

# Rio Grande Sierran

Volume 60, Issue 3      News of the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter: New Mexico & West Texas      July / August / September 2022



Jennifer Esperanza for Positive Energy



Adobe



David Bouquin

## Connecting the dots


**Below:** Climate disruption caused by burning coal, gas, and oil is creating tinderbox conditions priming devastating wildfires like Hermits Peak-Calf Canyon. Read about how you can support recovery efforts (**Page 3**) and read on to learn what we are doing to create a safer, healthier climate.

**Above:** New Mexico is replacing gas and coal with solar (**Page 5**), adopting Clean Cars standards to make EVs easier to buy and reduce our dependence on expensive oil (**Page 7**); and making low- or no-pollution options like public buses and biking easier to adopt (**Page 8**).



Clockwise from top left: San Juan Generating Station by Mike Eisenfeld/San Juan Citizens Alliance; View of Hermits Peak fire from Holman Hill by David Cordova; Methane flare in San Juan Basin by Don Schreiber

### EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET

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1807 Second St., Unit 45  
Santa Fe, NM 87505

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Albuquerque, NM  
Permit No. 612

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#### Primary election results

The Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter's endorsed candidates went 15-for-19 in the June 7 primary. **Page 3.**

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County commission found federal agency ignored requirements set at last contract renewal. **Page 6**

#### Caja del Rio: 2 counties, 2 visions

Transmission lines, roads threaten ancient and iconic escarpment that defines the entry into Northern New Mexico. **Page 6.**

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# Community and hope are powerful tools

Summer is a time of fun and freedom. Work slows down. Kids are laughing outside. Water splashing, cooling the urgency of our daily lives. But between the war, the continuing pandemic, the murder of innocent people and children in stores and schools, the stark assessment of the January 6 attack on our democracy, crushing Supreme Court rulings and the fires that have brought the brutality of climate change so close to home, we can lose that sense of joy and even hope.

But in these dark times are also the inspiring stories of bravery, mutual



Camilla Feibelman  
Director's column

support, and the will to carry on toward a future full of love and care. I hope that you can find hope in the opportunities for action and community and the significant victories we share in this edition to strive together for the world we want to see.

Inspired by our Anita Gonzales, our board member, community leader and Las Vegas, NM, resident, the Rio Grande Chapter worked with our national Sierra Club to raise funds for the Las Vegas Community Foundation toward fire recovery. You can donate here to help: [sc.org/NMwildfire](https://sc.org/NMwildfire).

This will be a way of helping with people's immediate recovery needs, but much restoration work awaits, not to mention the urgent ongoing need for comprehensive climate legislation. Permian Basin oil extraction is pouring fuel into climate fires, and we've got to

take urgent action.

We've taken some good first steps. This May, the Environmental Improvement Board passed nation-leading Ozone Precursor Rules (Page 7) to go along with methane safeguards passed last year at the Oil Conservation Division. The same board also passed Clean Cars rules (Page 7) and later this year will pass a carbon standard on coal-fired power plants stemming from the Energy Transition Act (Page 5).

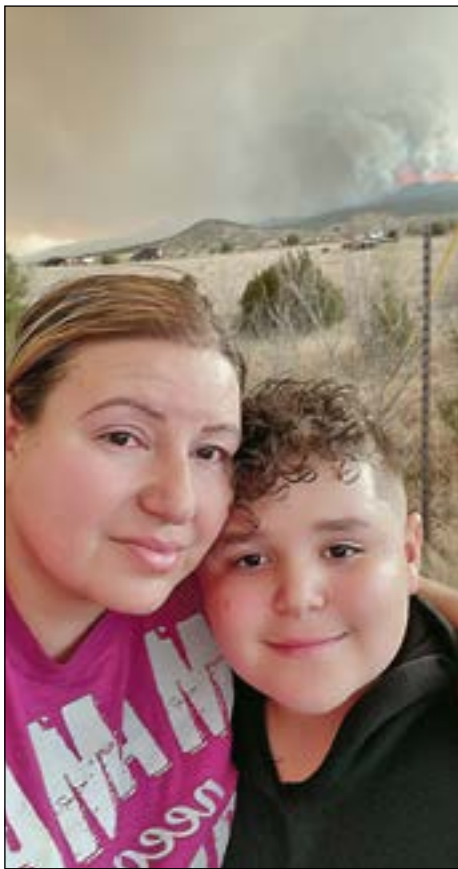
There's so much to do, but in your company and with your support we will find joy, take action and inspire hope.

# 'They say memories don't burn'

By Anita Gonzales  
Chapter Executive Committee

My name is Anita Gonzales and I live in Las Vegas, N.M., in San Miguel County. Las Vegas is a little town of 13,000 that lies along the Gallinas River in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

My family, like so many others, has lived here for generations, and my life is one of thousands that have been impacted by the Hermits Peak and Calf Canyon fires. San Miguel County borders Mora County and together, they form a centuries-old community that has existed since before New Mexico was a state. Our community is descended from Indigenous people who have lived in the area since before the United States existed. I can trace my family's history here back seven generations.



Anita Gonzales with her son, Curtis, at their home just before their first evacuation.

I consider myself one of the lucky ones in my community. Though my family had to evacuate, I'm back home, in the house my grandfather built. I write this with the purpose of lending my voice to others who may not have been so lucky.

When the fire started in Las Dispensas it was worrisome. It expanded quickly. After about two weeks, the fire had expanded to about 7,500 acres and was 91 percent contained. No major property damage had been reported and there seemed hope for recovery. But by April 23, the fire had grown to over 42,000 acres and everything magnified. Massive evacuation orders were released, and the fire was growing exponentially, burning tens of thousands of acres each day. Extreme heat, drought, and red flag wind days added to the severity of the fire as containment crews were unable to stop the massive beast that was destroying our community one village at a time.

Immediately, my little town of Las Vegas (and surrounding areas) jumped into action to support its neighbors. An evacuation center was started at the old Memorial Middle School building and became a safe haven to those that had nowhere to go.

I will never forget the first family I met at the evacuation site. They were

the fire had been on my mind for many days, once it was my turn, I wondered what was important enough to evacuate with. Family came over and together we ransacked my house, packing a suitcase for myself and for my son. When I was alone, the tears started to peek out. But I had to keep it together. My son was scared, and he needed comfort. Before driving away, we checked in with our neighbors to see their plans and lend help where needed. Then we took one last picture with the fire blazing in the background as an emotional goodbye, not sure what was to come.

After a shower and a night of rest, we were hoping to permanently be home, but we were evacuated again the morning of May 2. With the fire nearby in multiple directions and terrible air quality, we packed up to leave. We moved to Albuquerque for the week. That night was the first night in a few days without a smoke attack and a middle-of-the-night warning, and we had a somewhat restful sleep.

The time outside of Las Vegas was needed more than I realized. Emotionally and physically, I was tired. There is so much worry and heartbreak for those in the heart of the fire. I returned to Las Vegas on Mother's Day, happy to be in my home, though everything was still packed.

Life has slowly returned to a new "normal" for us here in Las Vegas. The guilt sets in as our return to "normal" has meant a crisis for others as the fire continues to spread. And what about those who had nothing to return to? How is that "normal"?

As people were able to return to their homes, there is a range of what they are coming home to. For some (like me), evacuation ended up being a precaution and we were only gone for a short time. I have a messy house that reeks like a bonfire and piles of items to put back. For others, they have been evacuated for weeks, their jobs and lives turned upside down as they sought long-term refuge elsewhere. Their freezers and refrigerators are full of rotten food and meat that will need to be dealt with. Their wells, pumps, and infrastructure

systems need to be fixed.

And then for others, the unimaginable. A return home to nothing but ash and molten rubble. Emotions are raw and different for everyone—optimism, empathy, heartbreak, guilt, denial, grief, sadness, depression.

As the fires rage on, we're losing generations of culture, generations of existence—people's herds, their crops, their ranching way of life is gone. People are returning to barren land to salvage. It will be hard, if not impossible, for many to rebuild. To date, more than 600 structures have been lost with many more unaccounted and over 15,000 households have been evacuated and counting.

The fires have also left environmental devastation in their wake. We're still dealing with terrible air quality and smoke. Parts of Santa Fe and Carson national forests are still closed. Water quality warnings have been issued to most of the affected areas, and many areas face new flooding threats. There's a huge loss of livestock, green space, and so much more. In many rural areas, we're looking at a huge loss of population along with a housing crisis, inadequate supplies to rebuild, and a reduced workforce. I can't help but wonder whether folks will ever return back to our area after being displaced. They say memories don't burn, but the things and places that trigger these memories do.

These wildfires are truly unprecedented. With each year that passes, fire season stretches earlier into the spring and later into the winter. As we experience the worst drought in at least 1,200 years, experts warn that more and worse are on the horizon unless we act to stem climate pollution. We must cultivate resilience as the climate crisis's impacts continue to grow. Our planet is hurting, and we must listen.

For now, I've been focused on relief. I'm working with local efforts with evacuation centers and supply centers. I urge you to please donate today at [sc.org/NMwildfire](https://sc.org/NMwildfire) to support organizations working with the people most affected—100% of your gift will support recovery efforts for our communities.

## Volunteer hero: Eleanor Eisenmenger

By Susan Martin and John Buchser

In each *Sierran*, we interview one of our terrific Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter volunteers. This issue, we feature Eleanor Eisenmenger, who has canvassed dozens of miles for our endorsed candidates.

Eleanor has shuttled many musicians from the Albuquerque airport to Santa Fe for classical performances. Her love of opera and music included sponsoring a modern classical music series at the Lensic, and she made it so affordable the entire community could enjoy it. She has been commissioning music by Black artists for years.

Eleanor also worked as a tour guide for a company in Kenya. She became a pilot in her 20s when she worked for British Overseas Airway Company. She has lived through coups and is unflappable.



the legislative sessions, and, for about the past five years, campaigning door to door.

