



Rio Grande Sierran

Volume 60, Issue 2

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

April / May / June 2022

Victory for recreation

New Mexico Supreme Court rules that private property owners may not seal off public access to rivers and streams that run past their land. See Page 5.



Right: Scott Carpenter lifts a fence so Michelle Vigil can boat through on the Pecos. “Private property” signs and dangerous fences abound on New Mexico rivers, but a new ruling says the state’s waterways can’t be privatized. Photo: Sherry Barrett

Above: Steve Harris navigates a gate to avoid a nasty swiftwater fence. Photo: Scott Carpenter



Sign at abandoned Chuza facility: “Táá íiyisí báhádziiid” (“it is scary/harmful” in Diné) By David Fosdeck. Translation: Adella Begaye

Abandoned oil and gas wells foul the landscape, pollute soil and water: **Page 7**



Sen. Mimi Stewart, Tammy Fiebelkorn, Rep. Kristina Ortiz, by Charles Goodmacher

Energy-efficiency improvements for low-income families, improved solar credits pass in New Mexico legislative session: **Pages 3, 9**



Photo by Jessie Emerson

Albuquerque repeals its Clean and Green Ordinance, brings plastic bags back. **Page 11**

EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET



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New Mexico election endorsements

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Threat of training flights over Gila (again)

An Arizona Air Force base wants to use airspace over the Gila region for training flights as low as 100 feet above ground. **Page 5**

Saving the historic Caja del Rio

Many conservation organizations, including Sierra Club, are prioritizing the Caja del Rio as an area for future wilderness or national monument designation. **Page 8.**

More: Chair’s column: **Page 2.** Methane: **Page 7.** Sombrillo: **Page 8.** Club-endorsed Taos mayoral win: **Page 10.** Central NM: **Page 11.** Outings: **Page 12.**

Earth loses another great one in Alice Cox

Our chapter is thriving with committed, dynamic staff and volunteers. This month I want to highlight two of them.

Rio Grande Chapter volunteer leader Alice Cox passed away in February.

A diminutive, sparkling blonde, Alice was frequently underestimated. Born in Atlanta, Alice spent her first 2 years in El Paso, part of our Chapter's region, where her father Ralph had come after serving in WWII. He fought in the Battle of the Bulge and in the African theater and moved to El Paso to open a bar and restaurant. When baby Alice sat at the bar and yelled "Beer!" her mother decided it was time to move the family back to a more genteel Atlanta. She spent her early life in Georgia, but always yearned for the mountains.

Alice relocated to Santa Fe to be in the mountains, and eventually made a home



At left: Alice Cox, who passed away in February, with one of her beloved dogs. Above: Alice with Wayne Jennings.

in Pecos, next to the National Forest. She was a multitasking entrepreneur working many types of jobs; hairdresser/salon owner, personal chef, restaurant owner and manager, car salesperson, painter, landscaper and kimono maven. She opened the Pecos Pizza Palace, which was written up in the *New York Times*, and gave it her all until her health became endangered and she moved on.

She gave thousands of hours to Sierra Club efforts, from tabling in Taos to

canvassing in Albuquerque to being the Northern New Mexico Group's membership chair and welcoming new members. Her deep experience in the hospitality industry made the Northern Group's holiday parties fun, welcoming and memorable. Most importantly, they kept our members engaged and more likely to become activists.

Alice's mechanic was devastated when he learned of her passing: "She was someone you really wanted to know."

She brightened our world and fought for the earth. We will miss her.

10 years: I want to highlight Mona Blaber, who is celebrating her 10th anniversary with the chapter. Mona works with nearly every volunteer in the organization leading our communications work. She knows each of our issues, helps volunteers amplify their work, and does it in creative and innovative ways.

I first heard about Mona through the Santa Fe Democratic Party grapevine. There was an amazing ward coordinator in Eldorado who had organized her ward into an entity that could determine the fates of campaigns. When we met, I was struck by her youth, charm, intelligence and willingness to engage in the often-heartbreaking thing we call the political process.

Mona has expanded the reach of our programs and initiatives to fight the climate crisis at the local, state and federal levels with a deep understanding of the issues and the politics. Our entire chapter joins in congratulating you, Mona!



Volunteer hero: Claire McKnight

By Mona Blaber
Chapter communications

Each issue we interview one of our terrific Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter volunteers. Claire McKnight is our chapter PAC treasurer, head office volunteer in the Santa Fe office and a true behind-the-scenes hero who makes all of our work possible.

What is your role with the Rio Grande Chapter?

I do two related things for the Rio Grande Chapter. I am the Treasurer for the Political Action Committee (PAC), and I deposit and acknowledge donations both to the general fund and to the PAC Fund.

How did you get involved with our team?

When I retired and moved to New Mexico, I knew that I wanted to do something that would benefit the environment and not just entertain myself (although I do that also). A friend suggested the local chapter of the Sierra Club and getting in touch with Camilla Feibelman, the Rio Grande Chapter director. I hesitated at

first since I am not very outgoing and could not see myself becoming a lobbyist or playing a similar role. But I did contact Camilla, and she suggested my current role. It has turned out to be ideal for me, since I work mostly by myself and it allows me to fit the work into my schedule easily.

What does your work involve?

Picking up checks from the office and depositing them, writing thank-you notes, and, specifically for the PAC, keeping track of the bank account, writing checks for candidates that the chapter and political committee determine deserve our support, and filing reports with the Sierra Club National organization and the New Mexico Secretary of State.

Why do you contribute your time to the Sierra Club?

It makes me feel that I am contributing something to a very worthwhile organization and to our environment.

What's your favorite memory of volunteering?

Seeing how well the state

Volunteer with us!

A few of our many volunteer opportunities:

■ Join our NMClimateCorps for biweekly opportunities for climate action.

■ Become our PAC treasurer or help with other administrative tasks.

■ Help with social media or design graphics or maps.

Email us at riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org.

candidates that the chapter and PAC supported did in the 2018 election.

What would you tell people who want to get involved but don't know how?

Contact Camilla Feibelman or any of the chairs of the local groups. Their names and contact information are on Page 4 of the *Sierran*. Remember that there are lots of different roles you can fill, and it feels good to contribute to an effective organization and to the environment.

Check that mailbox

Every year in March, local Sierra Club chapters mail our one annual appeal to you, our terrific members.

We rely on your donations to fund the Rio Grande Chapter staff, volunteer organizing and resources that help foster victories right here in New Mexico and West Texas.

This past year has been truly extraordinary. We have all been impacted by multiple crises — from the pandemic to the deterioration of our democracy and climate disasters forcing people to flee their homes.

Together, we are rising to meet the challenge. Rio Grande Chapter members show up day after day. Some of what we achieved together in 2021:

- A bill to ban cruel trapping on New Mexico public lands;
- Defeat of PNM's efforts to offload its share of the Four Corners coal plant to the mine owner, which could have perpetuated its polluting indefinitely;
- Passage of the Community Solar Act to make solar more affordable and accessible to all

New Mexicans; and

- Helped negotiate a settlement requiring El Paso Electric to reduce its harmful air and climate pollution in Southern New Mexico and El Paso and begin a four-year moratorium on new fossil-fuel facilities.

Our volunteer activists and Rio Grande Chapter organizing were a key part of a David-vs.-Goliath effort to defeat multiple climate-harming hydrogen bills and made a real difference for good at the 2022 Legislature. You are powering our movement, and we rely on your contributions to fund this work.

Please make a contribution at riograndesierraclub.org/donate (or scan the QR code below with your phone) or return the form you received in the mail.

Thanks for helping us fight for a better and healthier New Mexico and West Texas.



Join the Sierra Club

You can join the Rio Grande Sierra Club (your membership is for both the national group and 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, Attn: Member Services 2101 Webster St., #1300, Oakland, CA 94612

Would you like to make a donation to support our work

in New Mexico and El Paso? You can make a charitable or noncharitable donation or donate to our Stop Holtec or GWE funds at riograndesierraclub.org/donate.

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




NM proposes adoption of EV rules

By Mona Blaber
Chapter communications
As more Americans look for ways to free ourselves from Big Oil profiteering and rising gas prices, New Mexico may soon help us leave the gas pump behind for cleaner air and a safer climate.

In May, New Mexico’s Environmental Improvement Board considers Advanced Clean Cars standards that would require automakers to offer and sell increasing numbers of zero-emission vehicles, like electric vehicles, in New Mexico.

If the board approves the proposal from Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham’s Environment Department, New Mexicans will see many more clean cars in dealerships and on the road, and residents will breathe dramatically



Take action for Clean Cars

Go to **addup.sierraclub.org/campaigns/clean-cars-nm** or scan the QR code at left with your phone to urge the EIB to adopt

Advanced Clean Cars standards for New Mexico.

healthier air.

