



Democracy at stake



Sierra Club volunteers talking to voters is a critical component of supporting endorsed candidates. See Page 6 to join our team.

Our endorsements for the Nov. 8 election: Page 6



David Fosdeck

Closure without closure: San Juan plant burns the last of its coal as Farmington pursues ownership: **Page 3**



(Dog) walk on the wild side: How to prep your pup for outdoor adventures. **Page 11.**



A cask carrying spent nuclear fuel. Courtesy Department of Energy

Mission critical: State legislation could prevent proposed Holtec high-level nuclear storage in N.M.: **Page 5**

EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET



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

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

Inside:

- Pajarito Group to rejoin Northern NM Group**
Our Sierra Club Los Alamos-area group will become part of the Northern Group, pending a comment period. **Page 4.**
- State to hear appeal on Alto concrete plant**
The Environment Department rejected the proposed plant's permit, but developers are appealing at an October hearing. **Page 5**
- Chaco coalition decries continued leasing**
Groups oppose Trump-era leases that Interior Department is still defending. **Page 9.**
- More:** Director's column: **Page 4.** El Paso air quality: **Page 5.** Strategic Water Reserve: **Page 8.** Forest resilience: **Page 8.** Biking and Zero Waste: **Page 10.** Outings: **Pages 11-12.**

Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter Contacts

riograndesierradclub.org

facebook.com/nmsierradclub

Twitter: @riograndesierra

instagram.com/riograndesierradclub

Executive Committee

Susan Martin, chair, 505-670-3279, smartin317@gmail.com
Diane Reese, vice chair, Central New Mexico Group representative: DianeAbqNM@gmail.com
Anita Gonzales, secretary, 505-718-9517, anita4newmexico@gmail.com
Laurence Gibson, El Paso Group representative, 915-309-5419, lgibson@utep.edu
Carlos Trujillo, Northern New Mexico Group representative: carlos.jude.trujillo@me.com
Jody Benson, Pajarito Group representative, 505-662-4782, anteaterjb@gmail.com,
Kurt Anderson, Southern New Mexico Group representative, 575-635-7871, kurt@nmsu.edu,
Karl Braithwaite, 505-850-3369, karl@braith.net
Derrick Toledo, 505-401-7932, derrick.toledo@gmail.com
Dale Doremus, 505-795-5987, ddoremus@q.com,
Shannon Romeling, 518-275-7681 sromeling73@gmail.com
Mayane Barudin, mayanebarudin@gmail.com
Consuelo Walker, consueloow4523@gmail.com

Offices and Staff

Albuquerque office
2215 Lead Ave. SE, Albuquerque, 87106, 505-243-7767
Camilla Feibelman, Rio Grande Chapter director, 505-715-8388, camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org
Miya King-Flaherty, Our Wild New Mexico organizing representative, 505-243-7767, miya.king-flaherty@sierraclub.org

Roddy Hughes, Beyond Dirty Fuels Campaign senior campaign representative, 202-271-5881, roddy.hughes@sierraclub.org
Connie Huffmire, Treasurer: 505-382-5769
Northern New Mexico Office, 1807 Second St., Unit 45 Santa Fe, NM 87505, 505-983-2703
Mona Blaber, communications director, 505-660-5905, monablaber@gmail.com
Claire McKnight, PAC treasurer, 646-864-0209, claire.mcknight@gmail.com
Brintha Nathan, bookkeeper, 505-310-0595, brintha2709@yahoo.com
Southern New Mexico Antoinette Reyes, Southern New Mexico organizer, 575-342-1727, antoinette.reyes@sierraclub.org
Luis Guerrero, legislative and political organizer, luis.guerrero@sierraclub.org or 575-635-3354.
Sierra Club National
2101 Webster St., Suite 1300, Oakland, CA, 94612. 415-977-5500

Local Groups

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

la, NM, 88046; Chair: Howie Dash, howiedash@aol.com, 575-652-7550.

Outings

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

Conservation Issues

Conservation Chair: Karl Braithwaite, 505-850-3369, karl@braith.net
Energy/Climate Change: Chair: Karl Braithwaite
Water: Dale Doremus
Dairy: Dan Lorimier, dlorimier1948@gmail.com
Water Sentinels: Shannon Romeling
Public Lands: Chair: Derrick Toledo
Bosque Issues: Richard Barish, 505-232-3013, richard.barish@gmail.com,
Nuclear-Waste Storage: Chair: John Buchser
Wildlife: Chair: Mary Katherine Ray, mkrscri@gmail.com, 575-537-1095
Four Corners: Miya King-Flaherty, miya.king-flaherty@sierraclub.org
Methane: Antoinette Reyes, antoinette.reyes@sierraclub.org
Mining, Sand & Gravel: Allyson Siwik, allysonsiwik@gmail.com; Teresa Seamster, ctc.seamster@gmail.com
Transportation: Ken Hughes.

Zero Waste: Central NM Group: Carol Chamberland, pictografix@comcast.net, 505-341-1027
Pajarito Group: Jody Benson
Bag-Free Team: Jody Benson, 505-662-4782, anteaterjb@gmail.com

Activism Teams

Communications Team: Chair: Shannon Romeling. Members: Laurence Gibson, John Buchser
Rio Grande Sierran Editorial Board: Laurence Gibson, Ken Hughes, Mary Katherine Ray, Jody Benson, David Coss, Shannon Romeling
Sierran Editor: Mona Blaber, 505-660-5905, monablaber@gmail.com
Web Editor: Ellen Loehman, loehman@msn.com, 505-328-2954
Elections: Chair: Claire McKnight, Jan Cohen, Mona Blaber
Nominating: Chair: John Buchser, Ken Hughes, Susan Martin, Carlos Trujillo
Finance: Brintha Nathan, Howie Dash, Claire McKnight, Connie Huffmire
Friends and Funds: Chair: Carlos Trujillo
Members: John Buchser, David Coss, Shannon Romeling
Legal: Richard Barish, 505-232-3013, richard.barish@gmail.com
Legislative: Mayane Barudin
Personnel: Susan Martin, Diane Reese, Connie Huffmire
Political Committee: Chair: Richard Barish, richard.barish@gmail.com, 505-232-3013. Northern Group: Ken Hughes; Pajarito Group: Jody Benson; Central Group: Diane Reese; Southern Group: Gayle Eads; El Paso Group: Laurence Gibson; Members: Susan Martin, John Buchser; Patricia Cardona, Chris Calvert, Joe Wells, Carlos Trujillo, Tom Ribe, Melinda Smith, David Bouquin, Jim Hannan.
Trade Issues: Chair:

Richard Barish
Compliance officer: Frank Katz
Sierra Student Coalition: Open

Coalitions/ Working Groups

America Votes New Mexico: Luis Guerrero, Miya King-Flaherty
Chaco Coalition: Miya King-Flaherty, Teresa Seamster
Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy: Karl Braithwaite, Camilla Feibelman
Dairy Coalition: Dan Lorimier
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
NM Prospera: Luis Guerrero
New Mexico Permian Environmental Justice Coalition: Antoinette Reyes

National Representatives

Council of Club Leaders
Delegate: Shannon Romeling. Alternate: Susan Martin
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

Vote for chapter, group executive committees

Three candidates are running for three open spots on the Rio Grande Chapter Executive Committee. Only Sierra Club members may vote. Please mail this ballot with the member information intact on the label on the reverse side, or vote online. Online voting will be available to members in November at www.riograndesierradclub.org. Candidate bios will also be available online. To vote on paper, mail this completed ballot to: Sierra Club Election Committee, 1807 Second St., Suite 45, Santa Fe, NM, 87505. Ballots must be received by Dec. 9. Two-member households can each vote, using both boxes. Please also vote for candidates for the group executive committee where you live. **Note: El Paso Group ballots and candidate statements will be mailed separately, but El Paso members may vote for chapter executive committee using this ballot.**

Rio Grande Chapter Executive Committee (vote for three)

Candidate statements will be published at riograndesierradclub.org

☐ ☐ Derrick Toledo

☐ ☐ Tricia Snyder

☐ ☐ Diane Reese

Pajarito Group Executive Committee (4 open seats)

☐ ☐ Mark Jones
☐ ☐ Jody Benson
☐ ☐ Tom Ribe
☐ ☐ Write-in_____

Northern New Mexico Group (5 seats)

☐ ☐ Chris Calvert
☐ ☐ Ken Hughes
☐ ☐ Norman Norvelle
☐ ☐ Carlos Trujillo
☐ ☐ Joe Wells

Central Group Executive Committee (4 open seats)

☐ ☐ Jessica O'Callahan
☐ ☐ Terry Owen
☐ ☐ Laurine Zunner
☐ ☐ Write-in

Southern NM Group Executive Committee (4 open seats)

☐ ☐ David Baake
☐ ☐ Howie Dash
☐ ☐ Gayle Eads
☐ ☐ Mary Katherine Ray

An aerial view of San Juan Generating Station and San Juan Mine taken by Mike Eisenfeld of San Juan Citizens Alliance, which has helped lead the local charge for cleaner energy solutions in the Four Corners for decades.