**Why do you give your time to the environment and the Sierra Club?**

I have always been interested in the environment, in the USA and overseas (England, Germany and East Africa), where I spent many years.

**What's your favorite volunteering or environmental memory?**

### Volunteer with us!

A few of our many volunteer opportunities:

- Join our NMClimateCorps for biweekly opportunities for climate action.
- Help with data entry, social media or design graphics or maps.

Email us at [riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org).

Eleanor loves interacting with people. It is rare for anyone to turn down talking to this elegant woman walking the neighborhood with her canvassing companion, Tom Gorman.

She is intrepid and adventurous. We are fortunate to enjoy her company and her hours of volunteering.

**What is your role with the Rio Grande Chapter?**

I have been involved with the Sierra Club here, and previously in Western Massachusetts, for about 36 years.

**How did you get involved?**

When I moved here in 1994, after the death of my husband, I immediately became involved with the Sierra Club, first volunteering with the Club at

## GWE is growing!

By Genie Stevens

A recent Climate One podcast cited the book *Miseducation: How Climate Change is Taught in America* by Katie Worth. The premise is that the oil and gas industries maintain a strong influence on science and climate education in this country and, as many teachers are never trained in the subject, they often find a "green curriculum" online that is actually "greenwashing" offered up by the oil and gas industries. And, yes, the industries have infiltrated the education system in New Mexico.

The Sierra Club has a solution.

This year, The Global Warming Express (GWE) program celebrates a full decade of mentoring kids who go on to inspire others about the solutions to the climate crisis. For 10 years we have been bringing hands-on program mentoring through the entire school year to fourth- through sixth-graders in science, climate science, resilient solutions, arts, advocacy training and action. We even teach the kids how to research effectively to find the "real science" sources.

online curriculum app! Check out the trailer intro at [vimeo.com/700484673/](https://vimeo.com/700484673/).

The Global Warming Express was honored to be featured in an Earth Day broadcast of the radio program *The Children's Hour*, which is syndicated with over 200 radio stations. The program featured renowned climate scientist Dr. Michael Mann and his co-author Megan Herbert, as well as Kaia, a former GWE student in Albuquerque, and Marina, who wrote the book and started the Global Warming Express program. Go to [childrenshour.org/every-day-is-earth-day/](https://childrenshour.org/every-day-is-earth-day/) to hear the interview.

**We are recruiting volunteers in Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Las Cruces, Taos and Los Alamos** for our school programs in fall 2022. Successful applicants receive in-person training to be part of a two-person team for an after-school program at an elementary school near you. The sessions with the kids are fun, engaging and rewarding. No previous science or teaching experience is required, and mentors receive a small stipend.

Join us as we counter Big Oil's classroom influence, one GWE program at a time. To apply, contact Director of Climate Education Genie Stevens, [genie.stevens@sierraclub.org](mailto:genie.stevens@sierraclub.org). Learn. Dream. Do.



Photo taken by Christine Ceglia

## Christine Ceglia memorial fund

By Camilla Feibelman

Christina Ceglia, July 28, 1958–July 9, 2020, generously donated her estate to establish a Designated Legacy Fund for the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter.

This permanent endowment will support projects that

protect and preserve the natural environment and ecosystems of Northern New Mexico.

Donations can be made to this fund at: [www.taoscf.org/memorial](https://www.taoscf.org/memorial).

The Rio Grande Chapter would like to thank Christine and her family for entrusting us to carry out her legacy.

## Sierra Club goes 15-for-19 in N.M. primary

By Richard Barish  
Chapter Political chair

Candidates endorsed by the Rio Grande Chapter won big in the June 7 primary election. Fifteen of the 19 candidates we endorsed in contested races came out on top.

Once again, a conservative PAC spent big on the primary, seeking to change the balance of power in the state House by defeating some of the progressive Democrats who have been elected in recent years, in particular from Northern New Mexico. However, every progressive we endorsed who was targeted by that PAC won—including environmental champions Andrea Romero, Susan Herrera, and Kristina Orteiz. Eleanor Chavez and



Photo by Susan Martin

**Sierra Club volunteers Eleanor Eisenmenger and Tom Gorman canvassed for Anita Gonzales, right, who came within 77 votes of beating an incumbent despite focusing on fire relief for much of her campaign.**

Tara Jaramillo won races for open seats.

The Chapter Political Team drafted questionnaires and interviewed dozens of candidates; we got word of our endorsements out to our

35,000 members and supporters in New Mexico through the *Sierran*, emails and social media; and key to campaign success, we organized more than 50 volunteers to call and canvass for our candidates.

Results for all Sierra Club-endorsed contested races:

**US Congress**

House District 2: Gabe Vasquez **WON**

**Statewide races**

Attorney General: Raúl Torrez **WON**

**N.M. House of Representatives**

District 5: Rep. D. Wonda Johnson **WON**

District 12: Melissa Armijo **LOST**

District 26: Eleanor Chavez **WON**

District 29: Tara Jaramillo **WON**

District 39: Rudy Martinez **WON**

District 41: Rep. Susan Herrera **WON**

District 42: Rep. Kristina Orteiz **WON**

District 46: Rep. Andrea Romero **WON**

District 70: Anita Gonzales **LOST** by just 77 votes

**County Offices**

**Bernalillo County Commission**

District 1: Barbara Baca **WON**

District 5: Eric Olivas **WON**

Bernalillo County Sheriff: John Allen **WON**

Bernalillo County Assessor: Damian Lara **WON**

**Santa Fe County Commission**

District 3: Camilla Bustamante **WON**

District 1: Justin Greene **WON**

**Taos County Commission**

District 1: Susan Trujillo **LOST**

District 5: Cristobal Duran **LOST**

## Call for Executive Committee nominations

Want to get more engaged in saving the planet? Run for election to your local group or the chapter executive committee.

The Rio Grande Chapter is made up of five regional groups in New Mexico and West Texas. Each has an elected executive committee of volunteer leaders. Terms are three years for the Chapter and two years for the Groups.

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 Nominating Committee chair John Buchser at [jbuchser@comcast.net](mailto:jbuchser@comcast.net).



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**Pajarito Group**, 520 Navajo Road, Los Alamos, NM, 87544. Chair: Jody Benson, anteaterjb@gmail.com, 505-662-4782.  
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**Friends and Funds:** Chair: Carlos Trujillo  
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**Chaco Coalition:** Miya King-Flaherty, Teresa Seamster  
**Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy:** Karl

Braithwaite, Camilla Feibelman  
**Doña Ana County Coalition:** Howie Dash  
**Friends of the Rio Grande del Norte:** Eric Patterson  
**Otero Mesa Action Team:** Antoinette Reyes  
**Valles Caldera Coalition:** Teresa Seamster, Tom Ribe  
**Nuclear-waste storage:** John Buchser, Patricia Cardona  
**Chihuahuan Desert Border Coalition:** Antoinette Reyes, Kurt Anderson

### National Representatives

**Council of Club Leaders**  
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**Building Healthy Communities Team:** Ken Hughes  
**Sierra Club Wildlands and Wilderness BLM Subteam:** Miya King-Flaherty  
**Rio Grande Water Fund:** Teresa Seamster  
**National Water Sentinels:** Teresa Seamster, Shannon Romeling

### Join the Rio Grande Chapter

You can join the Rio Grande Sierra Club (including both the national Sierra Club and the local Rio Grande Chapter) **for only \$15!**  
**Online:** Go to [sc.org/joinNM](http://sc.org/joinNM)  
**With your phone:** Scan the QR code at right:  
**By mail:** Send a \$15 check with your name, address and phone number to  
Sierra Club, Attn: Member Services  
2101 Webster St., #1300,  
Oakland, CA 94612 (Please include the code F94QB17041 in the memo line of your check!)



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## Renewables and utilities

# PNM ordered to cut rates with coal exit

*PRC requires utility to credit customers and issue community funds as soon as San Juan plant closes*

By Mona Blaber

### Chapter communications director

The Public Regulation Commission voted 5-0 on June 29 that PNM violated the Energy Transition Act. The Commission agreed with environmental and consumer groups that PNM should not keep charging customers for San Juan Generating Station expenses long after the plant is closed. The commission also required PNM to issue the community and worker funding that would be generated by the Energy Transition

bonds as soon as the coal plant closes.

“The ruling means the average PNM customer will see a savings of more than \$8 per month, and hundreds of dollars over the next 18 months,” said Ona Porter of Prosperity Works, which advocates on behalf of low-income consumers.

PNM planned to charge customers for coal expenses after it exits the plant in September, which would have resulted in over \$125 million in double collections from PNM ratepayers. The company is appealing the decision.

PNM revealed earlier this year that it would delay issuing ETA bonds until after it filed its next rate case. The low-interest ETA bonds dramatically lower customer payments for stranded

San Juan Generating Station expenses and were meant to be issued when the utility exits San Juan. Instead, PNM planned to keep charging customers for as long as 18 months afterward, until after its next rate case.

The charges would include operations and maintenance costs that the utility was no longer paying, as well as a rate of return that PNM collects.

The savings from the bonds' lower interest rates (compared to the 10% rate of return customers are currently paying to PNM) will also provide \$40 million in funding for impacted communities and workers.

Dozens of New Mexicans, including many from the impacted Four Corners area, offered public testimony last

month urging transition, immediate rate credits reflecting the savings of removing coal from PNM's portfolio, and immediate investment of ETA transition funds for the community and plant and mine workers.

“The Energy Transition Act's intent is carried out by the decision today. For those having a hard time paying their energy bills, relief is coming,” said Stephanie Dzur, an attorney representing the Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy.

