Persevering, remotely

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

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.
DOE taking comments on nuclear ‘consent’

By John Buchsner, Nuclear News Editor

Energy is requesting comments on “informed consent” as it considers a new rule. The agency is seeking public comments on a proposal by the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission to more formally incorporate public consent in its licensing process.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) recently proposed adding “public consent” to current federal standards that apply to the development of a nuclear facility. The general rule is that nuclear facilities must be developed in a manner that demonstrates public consent, but the details of what constitutes “public consent” are not specified in the current rules.

In a new Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) published in the Federal Register, the NRC and NNSA are seeking public comments on how to best incorporate public consent into the licensing process. The NPRM is available at https://www.reginfo.gov.

The deadline for public comments is April 1, 2022. Comments can be submitted in writing to the NRC Administrator for Nuclear Reactors, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C. 20555-0001, or online at https://www.reginfo.gov.

The NPRM includes a discussion of the reasons for adding “public consent” to the licensing process, as well as a review of the current rules that apply to nuclear facilities. It also includes a list of the key issues that the NRC and NNSA are seeking public comments on.

The issues include:

- The definition of “public consent”
- The role of the public in the licensing process
- The process for obtaining public consent
- The impact of public consent on the licensing process

The NPRM also includes a section on how the public can participate in the rulemaking process. This includes how to submit comments, how to access the rulemaking docket, and how to participate in public hearings.

The deadline for public comments is April 1, 2022. Comments can be submitted in writing or online. For more information, visit https://www.reginfo.gov.
Grassroots pressure ends bag loophole

By Anni Hanna, NM Climate Justice

There’s a win for environmental justice in Albuquerque where Mayor Kellie has finally signed “plastic bag ban.” A big thank you to everyone who called and emailed, and made the change happen. From my own experience, this has been a long, hard and inspiring battle, and now we have an accep-table bag as switched with hands that are designed for multiple reuse. They can be either: made of cloth or non-woven material. Plastic bags and other single-use plastics. The key is to design them to make better citizens. In New Mexico, we see first-hand the health consequences of fracking. Caroline Alley, plastic retailers and pan-elpers: “the leaking of our landfills and brown neighborhoods, whose cancer rates are much higher than average. In spite of all of this, our voice does matter.”

Students hold UNM to account

By Rayer Alcott, UNM Leaf

The University of New Mexico Leaders for Environmental Protection (UNM LEAP) 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 development, a carbon- and water-free campus, protecting the workplace and interns from climate change, and strengthening the world’s role in the climate crisis.

The UNM LEAP student activists have filed a complaint with New Mexico Governor General Secretary of Natural Resources to investigate the UNM’s leasing program as directed by the 2009 climate action plan released in early summer, but the potential reforms of the federal Department to comprehensively manage the “comprehensive” leasing program as directed by the Executive Order in 2018 are barred by the court’s order lifted in 2019. The “comprehensive” leasing program includes 3 million acres within the Rio Grande Valley, which oversees drilling on public lands.

We’re working with the70 students to ensure the success of the Environmental Justice movement and the grass-roots work to save our communities from the destruction of our world and the social and environmental injustices that are inflicted on us. We are working with the 70 students to hold the university accountable for its role in the climate crisis.

Volunteer leader: Lauren Zunie

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This month’s volunteer interview is with Lauren Zunie of Albuquerque. From starting divestment efforts to fighting a coal moratorium, Lauren is a strong voice for a more sustainable future.

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

Lauren: My role with the Rio Grande Chapter is to build the chapter’s capacity to have a bigger voice in the community and to have a bigger impact on the community.

2. What is some of your hobbies?

Gardening, birding and folkdancing.

3. How do you stay motivated?

I’ve met so many incredibly talented, dedicated or desperate!

EPA methane standards crucial to climate action

By Melia King-Fishery, Our Voice New Mexico

With the hope of reducing methane from oil and gas development, the federal government has announced new rules that would be public for comment in late November in the Federal Register.

The new rules are proposals to require methane emissions from oil and gas development and to require zero-emit-ters that haven’t taken steps and New Mexico, which are mentioned, will do a lot to reduce methane emissions. Here in the states, some refuse to do this work.

New Mexico’s Southern New Mexico Chapter has written letters to the EPA to include a community monitor- ing program in the new rules. By eliminating the exemption for regular maintenance, we can reduce methane emissions that are calculated to emit before three tons per year of methane, a type of emission that New Mexico regulato- ries seem poised to eliminate in new rules. Flaring is a major problem for communities near oil and gas operations. New Mexico in 2020 has reduced emissions of nitrogen oxides to zero.

Our Chapter requires that owners and operators to play and control emissions from abandoned and orphaned wells.

The rules must be met.

EPA methane ruling a win for El Paso

By Antonio Reyes

Southern New Mexico organizer for Sierra Club and community organizer for Our Voice New Mexico, Anne Felix, Secretary, 915-853-9212, afelix@sierraclub.org.

The EPA has written letters to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the past month. The rules are the latest in a long list of efforts to make New Mexico a leader in the fight against climate change.

The American Lung Association ranked New Mexico as one of the top 10 states for air quality in the country.

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By Luis Guerrero Chávez, Albuquerque Journal

A biennial legislative session

The 2022 New Mexico legislative session will allow for the implementation of the 2019 Race to Zero Day. Vaccines will be required to enter the building, and some remote participation will remain.

Hope for real and fair climate solutions

The New Mexico Legislature begins first virtual session

February

Almost immediately after assuming office, President Joseph Biden made a commitment to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. New Mexico is at the forefront of this national conversation, with lawmakers working to develop policies and strategies to meet this goal.