800 MW of coal no longer burning

By Mona Blaber
Chapter communications director

Partially delayed and accompanied by drama and uncertainty, the last operating stack at San Juan Generating Station in Waterflow, N.M., burned its last ton of coal in the early morning of Sept. 29.

In 2017, majority owner and operator Public Service Company of New Mexico (PNM) announced that the plant was too expensive to operate and that the two remaining units would be retired in 2022, rather than 2053. On-the-ground communities and advocates had long since called attention to the plant's expense as well as its damage to health, air quality and the climate.

In 2019, New Mexico passed the Energy Transition Act, enabling the use of low-interest bonds to lower the costs PNM customers were already paying for past plant expenses and to provide transition funding to plant and mine workers and the impacted community.

The \$20 million in job training and severance for workers is being disbursed, and PNM has sent the \$20 million for community projects to the state agencies that will distribute it, though recipients have not yet been chosen.

Residents are urging state agencies to invest the funds in local, sustainable projects that move the region forward.

"The plant closure has significant positive and negative implications. One positive impact is the anticipated release of ETA funds to help secure the self-sustenance of communities that were impacted by the plant," said **Duane "Chili" Yazzie of ToohBAA, a Shiprock Farmers Cooperative**. "Our farmers group in Shiprock applied for the funds in the hope that it will help address one of the great needs that our farmers have, with the provision of skilled labor. With the funds, we expect to acquire equipment operators, diesel mechanics, planners and administrators who will help organize our farming activity to optimize our agricultural potential. We look forward to an expedited release of those funds."

The city of Farmington, a 5% plant owner that wants to take over San Juan

and sell it to Enchant to keep it running, has filed suit to prevent demolition.

Community members stressed the need to promptly and completely reclaim and clean up the facility, rather than allowing it to continue to pollute under Enchant, which has failed to obtain the permits, buyers or funding to operate with carbon capture, a technology that has failed in every commercial coal plant where it has been tried.

While \$1.1 billion in solar and storage were approved to replace the coal power, including San Juan Solar in the same school district to replace the property taxes the coal plant provided, supply-chain and tariff issues have delayed construction, and clean-energy groups are urging PNM to renegotiate contracts to get the facilities online.

"As Four Corners residents, we want to see the negotiated replacement power, solar and energy storage, and we want the ETA implementation money to go to the impacted coal workers and communities," said **Mike Eisenfeld of San Juan Citizens Alliance**. "Enchant Energy has been disingenuous and unaccountable on the progress of their project, which joins a long list of failed carbon-capture and sequestration projects funded through the Department of Energy. City of Farmington has expended \$2 million in legal fees supporting Enchant's failed project, with timelines now extending to 2027. We see an immediate need for past and current owners to carry out their decommissioning and reclamation responsibilities within 90 days of SJGS and San Juan Mine closure."

At its peak, the coal plant used more water than all of Santa Fe. Some water rights from the plant have now been allocated to run in the San Juan River.

"We now have an opportunity to protect and manage water sources in the Four Corners region," said **Jessica Keetso of Tó Nizhóni Aní**, Navajo Nation. "A transition to solar, wind, renewable, clean-energy investments helps eliminate the waste and misuse of water. Precious water sources have been used to feed giant power plants all over the Four Corners region for over half a century. These water sources are limited and have been compromised in

many regions. It's time to make sure that transition and cleanup happen in an organized and speedy manner, and that ETA investments bring an opportunity for coal-impacted communities to drive economic diversification."

"Today marks a pivotal moment in our Four Corners region with the decline of fossil-fuel production. We regard this moment as a transformation for the environment in less CO₂, methane, NO_x, VOCs, coal ash, and other toxic pollutants. We welcome a return of cleaner air and water for the health of tribal communities and climate," said **Ahtza Chavez, Executive Director of Naeva**.

"Remediation will be difficult. Over 50 years of damage was done to the environment," said **Norman Norvelle, former San Juan plant chemist and Farmington resident**. "From releasing plant wastewater effluent into the Shumway Arroyo to air pollutants and mercury into the San Juan River watershed and the fish of quality waters. Also, plant solid and liquid waste disposal into unlined surface mine pits. Even after the plant is shut down, there will be need for extensive cleanup and monitoring to verify cleanup of the contaminants. Sampling and monitoring should be done by 3 or 4 different organizations to assure completeness. If not done adequately, the chemical contaminants will go into the San Juan River near the Hogback."

"San Juan Generating Station has been a source of jobs and revenues in Four Corners for more than half a century, but it can no longer be operated in a manner that is fiscally and environmentally responsible," said **Cydney Beadles, Managing Senior Staff Attorney of Western Resource Advocates' Clean Energy Program**. "The Energy Transition Act helps mitigate the impacts on local workers and communities and ensures that ratepayers get the cost savings that come from shutting down an inefficient coal plant, and the Public Regulation Commission issued an order requiring bill credits upon abandonment. Unfortunately, those credits have been temporarily suspended by the state Supreme Court at PNM's request, but we remain hopeful that the court will soon lift that stay."

Court blocks rate credits

By Mona Blaber

PNM customers should see a credit of more than \$8 on their next electric bills, thanks to the Energy Transition Act and closure of the costly San Juan Generating Station. But pending a state Supreme Court ruling, PNM may pocket the savings instead.

The ETA enabled low-interest bonds to pay off past capital investments in San Juan that customers have been paying back to PNM at a 10% rate of return. The bonds allow customers to pay off that debt at more like 3%, lowering bills and creating enough extra savings to provide millions in funding for workers and impacted communities.

That was the plan that the Public Regulation Commission approved in 2020. But earlier this year, PNM revealed at the bottom of a press statement that it would delay the bond issue until after its next rate case in 2023 — therefore delaying customer savings. Western Resource Advocates did the math and filed a PRC motion showing that PNM would collect an excess \$100 million from customers on the plant for up to 18 months after it closed. Nearly every party that intervened in the original San Juan case supported WRA's motion. The PRC hearing examiners agreed, calling PNM's actions "gaslighting." The commission ordered PNM to issue credits worth \$8.19 per month to the average customer (more or less depending on usage) as soon as the last unit closed.

However, PNM appealed to the New Mexico Supreme Court, which ordered a stay of the credits while it considers responses to PNM's motion. Every day the court delays its ruling is a day customers lose out on significant rate savings they need and deserve.

New Mexico can be proud of its leaders

A Sept. 14 *Washington Post* op-ed by Tom Condon suggests using funds from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) to buy Boy Scout Camps for preservation of natural resources, wildlife corridors, and, often, local economies.

“The Boy Scouts of America organization is, as the cops say, jammed up. The BSA is in federal bankruptcy court in Delaware, where this past week it gained approval for a \$2.46 billion plan to settle more than 82,000 claims of child sexual abuse spanning decades.

“Many of these camps are almost pristine, ecologically valuable parcels, with waterfront and forested land. While local governments and nonprofits are trying to save some of the camps, others are being sold and converted to other uses, including a gated community, a



Susan Martin
Chair's column

in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. It is currently owned and operated by the Boy Scouts of America and is one of the largest youth camps in the world. Just 51 miles up the road is the incredibly beautiful Valle Vidal unit of the Carson National Forest, once a part of the

water park, a gravel mine and an off-road driving facilities.”

A list of Boy Scout camps shows nine in New Mexico, including the world-renowned Philmont, 140,177 acres of wilderness

Maxwell Land Grant, then a subsidiary of Pennzoil, and now owned by the US government. In 1982, Pennzoil donated the Valle Vidal portion of the ranch to the American public. Philmont runs a training center that uses the Valle Vidal for its mountain Trek programs.

New Mexico is very fortunate that Sens. Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Luján and U.S. Reps. Melanie Stansbury and Teresa Leger Fernandez are environmental champions uniquely prepared to guide expenditure of IRA funds toward priorities like making these camps public lands, which could contribute to meeting Gov. Lujan Grisham's 30x30 commitments.