“PNM wanted to continue to charge New Mexicans for a coal plant the utility will be closing, hiding the benefits of switching from coal to cleaner sources of energy,” said Cara Lynch, attorney for CCAE and Prosperity Works.

## Summer conservation tips

Strategic and timely power use can keep the lights on and save money and energy while protecting the grid from climate-fueled heat strain.

- ✳ **Conserve energy between 4 and 8 p.m., when demand is peaking.**
- ✳ **Draw blinds or drapes during the sunniest part of the day.**
- ✳ **Avoid using the stove and oven during the hottest part of the day.**
- ✳ **Do laundry and run dishwasher after 7 p.m. or in the early morning.**
- ✳ **Wash laundry in cold water. About 90% of the energy used by washers goes to water heating.**
- ✳ **Sign up for service notifications from your utility to be aware of when conservation is most valuable.**
- ✳ **Ceiling fans allow you to raise your thermostat about 4 degrees.**
- ✳ **In summer, fans should turn counterclockwise, pushing air downward, making the home feel cooler.**

# Flex your power to avoid summer blackouts

By Mona Blaber

### Chapter communications director

Our existing power grid is a marvel of engineering, but it was not built with the realities of climate change in mind. Our failure to rapidly reduce fossil-fuel pollution is driving new pressures and threats to the electricity system, including wildfires and extreme weather.

In New Mexico, the aging San Juan Generating Station coal plant has long been scheduled to close this year. PNM and other owners decided to extend the operation of one of the San Juan units through the summer due to a confluence of crises, including the COVID pandemic, supply-chain delays, and the increased likelihood of extreme heat due to climate change.

In addition, a U.S. Commerce Department investigation on solar tariffs brought many of the nation's solar projects to a halt this spring.

The Biden administration in June issued a two-year waiver on solar tariffs, but the months-long standstill means some facilities meant for New Mexico customers will be delayed.

To avoid future catastrophic events that compromise our grid, we must eliminate the planet-heating emissions of coal, oil and gas power. Utilities must also invest in better planning, strengthening energy-efficiency programs,

improving customer communication and time-of-use programs that incentivize electricity use at non-peak times.

But we as customers have a significant impact on grid strain, and taking some simple steps such as changing the time we wash our clothes can save energy and help avoid blackouts and brownouts during extreme weather events.

Check to see if you can sign up for service notifications from your utility so you can be aware of when conservation is most valuable.

PNM has info on rebates for energy-efficient appliances, home energy checkups, income-qualified kits with free light bulbs and energy-saving power strips and other programs at [pnm.com/save-money-and-energy](http://pnm.com/save-money-and-energy).

The Public Regulation Commission features links to other energy-saving programs, rebates and tips from PNM, El Paso Electric and SPS at [www.nm-prc.org/utilities/energy-efficiency/](http://www.nm-prc.org/utilities/energy-efficiency/)

Follow your electric utility on social media and watch for conservation notices, then respond by lowering your consumption when requested.

As always, encouraging utilities and policymakers to act on climate change is critical, but you can make a difference right now to protect the grid, burn fewer fossil fuels and save some cash.

# Coal plant's future may hinge on rule

By Mona Blaber

### Chapter communications

In addition to requiring utilities to provide more renewable energy to New Mexico customers, the 2019 Energy Transition Act set emissions standards for New Mexico coal plants, no matter where they sell their power.

The law primarily applies to coal-fired San Juan Generating Station, which PNM plans to abandon this summer. While PNM plans to close the aging plant, the city of Farmington, a 5% owner, intends to take over full ownership and sell it to Enchant, which in turn proposes to run it as a carbon-capture coal plant. The company is far behind on

both financing and permitting (and every commercial carbon-capture coal plant in the U.S. has failed), but executives suggested they could simply run the remaining unit as is and buy time for the carbon-capture conversion if the state measures emissions on a three-year rolling average.

The state has now proposed a rule to implement the Energy Transition Act's emissions limits, including a 12-month average. The Sierra Club has submitted comments, joined by numerous allied groups, advocating for improvements to the draft rule, including a 30-day average for compliance that would prevent San Juan from continuing to pollute at current levels.

## Solar shines in Santa Fe

By Neal Denton  
Santa Fe Sustainability officer

(Originally printed in The Santa Fe New Mexican)

Imagine a world where every homeowner can afford rooftop solar regardless of their income. With the recent success of the Solarize Santa Fe program, the city of Santa Fe is making that world a reality.

Solarize Santa Fe is a solar bulk-purchasing program designed to help Santa Feans save money. Think of it as buying at wholesale prices – the more people who sign up, the more everyone saves on solar power together.

The pilot program, which ran from September 2021 to March 2022, has received a Climate Protection Award from the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

In 2018, Santa Fe adopted a goal to reach carbon neutrality by 2040. That transition is not an easy one, and as we make changes to the way we produce

power, build buildings and get around, we must ensure those changes are equitable.

The City and its partners, Sierra Club and Coalition of Sustainable Communities, carefully selected a featured solar installer through a process that offers discounted prices for this program. The team also encouraged local credit unions to create solar loans with lower interest rates. As a result, most Solarize Santa Fe participants saw immediate energy savings, with no up-front cost. To help reach homeowners who could benefit, the Solarize team partnered with Santa Fe Public Schools for the outreach campaign. As a result, 39 more homes have solar energy.

To build on that success, the Santa Fe Governing Body has approved \$500,000 to scale up the program. Be on the lookout for news about the re-launch of the Solarize Santa Fe program later this year and the launch of the Santa Fe Clean Energy Fund in 2023.

### ‘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*.



# Caja del Rio: caught between 2 visions

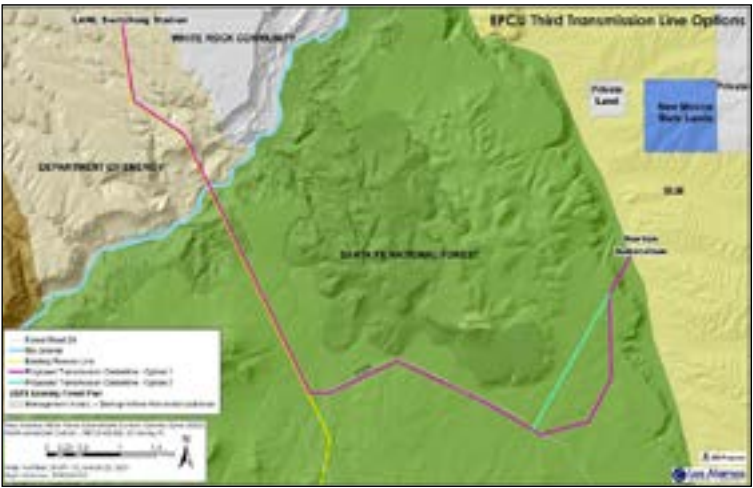
By Teresa Seamster,  
Northern NM Group

Santa Fe County passed a resolution in May calling the Caja del Rio plateau “one of the most remarkable natural landscapes in the American Southwest ... critical for sustaining Santa Fe County’s rich and diverse cultures, traditions, heritage... inhabited by Native and Indigenous communities since time immemorial... (and) contains a dense concentration of thousands of sacred sites, petroglyphs, irrigation systems, and other cultural resources.”

This 106,880 acres of public lands also contains two vital watersheds — Santa Fe River Canyon and the Rio Grande corridor from Buckman down to Cochiti Lake. This is an ancient and iconic escarpment that defines the entry into Northern New Mexico.

With a different vision, the Los Alamos National Lab estimates Los Alamos County needs 3,200 new homes in the next five years to accommodate a new mission and thousands of new employees to manufacture plutonium pits for nuclear warheads.

Redija Canyon, currently zoned a recreational open



Potential transmission routes through Caja del Rio.

space, is now under consideration for housing development. The Pajarito Mountain condo development plan is currently not approved but the extreme housing shortage in Los Alamos is causing local residents and employees to voice their concerns that the environment is “taking a real hit” and “no one has been taking notice.”

LANL is proposing a shortcut for pit-production workers commuting from Rio Rancho to Los Alamos on I-25, cutting across the plateau over proposed wilderness in the Caja del Rio. This proposed highway would require a new bridge to cross the Rio Grande north of

Frijoles Canyon. Also being proposed is the new Electrical Power Capacity Upgrade, a 115-kilovolt transmission line sited along 12.5 miles on the Caja plateau from the Norton substation, around the base of the Ortiz Mountains, and across the Rio Grande south of White Rock. A draft Environmental Assessment is in preparation and public comment will be available.

Various development proposals have been vetted before without success, but currently there is \$13 billion in the federal defense budget for massive new housing and transportation infrastructure to bring people

to Los Alamos. The likelihood of significant changes on the Caja del Rio landscape and in Santa Fe’s already red-hot housing market is high, unless less destructive routes are found or the current lab mission is continued without the massive expansion into pit production.

The alternate pit producer at Savannah River in South Carolina is already prepared to build the entire national inventory of required pits. The inclusion of LANL as a secondary pit location has been highly controversial due to the high costs of retrofitting such a remote location and trying to develop a large workforce willing to commute.

While the state welcomes the added revenue from the Lab, the cost of losing these irreplaceable lands to development can be far greater. In 2010, *New York Times* reporter Henry Shukman, traveling up La Bajada Hill to see the Caja plateau for the first time, wrote:

*“It is still one of those approaches, those arrivals, that seems mythical, impossibly grand... a place that could change not only one’s external life but also one’s inner, spiritual life. You will never be the same again.”*

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# Grant County may end wildlife-killing contract

## Center for Biological Diversity

SILVER CITY, N.M. — Grant County commissioners voted 2-1 against renewing a contract with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Wildlife Services program last in June because the federal agency, which kills carnivores on behalf of the livestock industry, ignored requirements within its last contract.