A recent American Lung Association report found that cleaner cars go beyond being a critical tool in solving the urgent climate crisis: They will also save New Mexicans an estimated \$20 billion by 2050 and improve community health significantly.

In New Mexico, the ALA report found

that transitioning to zero-emission vehicles and electricity would result in:

- 273 avoided deaths
- 7,380 avoided asthma attacks
- 32,000 avoided lost workdays
- \$3 billion in public health benefits.

If you’ve recently shopped for an electric vehicle, you may have noticed that your options in New Mexico are sparse. They may not be available on lots, salespeople are not educated about them, and often dealers would prefer to sell cars with traditional combustion engines because EVs don’t require much maintenance from service departments.

While EVs save consumers thousands of dollars in maintenance and operation costs, up-front prices are sometimes still higher than gas-fueled cars. New Mexico must ensure that

low-income families have the opportunity to purchase electric vehicles. Federal credits for EV purchases help, as does a 2020 New Mexico law that is, through utilities, providing rebates that cover most of the cost to install home fast chargers, with rebates increasing for lower-income residents. More public charging stations are already planned around the state. The last piece of the puzzle is state credits for EV purchases.

The state should also move as quickly as possible to adopt Clean Truck standards to address the disproportionate air and climate pollution produced by heavy-duty vehicles.

Making clean cars and trucks accessible and affordable can put us on the fast lane to better health, a safer climate and leaving our dangerous and expensive reliance on Big Oil in the dust.



Photo of San Juan Generating Station courtesy PNM

The closure of coal-fired San Juan Generating Station will reduce costs for PNM, but the utility doesn’t want to reflect those savings in customer bills until as late as 2024.

PNM stalls customer savings

San Juan coal closure will lower expenses, but utility wants to delay the rate reduction

By Mona Blaber and Karl Braithwaite
PNM is planning to keep charging customers for San Juan Generating Station long after the polluting coal plant has stopped providing power to our homes.

In 2020, New Mexico’s Public Regulation Commission approved a plan for PNM to switch from the coal-fired San Juan Generating Station to cheaper renewable energy and battery storage and pay off the costly coal plant’s remaining debt with low-interest bonds. Combined, those changes are expected to lower the average customer bill by an estimated \$7 a month.

But PNM doesn’t want us to see those savings for at least a year and a half.

The utility has announced it will delay the bond sales — and the resulting rate reductions — until after it imposes an unrelated rate increase in late 2023 or 2024, so it can continue

collecting profits on San Juan and camouflage the impact of its rate hike.

Ever since San Juan costs first went into our rates after the plant was built in the 1970s, a portion of our bills has gone toward paying for past capital investments in the plant. We also pay PNM a 10% rate of return on those costs — a bit like paying an interest rate to a bank on a loan.

That “rate of return” collected from customers on power-plant investments is a big source of profit for utilities like PNM.

Because PNM and customers still owe millions on San Juan but the plant has become too costly to continue operating, the Energy Transition Act enabled PNM to sell low-interest bonds to pay off San Juan’s debt when it closes. When the bonds are sold and the debt paid off, PNM will no longer collect its 10% rate of return from customers. Customers will pay off the bonds but at about a 3% interest rate to bondholders rather than a 10% rate to PNM — that’s where a chunk of our savings will come from and why PNM benefits from a delayed bond issue but customers don’t.

In addition to saving customers money by reducing the interest rate, the bonds will also fund \$40 million to coal workers and the communities that have been most impacted by the coal plant.

If PNM issues the bonds when it exits San Juan this fall, customer rates go down and money flows to the community and workers. But if PNM waits two years to issue the bonds, customers have to wait to see their savings.

PNM claims it will pre-fund the \$40 million for the community and workers as soon as the plant closes in October. But we have to take their word for it.

PNM has claimed publicly that it will pay customers back for 18-24 months of paying for power we’re not receiving and for the \$100 million or so in profits it will rake in, but its PRC filing suggests it will do no such thing.

And rising interest rates mean the delay could also force customers into paying a higher rate on the bond payback.

The PRC should at the very least force PNM to issue a credit to customers starting the month San Juan closes. It’s time to realize the savings that renewable energy will bring us.

Community efforts kill NM hydrogen subsidies (for now)

But threat of ‘blue’ hydrogen still looms

By Mona Blaber
Chapter communications

The oil and gas industry continues to push for dangerous methane-fueled “blue” hydrogen, but New Mexicans showed up in force at the 2022 legislative session to quash numerous bills offering public funds for private hydrogen schemes masquerading as solutions.

Four pieces of legislation that offered subsidies or incentives for methane-fueled, or “blue,” hydrogen development all died during the 30-day session after dozens of New Mexicans testified against the bills at each committee hearing.

The bills varied, but several offered \$125 million of taxpayer funds and other incentives for hydrogen projects. The bills prioritized a project that would revive the shuttered Escalante coal plant near Grants as an electricity-producing hydrogen facility. The Escalante project promises fewer than 100 permanent jobs and would cost millions more than producing the same amount of electricity via solar and storage.

Hundreds of people, including dozens of front-line community members, attended remote committee hearings to oppose the harmful gas extraction that blue hydrogen would perpetuate.

The bills got progressively less harmful in terms of the pollution levels of the hydrogen they would incentivize, but none created protective measures against methane-fueled hydrogen’s considerable safety, health and climate risks.

While “green hydrogen,” derived from water in a process powered by renewables, could be an important tool in some hard-to-decarbonize industries like steel or cement production, “blue” hydrogen causes more climate pollution than burning coal or gas for heat, according to several recent studies. This is in part because methane, a powerful greenhouse gas, leaks prolifically during extraction, processing and transmission. A recent Stanford study found a leakage rate from New Mexico’s Permian Basin that makes natural gas’s climate impact three times worse than coal’s. When the IPCC is issuing a “red alert” for humanity, we cannot afford that.

However, the oil and gas industry is faley but successfully pushing methane-fueled hydrogen as a climate solution. New Mexico has signed a memorandum of understanding with Utah, Colorado and Wyoming to apply for federal funds as a four-state “Hydrogen Hub.” New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham also issued an executive order in March that directs the Economic Development Department to include hydrogen as one of its key economic sectors.

Hydrogen developers are still coming to New Mexico and other states, and the \$8 billion for hydrogen hubs in federal infrastructure legislation will be distributed somewhere, but the defeat of these bills shows that we can make a difference and help decision-makers understand we must urgently act to reduce climate pollution, not create new sources of it.

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‘Sierran’ publication information

The *Rio Grande Sierran* is published four times a year, in January, April, July and October, by the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club as a benefit for members in New Mexico and West Texas. The opinions expressed in signed articles in the *Sierran* are the opinions of the writers and not necessarily those of the Sierra Club. Products and services advertised in the *Sierran* are not necessarily endorsed by Sierra Club.
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*.

Court provides big stream-access victory

By Norm Gaume
Adobe Whitewater Club
New Mexico conservation groups won a victory for public access to streams and rivers with a March ruling by the state Supreme Court.

In 2020, the Adobe Whitewater Club of New Mexico, the New Mexico Wildlife Federation, and Backcountry Hunters and Anglers petitioned the New Mexico Supreme Court for a ruling that the state Game Commission's 2018 rivers and stream privatization rule is unconstitutional. On March 1, the New Mexico Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the state Constitution does not permit New Mexico's waterways to be "privatized" and sealed off from public access. After a one-hour hearing and 15 minutes of deliberation, Chief Justice Michael Vigil announced that the Court agreed the issue of public stream access is of great public importance, the petitioners have standing, the Game Commission rule is unconstitutional, and all Game Commission certificates

issued to the privatizers are void. The voided privatization certificates had authorized three wealthy landowners to close boatable sections of the Upper Rio Chama and the Upper Pecos River and sections of the Mimbres River and two other small streams in southern New Mexico. The Supreme Court reaffirmed New Mexicans' constitutional right to paddle all of New Mexico's rivers and streams. They said the water in New Mexico's rivers and streams belongs to the public. The court said rivers are not for the exclusive benefit of private landowners. The public has a recreational easement granted by the New Mexico Constitution. Paddlers have the right to travel these waterways unimpeded by private landowners and anglers have the right to fish them. Trespass across private land to reach public waters was not at issue in this litigation and remains illegal. The paddling community recognizes and respects the rights of landowners to preclude trespass on private land bordering the river. Paddlers are

dedicated to working with landowners to ensure all our natural resources are protected. However, the handful of wealthy landowners do not have the exclusive right to monetize public rivers and streams. At the beginning of her term, then Gov. Susanna Martinez fired all Game Commissioners and replaced them with politically active private-property advocates. Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham also fired all the commissioners at the beginning of her term. She replaced them with a bipartisan group chaired by Joanna Prukop, a fish and game professional who was a cabinet secretary during the Richardson administration. The Governor fired Prukop after the Game Commission voted in 2019 to suspend the privatization rule and revisit it. Vice Chair Jeremy Vesbach was removed from the Game Commission by the governor in 2021 after it denied five more privatization applications. The governor gave no reason but Vesbach stated he believed his position on

stream access and his view that privatizing streams in NM was unconstitutional figured significantly on why he was dismissed. In March 2022, Gov. Lujan Grisham appointed Deanna Archuleta to fill one of three vacancies. Archuleta is the senior director for federal relations at ExxonMobil, though prior to that she has a background in public service including working for The Wilderness Society and the Department of Interior under the Obama administration. Wildlife belongs to everyone and not exclusively to one user group or special interest. While the Game Commission does routinely concern itself with matters of controversy, the controversy can be defused if commissioners are allowed to consider all points of view without fear of losing their seats. For more information, visit the Adobe Whitewater Club at adobewhitewater.org/stream-access. *Norm Gaume is a former Interstate Stream Commission chair and Adobe Whitewater Club board member*



Photo courtesy Air Force

The proposed low-altitude Air Force training flights would release burning flares and chaff fibers over the Gila region.

