day, so I joined the Central Group's Zero Waste Team and was soon organizing and leading the team's Zero Waste Tours. During COVID I have made "get out the vote" phone calls for candidates, sent lobbying emails to legislators on certain bills, continue delivering SC newsletters around town and doing some remote data entry.



2. What are some of your hobbies?

Gardening, hiking and folkdancing.

3. Why do you volunteer for Sierra Club?

I've met so many incredibly talented, knowledgeable and dedicated people and learned so much about New Mexico (my adopted home of about 20 years), its beauty but also some of its problems and what we can do about them.

4. Why are you inspired to work for the

environment?

I've always been close to Nature ever since I was a kid. Now with climate change wreaking ever-increasing havoc on the earth, it's not just a matter of protecting Nature but protecting our future ability to live. I don't know how anyone could NOT care about the environment.

5. What is your favorite memory of the environmental activism?

The first time I visited the Roundhouse was for tabling during a legislative session. It was a real eye-opener! There were so many people and so many tables we could hardly hear one another! There were activists, lobbyists, legislators, school children. I also attended some hearings, met with legislators and learned how to note my wish for a yes or no vote on bills on a tally sheet at legislators' offices. I was amazed at how open and inclusive the legislative process is here.

Central NM Group contacts

Chair: Diane Reese, DianeAbqNM@gmail.com, 505-507-6416

Vice Chair: Ray Shorridge, rshorridge@gmail.com

Treasurer: David Ther, grelbik@gmail.com

Patrick Burton, patrickburton9@icloud.com

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

Zero Waste: Carol Chamberland, pictografix@comcast.net

David Bouquin, dbouquin5@gmail.com

Peter Kelling, cloudsandwater@juno.com

Fred Houdek, fhoudek@gmail.com, 630.809.4234

Other Responsibilities Political/Bosque: Richard Barish, richardbarish@gmail.com

Volunteer coordinators: Keely Scheffler, kscheffler99@unm.edu, Patty Duncan, pgnm@comcast.com

Wildlife: Open Military Outings: Terry Owen

Sierra Club and Root Beer: Bikes!

The Central New Mexico Group of the Sierra Club wants to change the perception of bike transportation to something for everyone, not only the dedicated or desperate! Let's start with making biking the natural and easy way to take neighborhood trips — to the grocery, pharmacy, the library, coffee shop, cafe.

Join us at the Snow Park Community Center, 9501 Indian School NE from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, March 19, to discuss challenges and opportunities. We'll have biking support groups present, expert presentations, a bike maintenance workshop, e-bikes to try out, City Transportation Department representatives and more.

We're rich! But is that a good thing?

Denise Fort (former NM DFA Secretary and Sierra Club member since 1975)

The state of New Mexico is awash in money from the federal infrastructure bill and a surplus resulting from what turned out to be overly conservative revenue estimates a year ago.

The mood is euphoric in Santa Fe; there's nothing like the ability to spend money to lift everyone's spirits. To be clear, this money won't be spent on ongoing salaries for education, health, etc., because it's so-called nonrecurring revenue. It's more like capital funds, meaning that it will be spent on one-time expenditures, mostly involving infrastructure. As we go to press, the special session has already authorized some capital spending; the full session that begins in January will have even more nonrecurring money.

For environmentalists, lots of money is a double-edged sword. We want to see the state extend broadband services to rural areas, fix up our schools, repair our public pension funds, and address the many public needs that have gone underfunded for years. We are committed to addressing the inequities in funding that plague New Mexico and addressing the needs of the 25% of New Mexico children who live in poverty.

We also hope for a trust fund for conservation properties and addressing water needs. With \$25 million, the state could begin to acquire water rights for environmental flows in our desiccated rivers. And we need matching funds for wildlife protection. We should be building up our public transportation alternatives in the state; we need passenger rail, intercity buses, and investments in charging stations for electric vehicles. It would make a lot of sense to follow the direction of the Southwest

Energy Efficiency Project and invest in energy-efficiency measures, especially for homes of low-income families. The list goes on.

But a frenzy of capital spending also presents risks to the environment. Water projects have been reviewed by the state's Water Trust Board in recent years, which at least enables some transparency about what is sought and often requires a local contribution. In contrast, legislators may be asked to fund environmentally damaging projects such as new diversions, dams, pipelines, etc., with no consideration of environmental costs. We still don't have a state Environmental Protection Act that would provide environmental review of spending. A ton of federal money for dam repair will be available to states. Some dams are in ill repair and serve public purposes. Others have destroyed the ecological functioning of rivers, have limited benefits and should be removed. The federal money can be used for dam removal, but will anyone speak up for that? Roads are supposed to be maintained with the state's gas tax, but New Mexico is 47th in the nation in our gas-tax rate. Using the surplus for road repairs subsidizes auto and truck transportation at the expense of people who don't own cars or drive very little. From a climate, land-use, and sustainability perspective, this is the wrong way to fund highway repairs and construction.

It's going to be a wild legislative session. The fact is that the legislature has yet to adopt a capital budgeting process that is adequate for the importance of this spending. Monies are still divided up among the governor and each legislative chamber. It will take our best efforts to support funding of needed causes and prevent the authorization of projects that hurt people and our environment.

New Rio Grande Chapter legislative chair

Newly elected to our Executive Committee, Mayane Barudin has agreed to lead our chapter's lobbying efforts as Legislative chair. Mayane advocates for inclusive renewable-energy policy.

A Tribal member of Kewa Pueblo, Mayane hopes to enable economic prosperity and environmental justice for her community and Indigenous peoples through energy policy reform and solar campaign initiatives. Her work prioritizes environmental and energy justice for historically underserved communities. Mayane started Sovereign Energy as a native-led nonprofit organization to center Tribal energy sovereignty and Indigenous voices within the renewable energy transition.

Endless thanks to our great retiring chairs, Melinda Smith and Patricia Cardona, and welcome to Mayane!



Photo courtesy Evalyn Bemis/EvalynBemisPhotography.com

The 2022 New Mexico legislative session won't allow gatherings like this 2018 Renewable Energy Day. Vaccines will be required to enter the building, and some remote participation will remain.

Hope for real and fair climate solutions

By Luis Guerrero Chapter legislative organizer

And just like that, another Legislative Session is upon us. This year is the shorter, 30-day session, which typically is meant for budget and any issue that is on the governor's "call."

Climate legislation: The need for meaningful, immediate action on climate has never been more clear.