“USDA’s unwillingness to stay within guardrails that were locally crafted and designed to protect our cherished wildlife should disqualify them from getting one more penny,” said Grant County resident Michael Robinson, a senior conservation advocate at the Center for Biological Diversity. “I hope more counties will follow suit and kick out these rule-breaking federal trappers and poisoners.”

In a 2020 compromise with residents who opposed the program’s ongoing slaughter of wildlife, commissioners approved a contract with Wildlife Services and renewed that contract unchanged in 2021. It provided \$25,000 of federal grazing fee funds to match \$57,159 in federal appropriations but required the agency to “prioritize nonlethal methods” of livestock protection. Yet, in a final quarterly report belatedly released before last week’s vote, and previous reports, the agency did not document any instances of nonlethal protection.

“This rogue agency ignored its pledge to reform its practices so as to take less of a toll on wildlife,” said Silver City resident Glenn Griffin. “Money for killing coyotes, mountain lions and bears would be better spent on county road maintenance.”

nance.”

“Again and again we see Wildlife Services prioritize killing native animals rather than trying long-term, cost-effective, nonlethal coexistence practices,” said Chris Smith, southwest wildlife advocate for WildEarth Guardians. “It seems like every year they disrespect the Grant County Commission by failing to transparently and thoroughly report on what the commission has contracted them to do.”

The livestock industry and Wildlife Services are expected to seek a re-vote in the county commission, with the inclusion of two commissioners who were absent from the vote in June.

“Killing wildlife to address conflict with humans as the misnamed Wildlife Services agency appears to prioritize, does not address the root cause of the conflict,” said Mary Katherine Ray, Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter Wildlife chair. “Instead, this killing just perpetuates more and more conflict which results in more and more wildlife death not only squandering county funds but also harming nature.”

“We applaud the Grant County Board of Commissioners for staying true to their commitment to prioritize nonlethal methods of wildlife management,” said Nina Eydelman, chief program and policy officer for wildlife with Animal Protection New Mexico. “The county is rightfully holding USDA Wildlife Services accountable when they repeatedly disregarded this contract provision by using cruel and indiscriminate poisons instead of nonlethal means.”

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## Oil and gas pollution

# NM Gas agrees to nix hydrogen pilot

By Mona Blaber

Consumers will see a much lower rate increase and won’t have to pay for a proposed hydrogen-blending pilot project after consumer and environmental groups signed a settlement with New Mexico Gas in May.

Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy, Western Resource Advocates, New Energy Economy, the New Mexico attorney general and other intervenors reached the agreement with New Mexico Gas Co. on its rate case, which had included plans to charge customers for a pilot to blend hydrogen into its gas supply and for compressed-

natural-gas fueling stations. The settlement included agreements that:

■ NM Gas will not provide any customers a blend of hydrogen and natural gas without seeking the PRC’s approval in a future case;

■ The utility will share testing results of a pilot it is conducting to study the impacts and potential hazards of hydrogen on household appliances, and that shareholders, not ratepayers, will pay for that pilot;

■ NM Gas will analyze electric options when the company purchases passenger vehicles and trucks and to “show a preference” for electric passenger vehicles and trucks when feasible;

■ NM Gas will end an offer to finance, construct, and operate compressed-gas fueling stations for customers on the customers’ property; and

■ The utility will analyze the feasibility of electrifying some or all of the company’s compressor stations.

Although not included in the settlement, the utility agreed to work with CCAE, WRA, NEE and others on a legislative proposal to enable reduced utility rates for lower-income New Mexicans.

The settlement goes to the PRC to approve.

“New Mexico Gas originally requested millions of dollars to test a blend of hydrogen and methane on a section

of the company’s system that serves hundreds of customers. But the company has not even completed its initial tests of the safety and air-quality impact of running appliances on a hydrogen blend in a laboratory setting,” said Sara Gersen, a senior attorney at Earthjustice who represents CCAE in the case. “The company agreed to conduct additional analysis before using hydrogen in its distribution system. Without the distraction of this hydrogen pilot project, New Mexico’s leaders should tackle climate and air pollution by helping customers upgrade to zero-emission electric appliances and quit burning fossil fuels in their homes and businesses.”

# New Mexico leads the way on methane

By Camilla Feibelman

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham’s administration has followed through on her commitment to enact nation-leading oil and gas pollution rules.

This exciting progress in New Mexico, the nation’s No. 2 oil producer, could help achieve our nationwide goal of a 65% reduction of methane emissions by 2025. In April, conservation, public health and community leaders from across New Mexico applauded the Environmental Improvement Board’s preliminary approval of final ozone precursor regulations for oil and gas production and processing, addressing equipment leaks and malfunctions that account for 70% of the industry’s methane emissions. These rules are complementary to those passed last year at the Oil Conservation Division, banning routine venting and flaring, and with those previous rules set a strong basis for forthcoming federal rules.

The State Ozone Precursor rules require oil and gas operators to inspect all wells for leaks on a frequent basis without exemptions and protect those living closest to oil and gas by requiring more frequent inspections to find and fix leaks in proximity to homes and schools. The rules also include key improvements supported by public health advocates, communities and even OXY USA Inc., the state’s second-largest oil producer.

These improvements will deliver the strongest possible protections – especially for frontline communities living closest to well sites.

These rules hold oil and gas operators accountable for their pollution, limit waste, protect public health and combat climate change.

## Next steps: EPA methane safeguards

In addition to strong enforcement of the state protections, we need the federal government to follow New Mexico’s lead, banning routine venting and flaring and requiring frequent leak detection and repair on all facilities and wells with leak prone equipment.

It will take both state and federal action to effectively reduce methane waste and pollution in the U.S. This is especially true in the Permian Basin, where the lack of rules in Texas leave communities in New Mexico at risk from regional ozone pollution. New Mexico cannot go it alone on climate action.

With the state being devastated by a historic fire season and extreme drought, it is more important than ever that we take strong action now to address methane waste and pollution. As a powerful short-lived climate pollutant, cutting methane is the quickest way to slow global warming. Action to cut methane will also reduce pollution that harms respiratory health.

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# Cycling, one pedal at a time

By Patrick Burton  
Central NM Transportation chair

As gas prices continue to rise, the cost savings of biking become more apparent.

In fact, some e-bikes can be purchased for the equivalent of about five trips to the gas station to fill up a pickup truck. Trek, an e-bike company, determined that their manufacturing emissions are offset after using one of its products to replace 430 miles of car travel. Cost and emissions savings add up quickly!

If your regular route isn't easily bikable, don't assume that biking won't work at all. A vicious cycle keeps people from biking: There aren't enough safe streets for people to ride on, so they

drive more, inducing demand for more streets, which don't have safety features because there aren't enough people riding bikes. Help break the pattern by biking somewhere, anywhere you are comfortable doing so. Ride to complete a nearby errand, or if you don't have any nearby errands, explore your neighborhood and find a new favorite. Make your patronage by bike noticeable to the business and other customers too!

Of course, not all destinations are within easy range of a relaxed bike ride (about 3 miles, or about 6 miles on an e-bike). Fortunately, Albuquerque has extended the Zero Fares pilot for another year! A bus and a bike are a great way to extend the reach of low-carbon transportation. Each bus has bumper-mounted racks, or inte-

rior racks on the ART routes. Internal racks would be nice, of course, but as an alternative, scooters and folding bikes are a great last-mile option and compact enough to carry on board.

Micromobility options such as scooters, folding bikes, and other one-person transporters are also a way to offset some car travel. Try combining errands by parking in a central location and biking to each place on your weekend to-do list.

Low-carbon, active transportation unfortunately isn't the easy default option it should be. Don't give up — find safe options that work for you, and keep asking your municipal planners for improvements.

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Photos courtesy ABQ Ride

**ABQ Ride unveiled five electric buses in June — all sporting wrappers designed by school kids. Albuquerque has extended free public transit through June 2023.**

# Zero Fares extended

By Luis Guerrero,  
Legislative and Political Organizer

On May 16, the Albuquerque City Council voted 7-2 (with councilors Grout and Lewis opposed) on a budget that includes \$1.5 million to keep city public transit free through June 2023.

Even the councilors who were initially hesitant in their support of the program, called Zero Fares, did not alter it in any of the amendments.

Many groups and passionate individuals, including members of our Rio Grande Chapter Central New Mexico Group, called, emailed and spoke with their Councilors and Mayor Tim Keller to ensure this program stayed in the budget.

The program reduces the use of single-passenger vehicles and makes it easier and less costly for Albuquerque residents to get to school, work and other destinations. The Zero Fares program

is about equity (people most impacted getting what they need) and racial justice (addressing historic injustice and disparities based on ethnicity and race) solutions.

NM Voices for Children reports that area nonprofits and other organizations could save as much as \$1.6 million over the next three fiscal years that previously went to purchasing bus passes.

These savings may now be reinvested into client services.

Zero Fares has a profound positive impact on the health and wellbeing of people in Albuquerque. Until the pilot program began in January, fares were the greatest barrier for Burqueños to ride the bus. Funding Zero Fares removed this barrier, so all Albuquerque residents have reliable, no-cost transportation connecting them to school, work, recreation, healthcare and food sources.

of its drinking water to avoid depleting the aquifer. However, the recent persistent drought has led once again to an increased use of groundwater.  
In June we toured the ReStore, a thrift store for Albuquerque Habitat for Humanity. Unlike other thrift stores, donations here are mostly house-related. They accept furnishings, light fixtures, appliances, building supplies, toilets, power tools and swamp

coolers in good working order. Sales raise funds for building Habitat for Humanity homes, which are constructed with brand-new materials.  
We plan to visit a house-raising site and a dedication ceremony for a finished house soon. Check the Outings section for upcoming Zero Waste Tours and the events calendar online for the latest updates on tours.