Test flights over Gila (again)?

Howie Dash, Southern Group Excom Chair
An Air Force base in Arizona wants to use airspace over the Gila region in eastern Arizona and Western New Mexico for training flights as low as 100 feet above ground and supersonic flights as low as 5,000 feet above ground.

Previously, Holloman Air Force base made a similar proposal but acted on the substantial public opposition in deciding not to use the additional air space after all. In its scoping documents seeking public input for the proposal, the Air Force did not demonstrate the need for this new training area. As before though, the low-altitude flights of screaming jets would be releasing burning flares and chaff fibers, would disrupt the

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peace, impact wildlife, risk the start of wildfire, and alter the character of wilderness areas, areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Wildlife Refuges and National Monuments. We understand the role of the Air Force in protecting our national security, but surely the unique, remote and wild nature of the Gila that we cherish is part of what should be protected. The public comment period

for the scoping process is now closed. Thirty-four conservation groups in New Mexico and Arizona including Sierra Club expressed concerns with the proposal. Thanks also to the many of you who responded. The final Environmental Impact Statement is scheduled to be released in fall 2023 and with it, there will be another public comment period. Stay tuned!

Climate change and Albuquerque's drinking water

By Mike Neas
By the 1990s, it was apparent that Albuquerque and Bernalillo County did not sit over a water supply the size of Lake Michigan as previously thought. The Albuquerque Basin Aquifer was being depleted faster than it was able to recharge. River diversions were necessary to protect and maintain the longevity of the aquifer. Most of the tap water for roughly 600,000 Bernalillo County residents is supplied by the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority via a combination of groundwater from the Albuquerque Basin Aquifer and surface water from the San Juan-Chama Drinking Water Project.

Groundwater wells combine with the San Juan-Chama project to produce about 32 billion gallons of drinking water for Water Authority consumers every year. The Albuquerque Basin Aquifer is finite but can recharge if adequate surface water is available to offset

its use. That's why the current ratio of surface water to groundwater may be of concern (see chart). Diminishing water supplies (due to climate change) in the Upper San Juan River Basin forced the ABCWUA to shut off the use of surface water in early runoff season the last two years. Last year, 25% surface water and 75% groundwater supplied Bernalillo County, which has consumed a fairly constant overall total since 2012. That ratio is reversed from surface water making up 70% of the demand in 2017 and 2019. The water authority's 2022 annual operating plan, which will include a projection of diversions for 2022, may not be available until the end of May. It all depends on snowpack and runoff. Constant vigilance is needed to protect our water supply, and we must question the push to continue unsustainable growth like the proposed Santolina development, which could further deplete our water resources.

Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility water supplied			
	Surface water	Groundwater	Total acre-feet
2014	56,604 (59%)	39,352 (41%)	95,856
2015	48,702 (54%)	41,600 (46%)	90,302
2016	61,276 (65%)	32,920 (35%)	94,196
2017	65,816 (70%)	28,811 (30%)	94,627
2018	48,400 (52%)	43,958 (46%)	92,358
2019	62,720 (70%)	27,415 (30%)	90,135
2020	30,282 (32%)	65,422 (68%)	95,704
2021	23,870 (25%)	70,516 (75%)	94,386

Big bills stall in short session

By Luis Guerrero and
Mona Blaber

The Legislative Session is an exhausting time for Legislators, staff and the many activists that walk in and out the doors of the building (or on and off the zooms). Unlike last year when everything was virtual, this year we had the opportunity to attend the session in a hybrid format. There was tight security to get in the building and visitors were required to wear a face mask and show proof of vaccination.

The Rio Grande Chapter, along with other partner environmental organizations, rallied together outside the Roundhouse for Environment Day to cheer on environmental legislation and our champions. We had a great crowd of activists who braved the cold Santa Fe winter weather with the help of hot chocolate and biscochitos. Many champion legislators, including Reps. Kristina Ortez, Joanne Ferrary, Tara Lujan, Debbie Sariñana, Sens. Harold Pope Jr., Antoinette Sedillo Lopez, Jeff Steinborn and staff for Senate Pro Tem Mimi Stewart attended to talk about their environmental legislation.

On the last night, House representatives, cheered on by a broad coalition of New Mexico community groups, stayed up all night to pass voting-rights legislation early the final morning. However, delay tactics by Republican Sen. William Sharer prevented the voting-rights legislation from passing the Senate before the noon session close.

And in the last moments of the session, House Speaker Brian Egolf, a climate leader in the Legislature, announced he won't run for re-election. Egolf helped the environmental community outlaw coyote-killing contests and trapping on public lands as well as pass the Energy Transition Act, community solar, EV infrastructure and many other important pieces of legislation. He also helped to cultivate and elect a diverse, young, progressive pro-environmental caucus — as well as one of only two majority-female House chambers in the nation. We hope his successor will be as successful an advocate for legislation that protects and uplifts all New Mexicans.

Thirty-day even-year sessions, which are intended to focus on budget only, have generally included little environmental legislation,



Photo by Luis Guerrero

From left, state Sen. Antoinette Sedillo-Lopez and Reps. Joanne Ferrary and Debbie Sariñana speak about the Green Amendment on Environment Day in March.

though each year we've worked more on properly funding environmental agencies and programs.

This year, however, was a whirlwind of ambitious legislation, even if it didn't all pass in the crushing timeline that has always been inadequate to suit New Mexico's needs. That is the power of organizing — organizations and activists across New Mexico showing up, joining forces and throwing elbows. The governor and legislators proposed major, important policy, and though we didn't agree on some of it, it's truly a sign of progress that our state is considering transformational policies like the climate requirements in HB6 or the Voting Rights Act, especially in a budget-focused session.

Remote committee hearings and online polls allowed New Mexicans to show up in force from all over the state, and legislators took note. Grassroots activists made a difference, and we will continue to progress toward a thriving, healthy economy for all in the Southwest.

Below are a few of the highlights and lowlights of the session:

Successes

HB37 (Low-income energy efficiency funding): This bill, led by SWEEP's Tammy Fiebelkorn and Rep. Kristina Ortez, will provide \$10 million in a pilot project to support energy-efficiency improvements for low-income New Mexicans' homes to save money and lower energy use. Sponsors also included Reps. Sariñana, Patricia Roybal Caballero and Luján and Sen. Stewart.

HJR1 (Reps. Chris Chandler, Allison, Luján, Serrato and Sweetser) will let voters decide on constitutional changes to allow the state government to directly

serve the utility needs of low-income New Mexicans without violating the anti-donation clause. These changes will facilitate the implementation of HB37, above.

HB164 (Uranium cleanup), sponsored by Sens. Jeff Steinborn and Shannon Pinto and Reps. Debra Sariñana, D. Wonda Johnson and Anthony Allison: This law will begin to address the 137 unclaimed uranium mines that continue to expose rural and Indigenous communities to toxic and radioactive pollution; HB164 creates a strategic cleanup plan and establishes an evolving fund to resource reclamation work. (Contact Susan Gordon of MASE for more info: sgordon@swuraniumimpacts.org)

HB 163 (solar tax credit): Rep. Joanne Ferrary and Sen. William Soules sponsored legislation to extend the solar rooftop tax credit, add more money to the fund and make the credit rebateable. This bill made it into the comprehensive tax package.

Hydrogen: A ferocious community effort stopped all hydrogen incentive bills, as well as the \$125 million earmarked in the budget for such projects. But we haven't seen the end of methane-fueled ("blue") hydrogen. See Page 3 for more.

