Sierra Club outings resume after 16-month break: See back page

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Clean Cars: Groups petition NM to start critical climate rulemaking. Page 6
Dirty Water Rule: Repeal will restore protection to N.M. waterways. Page 6

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EPA could thwart El Paso gas expansion
If the agency finalizes designation of air-quality violation for El Paso County before El Paso Electric gets a permit to expand Newman Gas Plant, the utility will have to go back to square one. Page 7

Albuquerque residents fight asphalt plant
Proposed site of Hot Mix plant is close to South Valley homes, wildlife refuge. Page 8

River access focus of privatization scheme
Rule benefiting wealthy landowners is under question. Page 11

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Zero Waste: Page 8
Northern NM, wildlife: Page 9
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Emerging from the pandemic is harder than I thought.

Doing meetings from home actually made protecting family time easier. Evening events were the time it took to zoom on and off, no travel time needed. I was still there for bedtime snuggles for the little people. Now we emerge a little bit tired and frazzled because from home I might schedule a zoom meeting every hour of the day because from home I might schedule a zoom meeting every hour of the day where we suspend our normal activities to deepen the practice of our beliefs.

What is our practice as a community? Are we still fighting for policing transformation as an environmental issue — that each person has a right to be safe in their environment? Are we still looking deeply into the ways in which systemic racism plays out in our person, our families, our organizations, our neighborhoods, our communities, our cities, our state, our country, our world? Are we taking real action to enact reparations? Are we holding fast to the need to pause, learn, and change? Do you sometimes feel overwhelmed by the enormity of issues like racism and climate change and how they are linked together? To better answer these questions, let’s deepen our practice of anti-racism together.

And for gender equity we have to ask how work-life structures fit together. So many women quit their jobs to hold their families, together. The Sierra Club offered family leave for those caring for dependents, allowed us to work from home and continues to provide mental health care for those of us struggling to keep it all together. But how do we ensure that each person has the right to develop to their full potential in their career and still experience the daily joys of family life?

I’m not always good at slowing down because of the feeling of urgency that drives our movement. But I can’t help but wonder if we all shouldn’t take a pause this summer to take stock, to better understand how we are, how we’ve been and how we want to be. Join me in that. Take a break. Join one of our outings, which start this month (see back page). And then let’s come together to move forward not just together but also better.

Call for Executive Committee nominations

The Rio Grande Chapter is made up of five regional groups in New Mexico and West Texas, all led by volunteer executive committees. If you’re a member of the chapter and would like to be considered for nomination to either your local group or the chapter Executive Committee — or if you’d like to nominate someone else — please write to monablaber@gmail.com.

Call for volunteers

The Rio Grande Chapter is a volunteer-led and volunteer-driven organization. We need volunteers for everything from calling members about events to mailings to cataloguing photos. Want to learn more about how you can help? Email monablaber@gmail.com.

Western yellow-billed cuckoo gets protection

By Mary Katherine Ray

The Western yellow-billed cuckoo was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 2014. In April, U.S. Fish and Wildlife designated 300,000 acres of critical habitat along streams and rivers in seven western states including New Mexico. The New Mexico portions include a long stretch of the Rio Grande River in Socorro and Valencia counties along with portions of the Galia, Mimbres, San Francisco rivers and upper Rio Grande. This bird was seen in Sierra County along the Rio Grande.

The call of the yellow-billed cuckoo consists of loud rattles and hoots. Folklore has it that because of when you can hear them and their loud volume, the bird is summoning rain, which is why he’s sometimes called the “rain crow.” Given the recent arrival of rain at last to most of New Mexico, it must have worked!

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returns, how to ensure leasing
the American public with fair
current leasing process provides
halted, the Interior Department
gas drilling on public lands to be
out. As surveys show that most
Americans are speaking
our climate, health and waters,
continuous obstacles to the
on our climate.
report on the impacts of fracking
its effect remains murky as we
on public lands and waters, but
Kayley Shoup, a Carlsbad, NM, resident and member of Citizens Caring for Our Future, has been visiting
oil and gas sites with Earthworks to use FLIR cameras to reveal leaks of invisible methane and VOCs.

Speaking out for oil and gas reforms, waiting for action

Miya King-Flaherty
Our Wild New Mexico organizer
A recent ruling has lifted
President Joe Biden's
ban on new oil and gas drilling on public lands and waters, but its effect remains murky as we wait for the Interior Department's report on the impacts of fracking on our climate.
The industry has thrown up continuous obstacles to the administration's efforts to protect our climate, health and waters, but Americans are speaking out. As surveys show that most Southwest residents want oil and gas drilling on public lands to be halted, the Interior Department is reviewing the federal oil and gas leasing program.
The agency is expected to release its interim report in July as it considers reforms to the Bureau of Land Management's oil and gas leasing program that has long needed updating. The report could assess whether the current leasing process provides the American public with fair returns, how to ensure leasing complies with laws like the National Environmental Policy Act, and proper tribal consultation.
With a new administration and Interior Secretary Deb Haaland leading these efforts, we have real opportunities to make fundamental reforms that center on tackling the climate crisis and environmental justice.

Other reforms under consideration are increasing federal bonding rates that operators pay. Before they can drill, companies must post money — called a bond — for cleanup. Unfortunately, the bonding amounts set by the state and federal governments are too low to cover the cleanup costs of abandoned wells. A recent Center for Applied Research report for Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard revealed that capping orphaned oil and gas wells could cost $8.4 billion. This figure does not include the cost of reclaiming a well site or cleaning spills, nor does it account for the thousands of wells on federal lands. The state has just over $200 million in financial assurance funds to plug orphaned wells, leaving New Mexicans on the hook to fund the enormous gap. Orphaned wells leak methane and other volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that contaminate our air and impact the health of our communities.