# The perils of plastic and what we can do

By Carol Chamberland Zero Waste Central New Mexico

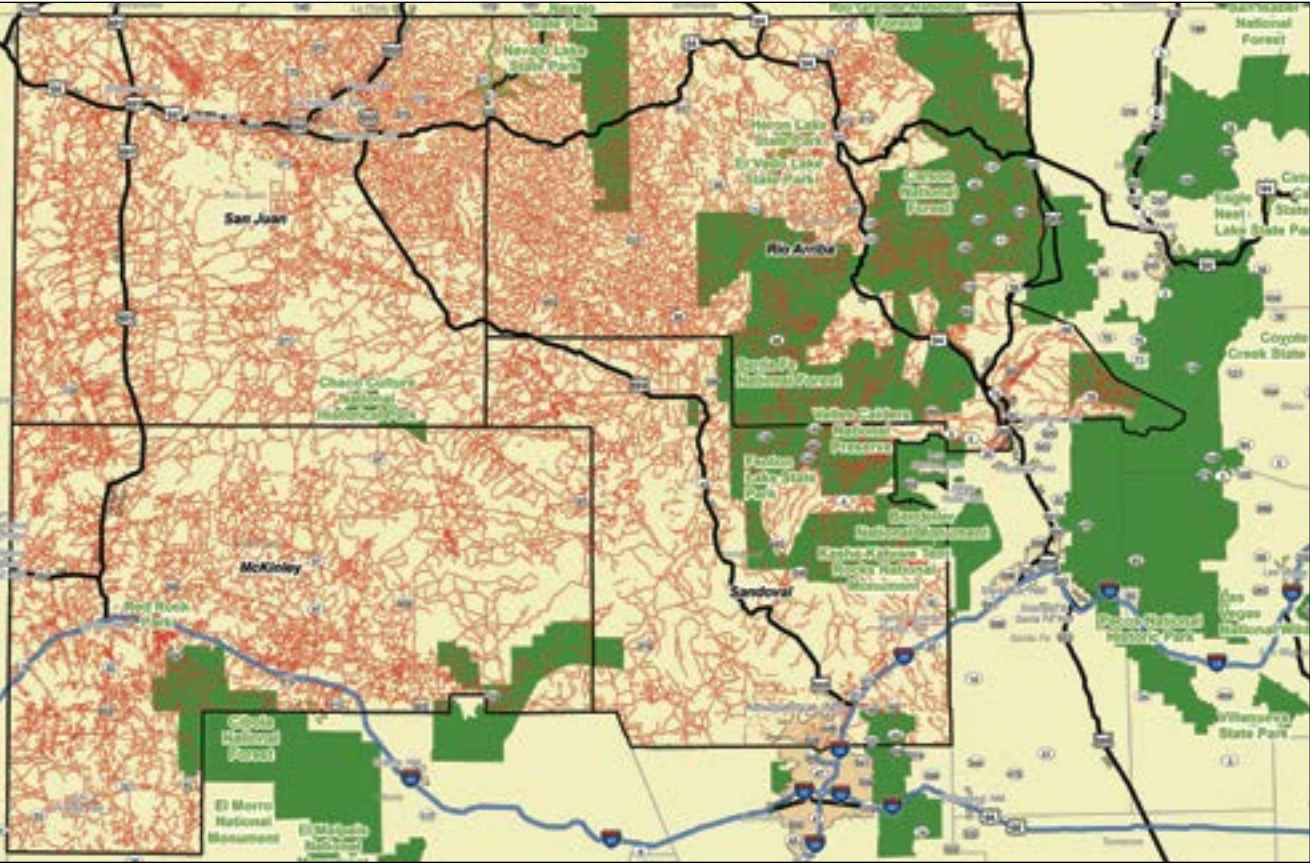
For seven weeks this spring, I attended an online course on plastic pollution taught by Judith Enck, former EPA administrator during the Obama years.

- Here are some key points:
- Since 1950, 9 billion tons of plastic have been produced, half of that in the last 19 years. Less than 5% has been recycled.
  - The United States is the largest generator of plastic solid waste, by mass and per capita.
  - 99% of plastics are produced from chemicals sourced from fossil fuels.

- Recycling was introduced in the 1970s by the plastics industry to shift responsibility for the alarming growth of solid waste onto the consumer.
- Plastic additives are used to add color and flexibility. These toxins leach into food and make recycling virtually impossible.
- Only 1 and 2 plastics are readily recycled — and those are downcycled into lesser-quality products, not new 1 and 2 plastic items.
- With the rise in renewables and decline in demand for fossil fuels, the industry is shifting to plastic production to remain lucrative.
- The petrochemical industry strives to expand plastic production globally. They push back on plastic bans, showing up in small communities and foreign

- countries to oppose restrictions on plastic.
- The industry now promotes “chemical recycling,” a method to create new fossil fuel by heating plastic waste at very high temperatures. The process has a massive carbon footprint and is not actually considered recycling.
- Most fossil-fuel extraction and processing happen in less affluent communities where above-average rates of cancer and other illnesses occur.
- Many countries around the world, eight states and dozens of cities have enacted plastic ordinances of varying stringency.
- The Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act, introduced in 2020 by Sen. Tom Udall and Rep. Alan Lowenthal, would shift responsibility for plastic waste onto manufacturers by creating a nationwide container refund program, mandating a pause on construction of new plastic production plants and eliminating certain single-use plastic products.
- Extended Producer Responsibility bills are being introduced around the country to require that manufacturers cover the cost of recycling, among other measures.
- Five ways to minimize plastic pollution: drink tap water, buy food in glass or foil containers, eat fresh foods. Don't assume your impact is limited to what you do in your personal life — work with your community. And vote.

## Land, water and climate



Map by David Fosdeck

**Unpaved roads in four New Mexico oil and gas counties are visible in red above. More leasing means increased health issues associated with extraction, including dust from more unpaved roads leading to drilling sites.**

# Oil, gas auctions continue

By Miya King-Flaherty

Record high temperatures in the Southwest, a wave of extreme climate disasters plaguing the nation, and an unprecedented drought season not experienced in New Mexico in over 1,200 years are realities we'll continue to face more and more if we continue to rely on fossil-fuel extraction as a primary energy source.

More oil and gas leasing on public lands will further exacerbate these impacts. But after a brief pause on the latest round of federal oil and gas leasing, the Biden administration announced in April that the Bureau of Land Management would resume leasing for the June 2022 lease sale. Originally, the BLM nominated over 646 parcels covering more than 740,000 acres for the sale throughout 10 states, but after incorporating some federal reforms included in the Department of the Interior's review of the oil and gas leasing program, the BLM significantly scaled back the acreage to 173 parcels over about 140,000 acres in 8 states, including 5 parcels in southeastern New Mexico's Permian Basin.

The agency also incorporated

**In May, the Sierra Club collected and submitted 4,500 protests opposing the latest lease sale.**

reforms such as raising the royalty rate operators must pay from 12.5% to 18.75%, analyzing the social cost of greenhouse-gas emissions in its Environmental Assessment, deferring parcels in critical habitat areas, and excluding lands that have a low potential for producing oil and gas, many of which are reforms we have advocated for. We hope the administration will make these reforms permanent and also raise the minimum bond amount operators pay to a sufficient level to cover reclamation and cleanup of orphaned or abandoned wells should a company go bankrupt. For too long, oil and gas operators have been allowed to abuse the system at taxpayer expense without paying their fair share or cleaning up their mess.

Despite these reforms, we continue to call for an end to oil

and gas leasing on public lands. More leasing and fracking means more frequent and extreme natural disasters and increased public health problems associated with the harmful effects of extraction.

In May, the Rio Grande Chapter and our National team collected and submitted 4,500 protests opposing the latest lease sale. Thank you for continuing to speak out. The protests were submitted to the Bureau of Land Management in all eight states that held lease sales: Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota and Oklahoma. Sierra Club supporters nationwide have spoken up. It's up to the Biden administration to listen and put an end to leasing once and for all.

It's long past time for our federal government to phase out oil and gas fracking and to prioritize our climate, environment, and public health above a profiteering industry that got us into the climate crisis in the first place. It's also critical to end leasing on public lands if the Biden administration is to meet its climate goals. We'll keep you posted on upcoming actions.

# SWIMing in the sand: water and climate

by Jerry Kurtyka, El Paso Group

American humorist Will Rogers once quipped that “The Rio Grande is the only river I ever saw that needed irrigation.”

Mostly, he was right, as the river didn't have water in it until late spring. And it is a short irrigation season this year as the Elephant Butte Reservoir continues at low levels in this extended period of drought.

With all the factors that determine river flow and aquifer levels in the Mesilla and Hueco bolsons — snowpack in the southern Rockies; rainfall and runoff; irrigation for agriculture; urban and business consumption; water management policies; climate change; evaporation; technology

— the Middle Rio Grande is the classic “wicked problem” where everything is connected to everything.  
It was to address policy decisions under varying conditions of climate and water use that a team of UTEP scholars and technologists created SWIM, or Sustainable Water through Integrated Modeling. The challenge was one of engaging stakeholders using a modeling approach. These broadly include cities, farmers, scientists, students, researchers, water managers, and activists. And that is where I got involved as a water activist.

SWIM is an easy-to-use graphical web-based interface for modeling water policy options under different climate

scenarios. The study area covers the Rio Grande from the gauging station at San Marcial, NM, to the gauging station at Fort Quitman, TX. SWIM comprises a Water Balance model and a hydroeconomic model that combines crop prices with overall optimization features. SWIM is easy for nontechnical users to learn.

If there is interest, I will conduct workshops for Sierra Club members to learn how to SWIM and to consider how we can collaborate as stakeholders. Contact me at jerrykurtyka@gmail.com or 915-526-6297. In the meantime, SWIM is accessible with lots of tutorials at swim.cybershare.utep.edu/en/home

So, log on and make a splash!