Losses (next year's successes!)

The Clean Future Act (HB6), requiring 50% reduction in climate pollution economy-wide in New Mexico by 2030 and 90% by 2050, with a focus on prioritizing pollution reductions in and consultation with disproportionately impacted communities, died on the House floor, also a victim of timing and delay

tactics by Republicans. We all know that every year we wait to act on climate is a year too long, but the Energy Transition Act is already having a major beneficial impact on cleaning up our electrical sector. And in the lead-up to next year, several state rulemakings like Clean Cars will help clean up other industries as we plan for comprehensive legislation that slashes climate pollution across all economic sectors with a focus on equity, justice and a thriving economy.

The Clean Fuels Act (Speaker Egolf, Sen. Mimi Stewart, Rep. Nathan Small, Rep. Kristina Ortez, and Sen. Correa Hemphill), which introduced a method to ramp down carbon intensity of fuels and transition toward transportation electrification and less reliance on expensive and dirty fuels, died in a 3 a.m. tie vote in the House on the final morning of the session.

HB127 (No "temporary" high-level nuclear waste storage): Sen. Jeff Steinborn and Rep. Matthew McQueen worked hard for this legislation that would have helped prevent Holtec from building its proposed "temporary" storage site for all the nation's high-level nuclear waste (which would all be transported across the state by rail) in southeast New Mexico. Texas recently passed a similar law to block a nuclear storage facility there, so next year might not be too late to reintroduce this legislation to prohibit state permitting of such a facility.

HJR2, Green Amendment, failed in House Judiciary. It made it further than last year, and thanks to grassroots advocacy and a large coalition, it gained heightened attention.



Roxy's Law goes into effect

Mary Katherine Ray, Wildlife Chair

On April 1, fur trapping on New Mexico public lands ended forever thanks to the passage last year of Roxy's Law.

Though signed into law in early 2021, the law didn't take effect until now because the license year at NM Game and Fish runs from April 1 to March 31 and last year at this time, the bill had not yet been passed.

Strangely, this past winter, we received almost no reports from the public about trap incidents despite trapping still being legal. We can speculate and hope that low prices of fur may have contributed to fewer traps being set even without Roxy's Law.

The coyote fur market has markedly cooled. In recent years, the Canada Goose coat company, which uses coyote fur to trim its garments, has single-handedly kept the price high with its demand. But the company finally bowed to public pressure and stopped buying coyote fur this year. (It plans to use recycled fur or fur already in inventory going forward for now).

All of this goes to show that trapping is a business in which the public's wildlife is turned to private profit. It does not have any bearing on wildlife "management" needs. How the populations of trapped species fluctuate, especially now in our era of severe drought, is not monitored, nor is the effect that trapping might have on them. We do know that in places such as national parks, where trapping has been forbidden for many years, these animals are self-regulating and there has been no pressing need for such "management" or the random removal of animals like bobcats, foxes, ringtails and badgers through trapping.

Illegal traps will still be a possibility, but from now on, with a few exceptions, a trap on the National Forest, BLM or state trust land will not be lawful. If you find one, please don't take matters into your own hands. Contact law enforcement at the NM Game and Fish poaching hotline, 1-800-432-4263. That way penalties can be fully imposed if the trap was set illegally! Also, please report the incident to our TrapFree New Mexico coalition, trapfreenm.org/report-trap-incident/ so we can see that the legal obligations of Roxy's Law are met.

Starting now, traps will no longer be legal where the family dog can be caught and injured, the public will no longer be subjected to witnessing the suffering of injured and struggling wildlife, and non-target species like endangered wolves will also be spared. Enjoy our public lands going forward and enjoy the peace of mind that they are now trap-free.

NM finalizes oil & gas methane reductions

By Camilla Feibelman
Rio Grande Chapter director
The Environmental Improvement Board is finalizing oil and gas rules meant to cut smog and methane as this issue goes to press, but we already have some great news.

The EIB has adopted the Environment Department’s proposal for frequent, comprehensive leak inspections, including annual inspections at smaller well sites as well as inactive wells and standalone wellheads. Frequency of leak detection and

repair required for small wells (which have a high propensity to leak), is critical. These rules have been years in the making and, if strengthened in the ways that a coalition of environmental and community groups have proposed, could lead the nation in stemming this pollution that is so devastating to our health and climate. A new Stanford University study found staggering emissions rates in the Permian Basin, making more clear than ever that leak detection and repair must be required for all facilities big or small.

The EPA and BLM are also working on oil and gas methane safeguards that ideally would provide a floor for all extractive states to meet and exceed. A Louisiana federal district court recently ruled that a tool called the Social Cost of Carbon could not be used to build the case for these federal rules. But an appeals court overruled that decision pending a final ruling. Ideally, federal safeguards will include things like community reporting of violations and the banning of routine venting and flaring.

Oil & gas dependence
Numerous recent studies have demonstrated the economic toll oil and gas is taking on New Mexico and the investments and jobs that would develop from holding the industry to clean up abandoned wells. Learn more at riograndesierraclub.org or write to camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org to be added to our Climate Action listserv.



Photo courtesy Don Schreiber; map courtesy Dave Fosdeck

Oil and gas operators like BIYA often keep the status of abandoned wells as “shut in” or “temporarily abandoned” so they don’t have to pay to properly clean up the site. The BIYA well above has not produced oil in nine years. Below: Red dots are non-producing wells that have yet to be plugged and remediated.

Operators duck cleanup of abandoned, polluting wells

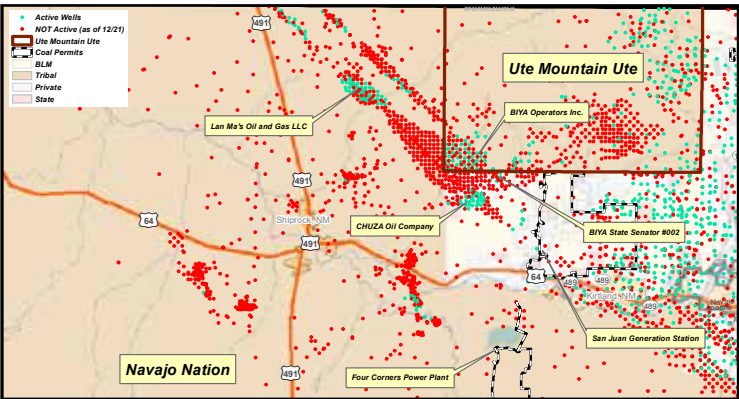
By Don Schreiber and Dave Fosdeck
When I first looked at the BIYA State Senate No. 2 well in San Juan County, I thought, “How can this happen?”

I was struck by the utter neglect of this old oil well in San Juan County, not far from the Four Corners Monument, the sacred Diné mountain we call Shiprock, and just below the famous Mesa Verde National Park. It seemed to be an ugly piece of vandalism in a place of grandeur and beauty, on lands of great cultural significance for indigenous people.

There was no evidence of maintenance, or any activity at the end of a near-impassable “road.” Completely antiquated equipment, including an unlined dirt waste pit on this well out here all alone, screamed orphaned well.

But a quick check of the New Mexico Oil Conservation Division’s website shows the well status as “active.” “Active?”

In the last 17 years, this well has produced exactly 101 barrels of oil, and exactly zero mcf of gas. In the last 10



years, six barrels of oil. In the last nine ... none. In 2016, OCD wrote the operator, BIYA, saying “If you consider the above-mentioned wells incapable of production in paying quantities, the subject leases will terminate and you should make plans to plug and abandon these wells.” Plugging the well was not in the operator’s plans, apparently. BLM, the administrator of this well’s minerals, lists the well status as “Oil Shut-In,” which is a term used for wells expected to go back into production. Regulations that govern orphaned wells have allowed operators to hide behind a welter of exceptions and extensions and run over state and federal agencies wholly

unequipped to force industry to uphold its end of the bargain. We are at great risk of missing the opportunity, both environmental and economic, to get wells like the BIYA State Senate No. 2 plugged, remediated and restored. And here’s the thing: this well is one of more than 800 similar wells all lying in the old Horseshoe Gallup field near Farmington. We’ve formed a team of experts, the Big BIYA Team, to help state and federal authorities find and classify these wells properly so we don’t miss out on the great economic boost that comes from properly plugging wells and stopping the damage to our soil, water and climate, so we begin to restore a place of beauty to its natural state.

Counties bow to (and pay) Texas group on land conservation

By Don Schreiber
President Biden’s 30x30 initiative and Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham’s enthusiastic support to protect and conserve 30 percent of New Mexico’s lands of enchantment represent the chance for our state to once again take a leading role in fighting climate change. It’s a chance for everyone, from individual landowners to Tribes to city and county governments, to protect and conserve the natural resources that make New Mexico so special and build our economy in diverse and lasting ways.