To address the climate crisis and identify solutions to reduce our state's reliance on a volatile industry, taking steps like pausing new oil and gas leasing is necessary. In New Mexico, 97% of the available public lands are already leased for oil and gas drilling, and the industry has stockpiled more than 6,000 drilling permits that were not affected by the pause and would continue to generate revenue for years.

A group of concerned citizens, impacted community members and chapter representatives recently met with New Mexico federal congressional staff to advocate for reforms and for a permanent end to new oil and gas leasing on federal lands. We must expedite the transition to renewable energy, find alternatives for replacing our tax revenue with stable sources, and generate clean-energy jobs. Our New Mexico leaders need to hear from you. See the box above to take action.

Excerpts from testimony at EPA methane listening sessions June 15-17

“With 122 gas wells on our ranch, we have always looked to the EPA to protect our family from the harmful, toxic and even deadly pollution that every gas well emits. We celebrated in 2012 when EPA put its methane emissions standards into place and saw how that immediately improved our lives and those of our neighbors. When those protections were taken away from us in 2017, we suffered not only the physical harms, but also a loss of hope. ... Now, as EPA considers restoring those vital protections for our family, we have a chance to hope again.”
- Don Schreiber, Four Corners rancher

“My family holds allotments in Eastern Agency of the Navajo Nation near Nageezi, New Mexico, where extraction has spread rapidly. We always knew about the impacts of oil and gas in our community that we could see with our own eyes all around the Navajo Nation. After learning more about the methane hotspot that rovers over the Four Corners, I know we need strong action on methane and other pollutants that are invisible and odorless that continue to impact our climate and our communities' health.”
- Joseph Hernandez, NAVA Education Project Dine energy organizer

“When we were young growing up in Shiprock, there were flowers and grasses carpeting the oil and gas areas. Rains and snows came when they were supposed to. Now we are in a prolonged drought. We are in a national sacrifice zone with the nation's largest methane hotspot hovering overhead, and we have had to live with the pollution from the power plants, the mining, and oil and gas development for many decades. The carbon and the gases ... are killing the flowers, the rains and the snows, and possibly our future. I respectfully request that the EPA make the strongest rules possible to reduce the methane pollution and stop the release of methane.”
- Daryl Jones Joe, Dine elder and United Methodist Women, Shiprock

U.S. methane rules restored; N.M. shapes safeguards

By Camilla Feibelman
Chapter director
Federal methane safeguards: President Biden signed legislation on June 30 to restore Obama-era EPA rules to reduce oil and gas methane pollution. The legislation, introduced by Sen. Martin Heinrich, was a key first step in turning the greenhouse-gas-emissions spewing out of oil and gas fields.
The week before, the EPA hosted listening sessions specifically to hear from those in the regions most impacted by oil and gas extraction. The sessions are intended to inform new methane safeguards that will hopefully go beyond the Obama rules and make up for the lost years of progress on protecting our climate, our health and our kids.

Close to 50 New Mexicans joined hundreds of moms, people of faith, and frontline community members in calling for the strongest rules possible, which would lead to 65% methane capture by 2025.

These stronger safeguards will likely be out for public comment in September, but in the meantime we still have time to comment in favor of strong rules by the July 30 deadline. Take action at sc.org/methane.

Oil Conservation Division methane rule: New Mexico's Oil Conservation Division methane rules went into effect on May 25. These rules will help industry prepare for new federal methane protections and may even be a model for the states. The state banned routine venting and flaring in oil and gas operations and requires companies to submit gas capture plans to the EPA. The rules are intended to inform new methane regulations and would continue to generate revenue for years.

A group of concerned citizens, impacted community members and chapter representatives recently met with New Mexico federal congressional staff to advocate for reforms and for a permanent end to new oil and gas leasing on federal lands. We must expedite the transition to renewable energy, find alternatives for replacing our tax revenue with stable sources, and generate clean-energy jobs. Our New Mexico leaders need to hear from you. See the box above to take action.

Take Action

Methane action: To tell the EPA to take the strongest action possible on the powerful greenhouse gas methane, please go to sc.org/methane and speak up for climate-saving safeguards!

NM climate survey: The state of New Mexico is asking residents to take a survey on climate change and what we would like the state to prioritize. For the English survey, go to www.surveymonkey.com/r/TVSQBSJ.

Mexico Environment Department has also put forward a strong proposal to cut smog-forming volatile organic compounds (VOCs) released by the oil and gas industry in counties around the state that are on the brink of exceeding federal standards. Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and Environment Secretary Jim Kenney deserve credit for the hard work to craft a smart, common-sense proposal to protect our air and climate.

When these rules are heard in September, there are a few improvements the Environment and Department of Energy would make to protect communities and address major sources of pollution.

These include protections for those living close to oil and gas facilities, strong requirements for operators to control methane leaks at oil and gas wells, and strong requirements to cut pollution from gas-processing facilities that are used in oil and gas production.

To learn more, please email camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org.
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Contributions are welcome. Send them to riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org. Submissions by Rio Grande Chapter members will take precedence. Articles chosen to be published are subject to editing. Letters to the editor may be up to 400 words, subject to editing, and are printed at the discretion of the editorial board. Editorial practices as developed and adopted by the chapter will be used in production of the Sierran.