# Valencia opens door to fracking

By Amber Jeansonne,  
Valencia Water Watchers

What if the Valencia County Commission held a public hearing but forgot to inform the public? And the one person they did invite was the Albuquerque oil man who helped them write the ordinance and would benefit from the ordinance?

That's what happened in May, when the Valencia County Commission approved an ordinance that makes it easier and cheaper to drill for oil and gas in a 3-1 vote with virtually no public input.

The “natural resource overlay zone” ordinance came after New Mexico oilman and billionaire Harvey Yates Jr. approached the council a year ago about plans to do exploratory drilling in Valencia County.

Valencia Water Watchers organized community members to show up and speak out at the county's June 1 meeting. After dozens of residents turned out and many spoke up against the ordinance, and dozens of residents submitted written comments (all opposed to the ordinance), the county commission voted to hold a special public hearing on this issue on July 14.

Valencia Water Watchers has found that the new code is lacking many of the safety requirements included in the county's Mineral Resource District and Solar Field Overlay Zone ordinances.

The continuous aquifer that runs underground from Cochiti Pueblo to Belen is riddled with fractures. If a drilling operation hits one of these faults, the aquifer — our water — could be contaminated and become unusable. Oil and gas drilling comes with many other issues, including increased traffic, noise, odors, contamination of the air we breathe, degradation of roads, risks of explosions and oil spills and fields of abandoned wells.

The Mineral Resource District zoning code is much more comprehensive but also has some flaws. We recommend that the commissioners schedule a review of the MRD language and that a Citizens Review Board be established that holds the commission accountable and represents the stakeholders and their voices and concerns.

Please attend the July 14 meeting and let the Valencia County Commission know that oil and gas production and fracking does not belong in the Albuquerque Basin, where the risk of contaminating water runs so high.

**Meeting:** 5 p.m. July 14 at the Los Lunas Transportation Department, 101 Courthouse Rd, Los Lunas, NM 87031. If you can not attend, please send comments to: Lichelle.Armstrong@co.valencia.nm.us and copy Nancy.Gonzales@co.valencia.nm.us.

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Below is a full-page ad originally run in the ‘Navajo Times’ by Do-oda Helium Mother Earth Protectors, T’iis Názbas and Tsé’ahnáozt’i’i as part of their campaign to stop a Navajo Oil and Gas proposal for expanded helium extraction on Navajo Nation.

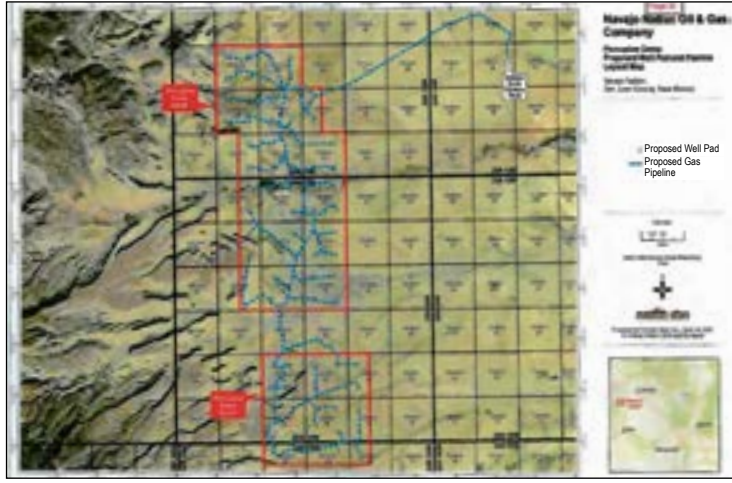
# What They Didn’t Tell You

At the April 3rd Teec Nos Pos (T’iis Nazbas) meeting, Mr. Lennard Eltsosie, Director Chairman for Navajo Nation Oil and Gas Company said “Helium ba’át’e’ adin” and translated as “Helium does not contain anything harmful, bad or dangerous.”

Mr. Eltsosie completely missed the mark because he failed to tell the elders and community that helium is also described as “Łeetsó Dít Dzid” or “decayed uranium” that has a life-long detrimental impacts on the environment and health as water, land, and air for current and future generations.

As an added blatant insult, Mr. Eltsosie boldly compared helium extraction to humanitarian and heroic deeds of the Navajo Code Talkers, who provided an unbreakable code during World War II. The Navajo Code Talkers did not carry out their duties to gain monetary wealth, nor did they fight in a war only to return to see their homeland’s natural resources plundered and destroyed. They protected their homeland as a refuge, not for many to be displaced for resource extraction and be relocated. It is absolutely appalling and wholly deceptive for the NNOGC to equate themselves to true Diné warriors who fought for freedom from oppression. As a get-rich-quick scheme, NNOGC wants to extract helium solely for profit and to secure their ability to proceed, they dangle false promises to community and chapter-elected people, provide an incomplete scope of work, fail to discuss consequential impacts, and collude with Navajo Nation government (aka, Navajo) elected people.

Historically, colonists’ incessant need to dig up, siphon out, and crack open for “progress” more than understanding and protecting resources to the unhealthy human



Navajo Nation Oil and Gas

## Tsé’ahnáozt’i’i (Sanostee), NM

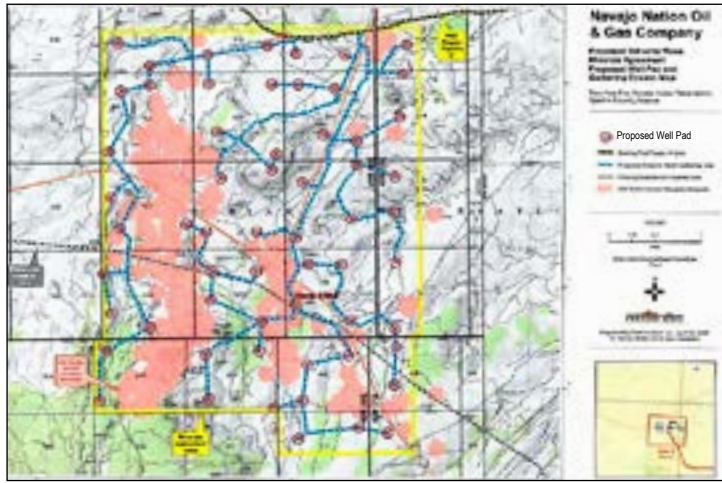
conditions. Navajo provided energy and natural resources to the southwestern states and federal government.

For over a century of extortion and exploitation on the Nohookáá’ Diyin Diné’é and resources, the gains only enriched companies and federal entities while leaving a continuous path of environmental harms. These extractions primarily benefit the wealthier, whiter, and affluent off-reservation towns and cities, while the economic conditions for Nohookáá’ Diyin Diné’é remains in a disadvantaged, static and impoverished desolate state. The reflection of 100 years of extractive industries has consequences resulting in local and global impacts on our health, society, culture, and environment, as evident by ecological collapse, biodiversity loss, and atmospheric changes.

Now, NNOGC attempts to coerce the people of T’iis Názbas, Littlewater, Tsé’ahnáozt’i’i (Sanostee), and Nahat’á Dził (Sanders) to allow helium extraction. Such threats are a violation of regulations that protect people from unduly aggressive behavior and adverse impacts. Helium has been extracted in New Mexico since 1943, and after a brief lull in the production in the late 1990s, it recently picked

up due to market forces.

Navajo Nation government (Navajo Nation), including chapter-elected people, are content to be in NNOGC’s back pockets while effectively creating discord and dissent within the local communities that they supposedly represent. The Navajo Nation should not venture into helium, hydrogen, and other fossil fuel-related endeavors as solutions. Navajo Nation failed to foresee that reliance on fossil fuel extractions would create budgetary shortfalls, such as the closures of Navajo Generating Station and Peabody Coal Mine. Navajo needs to pursue diverse sustainable, environmental-friendly economic alternatives as solutions, and stop all fossil fuel mining and extraction, perpetuating narratives to communities that such extraction as the only source of economic prosperity, while withholding the truth that these are detrimental to people’s health and habitat. If we, Nohookáá’ Diyin Diné’é, give in to these types of terminal economic undertakings, we will risk our land becoming uninhabitable. If we, Nahookáá’ Diyin Diné’é, can no longer sustain ourselves from the land, breathe the air, or drink the water, leaving our land will become our only option. We, Nohookáá’ Diyin Diné’é,



Navajo Nation Oil and Gas

## T’iis Názbas (Teec Nos Pos), AZ

cannot let that happen. We do not want our land to become a barren wasteland. We want to keep our traditional songs, prayers, offerings, and mountain bundles.

In Mr. Eltsosie’s op-ed in the Navajo Times, he characterized community members and families for keeping helium in the ground as “various groups” and “these groups,” as though they are external and heterogeneous of the greater Diné population. He doesn’t acknowledge that the Nohookáá’ Diyin Diné’é speaking against helium are also from T’iis Názbas, Littlewater, Tsé’ahnáozt’i’i, Nahat’á Dził, and other areas. Most are a network of people who organized for Dooda Helium Extraction. With their diverse traditional and contemporary education and experiences, the people speak as one voice and one message, nłichi’ tikoní ászóóli éi dooda (no helium). Some Nahookáá’ Diyin Diné’é read the 800+ page legislation and what they discovered are noted below:

1. NNOGC’s proposed operating agreements established royalty rates not only for helium, but also for oil, gas, natural gas liquids, argon, and other gas production. Thus, this project includes further fossil fuel extraction.
2. To capture helium, drilling deeper than a mile

below the Earth’s surface is necessary.

There will be enormous stress and pressure within each layer. These multiple factors apply to the dependence of strain, sound velocity, stress wave attenuation, and fracture behavior. This will create a cascade effect of disruption and intermingling above and below ground; also, any seismic activity such as tremors and earthquakes that could increase in frequency and severity due to drilling.