The federal 30x30 initiative, also called America the Beautiful, pursues the goal of conserving at least 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030 to meet the urgency of the climate crisis and the need to safeguard our drinking water, air, forests, ocean, wildlife and much more. Last year Gov. Lujan Grisham signed a supportive executive order to protect 30 percent of New Mexico’s lands, watersheds, wildlife, and natural heritage by 2030. The order creates a committee of agency officials to coordinate with citizen stakeholders to lay out a plan to achieve this conservation goal.

But right-wing groups, backed by dark money from fossil-fuel organizations like the Koch brothers, see 30x30 as a threat to the mining industry, to the oil and gas drilling industry, to the pipelines, compressor stations and processing plants that go with extracting and refining the substances that are destroying our home. American Stewards of Liberty and its CEO, Margaret Byfield, whose parents were part of the 1990s Sagebrush Rebellion that tried to take public lands for private ownership, have made an industry out of opposing 30x30 using anti-protection, anti-conservation resolutions at the county level throughout the West. And it’s lucrative to spread all that misinforma-

tion: New Mexico Wildlife Federation found last year that Chaves County alone has already paid \$185,000 to American Stewards of Liberty to “consult” on land management. Byfield made her anti-protection pitch to the San Juan County commission on March 1. Thankfully, Commissioner GloJean Todacheene insisted that the commission hear a presentation of the facts regarding 30x30. Speaking of extraction and development, Todacheene said, “What are we going to leave for [future generations] if we overdevelop the land?” So on March 15, Energy Minerals and Natural Resources Secretary Sarah Cottrell Propst and State Forester Laura McCarthy went through the realities of 30x30 for the commissioners, patiently and professionally dispelling Byfield’s fear-mongering — showing the positive vision of a program started by Senator Tom Udall and then-U.S. Rep. Deb Haaland, the true stewards of our Land of Enchantment.

Local land stewards Gwen Lachelt of Western Leaders Network and Joseph Hernandez of New Mexico Native Vote spoke in support of 30x30, and I was proud to add my voice. On April 5, the San Juan commission passed a resolution opposing America the Beautiful: “Until more information, specifically peer-reviewed scientific data, is produced that alleviates the Board’s concerns, it must oppose the 30x30 Initiatives.” Commissioner GloJean Todacheene was the dissenting vote, but the San Juan County resolution is relatively mild in comparison with the Texas group’s suggested language and other counties’ resolutions, a testament to community members’ organizing. Contact miya.king-flaherty@sierraclub.org to learn more and join local teams to protect our lands, waters and future.

Saving the historic plateau of the Caja Del Rio

By Teresa Seamster, Northern Group Conservation chair

The unique grasslands plateau of the Caja Del Rio does not conform to the typical mesa composition of forest-land, juniper shrub and sagebrush. The rolling grasslands provide habitat for peregrine falcon, Gunnison’s prairie dogs and burrowing owls, intermittent ponds produce scores of tiny frogs, and steep canyon walls provide eagles with breeding areas.

This is an ancient space of indigenous petroglyphs etched into basalt outcroppings and the migratory footprints of deer, cougar and bear crossing the plateau between the Santa Fe River to the east and the Rio Grande on the west.

Only 15 miles west of Santa Fe, the Caja Del Rio is a rugged volcanic

landscape, a remote setting with limited bumpy roads and nationally significant cultural sites of ancestral Pueblo homes, historic trails and intact remains of the El Camino Real de la Tierra Adentro.

These unique elements are what drove the Santa Fe National Forest to designate the area that runs down the middle of the 104,000-acre Caja Del Rio Plateau the “Caja Del Rio Wildlife and Cultural Interpretive Management Area.”

The “Supporting Preservation of the Caja Del Rio” Resolution by the All-Pueblo Council of Governors in 2021 states in part:

“The 20 Pueblo members of the All Pueblo Council of Governors recognizes the Caja Del Rio as a significant cultural landscape important to its

member Pueblos and urge the federal government that all federal management designations shall be subject to the direction and guidance of the Pueblos in accordance to the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples expressed Free, Prior and Informed Consent principle.”

In response to the resolution and public comments of support, the Santa Fe National Forest issued a revised forest plan with these proposed Desired Conditions for Caja Del Rio Wildlife and Cultural Interpretive Management Area:

1. The natural character of the Caja del Rio supports wildlife diversity and connectivity, and maintains the cultural and archeological integrity found there, while providing interpretive opportu-

nities for the public to learn and value these resources, in an area easily accessible to metropolitan Santa Fe.

2. The biological and cultural value of the area is recognized both internally and by the public.
3. Education and recreation opportunities exist for national historic trails that have local and national interest, including the Camino Real del Tierra Adentro and Route 66.
4. Existing utility line corridors will be maximized for additional utility line needs. New utility corridors and communication sites will not be allowed.

Many conservation organizations, including Sierra Club, are prioritizing the Caja Del Rio as an area for future wilderness or national monument designation.



Above: Foot traffic has existed in the Sombrillo for centuries. Below: A 300-foot monument rises from a deep canyon in the Sombrillo.

Splendor of Sombrillo at risk

By Teresa Seamster, Northern NM Conservation chair

The Nambe Badlands and Sombrillo Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) is a place of haunting antiquity and high-desert beauty north of Santa Fe. Pre-historic paleontological findings and cultural sites are densely packed in these foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, in addition to stunning monument formations of multicolored layers of volcanic ash and sedimentary soils.

As an ACEC, the Sombrillo has been identified by the Taos Bureau of Land Management as requiring special land protections due to “the quality, uniqueness, and significance of its natural and cultural resources.” Unfortunately, protections have been slow to come.

The building boom in Santa Fe County has led to increased pressure on the surrounding land and access to beautiful places where people want to hike, bike and ride. Mountain biking has increased exponentially in the past 10 years, and multiple biking sites tout “new trails in iconic landscapes” that encourage expanding networks of legal and illegally built trails.

While most mountain bikers show care and respect toward the environment and other trail users,



a trend toward downhill speed racing and extreme-incline biking is leading to rapid destruction and erosion of fragile slopes and ridgelines in the Sombrillo. Delicate trails used by walking travelers for years are being hammered by high-speed bike traffic that can include dozens of riders in a group.

The Northern New Mexico Group recently proposed a temporary closure of the Sombrillo ACEC on the west side of Highway 503 north of Nambé Pueblo until an assessment of cultural and geological resources can be completed. Many Chapter members contacted Taos BLM supporting this action.

Several approaches are being suggested that can protect the Sombrillo ACEC’s many fossil sites, indigenous petroglyphs, fragile cryptobiotic soil layer, and still allow access to the splendor of the landscape.

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More needed to truly ‘Honor Chaco’

By Miya King-Flaherty
Our Wild New Mexico

Now that the fight to protect Chaco Canyon from increased oil and gas drilling has the elevated attention of President Joe Biden and Interior Secretary Deb Halaand, efforts to advance a 20-year moratorium on new oil and gas leasing and drilling near Chaco Culture National Historical Park are underway.

The Bureau of Land Management initiated a 90-day public comment period on the proposed action, which would protect over 350,000 acres within a 10-mile radius of the park from new oil and gas development. In February, the agency held public meetings in Farmington and one online for the public to provide input on the 20-year “mineral withdrawal” (meaning minerals can’t be withdrawn).

The meetings were also meant to provide information on the “Honoring Chaco” initiative that Haaland announced in November that would include robust public engagement to inform a broader protection plan. But this process has yet to be defined.

Unfortunately, the public meetings didn’t offer meaningful public engagement or tribal collaboration. Instead, the agency changed the meeting’s format and held a question-and-answer session that had very limited interpretation services for attendees, many of whom were Diné (Navajo). When participants asked questions that incorporated culturally relevant information about the Greater Chaco landscape, agency officials simply told attendees to submit their concerns at the provided public comment stations and made no attempt to record anyone’s testimony. In response to community



You can submit a comment to demand that the BLM meaningfully engage with Tribal nations and impacted communities to protect Greater Chaco from drilling beyond a 10-mile radius. Go to bit.ly/3ikrNd8 or scan the QR code. Deadline May 6.

objections about this process, the BLM agreed to hold additional meetings to allow for public comment.

Tribal leaders, impacted community members, indigenous grassroots groups, and the Greater Chaco Coalition have long articulated concerns about legacy impacts in the area that the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Land Management are directly responsible for. These range from increased illness from pollution, poor air and water quality, unsafe road conditions and increased truck traffic, desecration of cultural sites, unregulated activities by oil and gas operators, and more.

It’s long past time to end sacrificing the Greater Chaco Landscape for energy extraction and for the agencies to prioritize the Biden administration’s commitment to strengthen tribal consultation and collaboration, prioritize environmental justice in its climate policies and combat the climate crisis.

While halting new development near Chaco National Park is a good first approach, any initiative that honors Chaco must put in place landscape-level safeguards to protect the cultural integrity of all Greater Chaco and its communities.

Primary Elections 2022

New Mexico House of Representatives



District 5: Rep. D. Wonda Johnson

Rep. Johnson has a terrific environmental voting record and is always thoughtful and responsive, listening to all sides but not afraid to take a hard vote. “We share the reverence to our lands, our relationships and connections since time immemorial. Protecting these lands is unequivocally a sacred trust to protect and preserve for all future generations,” she said.



District 12: Melissa Armijo

As a mother, Melissa Armijo knows that her children’s future depends on what we do right now. She has been a vocal advocate for clean energy and addressing climate change. As someone who has lived her entire life in the South Valley, she knows firsthand the impacts that environmental racism can have on a community. She emphasizes aggressive action on climate.



District 26: Eleanor Chavez

During her previous service in the Legislature from 2009 to 2012, Eleanor Chavez had a 100% environmental voting record. Eleanor is a labor and community activist, currently as executive director of National Union of Hospital and Healthcare Employees in NM. Among her many community roles, Eleanor is a member of the Board of Casa de Salud, a community healthcare clinic.



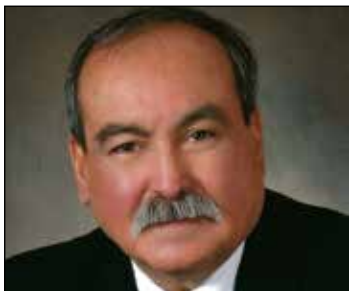
District 46: Rep. Andrea Romero

Rep. Romero has championed water conservation and protection, including using her discretionary money to fund the Water Data Act to modernize the state’s water management. She is among the best-prepared and knowledgeable members of the Legislature and helped to pass community solar, enabling communities to tap into New Mexico’s incredible solar potential.



District 29: Tara Jaramillo

Jaramillo is a speech language pathologist who co-founded Positive Outcomes, Inc., which provides healthcare and therapy services to children and families in central New Mexico. She is also a farmer in the Rio Grande Valley who has experienced the effects of climate change on her farm and believes we must urgently address the climate crisis.



District 39: Rudy Martinez

In his previous service in the Legislature, Rudy Martinez helped prevent the disastrous Gila River diversion project and supported keeping the Gila a wild, free-flowing river. He opposes the low-altitude military overflights that threaten the Gila Wilderness and pledges to work to secure federal Wild & Scenic River protections for segments of the Gila and San Francisco rivers. He believes a healthy environment leads to healthy communities.



District 41: Rep. Susan Herrera

Herrera, a consistent champion for environmental justice, cast the tie-breaking vote last year to pass Roxy’s Law outlawing trapping on public land. Wildlife chair Mary Katherine Ray notes that “Roxy, the dog killed by a snare, lived with her people in Rep. Herrera’s district, which made that vote all the more meaningful.” Without Rep. Herrera, our dogs would continue to be at risk of leghold traps, snares, and poisons on public lands.



District 42: Rep. Kristina Ortiz

Rep. Ortiz has dedicated her career to serving the environment, now as Taos Land Trust executive director. Most recently, Ortiz sponsored the CEED Act, which will fund energy-efficiency upgrades for low-income New Mexicans, reducing the energy cost burden on families as well as climate impact. She also championed the Sustainable Buildings Tax Credit and has been a cosponsor on an array of other climate legislation.



District 70: Anita Gonzales

Gonzales is a Rio Grande Chapter Executive Committee member. She works with NM MESA, a nonprofit pre-college program that empowers and motivates New Mexico’s culturally diverse students with science, technology, engineering, and math enrichment. She uses nature as a classroom, facilitating and participating in many environmental education programs. She also works to protect her community’s water as an acequia commissioner.

County commissions

Bernalillo County

District 1: Barbara Baca worked as Albuquerque’s Open Space Planner and headed Albuquerque’s Parks and Recreation Division. She worked with the Sierra Club and others on the Rio Grande Valley State Park Management Plan and the Northwest Mesa Escarpment Plan, which led to the establishment of Petroglyph National Monument. As a Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District board member, Baca has advocated for responsible water management and protection of endangered species.

District 5: With a science background and strong conservation ethic, **Eric Olivas** says he will advocate for use of the county’s bonding capacity to power all county buildings with renewable energy, install EV chargers at all county facilities, and electrify county buildings and the county’s vehicle fleet. He opposes sprawl developments that take resources away from built neighborhoods, and he supports changing building codes to phase out natural gas hookups.

Santa Fe County Commission

District 3: With an extensive background in community and academic level sustainability activities, **Camilla Bustamante** will work together with the city and pueblos on equal access to water, delivery of locally grown food, and emplacement of micro grids.

District 1: Justin Greene supports repairing city and county relationships, bringing back the Regional Planning Organization to plan shared issues — water, land use, energy, housing — in a cooperative fashion. He also favors metering water use as well as monitoring natural gas hookups for leakage.

Sandoval County

Commissioner Katherine Bruch (District 1) has been a key to playing defense on a difficult commission. She helped defeat an ordinance that would have opened the door to more fracking in Sandoval County and posed a serious risk to the aquifer for the entire region. She fought a resolution opposing the plan to preserve 30% of the country’s land by 2030.

See our website for additional endorsements: riograndesierraclub.org/elections

Bernalillo County Sheriff



John Allen is committed to bringing change to the Bernalillo County Sheriff’s Office and working transparently and collaboratively with other local law-enforcement agencies and the community to keep the public safe. Allen has

worked on the frontlines of law enforcement, as well as in supervisory roles at the Sheriff’s Department, and he serves as lead instructor at the CNM Law Enforcement Academy, where he trains officers for Albuquerque and other police departments around our state. He is committed reducing the carbon emissions of the sheriff’s department.

Bernalillo County Assessor

Damian Lara has a history of working on environmental-justice issues, and he pledges to bring that perspective to reducing the carbon emissions of the assessor’s office and ensuring that property tax assessments are fair and equitable.

Endorsement content authorized and paid for by The Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club Political Action Committee.



Attorney General: Raúl Torrez

Raúl Torrez camped and hiked frequently as a child and grew up instilled with a strong belief in the sanctity of our environment. As Bernalillo County District Attorney, he was the first prosecutor in the country to sue a right-wing militia to prevent them from policing our streets or intimidating people from exercising their free speech rights, and he prosecuted police brutality. He has emphasized the importance of protecting our most vulnerable populations who have suffered environmental injustices at the hands of polluters.

Sierra Club-endorsed candidate wins in Taos



New Taos Mayor Pascual Maestas campaigning with the Sierra Club New Mexico Group's Joe Wells.

By Shannon Romeling
In spite of being heavily outspent, the Sierra Club Northern New Mexico Group's endorsed candidate for Taos mayor, Pascual Maestas, was elected by a landslide margin.
Maestas' victory was a result of grassroots volunteer supporters and his ability to articulate his vision for a better future for Taos. Sierra Club's endorsement, including our volunteer power and communications to our more than 400 members in Taos, had a signif-

icant impact on the election.
Northern New Mexico Group Executive Committee member Shannon Romeling helped create a YouTube endorsement statement that was circulated by the Maestas campaign on social media.
Maestas supporters made Sierra Club endorsement signs and waved them at traffic in Taos main road. Individual members donated to the Maestas campaign and attended campaign events.
And with Maestas as the fifth council vote, the Taos Town Council has a progressive majority.

Water-sampling training
Please join the Water Sentinels Rios de Taos from 10am to 12pm May 14 for a free training on water-quality sampling at Fred Baca Park in Taos, under the pavilion. Learn how to sample surface water for basic parameters, the basics about water quality, how to become part of a citizen science team and how to start your own citizen science team. This training is funded by Amigos Bravos, the Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area, and the Sierra Club. Contact sromeling@amigosbravos.org or 575-758-3874.

What it's like going solar in 2022

By Carol Chamberland
Central NM Group
When I first checked out residential solar a decade ago, I gagged at the price tag and never looked back — until last year. The climate crisis is causing havoc around the world. Acknowledging my own contributions to our planetary woes, I recently took another look at solar, and I'm happy to report the price has plummeted. Below is a micro-summary of what I learned.

1. Solar panels are not all alike. They come in monocrystalline, polycrystalline and thin film. Efficiency ratings measure how well the panel converts sunlight into electricity. More efficiency, higher price, but you need fewer panels. The size of your roof matters, and how much power you use. See news.energysage.com/best-solar-panels-complete-ranking/
2. Inverters are not all alike. Solar panels generate electricity in direct current (DC), which needs conversion to alternating current (AC) for practical usage. There are string inverters (one does the job for multiple panels) and micro-inverters (each panel has its own inverter); each has pros and cons.
3. Warranties matter. There are product warranties and service warranties. What happens if a panel or inverter fails? Who does the haggling and how long before it's repaired or replaced? Annual maintenance should be included in the contract.
4. Installers: These are the folks who sell and install the panels. Are they local or national? How long have they been in business? Do they hire subcontractors or use their own employees? What kind of warranties do they offer? Whom do you call when there's a problem? I thought I could select a brand of panel and then choose a company for the project. Nope. Each installer specializes in their chosen brand of panel and inverter, so you pick the combination that works best for you.
5. Batteries. I wanted a battery so when my power goes out, I'd have a backup. But batteries are expensive and hard to obtain. If you'll be charging an electric vehicle, the extra cost of a battery makes sense. Legislation this year to give a tax credit for batteries didn't pass but is very much worth supporting for a reliable and sustainable grid in the future.
6. Designing the system. Your installer uses specialized software to



Solar costs have gone down more than 70% since 2011. Carol Chamberland's new system, left to right: micro-inverter control panel, R.E.C. meter, Photovoltaic system disconnect, home electrical panel and PNM meter.

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- determine the best spot on your roof and optimum angle of the panels. A few local companies have showrooms you can visit, but mostly they send a representative to your home to do the sales pitch.
7. Home assessment: After you hire an installer and pay a deposit, an engineer comes to make sure your house can structurally withstand solar panels. If your house fails, your deposit is refunded.
 8. Service Upgrade: If your electric

- service is old or incompatible, you'll need an electrician to upgrade your system, at an extra cost.
9. Inspections: The city must approve the service upgrade and the solar installation. Then PNM upgrades their equipment, followed by another inspection. Once approved, the meter is turned on.
 10. Monitoring. You can check your panels' daily production with an app.
 11. PNM co-generation. Per the PRC, the utility is required to offer co-generation services for up to 15% of their customers per substation. If your neighborhood is already saturated with solar, your application can be denied. See PNM's heat-map tool for details: The kWh your system generates are banked in your PNM account. This credit rolls over from year to year. Per my own usage and generating power, it will take about 13.5 years to recoup my upfront cost.
 12. Incentives: A gross-receipts-tax exemption meant I was not charged sales tax. The state tax credit is 10% of my costs, and the federal tax credit is 26%. The feds make it simple with a single line-item entry on your tax return. The state of New Mexico requires a multi-page application for a tax certificate, which is then used when filing your taxes. See www.emnrd.nm.gov/ecmd/tax-incentives/
Three months after filing my 23-page state application, it was rejected due to depleted state funds for 2021. Since I am not allowed to file again in 2022, I do not get a tax credit from New Mexico. Upfront grants would be more proactive to encourage solar. In 2022, the New Mexico credit was updated so that if your tax bill is smaller than your credit, you'll be given a rebate.



Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, right, visited both Castner Range and Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument, where she talked with Sierra Club's Antoinette Reyes.

Haaland visits El Paso's Castner Range

On March 26, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland visited Castner Range, where she was invited by local groups belonging to the Castner Range Coalition as we continue our 50-year campaign to permanently protect the site and advocate for its designation as a national monument.
“We are thrilled to see Secretary Haaland prioritize a visit to Castner Range and its hopeful designation as a national monument through the Antiquities Act — which would increase outdoor and recreational access to nearly 1 million people here in the greater El Paso metropolitan area,” said Laurence Gibson, the Rio Grande Chapter's El Paso Group chair.
“By designating this monument, we would not only honor Castner's 10,000-year archeological, geological, and cultural history, but also preserve this ecologically rich landscape that's home to an abundance of wildlife — a step in the right direction to meet the Biden administration's goal of protecting 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030,” Gibson said.
During her visit, Haaland hiked and heard from conservation groups about the importance of federal protections for the Castner Range.

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Clean and Green gets black and blue

Carol P. Chamberland
Central NM Zero Waste chair

With staggering disregard for logic, science and public opinion, Albuquerque's City Council voted to repeal its own Clean and Green Retail Ordinance, more commonly known as the ban on distribution of single-use plastic bags.

The embattled ordinance began in 2019 as a groundswell of public demand for action on plastic pollution. Enacted in January 2020, it was suspended months later when fears of Covid-19 infection deemed single-use bags to be safer. Medical research eventually proved this fear was unfounded, and the ordinance was reinstated in August 2021.

At implementation time, a definition was added stipulating bags over 2.25 mils were exempt. This allowed large retailers to distribute thicker bags in defiance of the intent of the ordinance. Public outcry forced the removal of the thickness loophole, and the more carefully defined ban went into effect in December.

The ordinance also mandated a study of the law's effects by the city's Solid Waste Management Department, to be concluded by June 30, 2022, when it would be passed to a select committee for further recommendation.

While the study was underway, Councilor Brooke Bassan introduced legislation to repeal the ban altogether, citing twisted claims of sanitary,

economic and social issues. Public outcry ensued, with Albuquerque residents emailing, calling and writing letters to the editor expressing their support for a plastic-bag-free Albuquerque.

Bassan's repeal proposal passed the Council's Finance Committee review in February and reached full Council consideration on March 7. Scheduled near the end of the evening's Zoom agenda, dozens of public commenters waited unseen for their turn to address the Council.

Due to the large number of speakers, they were restricted to one minute a piece. Director Matthew Whelan of Solid Waste was on hand to give a concise presentation of recycling facts

and the results of the study to date. Then the roll call of speakers began. For a full hour, 46 citizens urged a No vote on the repeal; only three spoke in favor of repeal.

Nevertheless, in the name of "freedom to choose," the repeal legislation passed 6-3. Mayor Keller vetoed the repeal, but at 11 p.m. April 4, the council voted 6-3 to override his veto. Once again, six councilors ignored numerous public comments in favor of the veto.

For the record, the regressives are: Councilors Bassan, Grout, Lewis, Jones, Peña, and Sanchez. Kudos to the Progressives, Councilors Benton, Davis and Fiebelkorn for stoutly defending Clean and Green. Plastic pollution is not going away — and neither are we.

Biking for short trips saves more than emissions

By Patrick Burton
Central NM Transportation chair

Carbon dioxide emissions get the lion's share of attention regarding pollution associated with transportation. This is not surprising, since transportation is the economic segment responsible for the largest portion of CO2 emissions.

Unfortunately, CO2 emissions aren't the only pollutant caused by vehicle use. Nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, unburned fuel (hydrocarbons), and soot are also emitted from the tailpipe. Fortunately, many of these emissions can be treated at the source, unlike CO2, which is emitted any time an engine is run.

Other pollutants from vehicle operation come from the vehicle itself. About 30% of the microplastics in the ocean are estimated to originate from tires. As the tire rolls over the road, pieces wear away and break off, forming microplastic. Similarly, friction on the brake pads wears the metal, generating dust.



Photo by David Bouquin

Laurie Zunner at the biking event that Sierra Club Central New Mexico Group held in March to introduce people to e-bikes and other biking info.

In order to bring a vehicle to a stop on demand, a lot of energy has to be redirected from the car's momentum.

High-strength materials, catalytic converters, and all of the technology in a car is necessary for safe operation.

However, consider how this high tech is put to use. According to the National Household Travel Survey, 46% of all trips are less than 3 miles. This is an ideal range for micromobility options. Bikes, e-bikes, and scooters can meet

many travel needs within this range without much difference in travel time.

The Central New Mexico Group recently hosted an information fair to educate the public about resources saved (energy, worn parts) and pollution avoided (CO2, smog, particulates) by biking for short trips. Free To Roam Ebiking conducted e-bike demonstrations along the Paseo de las Montañas Trail. Participants learned best practices and safe routes for navigating to destinations in their neighborhood.

Vehicle pollution is an inevitable side effect of starting and stopping a heavy piece of equipment. Short trips in a single-occupancy vehicle with frequent stop-and-go driving are the worst-case scenario for pollution of many types. Fortunately, short trips are also the easiest to substitute with a different mode of transportation.

For a more in-depth explanation of avoiding pollution by biking, please visit www.freetoroamebiking.com/blog.

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Sierra Club Recycling Conference

Jessie Emerson
Pajarito Group
Zero Waste Chair

I was inspired at the 2021 National Sierra Club USA Recycling Conference. The conference was an update on actions people are taking to reach the goal of Zero Waste and featured younger people from different cultures contributing to their communities, creating eco-businesses, and running People's Pantries.