Our elected leaders are also helping respond to the climate crisis. So many people have been devastated by the

Hermits Peak/Calf Canyon and other fires and their aftermath. Besides restoration and remediation efforts in the burn sites, our champions can assure that the potential injection of funding maximizes preservation efforts.

The Rio Grande Chapter has worked collaboratively with these four champions for the protection and enhancement of our air, water and natural resources and is appreciative of their dedication to prioritizing government action to address climate disruption. Nov. 8, Election Day, will be critical to ensuring we are led by climate champions. We need a climate majority in the state House to finally pass comprehensive climate and just-transition legislation. The fate of our lands, our climate and our communities depends on how we vote.

Pajarito to rejoin Northern Group

By Jody Benson
Pajarito Group chair

We keep quoting the maxim for untiring activists: “Sometimes it's hard when you wake up in the morning to choose whether to save the Earth or savor it.” The Pajarito Group made a difference working in the company of our compatriots who share the passion for preserving the One World we're traveling on together.

Thanks to each of you who responded to the online poll asking whether you would like to remain the separate Pajarito Group of the Rio Grande Chapter or rejoin the Northern Group from whence we separated in about 1998 to focus on Los Alamos National Laboratory issues and the Valles Caldera.

Votes were 68% to rejoin Northern Group; 32% to stay independent Pajarito, with many good suggestions.

Summarizing the comments: Most of us don't have the time to commit to sustaining a separate group, but people want to remain connected by being a Los Alamos activist group focused on local issues (particularly county development and LANL) within the Northern New Mexico Group.

The rejoining will be finalized in January after we have met all the requirements from National about the “dissolution” of the group. At that time, you will receive an official Northern New Mexico Group welcome.

That said, we are still Sierrans who now bring to the Northern Group a few hundred volunteers who want to: be a conservation chair, organize a social event, watchdog a county initiative (and there are many many initiatives to watchdog!), join the Political Committee, be a hike leader,



A Pajarito Group hike several years ago featured Mark Jones and Ilse Bleck, right, both longtime leaders in the Pajarito and Rio Grande Chapter executive committees.

Official Notice:

The Rio Grande Chapter is planning on updating its structure, which will formally remove the Pajarito Group (primarily in Los Alamos County and the Jemez Mountains) as a sub-entity of the Rio Grande Chapter. Members are welcome to comment at our Chapter ExCom meeting Jan. 14-15 in Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge north of Socorro before a final vote is taken. To attend this meeting please email Chapter Vice Chair Diane Reese, dianeabqnm@gmail.com.

plant trees, participate in a community cleanup, work on open-space issues including the Pueblo Canyon bike-trail siting, and even run for government office.

Los Alamos can continue to contribute to saving the world, though, despite the nuclear-weapons triggers to be manufactured here, the climate emergency is so much more huge, difficult, and insidious than a war threat. This problem is global; the primary enemy is attitude, ignorance, misdirected political posturing, and

the failure to create a cost-benefit analysis of sustainable energy; put the good of the nation before corporatocracy; rid politics of dark money; and just plain inaction.

But here, in Los Alamos, at this local level, we're working on it, and doing a darn good job.

Thank you for all the years and all your commitment and stewardship. We know our future — as our Right Now — depends on that work and caring. Let's continue to save the Earth.

GWE seeks treasurer

By Mike Hopkins

The Global Warming Express (GWE) runs after-school and online learning programs for kids from 8-12 years old. Now in our 10th year, we have delivered our climate-science program to thousands of kids throughout New Mexico.

With financial support from the Sierra Club, students in each program meet with mentors weekly to learn about climate science and solutions for resilience, set and accomplish activism goals for their homes, schools, communities, state and beyond. The GWE kids regularly contribute to city, county and state-level decisions. Their initiatives have helped to create and improve policy and practices in sustainability in New Mexico.

Our current treasurer is retiring and we are searching for someone to take the treasurer position on the GWE Board and perform financial accounting, compliance reporting and banking duties. While the time commitment is not substantial, some bookkeeping experience, attention to organized record-keeping and timely preparation of compliance reporting is required.

Our current treasurer will be ending his commitment on Jan. 1, 2023, but if a new treasurer is able to come on board soon, the current treasurer will be able to review the records and assist in preparation of the 2022 year-end accounting with the new person.

As the GWE is a successful, award-winning nonprofit that the Sierra Club believes in and supports, we think that it is well worthy of your participation. If you are interested, please contact: Mike Hopkins: mike@theglobalwarmingexpress.org or Genie Stevens: genie@theglobalwarmingexpress.org.

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.

To volunteer, email us at riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org.

Executive Committee

Jody Benson, echidanaejb@gmail.com, 505/662-4782
Howard Barnum, hnbarnum@aol.com
Cheryl Bell, bellrancho@gmail.com, 505/672-9655
Iris Chung, itlchung@hotmail.com
Michael DiRosa, mddbbm@gmail.com
Nona Girardi, nonamg@aol.com
Carene Larmat, carenelarmat@gmail.com, 505/920-5675
Treasurer: Mark Jones, 505/662-9443

Committee Chairs

Conservation: Michael DiRosa, mddbbm@gmail.com
Endangered Species/Wildlife: Cheryl Bell, bellrancho@gmail.com, 505/672-9655.
Global Warming: Charles Keller, alfonso@cybermesa.com, 505/662-7915
Mining: David Torney, dtorney@valornet.com, 575/829-3433
Zero Waste, School Liaison: Jody Benson, anteaterjb@gmail.com, 505/662-4782

Pajarito Group contacts



Above: The site of the proposed Roper concrete batch plant, with a nursery visible in the distance. Inset: The Roper plant in Carrizozo, N.M.

N.M. can still prevent ill-advised nuclear site

**John Buchser,
Nuclear Waste Issue Chair**

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is scheduled in early 2023 to grant Holtec International a license to ‘temporarily’ store high-level nuclear waste near Carlsbad.

In September 2021, the NRC granted a similar license to WCS/ISP in Texas near the New Mexico state line. The Texas Legislature passed a bill to prohibit state permits for the facility, and Texas Gov. Greg Abbott signed the legislation.

We need to follow the lead of Texas and pass a bill to block any state permitting needed by Holtec to build its facility (a building permit, water to make concrete, etc.).

During the 30-day legislative session earlier this year, state Sen. Jeff Steinborn and state Rep. Matthew McQueen successfully passed out of committee a bill to accomplish this, but time ran out for the full Legislature to pass the bill. The longer 60-day session this year will be our chance to pass this bill before Holtec gets the required state permits.

The Sierra Club and other organizations have challenged the NRC’s process in the Washington D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals and may challenge the final environmental impact statement in the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals, where the State of New Mexico also has filed suit.

The Texas attorney general and Fasken Oil have challenged the WCS/ISP license in the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals. In oral argument last month, Texas and Fasken argued that the NRC doesn’t have authority to issue the license under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act. The 5th Circuit decision could go to the Supreme Court.

Federal law requires a permanent disposal site to be identified before any interim site is established, but no such site has been identified. Holtec argues that their waste storage casks are safe, pointing out the decades of accident-free transport by the Navy. The Navy uses 8-inch-thick casks. Holtec uses 5/8-inch. The more you move this radioactive waste around, the more likely it is to experience an accident or terror attack.

It is urgent that we support the efforts of Sen. Steinborn and Rep. McQueen’s bill to prohibit state permits in order to stop Holtec’s scheme to make money off the Federal indecision in creating a long-term disposal facility, putting our communities at risk.

Alto fights concrete plant

**By Galen Farrington
Alto Coalition for Environmental Preservation**

Retired and tranquil, our space in the world had just been shattered by the nondescript legal posting placed on the fencing across the two-lane highway from our subdivision’s postal pod. As my wife and I stood in the drizzle, we read that a concrete batch plant was to be erected in the elk-inhabited meadow before us. We and two other retired couples met and developed an action plan that began with two opposition letters to the New Mexico Environment Department, as directed by the posting.

Here is the nightmare that would ensue if that plant were built: The world’s No. 1 industry, which uses the world’s No. 1 life-sustaining resource, water, would be located within destructively harmful breathing distance of at least 200 residents/property owners and numerous endangered species, some of which are protected in the Class I White Mountain Wilderness area less than 1.2 miles to the west.

The air quality surrounding concrete batch plants has been studied at length, and the common denominator contributing to compromised health is the ingestion of particulate matter,

sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide, volatile organic compounds, nickel, formaldehyde, and crystalline silica. This is especially true for the breathing-impaired segments of the elderly and youth populations.