3. Mr. Eltsosie states that “helium is thousands of feet below the earth’s surface. The water at this depth is not safe to drink as it has high concentrations of salt and other dissolved solids.” His statement does not justify the community’s concerns about their water sources, located in shallow aquifers. It presents a more severe concern because the drilling bypasses the geologic layers that hold the excellent water. They proposed drilling deeper, passing through layers of rock that may have arsenic, uranium, and other hazardous material. These concerns would make anyone nervous and simply does not make sense. Such as the proposed 63+ wells within 10,187.88 square miles of the community, which is the whole community of Tecspos, AZ, as illustrated in the maps above.

# Los Alamos Lab should bury power lines

By Jody Benson  
Pajarito Group

At about 45,605 acres — one of the “smaller” burns this season — fighting the Cerro Pelado Fire has, as of May 29, cost about \$40 million. That \$40 million, however, doesn’t include LANL’s ongoing operations to mitigate risks to power lines.

During Cerro Pelado, LANL/Triad commenced emergency operations to mitigate wildfire risk by cutting all trees and shrubs around LANL power lines. NEPA allows a 25-foot clearance around distribution lines. Understandably, leaning or dead trees that fall outside the 25-foot clearance but still pose a risk should be removed. LANL, however, removed many large, straight, mature ponderosas outside the easement. The Pajarito Group sent a letter to Director Thom Mason requesting an accounting of how this tree removal was covered by LANL’s existing NEPA.

Despite 20 years of drought and the wildfires near LANL property, LANL continues to erect new overhead power lines in heavily forested areas when underground options would be more safe and secure. For example, in one area, a new segment was added several years ago that “threaded the needle” between many mature ponderosas. Now LANL has targeted these large pines for removal.

In Los Alamos Canyon, LANL main-

**Pajarito Group contacts**

riograndesierraclub.org/pajarito

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Tom Ribe, tribe@swadventures.com

Treasurer: Mark Jones, 505/662-9443

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

Global Warming: Charles Keller,  
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tains a live overhead power line in a heavily forested area in the north-facing canyon bottom. This line has caused at least three ignitions. Trees 100 feet or more upslope from this line could be removed because of the possibility of their falling on the line.

In Lower Water Canyon, previously

forested with old-growth timber, LANL built new overhead segments that could’ve been trenched from State Route 4 and undergrounded on the existing access road. As in all areas “behind the fence,” we don’t know how many trees were removed or how many additional “hazard” trees LANL will

## Outings, from Page 12

find the oaks at Mesa Verde dressed out in autumn array of reds, golds, yellows and rusts. The weather should be mild. Participants are responsible for their own food and lodging. Camping in Mesa Verde is available at Morefield Campground. Lodging in the park is available at Far View Lodge. Camping and lodging outside the park can be secured in Cortez, Mancos or Durango, CO. Limit 13 participants, 18 and older. No dogs please. Sponsored by the Military Outdoors Program and all are welcome. Sign up by Sept. 21.

**Leader:** Hart Pierce, 505-320-1055, shpiece@q.com

**Level:** Moderate-Strenuous  
Location: Mesa Verde, CO

**Sign up:** www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

**Saturday, Oct 1: Bike to the Balloon Fiesta.** 5:45 a.m.-10 a.m. Want to experience the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta morning mass ascension but don’t want the hassle of fighting traffic? Join us for your own dawn patrol bike ride to Balloon Fiesta Park. We’ll meet near Rio Grande Nature Center State Park and ride along the bosque to the park, leave our bikes with the bike valet and enjoy the show. Return via the bosque on both paved and single-track trails. Multispeed mountain or gravel bikes or e-bikes with wider tires and tire sealant highly recommended. Helmet, gloves, headlamp and/or bike light required. Add lots of lights and colors to increase the fun and visibility quotient. Riders must have the ability to average 10-12 mph and stay with the group. Children 14 and over with parent or legal guardian are welcome. Ten miles round trip; 50 feet of elevation change. Sponsored by the Sierra Club Military Outdoors Program, and

## COVID-19 precautions

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.

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.

everyone is welcome. Register by Sept 27.

**Leader:** Terry Owen, teowen@comcast.net

**Level:** Moderate

**Location:** Albuquerque

**Sign up:** www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

**Friday, Oct 7: Las Conchas Trail Hike along the Jemez River East Fork.** 9 a.m.-4 p.m. 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 trail head on Highway 4. Recommended carpool driver donation is \$15. This outing includes one hour of driving each way from departure point, along the lovely winding mountain Highway 4 with a photo stop at the Gilman tunnels and waterfall. Then we will lunch together after the hike at Los

remove.

We asked LANL: Why weren’t power lines undergrounded on all new segments? With LANL’s annual operating budget nearing \$4 billion, why is the Lab not undergrounding utilities across the site?

Forestry management at LANL is a critical part of environmental stewardship on behalf of the public and Pueblos with ancestral ties to this land. We all expect a strong forestry program that manages not only wildfire risk but also forest health. Undergrounding power lines may cost more today but will save millions as the Earth continues to burn.

## Decision Time for the Pajarito Group

As a Pajarito Group member, you will receive an email asking whether you would like to remain the separate Pajarito Group or rejoin the Northern Group from whence we separated in about 1998 as we focused on LANL issues and the Valles Caldera. Please respond to the stay-or-rejoin poll, and also to the questionnaire about your Sierra Club interests. So much is happening environmentally and politically. Please let us know how you want to join together to “explore, enjoy, and protect the planet.” If you do not have email or would like to discuss issues, please contact a member of the Executive Committee (see Contacts box).

Ojos in Jemez Springs. This easy pine forest hike alongside the mountain stream is approximately 3 miles round trip with 50 feet of elevation gain. Join us for a dose of nature and camaraderie. Bring your own water, and wear outer layers as the mountain air may be chilly. Appropriate for children over 12 accompanied by a parent or legal guardian. No dogs. Register by Oct. 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

**Saturday-Sunday, Dec 3-4: Lightweight backpacking.** If you’ve mastered basic skills traveling in the backcountry lightweight-style, this trip is right for you. Meet at Winsor Trailhead and travel to Puerto Nambé area to spend the night. Sunday we do an Alpine-style ascent to Santa Fe Baldy to watch the sunrise. Return to the trailhead after we refuel and pack. Please sign up only if you feel comfortable and fit to carry a backpack more than 4 miles with elevation gain, summit the mountain and backpack back to the trailhead. 13.5 miles roundtrip with 3,500 feet of elevation gain. We’ll go over map and compass navigation, gear selection, Leave No Trace principles, self-care, off trail hiking, outdoor cooking and a few basic mountaineering skills. No dogs, please. Limit six participants, so register early and by Nov. 22.

**Leader:** Sandra Corso, sandra-corso@yahoo.com;

**Level:** Moderate-strenuous

**Location:** Santa Fe

**Sign up:** www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

The Navajo and Federal governments are required to protect our water. Water, the main ingredient of life, is already inadequately protected and lacks regulations and high standards for consumption. We are in a 1,200-year megadrought. Everyone’s priority should be protecting our future water use, not industrial wasteful uses. As any mined element, helium is non-renewable and unsustainable for long-term security supply chains, because it lacks efficient recycling. Studies show that the present helium recycling rate is minimal, causing helium squandering toward single use and driving prices up. The higher costs and return on investment will never equate to long-term economic benefits, plus there will be irreversible damages to the pristine aquifers and ecological systems. Losing an aquifer has no price tag.

## A Call to Action

Today, people from T’iis Názbas, Littlewater, Tsé’ahnáozt’i’i, Bitł’ááh Bito’ (Beclabito), To’koi, Red Valley, T’áá Błíich’íldii (Aneth), and Nahat’á Dził communities are under assault from helium extraction. We hope the rest of our Navajo kinship will never find their communities under similar serious threats from extractive industries, but if we continue to allow these practices, then it is likely all our people will one day be in this position. It may not be in 10 years or even in this lifetime; however, if the world continues to consume mindlessly and greedily, and the Navajo government continues to think the only solution is the extraction of fossil fuels, we will eventually succumb to a legacy of non-enforced environmental impact policies. We sound the alarm and call to action all Nohookáá’ Diyin Diné’é, Haatabii, and current and future Navajo leaders to be courageous and stand up for the people and our indigenous ecological systems. To rise and stand against Navajo government and entities’ pressures, and to get credible and reliable third-party research so leaders can make better decisions. We need protection of our people who are threatened or silenced when simply questioning the oppressive acts. We need elected people to operate an ethical and fair government, not the “dog and pony shows” we have witnessed at recent chapter and council meetings defending their monetary self-interests. Decades of fossil fuel extractions have only benefited the mining or extraction companies with multibillion-dollar profits while our precious natural resources have been depleted to benefit cities and towns hundreds of miles away from our poverty-stricken Navajo reservation. We, as Mother Earth Protectors against helium and other exploitative extraction, say “No more to being designated as a ‘National Sacrifice Zone’! No more environmental racial injustice! No more fossil fuels and mineral extractions!” Our Mother Earth needs healing to restore Hozho’. To donate, go to tonizhoniani.org/donate — please note “helium” on the donation.



# Hikes and outings

**Saturday, July 16: Yoga in The Mountains.** Come celebrate the day with us. Meet at the trailhead at 10 a.m. If you'd like to explore nature, hiking and outdoor yoga in the company of really nice people, this is the hike! We'll embark on an easy 2.5-mile hike that incorporates a one-hour outdoor yoga and mindfulness break midway. Includes 200 feet of elevation gain and amazing views of the mountains. Sponsored by the Sierra Club Military Outdoors Program, and everyone is welcome. Limited to 15 participants, and children over 12 are welcome when accompanied by parent or legal guardian. A \$5 cash donation for the instructor would be appreciated. Appropriate Covid-19 protocols will be observed. Good dogs are permitted. Register by July 9 at [www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/](http://www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/)

**Leader:** Mary Froment, [mcmfroment@gmail.com/](mailto:mcmfroment@gmail.com/) Terry Owen, [teowen@comcast.net](mailto:teowen@comcast.net)

**Level:** Easy

**Location:** East Mountains of Albuquerque

**Saturday, July 23: Bosque Bike Ride & Brunch.** 8:30 a.m.-1 p.m. This amazing riparian ecosystem is right in our back yard, so why not come and experience some single-track trails along the Rio Grande? Meet at the Alameda trailhead by 8:30 a.m. We'll make a stop at the Rio Grande Nature Center to look for wildlife. We'll proceed to Bike-in Coffee to refuel and catch some live music then retrace our route back to the trailhead. We'll average 12-15 mph on this 18-mile non-technical ride. Multi-speed mountain or gravel bikes and e-bikes with wider tires and tire sealant only. Helmets and gloves are required. Children 14 and over with parent or legal guardian are welcome. Appropriate Covid-19 precautions will be taken. Sponsored by the Military Outdoors Program, and all are welcome. Register by July 21.

**Leader:** Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, [teowen@comcast.net](mailto:teowen@comcast.net)

**Level:** Moderate

**Location:** Albuquerque

**Sign-up:** [www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar](http://www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar)

**Saturday, July 30: Outings Leader Training.** Interested in becoming a certified Sierra Club outings leader? The first step in that journey is to successfully complete Outings Leader Training. This seven-hour course will provide you with the foundational information you need to lead safe, fun and inspiring outings such as hikes, bike rides and ambles. You don't have to be a super outdoors person or

an expert in ecology, either. If you're a currently certified outings leader and have not yet received the new curriculum or it's been approximately four years since you last attended this course, please sign-up. This course will be conducted virtually and all persons who register will be required to download the instruction packet which includes the training materials, handouts and reference materials. Those will be available along with a Zoom link, about one week before the course. Register by July 23rd below. The requirements for becoming a certified Sierra Club Outings Leader are: Be a Sierra Club member. Be at least 18 years old. Complete Outings Leader Training. Complete a basic first-aid course. Successfully plan, publicize and complete a provisional outing with a currently certified outings leader. Register by July 26 at the link below.

**Leader:** Terry Owen, [teowen@comcast.net](mailto:teowen@comcast.net)

**Level:** Easy

**Location:** Virtual

**Sign up:** [riograndesierraclub.org/calendar](http://riograndesierraclub.org/calendar)

**Friday, Aug 12: Gutierrez Hubbell House and Walk at Durand.** 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Easy hike with a bit of South Valley culture. Gutierrez Hubbell House Open Space is a fine example of adobe architecture dating back to the 1860s. The property includes 10 acres, much of which is farmed and also fed by an historic acequia. We will walk the perimeter trail, an easy 1-mile loop. Then we will tour the museum. And since you have come to the South Valley, let's go over to Durand Open Space and do a 2-mile loop in the Bosque. Three miles round trip. Meet at GHH parking lot at 8:45 a.m. No dogs please. Appropriate Covid-19 precautions will be taken. Register by Aug. 10.

**Leader:** Diane Reese, [DianeAbqNM@gmail.com](mailto:DianeAbqNM@gmail.com), 505-507-6416

**Level:** Easy

**Location:** Gutierrez-Hubbell House, 6029 Isleta Blvd SW, Albuquerque, NM 87105 and Durand Open Space, 4750 Isleta Blvd SW, Albuquerque, NM 87105

**Sign-up:** [www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar](http://www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar)

**Saturday, Aug 13: Yoga in The Mountains.** Meet at the trailhead at 10 a.m. Explore the wonders of nature, hiking and outdoor yoga in the company of really nice people! Easy 2.5-mile hike that incorporates a one-hour outdoor yoga and mindfulness break midway. Includes 200 feet of elevation gain and amazing views of the mountains. Sponsored by the Sierra Club Military Outdoors Program, and everyone is welcome. Limit 15 partici-



Photo by Chauné Rael-Whitsitt

**Participants enjoyed great weather on an April Otowi Peak Loop hike. Updated listings can be found at [riograndesierraclub.org](http://riograndesierraclub.org), or subscribe to our Northern New Mexico Sierra Trail Mix listserv by emailing [listserv@lists.sierraclub.org](mailto:listserv@lists.sierraclub.org) with any subject and a message that says SUBSCRIBE RIO-NORTH-OUTINGS.**

pants, and children over 12 are welcome when accompanied by parent or legal guardian. A \$5 cash donation for the instructor would be appreciated. Appropriate Covid-19 protocols will be observed. Good dogs are permitted. Register by Aug. 8 at [www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/](http://www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/)

**Leader:** Mary Froment, [mcmfroment@gmail.com/](mailto:mcmfroment@gmail.com/) Terry Owen, [teowen@comcast.net](mailto:teowen@comcast.net)

**Level:** Easy

**Location:** East Mountains of Albuquerque

**Tuesday, Sept. 13: Zero Waste E-cycling Tour.** 10 a.m.-11:30 a.m. Come find out what more you can e-cycle than just computers and cell phones. Meet at Albuquerque Computer & Electronics Recycling Company, 3726 Hawkins St. NE, Albuquerque. Meet in their parking lot by 9:55 a.m. to sign in. Masks are required as it is in a large warehouse. We will be standing the whole time. No dogs. Register by September 7 below. Limited to 10 people

**Leader:** Laurie Zunner, 505-440-5337, [lzunner@hotmail.com](mailto:lzunner@hotmail.com)

**Level:** Easy

**Location:** Albuquerque

**Sign up:** [www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar](http://www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar)

**Saturday, Sept. 10: Inspiring Connections Outdoors-La Cieneguilla Petroglyphs.** With Santa Fe Youth Shelters. We plan on hiking in La Cieneguilla Petroglyphs Area west of Santa Fe. Meet at 8:45 a.m. and leaving at 9 a.m. and we should be back by 3 p.m. This hike is 2.7 miles round trip and 175 feet of elevation gain. Appropriate

Covid-19 precautions will be taken. Because we are working with youth, participants must fill out the ICO forms and undergo a background screening.

**Leader:** Raymond N. Greenwell, [matrng@hofstra.edu](mailto:matrng@hofstra.edu)

**Level:** Moderate

**Location:** Santa Fe

**Sign up:** [www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar](http://www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar)

**Saturday, Sept. 17: Yoga in The Mountains.** Celebrate National Yoga Month with us. Meet at the trailhead at 10 a.m. If you'd like to explore the wonders of nature, hiking and outdoor yoga in the company of really nice people this is the hike! We'll embark on an easy 2.5-mile hike that incorporates a one-hour outdoor yoga and mindfulness break midway. Includes 200 feet of elevation gain and amazing views of the mountains. Sponsored by the Sierra Club Military Outdoors Program, and everyone is welcome. Limit 15 participants; children over 12 are welcome when accompanied by parent or legal guardian. A \$5 cash donation for the instructor would be appreciated. Appropriate Covid-19 protocols will be observed. Good dogs are permitted.

Register by Sept. 10 at [riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/](http://riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/)

**Leaders:** Mary Froment, [mcmfroment@gmail.com/](mailto:mcmfroment@gmail.com/) Terry Owen, [teowen@comcast.net](mailto:teowen@comcast.net)

**Level:** Easy

**Location:** East Mountains of Albuquerque

**Sunday, Sept. 18: Hike Under the Cottonwoods.** 10 a.m.-11:30 a.m. We start

at the Rio Grande Nature Center parking lot for this easy one-hour-plus walk of about 2 miles and negligible elevation change. Enjoy the majesty of these old trees, open your senses to the sights and sounds of local inhabitants, maybe even spot a porcupine or coyote or hear bird songs on this early fall trek. Children over 12 accompanied by parent or legal guardian welcome. No dogs please. Wear comfortable shoes, bring water and a snack. Appropriate Covid-19 precautions will be taken. Register by Sept. 4 at the link below.

**Leader:** Candice

**Level:** Easy

**Location:** Albuquerque

**Sign up:** [www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar](http://www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar)

**Friday, Sept. 23: Salinas Pueblo National Monument Tour.** 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Tucked away in the middle of New Mexico is Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument. Its three distinct sites offer a glimpse into a unique time in history and provide a quiet place to reflect on local archeology and the Land of Enchantment. Abundant photo opportunities. Meet at Lowe's parking lot at 2001 12th St., then proceed to Tijeras, heading south on NM337 with stops for hiking and sightseeing at Quarai, Abo and Gran Quivera. Wear comfortable attire and sturdy shoes. Bring clothing layers, sunscreen, water and a picnic lunch. We'll return via I-25. Total hiking distance less than 2 miles and 100 feet of elevation change. No dogs, please. Register by Sept. 17.

**Leader:** June Parsons, 832-723-4533, [comicsilver@gmail.com](mailto:comicsilver@gmail.com)

**Level:** Easy

**Location:** Mountainair, NM

**Sign up:** [www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar](http://www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar)

**Tuesday-Wednesday, Sept. 27-28: Mesa Verde National Park Bike Tour.** We will tour the remote Wetherill Mesa complex of spectacular Ancestral Pueblo cliff dwellings such as Long House, Step House and many more. This area at Mesa Verde was once accessed only by guided tours, but in recent years has been opened to all. The paved path was used by a trolley for those tours. The paved loop is 5 miles with 200 feet of elevation change. We will stop at several sites that will require hikes to overviews of cliff dwellings and mesa top ruins, all less than a quarter mile from the paved path. Bring bike locks. On Wednesday, we will tour Chapin Mesa ruins loop, going to Cliff Palace and many other well-known sites and will cover 12 miles and 500 feet of elevation change. We should

Continued on Page 11