Here are some key concepts:

1. Rethink and Redesign, the Ultimate Upstream Actions. Think—always think: “Do I really need this?” Re-learn biomimicry—that is how to live like waste-free nature. Move from a use-once-and-toss culture back to repair-and-reuse. Sustainable consumption means redesigning things for a longer “cradle-to-grave” lifecycle.
2. Infrastructure: Redesigning systems to fit both the circumstances and community creates not only a healthy environment, but healthy humans and jobs.

Infrastructure includes systems for expanded reuse, charging electric vehicles, water-use projects, and recycling.

3. Keep It Local
Neighborhood zoning needs to transform single-use suburban housing into mixed-use that includes neighborhood hubs with mom-and-pop businesses and cafes along with stations for both recycle and reuse, and maybe a neighborhood Zero Waste Park. All business/office space, medical services, large retail, any manufacturing would be at an eco-industrial park.
4. Youth. How impressive are this country's youth! Their ideas include:
Awarding grants to K-12 for waste-reduction projects; involving community colleges and universities to design schools free of plastics and nonessential/non-compostable, single-use items.
- b. Classes, programs, and zero-waste clubs featuring sustainability to help train youth for the green market.
- c. Green school events using

no single-use products; creating school policy pledging to eliminate single-use items.

- d. Zero food waste including keeping organic waste out of solid waste.
5. No Food Left Behind: One in six Americans goes to bed hungry, while 35% of food is wasted. Become aware of the local food-distribution networks including micro-solutions such as pop-up food pantries in accessible areas.
6. Tree Planting for Food: Many cities plant fruit trees primarily for their spring beauty; however, in fall, much of the fruit lies rotting on the ground. Gleaning groups can gather and donate the fruit. My idea goes further: teach people how to can and dry food for future use.

The 4 C's of Zero Waste

1. Common sense
2. Community, education, and involvement
3. Creativity, colorful, out of the box
4. Children, education, public service.

Outdoors

By Terry Owen
Chapter Outings chair

Tuesday, April 19: 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 or be a refresher for those whose skills have grown rusty. Participants must be prepared for varying weather conditions and bring an Aspen Basin Quad topographical map available at US Forest Service or US Geological Survey or at some outdoor stores, and a basic magnetic compass. No dogs, please. Children 14 and over with parent or legal guardian are welcome. Class size is limited to eight, so register early.

Trip leader: Sandra Corso, sandracorso@yahoo.com

Level: Easy

Location: Santa Fe

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

Friday, April 22: Chaco Canyon Earth Day Celebration. The Chaco Canyon Earth Day Hike will take place at Chaco Culture National Historical Park near Nageezi, NM. Participants will hike the Peñasco Blanco Trail, which is a 7.2-miles loop over packed dirt and sand with an elevation gain of 200 feet. The trail passes several ancestral Puebloan sites and petroglyph panels and has spectacular views of New Mexico's Northwest Plateau and the Four Corners. Chaco Canyon is in high desert surrounded by Mount Taylor to the south, the Jemez Mountains to the east, the Chuska Mountains to the west and the San Juan Mountains to the north. This Earth Day hike will reinforce participants' commitment to preserving and protecting this unique cultural and environmental area that is constantly being threatened by fossil-fuel extraction. Appropriate Covid-19 protocols will be observed. No dogs allowed. Children 16 and over accompanied by guardian are welcome. Sponsored by the Military Outdoors Program, and all are welcome.

Trip leader: Hart Pierce, 505-320-1055, shpierce@q.com

Level: Moderate

Location: Nageezi, NM

Sign up by April 15: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

Saturday, April 23: Earth Day 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

12 Rio Grande Sierran



Photo by Donna Maddux

Hikers on a January outing around White Rock rated "easy." Check out our hike ratings, locations and other info in the listings on this page.

Covid-19 precautions will be taken. Register by April 20.

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

Level: Moderate

Location: Albuquerque

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/

Wednesday, May 4: Valles Caldera Spring Fling. This season-opening hike in the Valles Caldera National Preserve (VCNP) will be a great one. We will hike the Redondo and Solitario Loops, 8.6-mile trail with an elevation gain of 1,305 feet. The hike will go through mixed conifer/aspen interspersed with meadows and some burned areas. We will encounter a few shallow streams that are easily crossed. Photo opportunities abound on this loop as we will have beautiful views of the Valle Grande, game trails with possible sightings of elk, as well as some spring wildflowers. Near the end of the loops we will pass through Historic Grove, the only stand of old-growth ponderosas in the Preserve, and we will be able to see several cabins that were built when the Preserve was privately owned and served as a ranch and movie set. The hike will take about five hours. Sponsored by the Military Outdoors Program and all are welcome.

Leader: Hart Pierce, shpierce@q.com

Level: Moderate

Location: Jemez, NM

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/

Friday, May 6: Las Conchas Trail Hike along the Jemez River East Fork. Meet at 9 a.m. at Home Depot in Bernalillo, 7700 Highway 550 at the northwest corner of the parking lot. Carpooling encouraged as there is limited parking at the trailhead on Highway 4. Recommended carpool driver donation is \$15. This seven-hour outing includes one hour

Northern NM Outings Meetup reaches 2,500 members

By John Buchser, Northern NM chair

The Northern Group outings Meetup site has reached 2,500 hikers! Check it out at www.meetup.com/Santa-Fe-Sierra-Club-Outings/.

Alan Shapiro has been sending out weekly emails to members for years, with upcoming hikes, trail conditions and photos of recent hikes. To subscribe to the listserv, send an email to listserv@lists.sierraclub.org with any subject and a message that says SUBSCRIBE RIO-NORTH-OUTINGS.

Our hikes have been a salve to so many as we emerge from isolation. It is a wonderful benchmark to have reached this many hikers and share the Club's enthusiasm, extending John Muir's passion for the outdoors to Santa Fe residents and visitors.

of driving each way from departure point, along the lovely winding mountain Highway 4 with a photo stop at the Gilman tunnels and waterfall. We will lunch after the hike at Los Ojos in Jemez Springs. This easy pine-forest hike alongside the mountain stream is about 3 miles round trip with 50 feet of elevation gain. Bring water and wear layers as temperatures can range from 40-70 degrees. This hike is appropriate for children over 12 accompanied by a legal guardian. No dogs. Register by May 1.

Leader: June Parsons, 832-723-4533, comicsilver@gmail.com

Level: Easy

Location: Jemez Mountains, North of Jemez Springs

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/

Thursday, May 12: Zero Waste Water Treatment Tour Part Two. Whether or not you joined us at the Water Treatment facility a few months ago, you'll probably enjoy this bosque outing. We'll have a guided tour of the water diversion and fish bypass plus the pump station. We'll learn how the ponds got there and something about those jetty jacks. That entails a mile or so of walking on dirt trails and lasts about an hour. If there is

interest, we'll follow up with a leisurely stroll through the bosque for a total of 2 to 3 miles. Maximum participants: 12.

Register by May 5: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/

Sunday, May 15: Bosque & Rio Grande Walk. We will start at the Rio Grande Nature Center parking lot at 10 a.m. for this easy one hour walk of about 1.5 miles. Enjoy the solitude of the cottonwoods along the Rio Grande and encounter ducks, geese, porcupines and other inhabitants of the bosque on this late-spring day. Children over 12 accompanied by parent or legal guardian are welcome. No dogs, please. Wear comfortable shoes, bring water and a snack. Register by May 12.

Leader: Candice, 505-514-9829

Level: Easy

Location: Albuquerque

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

Friday, June 24: Eye of the Sandias Loop. Let's go check out this quirky landmark in the southern Sandia foothills. This moderate-strenuous hike offers stunning city views. We'll take a four-mile loop with 1,300 feet of elevation changes on an unshaded rough and rocky

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 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.

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 indoors. Masks are also required at all times for ICO outings participants, and in some other cases where children are participating.

trail. It also includes some bouldering and a long, slow, steep incline to the highest point. No dogs please. Hiking poles may be useful to keep your balance. Appropriate COVID-19 precautions will be taken. Meet at 8 a.m. with an expected return of 12 p.m. Register by June 20.

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

Level: Moderate-strenuous

Location: Albuquerque

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

Saturday, July 9: Armijo Trail and Cienega Spring Trail Loop Hike. Come to admire the beautiful ponderosa pines and mountain wilderness that's right in our backyard. Suitable for children over 12 when accompanied by a guardian. Five miles round trip with 900 feet of elevation gain over about four hours. Dogs on leash OK. \$3 Forest Service fee cash or Cibola Wilderness pass or other federal parks pass is required. Sponsored by the Military Outdoors Program, and we welcome everyone. Limit: 10 people. RSVP by July 7.

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

Level: Moderate

Location: East Mountains of Albuquerque

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

April/May/June 2022