In the 2021 session we worked hard to pass the comprehensive Climate Solutions Act, but it did not advance. Our coalition of organizations has never stopped working on it, though, and during Speaker Ego's Brian Climate Summit in October, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced that she would put legislation in her call to codify her Climate Executive Order (45% reduction of greenhouse gases by 2030 and net-zero greenhouse emissions by 2050).

It is up to us to voice loudly and clearly to our legislators what real, meaningful climate legislation should include. We have not yet seen draft language for the legislation but want to see equity and a focus on frontline communities at the center of economy-wide greenhouse-gas reduction, including significant near-term reductions that are enforceable. More to come.

Moonshot budget: With massive amounts of funding coming into the state, not just from oil and gas but also federal funds, now is the time to make significant investments in climate solutions. Funds

could go to construction of EV charging stations, weatherizing low-income homes, living-wage and stipend funding for workers in transition, and fully funding agencies to protect our air and water and hold polluting industries accountable. (See article at left).

Utility affordability: The Low-Income Utility Affordability Act seeks to improve utility affordability, reduce energy burden, and increase utility access of low-income New Mexicans. Improving energy efficiency in low-income housing lowers bills, improves the quality of affordable housing stock, and helps New Mexico achieve its zero-carbon targets.

Solar storage/tax credit: This would provide tax incentives and credits for solar storage that can be useful for charging EVs and can be used in adverse weather conditions.

NM Green Amendment: This is a constitutional amendment that requires a vote of both houses and a resolution on the next ballot. If passed, it would strengthen the constitutional language recognizing a healthy environment as an inherent legal right and would allow citizens and organizations to hold government officials accountable for violations of their environmental rights.

Nuclear waste: This bill would amend the Radioactive and Nuclear Waste Act, prohibiting the storage or disposal of high level-waste in New Mexico and prevent state agencies from authorizing local permits.

Clean fuels: This bill attempts to reduce the carbon intensity of the fuels used in transportation. Carbon intensity is a

measurement of a fuel's emissions profile that includes its production, shipping, and use.

While we believe that a clean-fuels standard can contribute to reducing greenhouse gases, we must attend to emissions in all sectors of our economy. The bill as drafted has higher aspirations than last year's legislation, and directs funds generated to transportation electrification and serving communities impacted by transportation pollution.

Hydrogen legislation: The state's discussion draft of hydrogen legislation incentivized fossil-fueled hydrogen projects. Most hydrogen is harvested from fracked gas, which creates massive climate pollution from methane leakage. Carbon dioxide is also emitted during the production process. And if hydrogen is burned, it produces nitrogen oxide, a health-harming pollutant.

There are several bill drafts circulating that essentially subsidize climate pollution, and one of them categorizes fossil-fueled hydrogen as a renewable energy.

While a hydrogen-production process fueled by renewables and derived from water (ideally not freshwater) may help to decarbonize sectors like aviation and shipping as a last-mile solution, the proposed bills do nothing to focus on these areas or to limit even the most polluting types of hydrogen.

Want to make your voice heard at the Roundhouse in support or opposition of some of these bills? Join our grassroots lobby team by emailing me at luis.guerrero@sierraclub.org.

NM Legislative Session: Jan. 18 to Feb. 17, 2022

2021: Year in Review

January

■ Almost immediately after assuming office, President Joseph Biden issues an order to temporarily suspend new federal oil and gas leasing on public lands. The pause does not affect existing leases or drilling permits, and royalty revenue to the state is uninterrupted.

■ New Mexico Legislature begins first virtual session.

February

■ The remote Ojo Encino Chapter House, west of Cuba, N.M., and in the greater Chaco Canyon area, is the first Navajo chapter to go online with continuous local air-quality monitoring using the PurpleAir network to measure particulate matter. The project is the continuation of monitoring conducted in the Counselor Chapter in 2018 as part of a community Health Impact Assessment. View air-quality readings at <https://rb.gy/tsmaeu>.

March

■ U.S. Rep. Deb Haaland of Laguna Pueblo becomes the first Native American Cabinet secretary in U.S. history. The Senate voted 51-40 to confirm the Democratic congressional representative for New Mexico's 1st District to lead the Interior Department, an agency that plays a crucial role in the Biden administration's ambitious efforts to combat climate change and conserve nature.

■ The New Mexico Oil Conservation Commission finalizes a rule to limit venting and flaring of climate-damaging methane by the oil and gas industry. Environmental and community groups advocate for banning venting and flaring of gas except in limited circumstances and requiring all oil and gas companies to capture 98% of methane emissions by 2026. The rule does not mandate fixing methane leaks. A separate rule from the Environment Department will target emissions and leaks of methane, volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxide.

■ New Mexico's legislative session ends, passing some significant policy signed into law in April (see below).

April

■ Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signs "Roxy's Law," prohibiting traps and poisons from public lands in New Mexico. Years of work and activism by New Mexicans contributed to that achievement. Hikers and walkers can now enjoy public lands without fear of their pets — or themselves — being injured or even killed in traps.

■ SB112, "Sustainable Economy Task Force," becomes law. This legislation will recommend diversification opportunities for New Mexico's economy and require implementation of recommendations from a Department of Workforce Solutions survey of 1,800 New Mexico frontline workers.

■ Community Solar Act also becomes law. Another bill that environmental and community organizations have been advocating for for years, this legislation 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.

■ Citing Energy Transition Act requirements, PNM proposes 100% solar and battery as replacement for PNM's retiring lease in Palo Verde



Above: N.M. Rep. Christine Chandler advocated for a trapping ban and other environmental legislation during the January-March remote legislative session.



Left: Global Warming Express kids supported the federal pause on new oil and gas leasing at an April rally.

Legislature screenshot: Mona Blaber
GWE photo: David McGahey

nuclear plant. The company will still own a separate share of Palo Verde after this lease expires. In choosing renewables, the utility also cited the PRC's rejection of its gas-heavy replacement plan for the San Juan coal plant in 2020 in favor of solar and storage.

■ Attorney General Hector Balderas files suit in federal district court against the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, requesting denial of Holtec's permit to build a temporary storage facility for all the nation's high-level nuclear waste in southeastern New Mexico. Balderas's suit complements the Sierra Club's legal challenges against the NRC's plans.

May

■ A Center for Applied Research report for Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard reveals that capping orphaned oil and gas wells could cost the state \$8.4 billion, not including the cost of reclaiming a well site or cleaning spills on federal lands. The state has about \$200 million in financial assurance funds to plug orphaned wells, leaving New Mexicans on the hook to fund the enormous gap.

■ A coalition of groups, including the Sierra Club, files a petition at the state Environmental Improvement Board and supplying a draft rule and the regulatory documents needed for the state to swiftly adopt Clean Car standards to make zero-emission vehicles more readily available and accessible in New Mexico.

■ In response to a suit filed by Sierra Club and others in 2018, EPA proposes to designate the El Paso area as in "nonattainment" with the 2015 ozone standard. The designation has implications for El Paso Electric's proposed expansion of Newman Gas Plant and other polluting facilities as their air permits come up for renewal.

■ N.M. Oil Conservation Division bans routine venting and flaring.

■ Del Oro Dairy in Anthony, N.M., agrees to modifications to its plan to capture polluted shallow groundwater from beneath its facility. This revised plan is the culmination of efforts between the New Mexico Environment Department, the New Mexico Citizens Dairy Coalition and Del Oro.

August

■ New Mexico Game Commission rejects five private landowners' applications for "certificates of non-navigability" that would have empowered them to prohibit recreation use of the Rio Chama and Pecos River through their properties.

■ The Bureau of Land Management announces it will hold a new round of oil and gas lease sales in February 2022. More than 1,000 New Mexicans submit comments protesting the lease sales.

■ Sierra Club, Earthworks and Chaparral Coalition for Community Health and Environment settle with El Paso Electric over proposed expansion of Newman Gas Plant. While EPE will go forward with the new gas unit, the settlement will substantially reduce air pollution in the region. EPE must retire two existing gas units and is prohibited from building new fossil-fuel facilities for four years, and must reduce CO2 pollution from the new unit by 500,000 tons and NOx by 50 tons.

September

■ N.M. Public Regulation Commission approves Southwestern Public Service's "Transportation Electrification Plan." The plans, required of all three of New Mexico's major utilities — will add charging stations for electric vehicles on New Mexico public roadways and provide rebates for residents to install fast chargers at home. El Paso Electric's and PNM's plans are approved within the next two months. See Page 3.

October

■ New Mexico Gov. Lujan Grisham announces she will put climate legislation on her call to be considered during the 30-day legislative budget session starting in January.

■ New Mexico Environment Department releases draft Clean Car rules to make electric vehicles more accessible in the state and tighten vehicle pollution standards.

November

■ Local elections held around New Mexico. See Page 10 for results for our endorsed candidates.

■ State releases discussion draft of legislation that would incentivize production of hydrogen that would generate considerable amounts of climate pollution. See legislative article on Page 6 and riograndesierraclub.org/ hydrogen to learn more.

December

■ EPA holds hearings on methane rules that will for the first time apply to both new and existing sources of oil and gas pollution.

■ New Mexico PRC rejects Avangrid and PNM's merger application.

■ One week later, PRC commissioners reject PNM's application to transfer its share of Four Corners coal plant to the mine owner, NTEC. The transfer would have increased the likelihood that the plant would continue pumping pollution indefinitely. See Page 3.

New hope for Greater Chaco

By Miya King-Flaherty,
Our Wild New Mexico
Organizer

Securing protections for Chaco Culture National Historical Park and the greater connected landscape is starting to look like a real possibility.

At the administration's first White House Tribal Summit, on Nov. 15, President Joseph Biden and Interior Secretary Deb Haaland announced initiation of a process for a 20-year ban on new federal oil and gas leasing and drilling within 10 miles of Chaco Park.

The announcement also instructed the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to conduct an environmental analysis and seek public comment on the proposed withdrawal that will take place during a two-year moratorium on new leasing of federal lands. Neither the moratorium nor the 20-year administrative withdrawal applies to existing leases or affects tribal allotted lands and minerals (lands that were allocated to Navajo families from the federal government in the late 1880s and are no longer part of the Navajo Reservation). If passed,



Photo by Miya King-Flaherty

Interior Secretary Deb Haaland announced the Biden administration will impose a 20-year ban on new federal leasing and drilling within 10 miles of Chaco Culture National Historical Park. Congressional and tribal leaders joined Haaland for an announcement at the park in November.

the mineral withdrawal would protect roughly 336,000 acres of unleased federal lands within a 10-mile buffer surrounding the park.

In the coming weeks, the BLM will publish a notice of the proposed withdrawal in the Federal Register, which will kick off a 90-day public comment

period and public meetings this February. We hope the public engagement process will be robust and truly reflect the Interior Department's commitment to tribal consultation and incorporate robust public feedback into decision-making outcomes that ensure protections for the broader Greater

Chaco landscape and surrounding communities impacted by oil and gas drilling, especially those outside the proposed 10-mile buffer.

Interior Secretary Haaland, tribal leaders, elected officials, state cabinet secretaries, and local advocates and groups working to protect the region

gathered at the Park to celebrate the announcement. Speakers touched on the importance of protecting the area for future generations, the deep meaning of Chaco Canyon for indigenous peoples whose ancestors thrived in the area, as well as the need to protect water and air resources and the people who live in those communities from the ongoing impacts of oil and gas drilling. At the celebration, Haaland named the process for protecting the area "Honoring Chaco."

Through this action, Haaland and Biden have spotlighted the vast concerns about oil and gas extraction impacting this sacred landscape, the living culture and public and spiritual wellness of communities in the region. It is time to prioritize the people and cultural integrity of this region.

Alongside our allies in the Greater Chaco Coalition, we'll continue to push the administration to ensure that the process, and future steps, prioritize environmental justice and meaningful tribal consultation that ensure broader landscape-level protections for the Greater Chaco region and those who live there.

GWE makes pandemic magic with app

By Genie Stevens
Global Warming Express

As we enter the winter season of darkness, punctuated by festivals celebrating generosity and goodwill, it's an apt time to tell the story of the Global Warming Express online app. Born at the outset of one of humanity's most difficult times, the app unfolded as a result of and an antidote to the pandemic.

In February 2020, we realized that our business as usual (bringing trained GWE mentors into the after-school classrooms of New Mexico elementary

schools) was not viable. A new model would provide us with the wonderful opportunity to reach classrooms in every grade school in New Mexico and even beyond. With no prior planning or experience in the digital world, our team began to create the GWE Online Curriculum App.

The first contributors were the kids. As usual in our By Kids/For Kids program, GWE kids from varied backgrounds became our curriculum-development team, working with me to develop curriculum that included elements of social and climate justice. Then, the team went

to work, rehearsing, reading and audio recording the books in the curriculum. At the same time, a retired school teacher from Manitoba, Canada, contacted us to ask about the online program. She wanted to offer it to schools in her province and volunteered to translate the entire program into French, free of charge. A seasoned actor and Spanish translator was the next to join us. She was excited to offer the app to her sister, a teacher in Mexico. She ended up translating, reading and recording it all. Our app developer and sound technician, too, contributed hundreds of hours of work.

Word spread and educators, actors and translators in Canada and Mexico volunteered their time and creative energy.

Our GWE mentor team, who could not be in the schools in person, put in hundreds of hours to help design and develop the work. Fifth-graders in Albuquerque jumped onboard to help beta-test. We now have an enchanting product and an enhanced team in New Mexico and on both sides of the border.

The pandemic did not stop us. Next semester we'll launch the apps in schools and, pandemic permitting, an outdoor afterschool program.

14 Years of Water Sentinels data in Taos

By Shannon Romeling
Executive Committee

The Water Sentinels Rio de Taos have been sampling water quality in Taos County streams since 2007. In collaboration with Amigos Bravos, a statewide organization dedicated to protecting water quality, volunteers have collected data that is used to influence policy around impaired waters for 14 years.

If a waterway is officially considered "impaired" by the New Mexico Environment Department, it can more easily receive state and federal funds to restore the river. Our Environment Department samples our rivers once every 7-8 years, and Water Sentinels fill this gap by collecting data three times a year and submitting to the agency.

In 2021, thanks to funding from the Sierra Club Grassroots

Network, Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area and Amigos Bravos, an intern was hired to compile 14 years of data on five rivers and create graphs of trends. A pamphlet will be distributed this winter.

Graphs and summaries will be available at sierraclub.org/water-sentinels and amigosbravos.org/water-quality-monitoring. Examples include: aluminum levels on the Red River; E. coli levels in the Rio Fernando, Rio Pueblo, Red River and Rio Hondo; phosphate and nitrate levels below Taos Wastewater Treatment Plant, and more.

Thank you to T'ika and our funders for this important work! Please contact sromeling@amigosbravos.org if you are interested in becoming a Water Sentinel in any part of New Mexico.

Park it, Buster! (In a state park)

By Terry Owen, Outings chair

Want to know about one of New Mexico's best-kept secrets? It's the New Mexico State Parks system. More than 70% of us live within 40 miles of a New Mexico State Park.

Whether you prefer the desert, the mountains or water, there's something for you in one of these 35 unique recreation areas, 28 of which have camping facilities. Plus, they're a bargain! A day use pass is only \$5, and an annual pass is \$40.

Military veterans with 50 percent or higher disability rating can obtain a free annual park pass

as a thank-you for your service. Do you like to camp? You can get a tent site for just \$10 per night or an RV site for \$18 per night at many of the parks. Reserve online at newmexicostateparks.reserveamerica.com

To find out more go, to the State Parks Department website emrdr.nm.gov/spd/.

During the pandemic, with tourist visits down, funding for these resources plummeted. To advocate for more funding for our state parks and environmental agencies, email Luis.Guerrero@sierraclub.org to join our list of grassroots lobbyists.

"The Balance to keep with the natural world"

By David Tsosie, Ed.D and
Teresa Seamster, Ed.S.

Hundreds of oil and gas wells dot the landscape of the Navajo Nation chapters of Counselor, Ojo Encino, and Torreon situated in the Chaco region of Dinéah.

Dinéah is the place of emergence of Diné people. Diné people have lived in Dinéah since time immemorial, caring for the land as instructed by the Holy People. Archaeological evidence of Diné people living in Dinéah dates to at least 1500 AD, but Diné oral histories establish their presence in the region far earlier.

When oil and gas development in the Chaco area began to escalate after 2014, the influx of drillers, industrial roads, pipelines, well rigs, noise, fumes and contaminated air and water threw affected communities and people out of balance with the environment and rendered them suddenly unable to retain control of how the land was used and how residents would be impacted.

Meaningful consultation

A unique approach to engage local residents and collect the deep-seated concerns about oil drilling from affected communities was developed over a three-year period by Drs. Larry Emerson and Herbert Benally (who have both since passed away) and David J. Tsosie, professor and Medicine Man.

Starting with small focus groups in the Navajo Tri-Chapters of Counselor, Ojo Encino and Torreon, the wide-ranging cultural survey generated more than 2,100 responses to 16 questions on the impacts on residents of leasing these rural areas to



Dr. David Tsosie

drill hundreds of new wells near homes, schools and churches, industrializing the surrounding landscapes and contaminating the land and air quality.

The following culturally defined questions show a high level of agreement and demonstrate the need for federal understanding of Navajo Fundamental Law and better consultation with indigenous frontline communities, before regional-impact projects are permitted to occur on nearby federal land and where residents hold deep cultural and sacred ties to the area:

Nitsahakées (East) Restore balance

Our local leaders have spoken out against drilling and no one at the tribal, state or federal level, including BLM and BIA, has listened: 76%

Despite communities objecting, the drilling continues: 81%

People were misinformed when they agreed to permits they thought were for testing, not drilling: 79%

Nahat'á (South) Have meaningful consultation

Our effort to pass on a healthy and prosperous environment to our children is being broken: 83%

The peace of the people has been disrupted as a result of drilling and fracking: 85%

liná (West) Protect wellness

The oil companies have no respect for

land, people & life - 83%

Actions by oil companies have divided families/community: 85%

Since oil companies made their presence here, all life is continually changing for the worse: 82%

Behavior of oil companies in getting a permit to drill shows their lack of concern for the community: 83%

Monies from oil companies for the right to drill divided many families: 82%

Sihaslin (North) Assure environmental justice

Because the land is being ruined, it will not be able to sustain an economy: 83%

The insensitivity of oil and fracking companies toward our community leads to mental and physical hardship: 80%

Oil companies know the community is in financial need and inappropriately entice landowners with money: 82%

Oil companies do not respect sovereignty or Navajo Nation law: 86%

Prayer and Song

What I believe to be sacred is being destroyed by drilling: 85%

Rare herbs that can help with health are disappearing since the drilling started: 62%

The concept of K'é Bee Hózhooḡo liná Silá (translated as "harmonized life exists with positive relationship") centers on kinship and one's relation to the environment. The Diné traditional belief is that K'é is the restoration and continuation of a meaningful social structure of the Diné people. When you are brought into this world, you are born into four clan systems: your physical existence (mother's clan), your mental being (father's clan), your mate-

rialistic belonging (maternal grandfather's clan), and your spiritual posture (paternal grandfather's clan).

The importance of K'é is referenced in the Fundamental Law, enacted by the Navajo Nation Council on Nov. 2, 2002. This law has always been instrumental in addressing many of the issues encountered by the People and "has guided, sustained and protected the Diné as they journeyed upon and off the sacred lands upon which they were placed since time immemorial."

When today's federal environmental law is applied to land held by sovereign tribal nations for millennia, the stark dichotomies of different cultural and societal values are revealed.

Under the National Environmental Protection Act, "people," "cultural use" and "environment" are considered separate categories that can be evaluated independently without seeing connected impacts.

Under Diné Fundamental Law, these distinctions are meaningless, as the land is viewed as a living entity. The purpose of the Law is to "provide sanctuary for the Diné life and culture, our relationship with the world beyond the sacred mountains, and the balance we maintain with the natural world."

This interconnected relationship of K'é between Diné, their culture and the environment is defined in Diné Natural Law as:

"Mother Earth and Father Sky is part of us as the Diné and the Diné is part of Mother Earth and Father Sky; the Diné must treat this sacred bond with love and respect without exerting dominance for we do not own our mother and father."



Photo courtesy E. Amata Boccella/The Sheep Sanctuary Inc.

Leo the angora goat in 2019, like other goats and sheep at a La Cienega animal sanctuary, developed cancerous tumors after area floods in 2018. Sierra Club Northern New Mexico Group is collaborating to help find the cause. Leo later died of his cancer.

Northern NM Group news

By Teresa Seamster, Northern NM
Conservation chair

Illegal trails threaten Nambé Badlands landscape

Friends of the Nambé Badlands and the Northern Group are collaborating to create awareness and solicit help in preserving the fragile Nambé badlands in the Sombriño Area of Critical Environmental Concern from damaging bike use.

SF Fat Tire Society and other mountain bikers have deliberately carved out and "burned in" new illegal recreational bike trails in hopes that the upcoming Bureau of Land Management's Sombriño Travel Management Plan will accept them without protest from the public. Damage has included cutting ancient trees, destroying fragile cryptobiotic soil, causing subsequent erosion and criss-crossing large sloping terrain and defacing slick rock formations.

The Friends of the Nambé have the following suggestions for those who want to make comments to Taos BLM:

1. All post-2011 trails in the Sombriño Area of Critical Concern should be closed. There are many illegal trail segments that should be removed in this area.

2. All pre-2011 existing and proposed trails need to be evaluated for ecological, paleontological, and archaeological impacts. The Sombriño Area of Critical Concern is a highly erodible landscape and was designated as such to protect significant paleontological sites and cultural resources. If it cannot be protected from impacts, it should be closed to biking.

3. Mountain-bike trail development on the east side of NM 503 must consider other users of the area. Trail designs should avoid parallel

trails that encourage short-cutting between trails.

Visit friendsofthenambébadlands.org to submit your concerns to Taos BLM and urge support for properly planned trails and careful recreational use on these sensitive public lands.

What's causing tumors in sanctuary's goats and sheep?

A recent call to the Northern New Mexico Group has led to our collaboration with a local animal preserve to find the cause of several deaths in their goat herd due to aggressive metastatic tumors.

The illnesses started after the 2018 Cochiti Canyon flood that inundated Dixon Apple Orchard and nearby farmlands. Some areas had 4 feet of standing water, and pollutants from fertilizer, abandoned equipment and refrigerators were mixed into the sludge. Several animals that had never shown symptoms before quickly developed tumors in their sides, nasal cavities, and ears.

One possible cause of the tumors could be the climate-change effects of an intense flood event followed by a long drought — causing severe solar radiation of the mainly bare skin areas on the goats. The attending veterinarian suggested environmental causes or some form of radiation. After two years of surgeries and treatment, seven goats and sheep have died of cancerous tumors.

The owners have discovered abandoned wells used for disposal of toxic chemicals on the property and some evidence of oil leakage in their arroyo. The next step is to analyze soil and water samples, following suggestions from New Mexico State University Cancer Research Partnership to test for carcinogenic chemicals that may still be present.

Sierra Club endorsees hold the line in local races

By Richard Barish, Political Chair
Thanks to all the Sierra Club volunteers who made calls and knocked on doors! The results of 2021 local elections were mostly good, but with some disappointments.

In mayoral races, both of our endorsed candidates won resounding victories. Tim Keller in Albuquerque and Alan Webber in Santa Fe both had comfortable wins that sent them to second terms.

In the Las Cruces City Council elections, all of our endorsed candidates won. With the election of Becky Corran, Yvonne Flores and Becki Graham, Las Cruces now has a city council composed entirely of women.

In Santa Fe City Council races, three of our four endorsed candidates, Sig Lindell, Carol Romero-Wirth and newcomer Amanda Chavez, prevailed. Roman "Tiger" Abeyta was upset in a



Winning Sierra Club-endorsed candidates include, from left, Santa Fe Mayor Alan Webber, Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller, incoming Albuquerque City Councilor Tammy Fiebelkorn and incoming Santa Fe councilor Amanda Chavez.

very low-turnout race in District 3, which highlights the need for everyone to vote.

In Albuquerque, the results were mixed. Longtime ally and environmental activist Tammy Fiebelkorn cruised to an easy victory, but Rob Grilley was unable to end Republican dominance of a far heights district.

The westside districts also remained a tough nut to crack for truly progressive

candidates in city council. Mayor Keller appointed Lan Sena to fill a vacant seat in District 1. Sena was unable to hold onto the seat against a very conservative Democratic candidate, Louie Sanchez. Cynthia Borrego also lost her bid for reelection to the former holder of that seat, conservative Republican Dan Lewis.

All of our endorsed Soil and Water

Conservation District candidates won. Steve Glass and Zoe Economou crushed their opponents in races for the Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District board, as did Teresa Smith de Cherif in the Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District race. Gill Sorg won a seat on the Doña Ana Soil and Water Conservation District board.

The Chapter for the first time made endorsements in Albuquerque Public School board races. It seemed important to get involved in these races, not only because of what the schools might or might not teach about climate, but also because of the Club's commitment to equity. Schools are often ground zero for equity issues. However, only one of our three endorsed candidates, Josie Dominguez, won her race.

There will be lots coming up in 2022, with races for governor, state land commissioner, and all of the State House seats. Stay tuned!

Pajarito Group

Progress in Los Alamos County

Glyphosate victory!

Your comments guided Los Alamos County Council to limit use of glyphosate on county land.

The Los Alamos County Council unanimously approved the Environmental Sustainability Board's proposed restrictions of the use of the herbicide glyphosate on County land. The Council stated they received overwhelming public input in favor of the limitations, and this community concern and involvement guided its decision. Thank you, Pajarito Group, for your activism to limit this toxin!

— Jody Benson

Sustainability task force

We Sierrans know that the effects of climate change are alarming, increasing, and impacting everyone. In 2020, a group of Los Alamos residents took action to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions by presenting a petition with hundreds of signatures to the County Council. From this was born the Los Alamos Resiliency, Energy and Sustainability Task Force, a citizen body given a one-year charter to explore ways for county government, businesses, and residents to achieve zero emissions and improve climate resiliency. (LANL is not included in the county's effort.)

The task force formed subcommittees: Community Planning & Zoning; Electrical Supply & Demand; Natural Gas Reduction; Transportation & Mobility; and Waste, Consumption & Natural Resources. The task force and subcommittees meet several times each month to research,



Photo by Jody Benson

Los Alamos High School Eco Club joined the Global Strike for Climate for the Future to spread awareness about the necessity of political action in national and state governments for transition from fossil fuels. The Eco Club represents thousands of local students and joins billions around the world who demand that governments — right now — fund energy resources that don't harm our climate and institute laws to end greenhouse-gas pollution.

discuss and recommendations.

The task force researched efforts already successful in other communities. From this came the Interim Report presented to the County Council. You can read the report at bit.ly/3pMoQVZ.

The final report is due in February when the Council will decide which recommendations, if any, to commit to:

- Perform a baseline emissions study to set goals and monitor progress, and create a Climate Change Action Plan;
- Assist property owners in upgrading/retrofitting their homes for energy efficiency;
- Continue to pursue "carbon-free" energy sources as well as energy storage options;
- Encourage rooftop solar and electric vehicles, heat

pumps and appliances;

■ Incentivize public transportation and healthy, active transport (walking, biking);

■ Divert all waste from the landfill through waste reduction, recycling, and composting;

■ Increase water conservation and watershed stewardship;

■ Increase carbon sequestration in soils, trees, and other vegetation, and make our urban and natural landscapes resilient to climate change; and

■ Provide information and support to help the community understand and reduce their carbon footprint.

In January, the task force is offering a series of lectures and hands-on programs at the Nature Center (PEEC) to

show residents how to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. You can explore ideas at <https://bit.ly/31RpyJa> and make comments at task-force meetings (bit.ly/3lUazpe) and by email to LARES. TaskForce@lacnm.us. To learn about and take meaningful action today, check out the world's most complete listing of climate solutions at the Project Regeneration: regeneration.org/nexus

Please join us in charting a sustainable, resilient future for our community. Email the County Council in support of LARES at countycouncil@lacnm.us. The issue will be before the Council in January.

— Sue Barnes and Katie Leonard

Pajarito Group

riograndesierraclub.org/pajarito

Executive Committee

Jody Benson, echidanaejb@gmail.com, 505/662-4782

Howard Barnum, hnbar-num@aol.com

Cheryl Bell, bellrancho@gmail.com, 505/672-9655

Iris Chung, itdchung@hotmail.com

Michael DiRosa, mddbbm@gmail.com

Jessie Emerson, osoherb-alsjessie@gmail.com, 505/470-1363

Nona Girardi, nonamg@aol.com

Carene Larmat, carenelarmat@gmail.com, 505/920-5675

Tom Ribe, tribe@swadventures.com

Treasurer: Mark Jones, 505/662-9443

Committee chairs

Conservation: Michael DiRosa, mddbbm@gmail.com

Endangered Species/Wildlife: Cheryl Bell, bellrancho@gmail.com, 505/672-9655.

Global Warming: Charles Keller, alfanso@cybermesa.com, 505/662-7915

Mining: David Torney, dtorney@valornet.com, 575/829-3433

Valles Caldera Issues: Tom Ribe, tribe@swadventures.com

Zero Waste, School Liaison: Jody Benson, anteaterjb@gmail.com, 505/662-4782

Open Spaces, Caldera Issues: Howard Barnum, hnbarnum@aol.com

Water Issues: Barbara Calef, bfcalf@yahoo.com, 505/662-3825

Mailing Address: 520 Navajo Road, Los Alamos, NM, 87544

Outdoor recreation



Photo courtesy Jan McGuire

A court has ruled that the 2015 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recovery plan for the Mexican Wolf was inadequate. The agency has drafted a new rule. Comments to improve the plan will be accepted until Jan. 27.

Draft of new wolf plan only somewhat better

By Mary Katherine Ray
Chapter Wildlife Chair

Back in 2015, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service adopted a new 10j rule (named for the section under the Endangered Species Act law that regulates activities that affect endangered animals), but now a court has ruled that the 2015 version failed to further the long-term recovery of the Mexican Wolf. The court found that the 2015 rule ignored the recommendations of expert biologists, and the continued designation of the wild population as "non-essential" was "arbitrary and capricious."

Under court order to rewrite the 10j rule, the FWS has now produced a new draft and the public has until Jan. 27 to comment. Disappointingly, the new draft rule is also inadequate. Your comments are needed to urge the agency to do the right thing!

The new draft rule at least does away with the population cap of 325 wolves, but the agency has replaced it with a population objective of 300-325 wolves. Scientists have concluded this is not enough and that a population of 750 wolves is needed to ensure self-sustainability. Further, that population needs to be divided among geographic subpopulations. The new draft still refuses to allow wolves to roam farther north than the arbitrary boundary of I-40, where there is suitable habitat, without facing removal by relocation or even death. Wolves should be allowed to roam and expand their numbers to a level that lets them achieve their role as apex carnivores, which is crucial to ecosystem integrity.

The new draft does place more strict, but temporary, limits on when wolves can be killed or removed because of the harm that losing genetically valuable individuals poses to the population. The wild wolf population is deeply threatened by inbreeding and cannot afford to lose genetic diversity. To that end, in order to incorporate more genetic diversity from the captive population into the wild one, the FWS 10j draft plans to continue to rely on cross-fostering pups from captive wolves into wild dens rather than releasing adult-bonded family packs. More puzzling, the agency still intends to measure success by counting the number of genetically valuable wolf pups that "reach

Southern New Mexico Group

Chair and Outings: Howie Dash, howiedash@aol.com, 575-652-7550

Treasurer: Cheryl Blevins, spotblev@earthlink.net, 575-524-4861

Secretary and Wildlife: Mary Katherine Ray, mkrscrim@gmail.com, 575-772-5655

Political: Dan Lorimier, dlorimier1948@gmail.com

Kurt Anderson, kurt@nmsu.edu, 575-646-1032

Mary Hotvedt: maryhotvedt@aol.com



breeding age," when it should be counting the number that have actually bred and produced pups of their own, thus directly ensuring that the population has incorporated the genetic diversity that

cross-fostered wolves offer. A wolf of the correct age that does not breed will not alter the dangerous genetic trajectory of the population.

Probably most significant is that the new draft fails to designate the existing wild population of lobos as "Essential." By retaining the non-essential designation, the Fish and Wildlife Service is asserting that if the wild population were completely extirpated, it could be replaced. Given that it has taken decades to even get to the current level of 186 wild wolves, believing that the captive population could be called on to recreate this assemblage defies reason. An "Essential" designation would also add layers of protection, including the requirement of critical habitat and participation of public land agencies.

To learn more, go to www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf/10j-revision/public-participation.html (or point your phone camera at the QR code above). You will find links for the comment page, for how to join and comment at the Jan. 11 virtual hearing, and the text of the draft rule. For more information, visit our coalition website at mexicanwolves.org.

When it comes to Mexican Wolves, progress seems so slow and hard-won. But we can't stop now. Wolves belong.



Winter-ready first aid

By Terry Owen,
Outings chair

The year 2021 found many of us getting outside and enjoying the summer on the trail, at the crag or on the water. We enjoyed the sun, the camaraderie, the inspiration and the perspiration that came with it. Even getting caught in a down-pour dampened our belongings but not our spirits.

Now, with visions of snowflakes dancing in our heads, it's time to prepare for our winter adventures. It's also time to take stock of our first-aid kits. You almost never think about it until you need it. When you do need it you find that the bandages no longer stick to anything, the antibiotic ointment has dried up, and the moleskin has turned into a useless glob.

Between waxing your skis and making plans for your favorite winter camping spot, why not take a few minutes and give your kit a refresh? It is one of your 10 essentials, after all.

While you're at it, you might think about what items you may want to include for winter-related risks. The most common outdoor winter injuries are: blisters, sprains/strains, cuts and hypothermia. You can easily assemble supplies that will handle these injuries and more.

First-aid kits are readily available online or at your favorite outdoor store, or you can build your own. Most of us don't need to take an entire surgical suite of gear when a small bag of

items will do the trick. However you decide to do it, here are some of the items Sierra Club recommends to handle the most common injuries. You can add any items you deem appropriate for your environment and activities. Lastly, if you haven't brushed up on your first aid and CPR training since you were a freshman in college, this is a great time to go online and register for a class. It won't make you a better skier, but it might make you a hero some day.

Injury Management

- Adhesive bandages/various sizes
- Gauze pads and/or gauze roll
- ACE bandage
- Triangular bandage/Cravat
- Butterfly bandages
- Adhesive tape
- Blister care such as Moleskin,
- 2nd Skin or gel bandages
- Cotton swabs
- 10ml syringe for irrigation
- Liquid all-purpose soap

Medications

- Antibiotic ointment
- Ibuprofen
- Acetaminophen
- Antihistamine/Benadryl
- Iodine/chlorine water treatment
- Personal medications

Miscellaneous

- Exam gloves-2 sets
- Ziplock bags-for making cold compress with snow/waste removal/wound irrigation
- CPR face mask
- Sanitizer
- Scissors/trauma shears
- Safety pins
- Waterproof case

Call for volunteers

Global Warming Express

mentors: Train to become a GWE Mentor for kids 9-12. Climate science, leadership training, public speaking, letter-writing and the arts. Train to mentor 9- to 12-year-olds once a week. Email Genie Stevens at genie@theglobalwarmingexpress.org.

Graphic artist, videographer:

We're looking for a graphic artist who can pitch in with graphics for social media, digital activism and the *Sierran*. Or if you're a social-media pro or a videographer who can volunteer your skills, please contact monablalber@gmail.com.

Other roles: Whether it's entering data, distributing *Sierrans* or more, there's a way you can contribute. Sign up at riograndesierraclub.org/volunteer



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Outdoors

By Terry Owen
Chapter Outings chair

Friday, Jan 7: Zero Waste Tour of Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority.

This tour of the city/county wastewater-treatment facility will be mostly outdoors, after a brief indoor orientation. Wear long pants and closed-toed shoes. Masks required. Everyone must wear a safety helmet, which will be provided, but you may wear your own bicycle helmet, as long as the chin strap is fastened. Because this is a working plant, participants cannot have any physical impairment that limits their mobility, including anything from a broken leg to a seizure disorder. Limited to 10 persons, first come, first served. Register by Jan 1. Trip Leader: Carol Chamberland, 505-341-1027, pictografix@comcast.net

Level: Easy

Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/

Saturday, Jan 8: Bernardo waterfowl-area birdwatching.

8-11 a.m. Drive the 3-mile vehicle tour loop in the wildlife refuge, take short walks to three viewing platforms and stop to watch birds and wildlife along the route. We may see some of the thousands of snow geese and Sandhill cranes that overwinter in the Middle Rio Grande Valley. Mule deer, coyotes, bald eagles, hawks, ducks, quail and songbirds may also be seen. The refuge is 53 miles south of Albuquerque at 164 NM-116, Bosque, NM. Meet at the Bernardo Waterfowl Area entrance at 8 a.m. Bring binoculars and cameras. No dogs please. Appropriate COVID-19 precautions will be taken.

Trip leader: Arlene, 808-779-5200, abvetlab@yahoo.com

Level: Easy

Location: Bosque, NM

Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

Saturday, Jan. 15: Intro to snowshoeing on Sandia Crest.

If you can walk, you can snowshoe! Meet at 10 a.m. at the Sandia Crest. This three-hour outing is about three miles round trip with 150 feet of elevation gain. We'll depart from the Sandia Crest parking lot and proceed along the crest trail with several stops to enjoy stunning views all the way to the continental divide. We'll cover tips for safely traversing on snowshoes and winter hiking. Sponsored by the Military Outdoors Program and everyone is welcome. Appropriate for children 14 and over with parent or legal guardian. No dogs, please. Appropriate COVID-19 precautions will be taken. Register by Jan. 10. A recommended gear list will be provided to registrants on Jan. 11.

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

Level: Moderate

Location: East Mountains of



Photo by Laura Shepardson

Hikers take a break on a November outing to Tetilla Peak. Northern New Mexico hikes can be found in our weekly Sierra Trail Mix email. To subscribe, send an email to listserv@lists.sierraclub.org with any subject and a message that says SUBSCRIBE RIO-NORTH-OUTINGS. Or check out the Northern Group's Meetup page: [meetup.com/Santa-Fe-Sierra-Club-Outings/](https://www.meetup.com/Santa-Fe-Sierra-Club-Outings/).

Albuquerque

Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

Saturday, Jan 22: Valles Caldera La Jara Trail. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Easy 1.5-mile snowshoe or hike depending on snow in the Jemez Mountains. Trail goes around Cerro La Jara lava dome with views of the Valle Grande. Prairie dogs will be hibernating, but we may see elk, coyotes and ravens. Valles Caldera National Monument is 51 miles northwest of Albuquerque. Meet at the visitor center parking lot at 9 a.m. Dress for cold weather in layers. No dogs please. Appropriate COVID-19 precautions will be taken.

Trip leader: Arlene, 808-779-5200, abvetlab@yahoo.com

Level: Easy

Location: Jemez Springs, NM
riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

Saturday, Jan 29: Intro to Land Navigation. This hands-on three-hour class on the use of map and compass for land navigation will teach you the basics to get you on your way or to be a refresher if your skills have grown rusty. Participants must be prepared for varying weather conditions and bring a topographical map available at USFS or US Geological Survey or at some outdoor stores, and a basic magnetic compass. Meet at 10 a.m. at Elena Gallegos Open Space. No dogs please. Children 14 and over with parent or legal guardian are welcome. Class size is limited to eight.

Trip leader: Sandra Corso, sandracorso@yahoo.com; Terry Owen, teowen@comcast.net

Level: Easy

Location: Albuquerque

Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

Wednesday, Feb 2: Zero Waste Tour to Cerro Colorado Landfill. This tour of Albuquerque's landfill will

be mostly outdoors, so dress accordingly. Masks are required, as are long pants and closed-toed shoes. There will be an orientation meeting indoors followed by a driving/walking tour of the spacious campus. We'll use the Solid Waste van but can also accommodate up to two high-clearance vehicles that can handle rough dirt roads. Safety vests will be distributed on site. Limited to 10 persons, first come, first served. Participants will be riding and standing for 1-2 hours. Meet at 1:30 p.m. Directions will be forwarded to registered attendees a week before the tour. Register at the link provided by Jan. 19.

Trip Leader: Carol Chamberland, 505-341 1027, pictografix@comcast.net

Level: Easy

Location: Albuquerque

Register: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/

Friday, Feb. 25: Volcanoes Hike and Talk. 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Easy hike with beautiful views. Approximately 3.2 miles round trip. Carol Chamberland is an Albuquerque artist who has studied and created works of art featuring the scenic beauty, the geologic and historic significance of the hike area. She will share her knowledge and experiences exploring this amazing area as we hike. The Pueblo people believe the volcanoes and the petroglyphs pecked into the volcanic boulders provide a direct spiritual connection to both their ancestors and to the spirit world, the place where time began. We will meet at the Volcanoes Day Use parking lot at 9:45 a.m. No dogs please. Appropriate COVID-19 precautions will be taken.

Trip leaders: Ken and Diane Reese, DianeAbqNM@gmail.com, 505-507-6416; reesekw@aol.com, 505-966-6676

Level: Easy; 327 feet elevation gain; unshaded, rough and rocky trail.

Location: Petroglyph National Monument, Volcanoes Day Use Area

Register: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

Wednesday, March 16: Zero Waste Tour of Rio Grande Compost Facility on the West Mesa. 10-11:30 a.m. See up close how bio-sludge from the ABCWUA is mixed with green waste, stable bedding and wood chips to make nutrient-rich compost. Masks are required. Tour starts indoors with a brief orientation then moves outdoors and to an open warehouse. Must wear long pants and closed-toed shoes. Participants must be able to stand and walk for the entire tour. Limited to six people, first come first served. Appropriate Covid-19 precautions will be taken. Register by March 9. Meet at the facility parking lot, 7400 Jim McDowell Road NW.

Trip leader: Laurie Zunner, 505-440-5337, lzunner@hotmail.com

Level: Easy

Location: Albuquerque's West Mesa

Register: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/

Friday, March 18: Bike Ride Exploration of Valle de Oro NWR and Bike-In Coffee. Valle de Oro is one of the few Urban Wildlife Refuges — and it is right in our back yard! We will meet at 8 a.m. and bike a short distance to the new Visitor's Center and hear about the refuge. Then we hit the Paseo del Bosque Trail for a 10.5-mile ride to Bike-In Coffee at Old Town Farm. You can purchase food and drinks and we'll explore the farm. Round-trip bike ride is 21 miles on flat, paved multi-use trail. Sponsored by the Military Outdoors Program and all are

Protocols for reopened outings

The following COVID-19 protocols for Sierra Club outings have been incorporated to help ensure the health and safety of participants.

To reduce contact, sign up for outings and complete the participant agreement at riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/

If you've signed up for an outing or event and begin to feel ill, please stay home and seek appropriate medical care.

There are potentially participants who are vaccinated and unvaccinated, and it's each participant's choice to attend or not attend the outing with this knowledge.

No vaccine or test results are required, and participants will not be required to disclose their vaccination or test status. Participants are welcome to wear masks if it makes them comfortable. Masks will be required if there's an indoor component to the outing, while they are indoors. Masks are also required at all times for ICO outings participants.

welcome. Appropriate COVID-19 precautions will be taken. Register by March 16. Contact a listed leader if you have questions.

Trip Leaders: Diane Reese, 505-507-6416, DianeAbqNM@gmail.com, and Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, teowen@comcast.net,

Level: Moderate

Locations: Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge and Bike In Coffee, 949 Montoya St NW, Albuquerque.

Register: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/

Saturday, April 23: Earth Day Celebration Bike Ride.

Celebrate Earth Day by taking a bike ride through the Rio Grande bosque. We'll meetup at the Hispanic Cultural Center at 8:30 a.m., ride up to the Rio Grande Nature Center and return via Bike-in Coffee for drinks and snacks. The ride is on a flat, paved 13-mile route. Children 14 or over with parent or legal guardian are welcome. E-bikes are welcome. Helmet and appropriate attire for conditions are required. Appropriate COVID-19 precautions will be taken. Register by April 20.

Trip leaders: Rose Rowan, rose.rowan7@gmail.com, and Terry Owen, teowen@comcast.net

Level: Moderate

Location: Albuquerque

Register: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/