According to Rice University, “The most recent data show that, in 2015 alone, particulate matter was linked to 5,200 premature deaths in Houston,” where there are dozens of concrete batch plants.

The Environment Department’s Air Quality Bureau states that its mission is “to protect the inhabitants and natural beauty of New Mexico by preventing the deterioration of air quality.”

The proposed concrete batch plant will not enhance air quality or add to the natural beauty along The Billy the Kid National Scenic Byway. National guidelines preclude heavy industry from disturbing the natural beauty of these designated areas.

Earlier this year, the Environment Department denied the contractor’s permit request with more than 50 pages of rationale. Roper Construction then waited until the eleventh hour to appeal. Now the state Environment Improvement Board will provide a second public hearing Oct. 18-20 to determine the legitimacy of the Environment Department’s “final order.”

The contractor has ignored crucially sensitive populations, has misrepresented modeling procedures required in the permit request, has ignored the neighborhood opposition, has demonstrated a complete disregard for the environment with an assault on government regulations, and has requested an operations schedule of 18 hours per day from 3 a.m. to 9 p.m. from May through August, an obvious disrespect for his neighbors’ quest for environmental peacefulness.

The Lincoln County commissioners have not reviewed the prospects of creating an ordinance that would apply to the NM Highway 220 corridor’s uniqueness, a responsibility granted to them in at least three documents they have pledged to adhere to.

During the last 17 months, Roper Construction has pursued its business plan in spite of the universal destruction that would result.

My wife and I dedicated a combined 85 years as educators to instill the first tenet the system addressed: to create a better citizenry that produced individuals who served the common good of their communities. This contractor missed that lesson.

Please go to riograndesierraclub.org/alto to urge the Environmental Improvement Board to reject Roper’s appeal and the plant’s permit.

EPA taking meaningful action on El Paso air quality

By David Baake, Southern NM Group

Every year, residents of El Paso and neighboring areas in southern New Mexico are exposed to dangerous levels of ozone, a corrosive air pollutant that attacks the lungs and other parts of the body, contributing to respiratory and cardiovascular problems and premature deaths.

The American Lung Association ranks El Paso-Las Cruces 12th on a list of the most ozone-polluted metropolitan areas, worse than New York, Chicago, and Dallas-Fort Worth.

After years of litigation and advocacy by the Sierra Club and local activists, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has started to take meaningful action to reduce pollution in the region. Last year, the agency designated El Paso County a “nonattainment” area for ozone, expanding an existing nonattainment area that included Sunland Park, NM. The designation initiates a process for reducing emissions from El Paso facilities that contribute to the pollution problem.

Unfortunately, the State of Texas continues to deploy every loophole in the Clean Air Act to avoid taking action to reduce pollution in El Paso. Earlier

this year, it filed a lawsuit arguing that EPA is moving too fast in trying to clean up pollution and asking the court to rule that the entire process must be delayed by three years. The Sierra Club’s Joshua Smith and I intervened on behalf of the Club to support EPA against Texas’s meritless suit. Texas is also seeking an exemption from the requirement to impose new emission controls on industrial sources.

Sierra Club prepared comments urging EPA to deny Texas’s exemption request earlier this year. Much more needs to be done to clean up the air in the borderlands, but recent actions by EPA have been encouraging.

Democracy and climate are on the line

Sierra Club endorsements

Only candidates who have opposition in the general election are listed on these pages. The chapter may add more endorsements after press time. Check out riogrande-sierraclub.org/elections for more info on the candidates.

To volunteer on our winning team, write to Camilla Feibelman at camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org.

To check what districts you're in or check your registration, go to nmvote.org.

By Richard Barish
Chapter Political chair

Going into the November election, we face enormous challenges — to our democracy, to the gains we've made on equity, to the very livability of this planet. Who we elect matters deeply as to whether we will be able to meet those challenges.

You can read more about great candidates in statewide races in separate articles on these pages, but I want to highlight the critical work of our endorsed legislators. Rep. Nathan Small, for instance, shepherded through the ETA, which mandated carbon reduc-

tions in the electricity sector. Rep. Andrea Romero sponsored legislation to make sure our clean-energy future benefits all New Mexicans and to make sure we will be able to meet our future water needs.

Rep. Joanne Ferrary is a lead sponsor of the Green Amendment, in addition to sponsoring Community Solar and other important energy legislation. Rep. Angelica Rubio was a lead sponsor of the Sustainable Economy Taskforce legislation.

Then there are the other endorsed legislators whose priorities lie in other important issues, but who always,

Endorsement content paid for and authorized by Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club PAC.

always have our back on environmental votes. Without all of these legislators, we would not have made the progress we have made here in New Mexico in addressing the climate crisis and other important progressive issues.

We've endorsed a great slate of incumbent and new candidates. Please be sure to vote for them! Early voting begins Oct. 11.

New Mexico State House endorsements



District 10 (Albuquerque): Andres Romero



District 11 (Albuquerque): Javier Martinez



District 13 (ABQ): Patricia Roybal Caballero



District 14 (Albuquerque): Miguel Garcia



District 15 (ABQ): Dayan Hochman-Vigil



District 18 (ABQ): Gail Chasey



District 22 (Placitas, Edgwd): Augustine Montoya



District 24 (ABQ): Elizabeth Thomson



District 25 (ABQ): Christine Trujillo



District 26 (ABQ): Eleanor Chavez



District 27 (ABQ NE Heights): Marian Matthews



District 28 (Albuquerque): Pamela Herndon



District 29 (Albuquerque): Joy Garratt



District 30 (NE Heights ABQ): Natalie Figueroa



District 31 (ABQ): Athena Christodoulou



District 33 (Doña Ana): Micaela Cadena



District 35 (Doña Ana): Angelica Rubio



District 36 (Doña Ana): Nathan Small



District 37 (Las Cruces): Joanne Ferrary



District 38 (Grant, Socorro, Sierra, DA): Tara Jaramillo



District 39 (DA, Grant, Sierra): Rodolpho Martinez



District 44 (Corrales, RR): Kathleen Cates



46 (N. SF County, Los Alamos): Andrea Romero



District 52 (Doña Ana): Doreen Gallegos



District 65 (San Juan, Sandoval, RA): Derrick Lente



District 68 (Bernalillo): Charlotte Little

Bernalillo County

Commission



District 1: Barbara Baca



District 5: Eric Olivas

Sheriff



John Allen

Doña Ana County

Commission



District 3: Shannon Reynolds

Sheriff



Kim Stewart

Sandoval County

Commission



District 1: Katherine Bruch

Election 2022

“Yes” on 2 for energy efficiency, Internet access

By N.M. Reps. Anthony Allison and Christine Chandler

New Mexicans have a proud tradition of stepping up to support our neighbors. Even in 2022, tens of thousands of New Mexico families live without basic utilities like Internet, water, and electricity, particularly in rural areas, including on our Nations, tribal lands and pueblos. It's high time we change that.

This fall, you will see an opportunity on your ballot to help ensure that all New Mexicans have access to the necessities that many of our rural communities currently lack while advancing job growth and New Mexico's economy.

Constitutional Amendment 2 amends

an outdated part of the state constitution that prohibits state funding from being used for things like Internet infrastructure, water and wastewater services, and other infrastructure needs.

Lack of adequate energy makes it difficult for families to cook or heat their homes. Lack of running water and adequate wastewater treatment create significant health issues. Lack of access to broadband in an increasingly online world makes it harder for kids to learn and small businesses to succeed. And as we address climate change, state investments will be important to transition to clean energy and provide access to energy-efficiency and weatherization.

Currently, though, New Mexico

cannot legally provide funding or other support for many essential household infrastructure programs that would remedy these issues because doing so would violate the state constitution's anti-donation provision. This is a major obstacle for infrastructure investments, often called “connecting the last mile.”

Constitutional Amendment 2 is modeled after similar exceptions to the state's anti-donation clause around important issues like affordable housing and economic development. It would allow voters to remove the legal barriers preventing the state from expanding infrastructure to rural areas for broadband and other critical services. To make sure our practices are fiscally

sound, if the resolution is adopted, we will also implement legislation that ensures accountability and safeguards for the expenditure of public monies.

Rural residents deserve access to the same critical infrastructure and opportunities available in other communities. If Constitutional Amendment 2 passes, the state can invest resources to advance energy efficiency, clean water and high-speed Internet to all New Mexicans.

Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter also recommends a “yes” on Constitutional Amendment 1, increasing Permanent Fund distribution for early-childhood care. Look for both 1 and 2 on the back of your ballot!

New Mexico Governor Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed her Climate Executive Order only days after taking office, committing New Mexico to reduce our climate pollution 45% by 2030 over 2005 levels. With President Trump in office, state action on the Paris Climate Accord would prove to be key during those four lost years. Surrounded by kids and climate advocates, she articulated a plan for state action that has largely been achieved today under her leadership.

With the coal-fired San Juan Generating Station slated by PNM to retire, Gov. Lujan Grisham championed the 2019 Energy Transition Act to create millions in funding for the workers and communities impacted by the plant closing. The ETA also enabled a financing tool to lower consumer electric bills (see Page 3), requires utilities to provide 50% renewable energy by 2030 and 100% carbon-free electricity by 2045, and authorized the Public Regulation Commission to select 100% solar and battery — \$1 billion worth of investment in the same region as San Juan — to replace the plant's expensive coal power.

Lujan Grisham's administration updated money-saving efficient building codes, passed Clean Car standards to make EVs more accessible, and is the first state to submit a plan for installing charging stations every 50 miles around the state with \$38 million in federal investments. She also signed an infrastructure law that will



provide rebates for electrical upgrades and home EV chargers.

There's more: Lujan Grisham's agencies have enacted some of the strongest methane-reduction standards in the nation to hold oil and gas operators accountable for venting, flaring and leaking the potent greenhouse gas. She also signed legislation creating the Sustainable Economy Taskforce, which has identified nine sectors to help our state move off dependence on the boom-and-bust oil and gas economy and toward more equitable and fair economic opportunities.

Gov. Lujan Grisham also signed legislation outlawing cruel coyote-killing contests and trapping on public lands.

She also signed an executive order committing the state to conserve 30% of lands and waters by 2030. The governor and her agency staff have

deeply engaged the public in this concept and used public surveys and town halls to craft a conservation plan. The creation of the Outdoor Recreation Department ensures that all New Mexicans can access their public lands.

Gov. Lujan Grisham has also been an outspoken and active opponent of the proposed “temporary” storage site for high-level nuclear waste in south-east New Mexico.

Lujan Grisham has ably led the state through unprecedented crises. This summer's fires and floods have required emergency management like nothing our state has seen before. And all the while, Gov. Lujan Grisham has led on protecting women's rights, our kids' access to education, and workers' access to sick days and pay raises.

Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver

At a time when voters in states around the country have to contend with elected officials who restrict voting and refuse to accept election outcomes, we have Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver to defend democracy and voters' rights.

Toulouse Oliver is incorruptible and committed to making sure that voting is both reliable and easy. She has an unparalleled record of action to ensure that every qualified voter who wants to vote can do so, and that every vote is accurately counted.

Toulouse Oliver formed the Native American Voting Task Force to identify voter accessibility issues in our Native

American and Tribal communities and create solutions. She implemented same-day registration as well as monitored, secure ballot drop-boxes, so voters can drop off their absentee ballots at their convenience. She strengthened the rules to require the disclosure of donors to dark-money PACs and made our campaign finance reporting system more accessible, so everyone can see who is funding campaigns. She is a great protector of democracy.



Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard

In her first term, Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard has truly prioritized our children, climate and natural world while breaking revenue records in her outstanding stewardship of our state trust lands.



Garcia Richard tripled Land Office renewable-energy leases, reducing reliance on oil and gas revenue. She halted the use of freshwater for oil and gas drilling on state trust lands and placed a four-year moratorium on new oil, gas and mineral leasing on state lands in Greater Chaco.

Garcia Richard also initiated a study on the inadequacy of New Mexico's bonding requirements, revealing that it would cost the state \$8 billion more than it has received in bonding from oil and gas operators to clean up all abandoned oil and gas wells. The study provides a basis to seek stricter oil and gas bonding requirements. Another Land Office study found that industry-funded remediation would create 65,000 jobs and \$4 billion in wages.

Garcia Richard has helped lead the fight to prevent the proposed Holtec storage site for high-level radioactive waste. She also created a Cultural Resources Office to create a rule to require cultural and archeological surveys to avoid desecration of irreplaceable cultural properties.

Attorney General Raúl Torrez

Raúl Torrez, currently Bernalillo County's district attorney, said his priority for the Attorney General's office is to be a voice for the voiceless, prioritizing representation of communities that don't have the resources to fight back. He wants to elevate the civil litigation side of the Attorney General's office to be able to, for instance, represent communities harmed by the health impacts of extractive industries.





Photo of Rio Grande by Richard Barish

New Mexico’s Strategic Water Reserve is a pool of publicly held water rights dedicated to keeping our rivers flowing, but it is woefully underfunded.

Keep Reserve flowing

**By Kristina G. Fisher,
Associate Director
Think New Mexico**

Nearly two decades ago, Think New Mexico proposed the creation of a Strategic Water Reserve, a pool of publicly held instream water rights dedicated to keeping New Mexico’s rivers flowing to meet the needs of endangered species and fulfill our water-delivery obligations to other states.

Legislation creating the Strategic Water Reserve was enacted with bipartisan support in 2005. In the years since, it has been used to lease and purchase several thousand acre-feet of water, primarily along the Rio Grande and Pecos rivers to benefit species like the Pecos Bluntnose Shiner and the Rio Grande Silvery Minnow.

Most recently, the Jicarilla Apache Nation partnered with the Nature Conservancy to lease 20,000 acre-feet a year of the tribe’s water to the Strategic Water Reserve. This water was previously used

to support coal-fired power production at the San Juan Generating Station; now it will help keep the San Juan River flowing.

However, the San Juan River lease is by far the largest transaction in the Strategic Water Reserve’s 17-year history, which highlights the unfortunate fact that the impact of the Strategic Water Reserve has been far more limited than we had hoped.

The main obstacle that has prevented the Strategic Water Reserve from achieving its full potential has been inadequate funding.

In its first few years, the Strategic Water Reserve received about \$5 million in legislative appropriations, enough to get off to a good start. Unfortunately, in the difficult budget years following the economic crash of 2008, funding for the Strategic Water Reserve was zeroed out and never fully restored.

Today, there is only about \$800,000 in the Strategic Water Reserve’s account, far

too little for it to be effective, considering that the San Juan River lease alone costs around \$500,000 a year.

In this time when New Mexico’s rivers are under increasing stress due to the climate crisis, the Strategic Water Reserve is more important than ever. So Think New Mexico, along with a coalition of a dozen other organizations, including the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club, is urging the Legislature and governor to invest \$15 million of this year’s record \$2.45 billion surplus into the Strategic Water Reserve.

If you would like to speak up in support of this effort, we encourage you to visit the Action Center on Think New Mexico’s website (www.thinknewmexico.org) where you can contact your legislators and the governor and urge them to restore funding to the Strategic Water Reserve and keep more water in New Mexico’s rivers.

Northern megafires lead to lessons

By Teresa Seamster
After battling two disastrous Northern New Mexico “escaped prescribed burns” this year, the U.S. Forest Service has recently completed a National Prescribed Fire Program Review. Responding to the historic fire intensity and widespread damage of the Hermit’s Peak and Calf Canyon fires, the report outlines many valuable lessons learned and new ignition rules, but does not provide prescriptive treatments to improve the forest conditions caused by climate change.

Fortunately, promising experimental fire-reduction treatments and forest soil research is becoming available to reduce the multiple stresses forests face, including soil aridity, loss of microorganisms, plant transpiration, hotter air temperatures, higher winds and “freak” gusty wind storms that can return for weeks at a time, making for intense, uncontrollable fire.

The Forest Service review outlines key changes to current prescribed burning practices:

1. New safeguards, such as same-day authorizations to burn, that keep pace with changing weather and ground conditions;
2. Mandatory practices that include more “robust scientific analysis of burn plans” and on-site assessment for spotting human error “linked to fatigue or inexperience”; and
3. Standardizing permissions to ignite fires and other communications with bosses and crews.

Part of the robust scientific findings on forest resilience is the importance of maintaining cool, shaded, moist soil and retaining the vast underground network of mature tree roots that provide the forest floor with stability and a flow of moisture, nutrients, essential bacteria and microorganisms.