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Do you have a membership question? Call 415-977-5653 or e-mail membership@sierraclub.org.
Scan the QR code below on your cell phone to join the Rio Grande Chapter using our online form.
Record cross-fostering wolf success

By Mary Katherine Ray
Chapter Wildlife chair

This year, the US Fish and Wildlife Service has announced that in April and May, a record 22 captive-born wolf pups have been cross-fostered into wild dens. Nine pups have been fostered into three different packs in Arizona, and 13 pups have been fostered into five different packs in New Mexico.

Cross-fostering is a way to lower the degree of inbreeding that has taken place in the wild population. Mexican wolves came so close to permanent extinction that by the time efforts to save them began, only seven were left. Such a small founding population meant that their genetic reservoir would also be small.

The Ladder Ranch, with recent releases from captivity, the wild population has become even more inbred. So placing captive pups with important genes into wild dens at birth or shortly thereafter to be raised in wild families is a way to add genetic diversity to the wild population.

However, to be successful, the genes of these pups must actually be incorporated into the wild population, and that can't happen unless and until they grow up, find mates, form packs and have pups of their own. This can take at least two years. Some cross-fostered pups have indeed done just that. A newly formed pack, the Negrito pack in Catron County, consists of a wild-born female and a 2018 cross-fostered male.

But now there's trouble. Both Negrito wolves were removed from the wild to captivity last spring for preying on cattle. They were in an area of the National Forest where wolves have often run afoul of livestock interests, begging the question about why the Forest Service does not change the management protocols for livestock in this area to better mitigate this problem. But at least the Negrito wolves were not killed outright, which has happened in past similar situations.

At the time of their removal, the Negrito female was pregnant! What to do with wolves who carry important DNA but who have killed livestock? Enter the privately owned Ladder Ranch in Sierra County. This ranch, owned by Ted Turner, abuts the Black Range Mountains of the Gila National Forest. The ranch already has large acclimation pens for Mexican wolves and has long sought to have a pack released within its boundaries. The Ladder Ranch has offered itself as a haven for imperiled species like the Bolson Tortoise and the Chiricahua Leopard Frog. What could be better than a landowner willing to offer a home to wolves who need a home? The Fish and Wildlife service announced that for the first time, an entire wolf family will be released onto private land this summer.

The Ladder Ranch encompasses 243 square miles and it raises bison, not cattle, which are much less vulnerable to predation. The ranch also has a vibrant elk population to serve as the wolves' main food source. At this moment, pups have been born! They will need to be about 6 weeks old for the pack to leave the pens and enter the wild. Young pups should anchor their parents to the area and once they set up house, they won't be likely to leave.

The Mexican gray wolf is so endangered that this subspecies was not included in the nationwide delisting of wolves by the previous administration. This delisting and subsequent wolf management under state control has been a violent and bloody catastrophe. Wisconsin had a spring wolf hunt that was so repugnant it exceeded the quota by more than 80%, also orphaning and killing pups that were doubtless in dens at the time. Idaho has passed a law allowing 90% of its wolves to be killed, and Montana has passed similarly barbaric measures that increase the length of the wolf hunting and trapping season (including the use of strangulating snares) to kill a limitless number of wolves.

Sierra Club has joined with the Center for Biological Diversity and the Humane Society of the US to petition the US Fish and Wildlife Service to re-list the Northern gray wolf. State and local governments cannot be entrusted with the stewardship of these important and beautiful animals.

Even though the Mexican gray wolf remains protected, Sierra County officials have threatened to sue the US Fish and Wildlife Service over the Ladder Ranch release. Republican state Sen. Crystal Diamond, in whose district the Ladder Ranch lies, sent a letter to the agency voicing her opposition to the Ladder Ranch translocation. Republican State management after delisting of most wolves has been a catastrophe. Wisconsin’s spring wolf hunt exceeded the quota by more than 80%. Idaho passed a law allowing 90% of its wolves to be killed.

Meanwhile, young wolf pups are opening their eyes in wild dens with adopted parents who will raise them wild. And hopefully an entire wild family will soon roam with the buffalo, returning to their place in Nature and returning at least some of Nature to a place of restoration.
Groups applaud repeal of Dirty Water Rule

Current law leaves more than 90% of NM waterways unprotected from wastewater, industrial discharge

By Mona Blaber

Watersheds across New Mexico applauded the Biden Administration’s June 9 announcement that it will begin the process to repeal the Trump Administration’s Navigable Waters Protection Rule, also known as the “Dirty Water Rule.” The rule, combined with previous reductions of protections at the federal level in 2001 and 2006, negatively impacts New Mexico more than any state in the nation, leaving more than 90% of New Mexico’s water unprotected by the federal Clean Water Act.

Amigos Bravos, New Mexico Akwesasne Association, and Gila Resources Information Project, represented by New Mexico Environmental Law Center, joined last year to appeal the Dirty Water Rule. The groups said the appeal will remain active until the rule is repealed. The Sierra Club and other conservation partners joined Earthjustice in a lawsuit against the rule. A New Mexico watershed, Chávez Creek, was part of the basis for the suit. Decades of environmental racism have left Native and land-based communities here in New Mexico feeling the impacts of water pollution for too long, and the Dirty Water Rule has only exacerbated the disparity,” said Rachel Conn, Amigos Bravos project director. “By quickly repealing this harmful rollback of the Clean Water Act, the Biden administration can finally tackle the nation’s clean-water crises and ensure that clean water for all is the standard.”

Paula Garcia, New Mexico Acreus Association executive director, said the Trump rule “has a disproportionate impact on land-based communities that depend on surface water for irrigation.” “Acreus, centuries-old irrigation communities, are specifically vulnerable to water pollution on stream systems that lack protection under the Trump rule,” Garcia said.

“Clean water is fundamental to our riparian ecosystems, wildlife and outdoor recreation economy. The Dirty Water Rule threatens our rivers in New Mexico, like the iconic Gila River, by prioritizing some industries over the health of our waterways and those whose livelihoods depend on clean water. By quickly repealing the rule, the Biden administration can support local jobs and ensure the outdoors remain accessible and protected,” said Allyson Swik, Gila Resources Information Project executive director.

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Groups applauding the Biden administration’s announcement:

By Mona Blaber

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By Mona Blaber

N.M. is stalling on Clean Cars, so we got it started

By Mona Blaber

Chapter communications

New Mexico has pledged to create Clean Cars standards to tackle the climate emergency — but the state’s timeline could delay adoption for years. So we did it for them.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham pledged in 2019 to create standards to tackle vehicle climate pollution and require manufacturers to deliver an increasing number of electric vehicles to New Mexico. When 2020 came, the state said rulemaking wouldn’t start in spring 2021. Now the state has postponed again, promising a rulemaking in 2022.

But because of Clean Air Act requirements around compliance timing, if New Mexico misses the window of finalizing standards this year, it likely couldn’t implement clean-car rules until 2027 — much too long to wait.

So in May, a coalition of groups, including the Sierra Club, worked to bypass the state, filing a petition at the state Environmental Improvement Board to begin Clean Cars rulemaking now.

The petition, filed on May 18, is a direct challenge to the state to begin rulemaking on its own, so all it has to do is update the rules already on its books.

The EIB must hear and approve our petition at its July 23 meeting in order to hit the deadline for the state to finalize Clean Car standards this year.

Unfortunately, New Mexico’s Environmental Department plans to oppose our petition, claiming that it doesn’t have the resources for a rulemaking and that it wants a long public meeting process. But the EIB process already provides opportunity for public comment, and because the standard New Mexico adopts must match other states’, there aren’t adjustments or details for stakeholders to weigh in on.

New Mexico’s environmental agencies have their hands full trying to protect us, and they are underfunded. Petitioning an EIB rulemaking reduces the onus on the Environmental Department.

On July 1, our coalition also filed a petition with the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Air Quality Control Board, asking it to update its standards by the end of 2021. The state and city both adopted Advanced Clean Car standards under Gov. Bill Richardson, but Gov. Susana Martinez revoked the state rules. However, the city never revoked its own, so all it has to do is

By Luis Guerrero,
Chapter Legislative and Political Organizer

On June 14, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi swore in New Mexico’s new 1st Congressional District representative, Melanie Stansbury.

The Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter endorsed Stansbury during the nominating process because of her strong record of championing climate justice as a state representative, including her stewardship of the Climate Solutions Act in the 2021 session.

Sierra Club volunteers called fellow members to get out the vote for Stansbury, held virtual office hours, and held events and trainings to encourage each other as we campaigned remotely. Rep. Stansbury joined one of our phonebanks to answer questions along with her field team and thank our chapter for all the support.

In the June 1 election, Stansbury beat Republican Mark Moores 60 percent to 36 percent in a race many around the nation were watching as a harbinger for the 2022 midterms. Rep. Stansbury’s landslide victory sent a national signal that climate is a winning message.

The Bernalillo County Commission chose Pamela Herndon to serve out the remainder of Stansbury’s term in the state Legislature. We look forward to working with both our new representatives.

Thanks to all of you for your help electing U.S. Rep. Stansbury and for helping us put another climate champion in Congress!

Volunteer support helped Stansbury cruise to victory

By Mona Blaber

Chapter communications

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By Mona Blaber

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NM Environment Secretary Jim Kenney, third from right, celebrated the opening of new Albuquerque EV chargers on June 24, the same day he announced that the department won’t start Clean Cars rulemaking until 2022, which could delay implementation until 2027.

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The cooling tower that serves San Juan Generating Station Unit 1, one of two operating units at the coal plant, collapsed on June 30. David Fosseck took this photo of the collapsed stacks of the cooling tower on July 5 and said both Unit 1 and Unit 4 were offline at the time. Plant operator and majority owner PNM has revealed very little about the collapse or its implications. Will PNM bother to spend millions repairing the tower before it exits the plant in 2022? Are there emissions impacts? What are the implications for Enchant’s risk-laden effort to convert the plant to a carbon-capture coal facility? Few answers have been provided.

### San Juan cooling tower collapses

#### By Mona Blaber

The cooling tower that serves San Juan Generating Station Unit 1, one of two operating units at the coal plant, collapsed on June 30. David Fosseck took this photo of the collapsed stacks of the cooling tower on July 5 and said both Unit 1 and Unit 4 were offline at the time. Plant operator and majority owner PNM has revealed very little about the collapse or its implications. Will PNM bother to spend millions repairing the tower before it exits the plant in 2022? Are there emissions impacts? What are the implications for Enchant’s risk-laden effort to convert the plant to a carbon-capture coal facility? Few answers have been provided.

### EPA may thwart EPE gas plan

#### By Antoinette Reyes

The Sierra Club and partners have been granted a legal standing in a contested case hearing for the air permit that EL Paso Electric is seeking to expand the Newman Gas Plant located at the border of El Paso County and Doña Ana County.

Our standing declarants are Sierra Club members who are directly impacted by the facility’s pollution, as they live within 2 miles of the plant. The administrative law judge also gave standing to Earthworks, but not to El Paso, another local organization opposing the Newman 6 expansion.

Newman Gas Plant is already the biggest emitter of nitrogen oxide (NOx) in the region. NOx exposure is associated with respiratory problems, heart disease, and negative birth outcomes. NOx emissions are even worse in the El Paso area due to elevated smog levels. Each year in the El Paso area, about 18 people die prematurely and 53 people end up in the emergency room due to elevated smog levels.

### PRC calls out PNM, Avangrid

#### By Mona Blaber

The New Mexico Public Regulation Commission has dealt several setbacks to Avangrid’s efforts to take over the state’s largest electric utility, PNM.

The Sierra Club has requested changes to the Avangrid-PNM merger agreement because it requires PNM to offload coal-fired Four Corners Power Plant to Navajo Transitional Energy Company, which is owned and run by the Navajo Nation. PNM has agreed to pay NTEC $75 million in shareholder funds as a buyout of its coal contract but wants customers to pay for $73 million in improvements on its 13% share of the plant before it transfers ownership. PNM has also promised to veto any effort by other owners to close the plant while it still owns it. Since PNM will be the owner until 2025 and closure votes require two years’ notice, that would guarantee the plant would stay open until 2027.

NTEC, which owns the coal mine that feeds Four Corners, has said it wants to keep the coal plant open as long as possible, even past its current planned retirement date of 2031, if possible.

In June, PRC hearing officer Ashley Schannauer ordered Avangrid to demonstrate why it withheld information on customer-service penalties its Maine subsidiary incurred and why it shouldn’t be penalized for not disclosing it.

Also in June, Schannauer agreed with the Sierra Club that questions concerning the role of Four Corners Power Plant are relevant to the merger case.

The merger and the Four Corners deal must both be approved by the PRC, which can adopt or reject either. Sierra Club is an intervenor in both cases, as are allies Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy, Dust CARE, NAVA Education Project, San Juan Citizens Alliance and others. Those groups signed on to a merger settlement after Avangrid agreed to invest millions in the impacted Four Corners community, develop 200 MW of renewable energy on the Navajo Nation and invest in electrification and energy efficiency for low-income New Mexicans and others. Those groups signed on to a merger settlement after Avangrid agreed to invest millions in the impacted Four Corners community, develop 200 MW of renewable energy on the Navajo Nation and invest in electrification and energy efficiency for low-income New Mexicans and indigenous and other frontline communities.
Neighbors protest proposed asphalt plant

By Diane Reese
Central New Mexico Group chair

I live in the South Valley of Albuquerque. You may never have visited this part of town, so let me tell you — it is wonderful. After retiring from the Air Force, my family and I moved to the South Valley because we wanted to live near the bosque and have space to grow a large garden and raise animals. We liked that we would be a bike ride away from the Valles de Oro National Wildlife Refuge in the Mountain View neighborhood. We joined a cohesive community with pride in traditional culture.

East of the river, we also found a concentration of toxic, hazardous industry. Once primarily farm land, much of the area was zoned in the mid-1970s for heavy industry, ignoring the homes and community that existed there. Soon, the shift from a cohesive agricultural area to heavy industry began — scrap metal and auto recyclers, Albuquerque’s waste-treatment plant, large groupings of above-ground petroleum storage tanks and businesses that left two Superfund sites. This was a classic example of environmental injustice — a low-income community, overwhelmed by people of color, receiving a disproportionate share of polluting industry.

In October, the City of Albuquerque’s Environmental Health Department granted a permit for a Hot Mix Asphalt batch plant. The plant would be built at the south end of the Mountain View neighborhood, just across the tracks from homes and farms and directly across I-25 from Isleta Pueblo. It would further pollute the air for Mountain View, the Refuge, and the Pueblo. Plastic plants are known to produce air pollutants, including arsenic, benzene, formaldehyde, and cadmium, that may cause cancer, damage to the central nervous system and liver, respiratory problems and skin irritation.

The permit was granted to New Mexico Terminal Services, which has a temporary special-use permit for, but is not currently operating, a railway trans-loading facility. If approved, the plant will be built at the trans-loading site — land that is zoned for A-1 “Agricultural Use Only.” The asphalt plant would require a zoning change to M-2, heavy industrial.

An appeal to revoke the permit has been filed by the Mountain View Coalition, which includes the Mountain View Neighborhood Association, Mountain View Community Action, and Friends of Valles de Oro National Wildlife Refuge. The coalition’s mission is to “advocate for the health and safety of both people and wildlife in the Mountain View Neighborhood.” The Central Group Executive Committee voted to support this coalition in its opposition to the asphalt plant.

Go to bit.ly/stopea Asphalttaust to read the mountain community to protest the stop. Please use your voice to support the people of Mountain View. By signing the petition, you will be kept informed on hearings with the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Air Quality Control Board. Next one is 5:30 p.m. July 14. Let’s make sure the Board knows we care!

Where is “away” for plastic?

By Carol Chamberland
Central NM Zero Waste

Recently I attended a rally to reinstate Albuquerque’s ban on single-use plastic bags. When I was the age of the Global Warming Express kids who were at the rally, plastic bags didn’t exist. Single-use wasn’t a thing. We got our groceries in paper bags, and waxed paper kept food fresh. Produce wasn’t shrink-wrapped. Milk and Coca-Cola came in glass bottles that were returned to the factory for sterilizing and reuse. If I’d had to worry about pollution, I probably wouldn’t have taken the mic at a rally. I was shy back then. I should mention that I’m not a hundred years old.