March

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

Endless thanks to our great retiring chairs, Melinda Smith and Stephanie Garcia Richard. For environmentalists, lots of time is spent on one-time expendable funds, meaning that it will be a struggle to replace those funds, especially as state revenues contract.

April

A clean-fuel standard can contribute to reducing greenhouse gases, but we need passenger rail, road repairs, and accessible public transportation. The federal money has been used in the state for highway and road repairs subsidizes auto transport, putting the expense of people who don’t drive much on those who do.

May

We still don’t have a state nuclear waste storage site.

An investment in energy-efficiency projects can reduce pollution and save money for households and businesses. Increased investment in renewable energy could provide more job opportunities and support local communities.

June

The US Fish and Wildlife Service announces that in April and May, a record 22 captive-born wolf pups have been recorded in Arizona, and 13 pups have been born in New Mexico. Walbran’s bill complements the Sierra Club’s legal challenge against the PNM’s plan.

July

A new federal oil and gas leasing auction was held in July, with several provisions related to climate change. The federal government plans to hold 10 auctions per year, with at least one in each state. The rules for leasing will be revised to include environmental and social impacts.

August

New Mexico’s power plant emissions will be further regulated to meet state climate goals. The state is one of the few in the country that has adopted a carbon pricing policy.

September

New Mexico’s renewable energy sector has experienced significant growth, with new solar farms being built and major wind projects being completed.

October

New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham announced that the state will be the first in the country to transition to 100% renewable energy by 2045.

November

New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham signed into law a bill that establishes a 100% renewable energy portfolio standard by 2045.

December

New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham announced that the state will be the first in the country to transition to 100% renewable energy by 2045. The state is one of the few in the country that has adopted a carbon pricing policy.
New hope for Greater Chaco

By Miya King-Flaherty, Organizer

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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 breakaway wins that sent them to second terms.

In the Las Cruces City Council district races, all of our endorsed candidates won. Tim Keller in the Albuquerque South District and Alan Webber in Santa Fe both had comfortable wins that sent them to second terms.

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Our endorsed candidates in local races proved that our members have the power to put people in office who will listen to us. These victories highlight the importance of participating in local elections.

The Las Cruces endorsement resulted in a council composed entirely of women. In Santa Fe City Council races, three of our four endorsed candidates, Sig Lindell, Carol Romanoff, and nowowmance Amanda Chavez, prevailed.

Amanda Chavez, the newcomer, joined the existing City Council to improve climate resiliency. It’s a victory for our members and the people of Las Cruces.

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The Las Cruces endorsement resulted in a council composed entirely of women. In Santa Fe City Council races, three of our four endorsed candidates, Sig Lindell, Carol Romanoff, and nowowmance Amanda Chavez, prevailed.

They’re not just a victory for our members and the people of Las Cruces. They’re also a victory for climate action. Our endorsed candidates have a clear plan to address the climate crisis.

They’ve pledged to implement a climate action plan, including:

- Setting a carbon price
- Phasing out coal
- Expanding renewable energy
- Investing in clean transportation
- Protecting forests and wetlands
- Supporting low-income communities

These pledges are backed by strong enforcement. Our endorsed candidates have the experience and the commitment to get the job done.

We’re thrilled with the results of the 2021 local elections. We’re grateful to all our members who volunteered their time and energy to make these victories possible.

We’ll continue to work with our endorsed candidates to ensure they keep their commitments to address the climate crisis.

Thank you to all the Sierra Club volunteers who made calls and knocked on doors! Your hard work paid off.

For more information, visit sjcc.org/local-races.
By Terry Owen
Chapter Outings chair
Friday, Jan. 7: Zero Waste Tour of Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority. This tour of the city’s wastewater treatment facility will be mostly outdoors, after a brief indoor orientation. Wear long pants and closed-toe 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 public vehicle tour loop in the wildlife refuge, take short walks to three viewing platforms and stop to watch waterfowl and birds along the route. This refuge is 5.3 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, abqvd@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 news. Some parts of 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 sent to registrants on Jan. 11.
Trip leader: Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, teowen@comcast.net
Level: Moderate
Location: East Mountains of Albuquerque

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 lave 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 north-west 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, abqvd@yahoo.com
Level: Easy
Location: Jemez Springs, NM
Sign up: 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 suitable for EFSF 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 according to weather. Masks required, as are long pants and closed-toe 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 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
Sign up: 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 placed into the volcanic boulders provide a direct spiritual connection to both their ancestors and to the spirit world; the plaza where the writing took place within the Rio Grande bosque. We’ll meet at the Volcanoes Day Use parking lot at 9 a.m. Dress for cold weather in layers. No dogs please. Appropriate COVID-19 precautions will be taken.
Trip leader: Ken and Diane Reese, DianeAbqNM@gmail.com, 505-507-6416, freneswkg@aol.com, 505-566-6676
Level: Easy; 327 feel 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 Compact Facility on the West Mesa. 10-11:30 a.m. See up close how bio-sludge from the ABCWAU 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-toe 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 Zanier, 505-440-5337, 1zunner@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 coffee and food 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

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, email a list to listserv@sierracclub.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/.

Level: Easy; 327 feel elevation gain; unshaded, rough and rocky trail.
Location: Petroglyph National Monument, Volcanoes Day Use Area
Register: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/

Saturday, March 26: Earth Day Celebration Bike Ride. Celebrate Earth Day by taking a bike ride through the Rio Grande bosque. We’ll meet up 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: Diane Reese, DianeAbqNM@gmail.com, and Terry Owen, teowen@comcast.net
Level: Easy
Location: Albuquerque’s West Mesa
Register: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/