President Biden’s recent Executive Order “Strengthening the Nation’s Forests, Communities and Local Economies” defines the protection of mature trees and old-growth forests on federal land as “one of the most cost-effective



Photo by Teresa Seamster

Ponderosa, with ladder fuels removed, tower behind Santa Fe Open Space Coordinator Peggy Darr and Santa Fe Wildland-Urban Interface Specialist Porfirio Chavarria.

climate policies the U.S. can employ at this time. These forests contain the bulk of stored forest carbon and provide watershed functions, vital habitats and biodiversity benefits.”

A promising resiliency approach is being tested in the Ortiz Mountains Preserve south of Santa Fe by County Open Space Coordinator Peggy Darr. A recent visit to the 200-acre test site showed careful retention of mature trees and a 50% removal of small trees (under 8 inches in diameter) and understory ladder fuels. This slash material was cut and used as a light mulch, while bigger logs were used for small check dams and on steep slopes for erosion control. Large trees benefited from more groundwater, and the forest floor bloomed with regenerated oak, fir, piñon and ponderosa saplings. The threatened Grace’s Warbler is the “test” species being monitored and shows early indications of population growth.

The Santa Fe County Commission will hold a remote public “listening session” on prescribed burns at 5:30 p.m. Nov. 10.

Transition group needs to hear more frontline voices

**By Robyn Jackson
Diné CARE Executive Director**

On Aug. 25, I joined a group of frontline environmental and social organizations in attending a Farmington event held by the federal Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization.

Many of our frontline organizations were not invited, even though the meeting was focused on distributing federal funding to coal-impacted communities and economic transition for the Four Corners region. Economic transition that is just and equitable is a campaign

and movement that we dedicate ourselves to in our communities in the Four Corners region.

Those of us who found out about it attended anyway. Thankfully, we were allowed into the meeting room and were able to listen in on an agenda full of scheduled comments from state, federal and tribal officials and industry representatives.

Later, there was some discussion of economic diversification, but the day lacked a real discussion of solutions and economic diversification that aren’t dependent on fossil fuels and that truly take into account community wellbeing.

Hearing these government and industry representatives speak about harmful hydrogen, nuclear and carbon sequestration as the economic solution for the Four Corners region was beyond disappointing.

Only one coal-impacted community representative was included on the agenda, and she was the only person who spoke about the need for a diversified economy not based on fossil fuels.

Later in the afternoon, I was one of four community representatives who spoke in support of renewable energy, solar energy storage, sustainable farming, and smarter uses of our water as ways to diversify our economy and

create a livable future.

At the end of the day, the Interagency Working Group lacked real solutions that would address community health concerns and elevate a vision of a just and equitable transition. So many critical and local voices were missing, and as a result, the kickoff meeting lacked substance.

The economic transition of the Four Corners region must tackle historical issues of inequity and environmental injustice.

These cannot be absent if we are to create real solutions for the region and our collective communities.

U.S. methane standards on tap

By **Camilla Feibelman**
Chapter director

With state methane and smog rules on the books, thanks to the leadership of Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and her agencies, New Mexico is leading the nation in ending routine oil and gas venting and flaring and requiring additional leak detection and repair for facilities close to homes, schools and businesses. We now await EPA and BLM rules that we hope will meet and even exceed our state rules.

Dishearteningly, though, this summer the Independent Petroleum Association of New Mexico filed suit, demanding that smaller-producing wells be exempted from the new standards for oil and gas production in counties that are in danger of exceeding the federal ozone threshold.

Smaller wells represent only 6% of New Mexico’s production, but according to Kayley Shoup, a community organizer for the group Citizens Caring for the Future, they account for more than 50% of emissions. She argued that hard-won rules adopted in April need to be followed.

“Every other industry is regulated,” she said. “The least they can do is inspect these wells that are leak-prone and causing methane emissions that are warming the planet and also harming the health of communities.”

Despite participating in the extensive public process and originally supporting the new rules, the Independent Petroleum Association is now claiming its members should not have to comply.

Wendy Atcitty, an organizer with Naeva, said her mother’s property, on the eastern side of the Navajo Nation, has 13 oil and gas wells within two miles, making strong protections against methane leaks, which have short- and long-term health risks, all the more critical.

“We have our elders and children, and we have to take account of their health — we don’t want to see any other impacts happening,” she said. “And hopefully, we can have a healthy future as we move with these new state laws.”

Shoup lives in one of eight counties where the state Environmental Improvement Board has said pollutants have reached at least 95% of the federal ambient air-quality standard.

“From 2017 to 2022 in Eddy County, the county where I live, there was a 40% increase of people living within a half-mile radius of an oil and gas line,” she said.

The Environmental Protection Agency is investigating whether some counties in the Permian Basin are not complying with the 2015 Ozone National Ambient Air Quality Standards. If that is the case, oil and gas operators would be required to take action.

The state Ozone Precursor standards, initiated by the New Mexico Environment Department, are complementary to the methane protections that went into effect in May. Together the rules ban routine venting and flaring and require increased leak detection and repair for homes, schools and businesses near oil and gas operations.

Maintaining the strength of our state rules sets a strong record for the EPA and BLM to create federal safeguards that would protect New Mexicans on the border of Texas that are exposed to pollution for the lesser regulated state.

The EPA has said it would issue its rules in October, and the Sierra Club and dozens of partners around the state will be engaging people to submit comment on what are expected to be strong rules with key areas for improvement. Stay tuned!

New Mexico News Connection contributed to this report.



Photos courtesy Bret Goodlet/WildEarth Guardians

Mario Atencio of Diné CARE speaks at a press conference Sept. 29 after the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver heard arguments on the Trump administration’s illegal approval of more than 370 drilling permits in Greater Chaco. Western Environmental Law Center represents Diné CARE, WildEarth Guardians, San Juan Citizens Alliance and the Sierra Club in a suit to block the permits.

Continued lease sales undercut Chaco progress

By **Miya King-Flaherty**
Our Wild New Mexico

Under the Biden administration, there is hope for better outcomes to protect sacred landscapes like the Greater Chaco region. But continued oil and gas leasing is undercutting that progress.

Last November, Biden and Interior Secretary Deb Haaland initiated a 20-year pause on new oil and gas leasing and drilling within 10 miles of Chaco Culture National Historical Park as part of the Honoring Chaco Initiative. However, these protections should go further to include protecting the region’s air and water quality, the health and safety of surrounding communities, sacred sites throughout the landscape, and much more.

Preliminary steps on the Honoring Chaco initiative have started with key stakeholders, including some members of the Greater Chaco Coalition. We’re hopeful that the Honoring Chaco Initiative will present new approaches for landscape-level protections and land-management reforms.

However, while this process is underway, the Bureau of Land Management continues to approve new drilling permits, pipelines, and other oil and gas infrastructure despite calls for an immediate moratorium on new permit approvals, for permanent protections to be put in place that address the cumulative impacts of development, for remediation and restoration of the region, and for meaningful tribal consultation and consent at every stage

of decision-making. These calls continue to be ignored by the agencies, as evidenced by the recent Bureau of Land Management decision to reissue Trump-era lease sales from 2018, 2019, and 2020 that open nearly 45,000 acres to oil and gas development. Members of the Greater Chaco Coalition challenged these sales, citing significant issues ranging from environmental concerns to lack of adequate tribal consultation and community outreach to failing to notify the public and more. The Sierra Club’s Rio Grande Chapter is supporting efforts to challenge this latest decision in court. At the behest of Sen. Joe Manchin, the Inflation Reduction Act includes leasing provisions that require that millions of acres be leased for oil and gas drilling in order for rights-of-way for wind and solar projects to be approved on public lands and waters. These provisions will impact frontline communities and will have implications here in New Mexico.

In October, the Bureau of Land Management issued a draft environmental assesment to offer over 3,000 more acres of lands for fracking in the Permian Basin. As we chart a new path for a resilient climate future, it’s crucial for land management policies to prioritize public health and safety, environmental justice, and environmental protections. You can take action by telling the Department of the Interior and Bureau of Land Management to end the legacy of sacrifice zones and to truly Honor Chaco: bit.ly/3QPXDxf

What’s in the Inflation Reduction Act for you?

By **Sierra Club**

The recently passed Inflation Reduction Act includes more than 100 programs that will invest about \$369 billion in climate action, clean-energy jobs, and environmental justice. Collectively, these unprecedented investments put us on a path to cutting climate pollution by 40 percent by 2030 while creating over 9 million family-sustaining jobs over the next decade. The act also includes funding to track its labor, equity, and environmental standards and impacts to enable oversight and accountability.