The first plastic bag was invented in 1965, but they didn’t become popularly accepted now, with a Sept. 1 deadline.

Call to Artists: Juried Recycled Art Exhibit

The Rio Grande Chapter Art Exhibits is organizing an online Recycled Art Exhibit, opening Sept. 15 and continuing through Nov. 15. Please contact Heather Kline at: heather9357@yahoo.com for specifications, eligibility, awards, judging and other details.

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Wildlife: Open Military Outings: Terry Owen

Rio Grande Sierra

Jul/August 2021
Safe passages for Northern NM wildlife

By Teresa Seamster, Northern NM Group Conservation Chair

Wildlife big and small, fleet and slow moving, now have a safe passage under the busy-highway stretching from Bernallillo to Bloomfield. Located south of the town of Cuba, the crossing area was designated as one of the 10 worst wildlife-vehicle collision spots in the state. The new open, undercover underpass now connects high-quality habitat on both sides of US Highway 550 for mule deer, elk, pronghorn antelope, mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, raptors, and reptiles.

In 2019, New Mexico passed The Wildlife Corridors Act and took a significant step forward to protect age-old wildlife corridors and key habitats by providing linkages between areas “used routinely by wildlife to travel through their habitat and include corridors used by migrating wildlife.” The ensuing Wildlife Corridors Action Plan was developed jointly by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, the New Mexico Department of Transportation and a research team led by the consulting firm Daniel B. Stephens & Associates of Albuquerque. Public participation was carried out through five meetings early in 2020 that brought individuals, tribal, state and federal agencies, county officials, wildlife organizations, landowners and regional planners together to examine maps, listen to alternatives and collect information on all the proposed project areas.

The Action Plan used modeling and vehicle accident data involving wildlife to identify areas of good habitat and migration routes that were bisected by roads. The new 550 Cuba project receiving funding for fencing and the culvert due to concern over high-speed crashes and high number of crashes per mile over a 10-year period (12-13) involving wildlife.

A more northern segment of US 550 from Aztec to the Colorado border is another dangerous area for wildlife that cross the highway to access good riparian habitat and water in the Animas River. A long section of over 30 miles will need to be assessed to decide the best ways to direct wildlife and provide connectivity while minimizing the risk of wildlife-vehicle collisions.

Public comments are still being solicited and can be submitted to wildlife.corridors@state.nm.us or via the website: www.wildlife.state.nm.us/home/public-comment/.

There will be a quantitative scoring process used to include the public input and projects will be re-evaluated using this public input.

Solar, Santa Fe-style

Ken Hughes

Chapter and Northern NM Group Executive Committee

I f you’ve been all Rip Van Winkle-like during the Covid daze and haven’t been to Santa Fe lately, or even if you live here but haven’t physically gone to work, you’re in for some changes in the form of solar installations, electric-car chargers and streetlight retrofits. These come courtesy of investments by the State’s General Service Division, along with the City and County of Santa Fe.

With the resumption of Railrunner service, one can get off at the South Capitol station to be greeted by massive solar arrays in parking lots on both sides of the tracks. They will provide a salient portion of the electricity for state footprint facilities. Railrunner service, one can get off at the South Capitol station to be greeted by massive solar arrays in parking lots on both sides of the tracks. They will provide a salient portion of the electricity for state footprint facilities. And the county’s green bank/fund; Cultural burning practices for better forest health

By Teresa Seamster

The annual burning of selected species of trees for enhanced growth, seed production and safety from wildfire by indigenous cultures is being carefully examined by forest and watershed groups for its success in maintaining healthy forest ecology over hundreds of years.

For decades, cultural burning was prohibited by federal land agencies, and severe punishments, including arrest or being shot at, were the price for attempting to conduct the specifically timed forest burns so vital to American Indian forest management in the 19th and 20th centuries. The benefits of traditional burns in reducing risk of unplanned and uncontrolled wildfire, and revitalizing the cycle of forest cleansing, reseeding and nutrient release that naturally occurs with regular low-intensity fire, are being examined in the Taos Speaker Series. Contact walle.hoefner@tnp.org to get a lecture recording or read more at www.nature.org/en-us/our-work/newmexico-revitalizing-cultureal-burning-practices/.

Ojo Encino air-monitor data

As part of the Tri-Chapter health-impact assessment of oil and gas emissions, Purple Air monitors at the Ojo Encino Chapter House provide real-time information on particulate matter and other emissions and weather at https://rh.gov/taosum. Additional monitoring at Counselor and Torreon Chapters is in process.

Northern NM Group contacts

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Counselor and T orreon Chapters is in process.
Things to focus on while minimizing

By Olivia Bell and Addy Witt
Los Alamos High School Eco Club

Minimalism
Living intentionally is the ultimate goal of minimalism. Every item — clothes, kitchenware, food, furniture — should have a purpose. Possessions that don't bring meaning or purpose cause unneeded clutter. Next time you go through your closet, kitchen, or any area in your house, make sure each item is actually useful to you. Slowly, item by item, your house will become more organized, minimal, and intentional. Minimalism doesn't have to mean owning only 50 items; it just means that everything you own brings meaning to your life.

Recycling
While disposing of unneeded items, consider the recyclability of your waste. For things that can't be upcycled and used again, check recycling services such as Terracycle. Search an item on the Terracycle website to find the various collection programs near your location. Waste from old pens to granola wrappers can be shipped to Terracycle, where they find creative solutions for single-use plastics. However, consider the cost of shipping items in terms of carbon emissions and try to accumulate a large amount before considering the Terracycle route. Also, of course, refrain from buying any more single-use plastics after disposal or upcycling. If you are unsure whether an item should be thrown away or recycled through the county trash/recycling program, check the County's Recycle Coach (losalamosnm.us) or app to find out what goes where.

Donating
If items are still usable, donate. Nonperishable foods can go to collection bins at the Aquatic Center, Senior Centers, and little food pantries at churches. Also consider dropping clean, usable items off at a thrift shop. But don't dump your trash off at any donation center! “Wishing cycles” are not recycling. The items must still have value and life. Also, there are online groups where you can post items to be picked up by other community members, including the Buy Nothing Los Alamos Facebook group and Los Alamos Freecycle (freecycle.org/town/ LosAlamosNM).

Buying in bulk
Recycling is not as sustainable as many of us believe, especially plastic recycling. Out of all the single-use plastics tossed into the recycling bin, only 9 percent is ever recycled because of the difficulty and expense of the process. Recycling plastic also causes air pollution, with toxins released when plastic is melted.

For more info on plastic recycling, read the very thorough NTR article, “How Big Oil Mised The Public Into Believing Plastic Would Be Recycled.” So how do we solve this unsustainable problem of nonrecyclable plastics? For now (until LANL creates an entirely biodegradable plastic alternative through the BOTTLE Project — see www.lanl.gov), our best option is to buy as few single-use plastics as possible. Aluminum recycling is still sustainable, so consider buying drinks in cans rather than plastic bottles. Glass is heavy and creates carbon emissions when shipped for recycling, so try to repurpose glass bottles and jars before tossing them in the recycling bin. Use your glass jars while shopping in the bulk section of our Co-op or any other store with bulk items. Simply weigh your empty jar to get a tare weight with the Co-op’s new weighing machine in the bulk section, and fill your jar with any of the bulk items, like flour, granola, beans, rice, nuts... As you clean and eliminate unwanted items in the kitchen, reuse your jars to divide and store bulk items.

Three books on soil and climate
By Daisy Swadesh
We know the Sierra Club’s roots were in the efforts to preserve the incompa-

rable beauties of nature, which became our National Parks.

We started by saving the grandeur of our National Park landscapes, but now, with climate change threatening all life, we also must consider the minuscule microorganisms of the soil. In regenerating the land’s ecosystems, the soil becomes what we literally live on. Healthy soil stores carbon as well as trees do, and brings back water cycles. All living systems function as ecosystems do, and restoring the health of our grasslands and agricultural lands can help reverse climate change. Let’s get dirty. Three books on the topic:

The Soil Will Save Us by Kristin Ohlson

Three books on soil and climate

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rable beauties of nature, which became our National Parks.
Outdoor recreation

Four Corners outings back in action

By Hart Pierce
Four Corners outings leader
July/August/September 2021 Rio Grande Sierran

If it is San Juan Co., the Four Corners is awakening from our long sleep, and folks are heeding our outdoors invitations, after two years of outdoor endeavors in droves. Mountain and Red Rock Canyon country are at a premium as outdoors enthuiasts flock to the Southwest to renew their spirits after a year and a half of restrictions. We are leading several outings in July, August and September (see Page 12). Please invite all who can participate to do so.

San Juan County, McKinley County, as well as Montezuma, La Plata and Archuleta counties in Southwestern Colorado are relatively COVID-free and offer a wide variety of outdoor experiences. Outings will be scheduled for whitewater hikes in the mountain passes north of Durango, Colo., and south of Silverton, Colo., for mid-July.

Day hikes will be scheduled for San Pedro Parks Wilderness in the Jemez Mountains northeast of Cuba and the Valle Grande in August and September.

As the Four Corners weather cools, outings will be scheduled for Chaco Canyon and the Ah-Slu-Sle-Pah Wilderness, Mesa Verde, Sand Canyon, Cedar Mesa (Bear's Ear), Canyon de Chelly, and other venues. When the aspens and oaks begin to turn, we will head for the mountains again to take in the autumn beauty. Outings activities will range from casual hikes to observe flora and fauna to moderately difficult hiking and biking. Some will require camping or long drives, and details will be described in the outings descriptions on the rio Grande Chapter website: riograndesierraclub.org outings. We hope you will join us!

Another exciting development in the Four Corners is the expansion of Animas River access for canoers, kayakers, paddleboarders and rafters.

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By Steve Harris
NM Paddlers Coalition

Fishermen and river-running enthusiasts in New Mexico are the targets of a stealthy and well-funded campaign to bar recreational access to segments of the Rio Chama and Pecos rivers, among others, where they cross private land.

The principal battleground is the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, where five wealthy private landowners have pending applications for “certificates of non-navigability.” These certificates empower them to outlaw recreational entry to private property via the rivers. The Game Commission has postponed its decision on the new round of non-navigable applications to its regular meeting on Aug. 12.

Please write the Game Commission at NonNav.Comments@state.nm.us requesting that it deny the five applications at the Aug. 12 hearing. Per the flawed rule, public comments must be written — no oral comments allowed— and submitted by 5 p.m. July 29.

The landowners’ applications have stalled under a banner styled the “New Mexico Habitat Conservation Initiative,” which, in 2015, brought legislation that sought to empower private landowners to declare portions of the state’s streams to be “non-navigable,” subjecting anglers and other recreators to fines of $500.

His clients privatization certificates were issued Dec. 31, 2018, the last day of Governor Martinez’s administration. He represents the five current applicants for stream privatization. And he made more than $100,000 in campaign donations to candidates for high office during the 2018 election cycle.

The privatization rule was adopted in 2017 by a previous Game Commission, under then-Chair Paul Kienzle. Its language makes approving landowner’s applications almost a foregone conclusion. If an application is correct in form, it will be accepted by the Game and Fish director and rubber-stamped by the commission. The rule deflects due process, requiring speedy action while permitting no testimony from parties who may, with evidence, oppose an application (e.g. the state’s many anglers and river-runners).

Most egregiously, it allows applicants to appeal unfavorable decisions to state district court, while denying such a privilege to opponents.

After the 2018 election, the Game Commission decided to revisit the HCI scheme. Encouraged by no less than three attorneys general’s opinions citing the public nature of the water flowing in New Mexico’s rivers and streams, the Game Commission, at its November 2019 meeting, decided to extend a moratorium on new applications and reopen the rule, with an eye to repeal or replacement. This move might have brought the commission into compliance with Article XVI — the public ownership of water provision — of the state Constitution and with case law allowing a right to use New Mexico’s waterways.

At the end of 2019, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham declined to re-appoint Game Commission Chair Joanna Prukop, citing “differences of opinion.” Prukop has said her removal was a result of the commission’s reconsideration of the water-access rule (Prukop’s Santa Fe New Mexican op-ed is linked at riograndesierraclub.org/river-access).

In March 2020, counsel for three New Mexico recreation groups (the Adobe Whitewater Club, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, NM Wildlife Federation) petitioned the state Supreme Court for a writ of mandamus, seeking clarification of whether the stream privatization rule is constitutional. US Sens. Heinrich and Udall and NM Wild filed amicus briefs in support. We are still awaiting a decision.

HCJ, however, seems in no mood to wait. Last year, according to a source, Gonzales threatened to unleash a “tsunami of litigation” against the Game Commission if it did not approve the already-submitted applications. And he has begun to deliver: in March, federal magistrate Steve Yarborough, ruling on an HCI legal action, issued a declaratory judgement ordering the depart- ment to hear the pending applications.

The General Services Department’s Risk Management Division declined to issue a notice of appeal, though doing so might have spared the Game Commission a great deal of time and potential embarrassment, should the rule be revoked.

This is where matters stand today. The Game Commission probably shouldn’t possess the discretion to decide who will enjoy the Rio Chama and Pecos River or other New Mexico streams. But thanks to this rule, they do. As the stream-access issue makes clear, private landowners’ view, open access is a slippery overachieving of the public and its finny residents. There is some logic behind this fear, though a civil discourse would have been the more prudent route to finding solutions to New Mexico’s growing habitat, access and privacy problems. There’s a darker possible motive as well, a desire of privilege—economic privilege—in New Mexico’s most desirable little rivers for their own exclusive retreats.

It may simply be that, in the land- owners’ view, open access is a slippery slope to disdain and disrespect for the public water and its finny residents. There is some logic behind this fear, though a civil discourse would have been the more prudent route to finding solutions to New Mexico’s growing habitat, access and privacy problems. There’s a darker possible motive as well, a desire of privilege—economic privilege—in New Mexico’s most desirable little rivers for their own exclusive retreats.

For now, the responsible users aren’t ready to surrender our right to boat or fish.
Protocols for reopened hikes and events

The following COVID-19 protocols for Sierra Club Outings have been incorporated to help ensure the health and safety of our volunteers, participants and staff. These are subject to change based upon CDC and Sierra Club guidance. We thank you in advance for your patience and assistance.

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, and in some other cases where minor children are participating.

If you should begin to feel ill or experience symptoms associated with COVID-19, during or after a Sierra Club outing, contact the Outings Leader so that they can notify other participants and club leadership for contact-tracing purposes.

hiking in the mountains, view wildlife, and take a break at the upper trail station.

Sponsored by the Military Outdoors Program and everyone is welcome. Appropriate for children over 12 with parent or legal guardian. Appropriate Covid-19 precautions will be taken. No dogs, please. Register at the link provided by Sept. 15. Contact the listed leader if you have questions.

Trip Leader: Terry Owen, 505-301-4549, terrow@comcast.net
Level: Easy-Moderate
Location: Albuquerqueno, off NM536 (Sandia Crest Scenic Byway)

Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

Saturday, Aug. 28: San Pedro Parks Wilderness hike

We will hike the San Pedro Parks Wilderness as it eases into autumn. San Pedro Parks Wilderness is in the Jemez Mountains northeast of Cuba, NM. Meet at 9 a.m. This out-and-back hike will begin at the Las Vacas Trailhead near San Gregorio Lake and proceed to its intersection with the Anasachtio Trail and return. The trail will take us through gently rolling terrain surrounded by ponderosa, oak and aspen, with many “into” and wetlands, which host a variety of mountain flora and fauna. The average elevation of San Pedro Parks is 10,000 feet. The 8-mile hike will take about 4 hours. No dogs please. Participants 18 years of age and over. Appropriate Covid-19 precautions will be taken. Register at the link provided by Aug. 23. Leader will provide recommended gear and apparel list in advance. Contact the listed leader if you have questions.

Trip Leader: Steve Rice, a recent addition to our outings team, looks through Los Alamos arch as he scouts hikes with Northern New Mexico Outings Chair Alan Shapiro. Our free, open-to-the-public hikes are back! See listings here for destinations and how to join.

Photo by Alan Shapiro