Though the IRA’s oil and gas leasing provisions place an unacceptable burden on frontline communities, the bill also marks the single biggest investment in climate action by Congress to date. To see which clean-energy incentives, rebates and benefits you could qualify for, and when they are available, Rewiring America has a great calculator tool at rewiringamerica.org/app/ira-calculator. Look out for some of the following benefits of the IRA, some of which are available now or by January:

- Lower the cost of electric vehicles

- by up to \$7,500;
- Lower the cost for lower- and middle-income households to buy used electric vehicles by up to \$4,000;
- Help individuals and businesses install more than 200,000 EV-charging stations in communities nationwide;
- Help reconnect neighborhoods — primarily in Black and Latinx communities — that have been divided for decades by highways that reinforce systemic racism and expose residents to harmful pollution;
- Help the average family save hundreds of dollars annually on utility

- bills through clean energy, energy efficiency, and electrification incentives
- Expand wind, solar, and battery incentives;
- Allow rural electric and municipally owned utilities, serving nearly one-third of homes, to move away from fossil-fuel power like coal and build solar, wind, and storage;
- Make it \$7,000 cheaper on average to install solar panels on your rooftop
- Boost access to renewable energy in low-income and Indigenous communities by covering 40%-50% of the cost of solar, wind, and battery projects.



Patrick Burton tests out a 9.5-mile bike loop in Albuquerque on Labor Day.

Photo by David Bouquin

Biking, enjoyment, errands

By David Bouquin

Central New Mexico Group

Experience how fun and easy it is to ride your bike to run errands and meet friends for lunch in the Northeast Heights of Albuquerque. Imagine picking up some necessary or fun items at the store after work or on a weekend, avoiding traffic congestion and parking, getting up-close views of friendly neighborhoods, and getting great cycling exercise at the same time. Patrick Burton and I experienced this on Labor Day.

Patrick, the Sierra Club volunteer Central New Mexico transportation chair, had mapped out a biking route, and I came along as his trusty sidekick, photographer, and comic relief.

It was a great, safe ride on both city streets combined with a lovely trail along an arroyo. We rode on a 9.5-mile loop starting at the Flying Star on 4501 Juan Tabo to the shopping complex with Whole Foods and back. It took about 60 minutes. There were many stores and restaurants along the way, including grocery, hardware, and a craft brewery.

The Central Group will be sponsoring an outing on this route at 10 a.m. Oct. 15. Any multi-speed bike capable of sustained speeds of 10 mph, including road, gravel, mountain, commuter or E-bike is appropriate to use.



Patrick recommends you inject tire sealant in all tires. Also, please bring a bike bag to carry the items you pick up along the way.

I was very impressed by the nice neighborhoods and shopping and eating/drinking opportunities along the way.

The route: Flying Star/Juan Tabo > LaGrima de Oro Road > Morris Street > Bear Canyon Arroyo Trail > Osuna Road > Seagull Street > Academy Road > Burilison Drive > Quemado Drive > through the Whole Foods parking lot > Academy Road > Moon Road > Back on to the Bear Canyon Arroyo to Flying Star. *Voila!*

Residents push for plastics law

Carol Chamberland Zero Waste Team

Regular readers of the *Sierran* need no introduction to the environmental and economic catastrophe that is single-use plastic. For the past several months a few of us have engaged in deep research and planning for a statewide bill addressing the problem. Several towns in New Mexico already have laws regulating this issue, although Albuquerque is not among them. Some local laws were passed but never implemented. New Mexico is a patchwork of differing policies on plastic. Ten American states have plastic-related statutes, with varying degrees of complexity. New Mexico can join that trend by passing this law.

Briefly, there are four goals of our proposed legislation:

1. No Styrofoam (polystyrene) food containers, trays, plates, cups, and packaging "peanuts."
2. No single-use plastic take-out containers, plates, cups, and stirrers. Exemptions if/when necessary: food pantries, soup kitchens, church meals, etc. Single plastic straws given upon request for ADA and HIPAA compliance.
3. No plastic shopping bags to be given out by retailers or food delivery services. There will be a 10-cent charge for recyclable paper bags, part of which will go into a state fund dedicated to environmental services or to assist local businesses that address the pollution problem. The other portion remains with

the retailer for use in administering the program. If stores give out or sell reusable bags made of plastic, they must have stitched handles.

4. State law would not preempt local governments from enacting more stringent measures of plastics control.

Implementation of these measures will require a reasonable transition phase. Our little group is expanding, and we are now seeking legislative sponsors. You can help by speaking to your state representatives and senators about this proposal. If they are supportive, let us know. If you run a small business and wish to support the effort, let us know that, too. This will be a long process, but if we don't start, we'll never get there.

Central NM Group contacts

Chair: Diane Reese, DianeAbqNM@gmail.com, 505-507-6416
Vice Chair and Treasurer: David Ther, grelbik@gmail.com
Secretary: Jessica O'Callahan, jessicaeoc@gmail.com
Ray Shortridge, rshortridge@gmail.com
Transportation: Patrick Burton, patrickburton9@icloud.com
Outings: Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, teowen@comcast.net,
Zero Waste: Laurie Zunner, lmzunne@gmail.com
David Bouquin, dbouquin5@gmail.com

Other Responsibilities

Political/Bosque: Richard Barish, richardbarish@gmail.com
Volunteer coordinators: Open
Wildlife: Open
Military Outings: Terry Owen

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

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!)



'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*.



Donate Your Vehicle Today!

Support our efforts to protect and improve the environment around us by making a significant contribution to our vehicle donation program.

The process easy, the pick-up is free and your donation is tax-deductible.



We make donating your vehicle easy!
1-844-6-SIERRA | scfch.careasy.org

It's football season on the trails!

By Terry Owen
Rio Grande Chapter Outings chair

I just read an Outside Magazine Online article about a high-school football team that decided it was a good idea to kick a football off of the 14,309-foot summit of Uncompahgre Peak. The team memorialized it on YouTube, of course. The article also listed some of the other objects people have decided to fling, hit, whack or throw off of any one of Colorado's 58 14ers.

For any of you who have climbed Uncompahgre Peak, you know that the north face has a 1,000-foot precipitous drop, and anything that was sent flying down that side would completely wipe out anyone or anything it hit down below. This, in and of itself, makes it seem like a bad idea. Then there's the issue of said footballs, frisbees, golf balls and any other objects sent downrange, littering the wilderness landscape. Which also got me thinking about

Leave No Trace Ethics. With football, hiking and backpacking season in full swing, it seemed like a good time for a quick review of the 7 Leave No Trace Principles. You can learn more at this website: Int.org/why/7-principles/.

1. Plan ahead and prepare;
2. Travel and camp on durable surface;s
3. Dispose of waste properly;
4. Leave what you find;
5. Minimize campfire impacts;

6. Respect wildlife; and
7. Be considerate of others.

If you want to score extra points, pick up any litter you find that someone else left. One nice practice is, on in-and-out trips, have a bag and gloves ready to pick up trash on the way out. We can't completely eliminate our impact on the planet, but we all can do our best to minimize our impact each and every day. It's all interconnected and it all adds up.

Prepare your pets for adventure

By Terry Owen
Outings chair

For many of us, our companion animals are as much a part of our family as the human members are and they often go with us when we hike, kayak or even bike. Just as you prepare yourself for your adventures, it's equally important to prepare your dog, cat or other animal for the trail, river or crag. Here are a few tips to help you and your pet get ready for a safe adventure together.

Ensure your pet is in appropriate physical condition. Start by getting them in for a nose-to-tail physical by a trusted veterinarian that specializes in the species and breed of your adventure partner. Ensure they're fit enough to handle the challenges they'll face. They need to train just like we do for long days in the mountains or on the river. Too often I've encountered pet owners on the trail trying to coax or carry their dog back to the trailhead because the owner overestimated the animal's fitness level.

Reconsider what and how much of the Ten Essentials you'll need to take. Assess the terrain, weather and risks that they may face and ensure you carry the appropriate gear to mitigate those risks. Do you need to bring booties and a coat for winter snowshoeing, or a flotation coat for river activities, or perhaps a backpack so that they can

carry some of their own food? Don't wait until you hit the trail to try out new gear, they should have gotten accustomed to any new gear or devices well in advance of your outing as part of your training regimen. Ensure it fits properly, doesn't chafe them, particularly behind their front legs, and isn't too heavy.

Don't forget the first-aid kit, extra food and water! Many of the items you carry in your first-aid kit are also the items you should carry when you take your companion animal with you. You might consider taking a little extra, just in case. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has an excellent list of recommended items that can be found on the aspca.org website.

Most importantly, for the safety of your pet and others, keep them leashed unless you're traversing a rock scramble or glacier. Don't risk a bad encounter with wildlife to ruin your trip, particularly when you're in backcountry areas. There are a number of leashes that have elasticized sections to absorb shock in case you or your pet should take a fall, and these are readily available online.

Our pets love adventure just as much as we do. A little bit of preparation can help you and your animal friend get home safely to plan your next excursion together.



Photo by Luis Guerrero

Public Lands Day at Caja del Rio

By Luis Guerrero
Political and Legislative organizer

The Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter participated in Public Lands Day by visiting La Bajada, part of Caja del Rio, an area being recommended for Monument protection as it faces threats from development.

Beyond its importance as a geological landmark, La Bajada escarpment is a major cultural landmark. The routes built to cross La

Bajada between 1598 and 1932 follow pre-contact pathways across the mesa, indicating its importance to Native cultures who utilized natural topography, grade changes and drainage systems to best utilize the mesa top.

While the hike was challenging, all the attendees had a great time and learned about the importance of preserving this land. Special thanks to our Northern New Mexico Outings Leader, Alan Shapiro, for leading the hike and making sure everyone made it back in one piece.

Register for Outings Leader Training

By Terry Owen
Outings chair

Interested in becoming a certified Sierra Club outings leader and leading local outings? The first step in that journey is to successfully complete Outings Leader Training.

This course will start at 8 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 3, and will end no later than 4 p.m. It will provide you with the foundational information you need to lead safe, fun and inspiring outings such as hikes, bike rides, snowshoe or ski outings and ambles. You don't have to be a super outdoors person or an expert in ecology, either. Also, if you're a currently certified outings leader and have not yet received the new curriculum, or it's been about four years since you last attended this course, you should consider joining us.

This course will be conducted virtually, and all persons who



June Parsons, right, led a September hike to Salinas Missions. A Dec. 3 course is the first step to becoming a Sierra Club outings leader.

Photo by David Coss

register will receive a resource packet that includes the training materials, handouts and reference materials. The packet will be available along with a Zoom link about one week before the course begins. Register by Nov. 28 at the link provided below.

Note that this training will provide some additional focus on risk management in the desert and Mountain West, including high-altitude outings. The requirements for becoming

ing a certified Sierra Club Outings Leader are:

- Be a Sierra Club member;
- Be at least 18 years old;
- Complete Outings Leader Training; and
- Complete a basic first-aid course.

Successfully plan, publicize and complete a provisional outing with a currently certified outings leader. Register at www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar.



Photo by Mike Cosgrove

Hikes and outings

By Terry Owen
Rio Grande Chapter outings
chair

Saturday, Oct 15: Shopping and Lunch Bike Ride thru the Heights. Experience how fun and easy it is to ride your bike to run errands and meet friends for lunch in the Northeast Heights of Albuquerque. We'll take an easy 9.5-mile loop and stop at grocery and hardware stores and cap it off with lunch, while avoiding heavily trafficked roads and the nightmare of parking. Any multi-speed bike capable of sustained speeds of 10 mph, including road, gravel, mountain, commuter or E-bike is appropriate. Injection of tire sealant in all tires is strongly recommended. Meet at Flying Star 4501 Juan Tabo Blvd NE at 10 a.m. for this two-hour outing followed by lunch at Flying Star. Appropriate for children over 14 with parent or legal guardian. Register no later than Oct. 11 at the link below. Participants will get tips on safe bike commuting and a free bike map of the city. A recommended gear list and additional information will be provided to registrants on October 12th.

Trip Leader: Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, teowen@comcast.net; Patrick Burton, patrickburton9@icloud.com

Level: Easy

Location: Albuquerque

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

Wednesday, Oct 19: Zero Waste Tour of Soilutions Compost and Soil Yard.

10 a.m. -11:30 a.m. Come tour this facility that makes regular and organic compost and soil in Albuquerque's south valley. Walter will be our extremely knowledgeable and engaging tour guide so be ready with your questions. Tour is outdoors so dress appropriately. Comfortable closed-toed shoes recommended as we will be standing the whole time. Masks are optional. Limited parking along side of facility. No dogs. Deadline to register is Oct. 15. Limited to 12 participants.

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

Level: Easy

Location: 9008 Bates Road. SE, Albuquerque.

Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

Friday, Nov. 25: Escape from Black Friday Hike: Skip the mall and go to the mountains instead and burn off that holiday meal. Hosted by the Military Outdoors Program and we welcome everyone. This hike is a 3.7 mile out and back and 944 feet of elevation gain. One of the classic hikes in the Sandia Mountains with a scenic view at the top. This is a steady incline, smooth



Photo by Susan Nichols

The September Bike to the Balloon Fiesta trip had 18 people, including three outings leaders. Check out upcoming outings on these pages. Updated listings can be found at riograndesierraclub.org, or subscribe to our Northern New Mexico Sierra Trail Mix listserv by emailing listserv@lists.sierraclub.org with any subject and a message that says SUBSCRIBE RIO-NORTH-OUTINGS.

packed trail and easy rocky areas. We will meet at the Tree Springs Trailhead Parking lot at 9:00 a.m. Appropriate Covid-19 precautions will be taken. Appropriate for children 12 and up. Good dogs on leash are welcome. Register at the link provided no later than November 22nd. Contact the leader if you have questions.

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

Level: Moderate

Location: East of Albuquerque

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

Saturday, Dec 3: 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 join us. This course will be conducted virtually and all persons who register will be required to download the instruction packet that includes the training materials, handouts and reference materials and those will be available along with a Zoom link, about one week before the course. Register no later than November 28th at the link provided below.

Leader: Terry Owen, 505-301-4349, teowen@

COVID-19 protocols

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. 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.

comcast.net

Level: Easy

Location: Virtual

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

Saturday, Dec. 3 through Sunday, Dec. 4: Lightweight Backpacking Outing. If you've mastered basic skills traveling in the backcountry lightweight style, this trip is right for you. Participants will meet at Winsor Trailhead and travel to Puerto Nambe area where we are going to spend the night. The next day we are going to do an Alpine style ascent to Santa Fe Baldy so that we can see the sunrise from the summit. We will plan to return to the trailhead soon after we refuel and pack our packs. Please sign up for this outing only if you feel comfortable and fit to carry a backpack for more than four miles with elevation gain, summit the mountain and backpack back to the trailhead comfortably. This is not an outing for beginners. The route is 13.5 miles roundtrip with 3,500 feet of elevation gain. On this outing we are going to 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. Leader will email a gear list ahead of time. Participants must be prepared for varying weather conditions and feel comfortable sleeping under the stars or in a tent. Meet at 10:00 a.m. at Winsor Trailhead, adjacent to the public bathrooms and picnic table at the Santa Fe Ski Basin. No dogs please. Children 14 and over with parent or legal guardian are welcome. Appropriate Covid-19 protocols will be observed. Outing size is limited to six, so register early. Register no later than November 22 at the link below.

Trip leader: Sandra Corso, sandracorso@yahoo.com;

Level: Moderate-Strenuous

Location: Santa Fe

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

Saturday, Dec. 31: New Years Eve Snowshoe on the Crest. If you can walk, you can snowshoe! Meet at 9 a.m. at Hobby Lobby on Juan Tabo to carpool or at Sandia Crest at 9:45 a.m. This high altitude, three-hour long outing is approximately 2.5 miles round trip with 150 feet of elevation gain. We'll depart

from the Sandia crest parking lot and proceed along the crest trail with several stops to enjoy stunning views all the way to the continental divide. We'll cover tips for safely traversing on snowshoes and winter hiking and this is a great outing for those who've never snowshoed before. Sponsored by the Military Outdoors Program and everyone is welcome. Appropriate for children over 14 with parent or legal guardian. No dogs, please. Register no later than December 22nd. Recommended gear list and additional information will be provided no later than December 24th.

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

Level: Moderate

Location: East of Albuquerque

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

Sunday, Jan. 15: To the River and Through the Woods Hike. We will start at the Rio Grande Nature Center parking lot at 10 a.m. for this approximately one-hour, easy 2-mile hike. Eyes wide open, cheek bones to the breeze, a trek through the winter wonders of the Bosque. No dogs please. Children over 12 accompanied by parent or legal guardian are welcome. Wear comfortable shoes or boots, dress in layers, consider a warm hat. Bring water, snack, walking stick if needed. Register at the link provided no later than January 12.

Leader: Candice Stanford, stanfordcandice@gmail.com

Level: Easy

Location: Albuquerque

Sign up: www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar