



Volume 61, Issue 3 News of the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter: New Mexico & West Texas July | Aug | September 2023

BIG STEP FOR CHACO

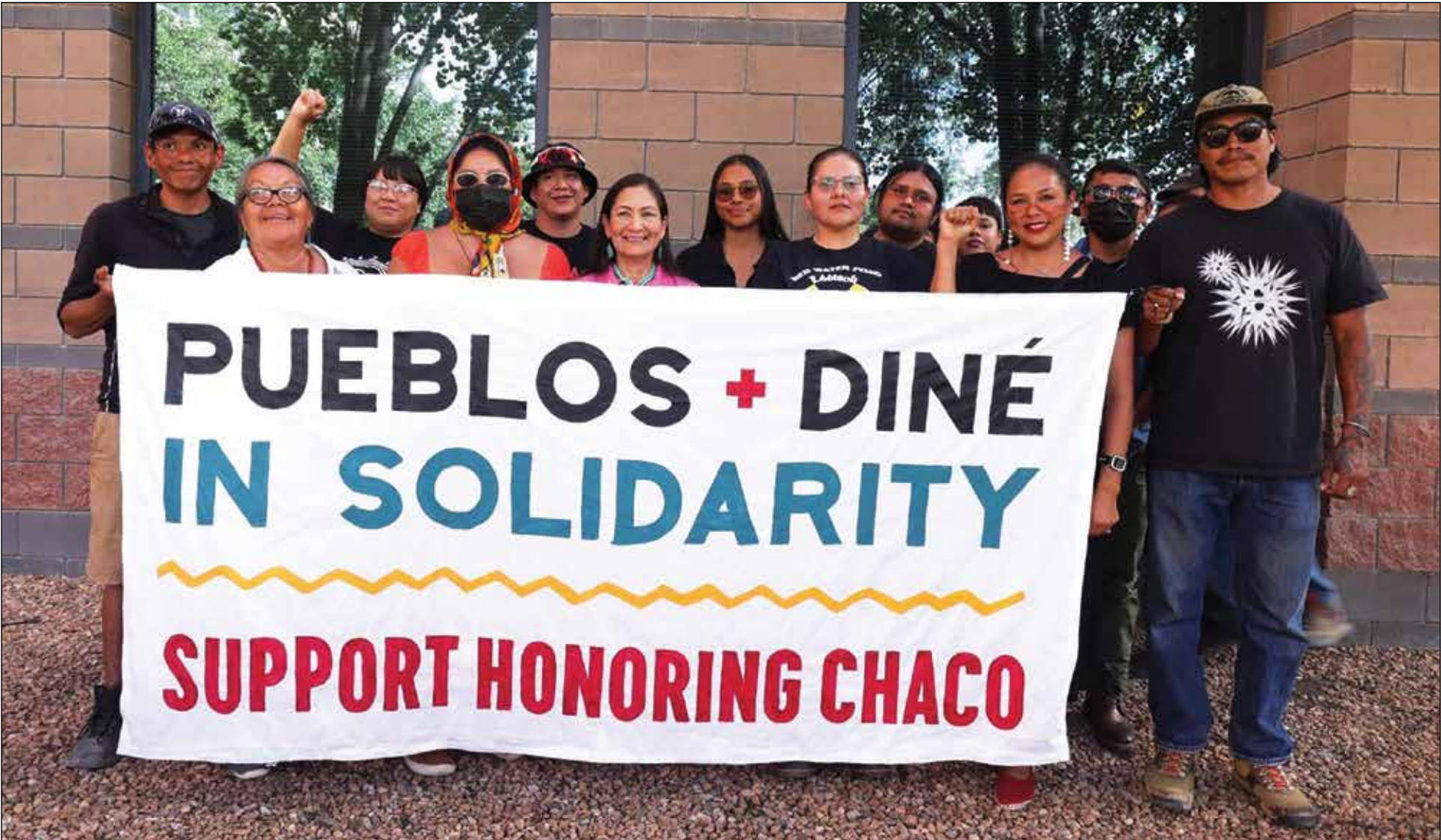


Photo by Richard Castaneda

Community advocates joined Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, center, on June 11 to celebrate a 20-year moratorium on federal oil and gas drilling within 10 miles of Chaco Culture National Historical Park. More is needed to protect the region and its people. **Page 3.**



Photo by David McGahey

Drilling on public lands: Community groups protest oil and gas auctions. The agency may change how it manages public lands: **Page 3.**




NM climate action: Gov. Lujan Grisham vetoed climate tax credits passed by the Legislature. But New Mexico can regain climate leadership. **Page 4.**



Spraying Rio Chama watershed: Monarchs are among the pollinators harmed by the pesticide the USDA plans to spray over the Rio Chama watershed. **Page 7.**

EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET

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Haaland protects Chaco Canyon from drilling

BY THE GREATER CHACO COALITION

The decision to protect public lands within a 10-mile radius of Chaco Culture National Historical Park for 20 years is official. After announcing the Department of the Interior’s plans to initiate the mineral withdrawal in November 2021, in early June 2023, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland issued a final decision that will ban new oil and gas development on unleased federal lands. The ban does not affect federal lands with existing leases, private, tribal or state lands — unleased state lands are also protected for another 4 years thanks to State Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard, extending the moratorium enacted in 2019.

In response to the withdrawal announcement, members of the Greater Chaco Coalition applauded the move as a great first step and called on the Biden administration to end all new federal fossil-fuel leasing across the country.

The coalition also called on the administration to do more to live up to its promises to develop a landscape-level approach for resource management in the Greater Chaco region and address the climate crisis.

By Interior’s own estimates, the mineral withdrawal around Chaco Park will have minimal impact on oil and gas drilling. Meanwhile, Diné communities living outside the 10-mile buffer face growing threats from oil and gas pollution.

Under the Biden administration, the United States continues to be the biggest producer of oil and gas in the world. Biden approved more drilling permits on public lands in his first two years in office than Trump. The administration rubber-stamped Trump-era leases in the Greater Chaco Landscape and recently approved the massive Willow project in Alaska amid widespread opposition.

In breaking with Biden’s promise to end new oil and gas leasing, the Bureau of Land Management is planning to auction more than half a million acres of public and ancestral lands for oil and gas drilling by the end of 2023, including here in New Mexico.

The coalition continues to call for an end to fossil-fuel leasing and development across the entire Greater Chaco Landscape and the country, uplifting longstanding demands for



Photo by David McGahey

Community advocates gathered in May at BLM’s Santa Fe office to protest the agency’s continued leasing of public lands for oil and gas drilling.

environmental justice, meaningful Tribal consultation and community consent, and an end to extractive colonialism.

Coalition statements:

Robyn Jackson, executive director of Diné C.A.R.E.: “Protection of Chaco Canyon is a great first step, but protections for the Greater Chaco Region, where there are living communities of Diné relatives, wildlife, and plant life, including countless sacred sites throughout the region, are just as critical and should be a priority for the Biden administration. The toll of oil and gas drilling has led to harmful community health impacts and serious climate impacts, as evidenced by the methane plume documented in the region. We cannot ignore the devastating impacts that oil and gas have on our climate, region, culture, living communities, and future generations. The Biden administration must phase out fossil fuels, clean up and remediate orphaned oil and gas wells in the region, as well as support a renewable and sustainable economy. Our Indigenous communities deserve environmental justice.”

Julia Bernal, executive director of Pueblo Action Alliance: “We acknowledge the efforts of the Department of the Interior’s Secretary Haaland as a step forward in future landscape management practices that protect culturally significant places. The Greater Chaco Landscape has endured generations of legacy oil and gas extraction; therefore full landscape management to phase out new and

existing oil and gas development is a necessary next step. The Greater Chaco coalition will continue to advocate for the end of the fossil fuel economy, and the remediation and clean up of historic oil and gas infrastructure, and the implementation of environmental justice principles for future land management practices that center frontline community voices.”

Samuel Sage, Counselor Chapter community services coordinator: “I sure hope that BLM listens and follows the secretary’s announcement instead of coming up with the excuse that no one has contacted them about the announcement. I am glad that this will be done. The frontline communities need relief from all the extraction activities.”

Judith Le Blanc, Native Organizers Alliance: “For the past two years, Native Organizers Alliance has worked to support the Greater Chaco Coalition in their call on the Biden administration to protect the Greater Chaco Landscape. Today’s announcement to prohibit new federal oil and gas leasing in Greater Chaco is a positive step forward. Now is the time for the federal government to respond with urgency to the acceleration of threats to our sacred places from climate change and fossil fuel extraction. We must move from consultation to fortifying our constitutional guaranteed treaty rights to the international standard of prior and informed consent from our Tribes and Native communities. President Biden’s commitment to environmental justice and Tribal sovereignty must be

at the forefront of transitioning to a cleaner, more sustainable future for all.”

Soni Grant, New Mexico campaigner, Center for Biological Diversity: “This is a welcome first step, but the Biden administration needs to follow up by ending all fossil fuel leasing on public lands and phasing out extraction. It’s high time that Biden lives up to his promise to end the fossil fuel era, and it’s critical that the entire Greater Chaco Landscape is protected. Today’s decision just isn’t enough to give our communities a fighting chance against the climate emergency.”

Ally Beasley, staff attorney for Western Environmental Law Center: “The Greater Chaco Landscape’s culturally important areas extend far beyond the borders of Chaco Culture National Historical Park, and it is an excellent first step that Secretary Haaland is recognizing that fact with today’s decision. More than 90% of Greater Chaco is already either industrialized by oil and gas extraction or promised to industry for more drilling in the future, even as we recognize this activity’s impacts on the area’s communities and the climate. We will continue to push for an end to oil and gas drilling on all public land in the U.S. so we may all enjoy a healthy, livable future in which our leaders prioritize environmental justice.”

Jeremy Nichols, climate and energy program director, WildEarth Guardians: “For too long, the fossil fuel industry has run roughshod over Greater Chaco. Finally, the Biden administration is mending the Bureau of Land Management’s legacy of broken promises to protect the region. We hope the path ahead will undo the harm of decades of sacrifice by addressing the existing impacts of oil and gas on climate and communities.”

Miya King-Flaherty, organizing representative for the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter: “Protecting 10 miles around Chaco Culture National Historical Park is an important step forward, but more must be done to ensure landscape-level safeguards for the Greater Chaco region and communities living there. Now is the time for the Bureau of Land Management to restore the balance in the region, beyond a 10-mile buffer around the park, and to phase out and end new oil and gas drilling that continues to harm public health and safety and air and water quality.”

BLM rule could prioritize land conservation

BY MIYA KING-FLAHERTY
Our Wild New Mexico Organizer

A proposed policy change could reshape how the Bureau of Land Management oversees public lands.

In April, the agency launched a 75-day comment period seeking feedback on its “Public Lands Rule.” The rule would establish a framework for the agency to manage lands for health and resiliency by placing conservation on the same level as other uses of public lands, which tend to favor resource extraction and grazing. The agency always had the authority to manage lands for multiple uses under the Federal Land Policy Management Act of 1976, but the agency did not have the framework to develop pathways for prioritizing land health standards.

As the largest land-management agency in the country overseeing 245 million acres of public lands and waters (13 million in New Mexico), this rule could ensure that lands are managed for conservation purposes and the protection of cultural resources. The agency has received tens of thousands of comments — including many from Sierra Club supporters. Our national team submitted technical comments providing feedback on aspects that should be strengthened. For example, the rule should clarify that BLM must designate Areas of Critical Environmental Concern that have important values and need special management attention.

Additionally, the rule should require the agency to consult with Tribes and ensure it seeks opportunities for

co-stewardship of ancestral lands. Please submit your comment at sc.org/blmrule. The deadline is July 5.

The oil and gas industry and the ranching community have cited concerns with a tool that would allow entities to lease lands for conservation purposes. Protecting public lands is critical for wildlife, water resources, outdoor recreation, protecting cultural resources, and for climate resiliency. Though this is a great opportunity to elevate conservation on public lands, oil and gas leasing has not slowed down.

Also, on May 25, the BLM state headquarters in Santa Fe held its quarterly online lease sale of 3,000 acres in New Mexico and nearly 6,000 in Kansas. In response, members of the Greater Chaco and Permian Basin Climate Justice coalitions held a series

of demonstrations at BLM field offices in Carlsbad, Las Cruces, and Albuquerque. Advocates also delivered a letter calling for the agency to cancel the sale, to end the federal fossil-fuel leasing program and to stop sacrificing New Mexico’s clean air and water, and public lands for more oil and gas drilling.

On the day of the sale, coalition members rallied at the BLM New Mexico state office to deliver a letter signed by 270 local and national groups, unions, businesses and institutions urging the agency to cancel its plans to sell-off more public lands. The BLM could have deferred the parcels but instead auctioned off the lands for \$79 million. Despite this, we will continue to keep up the pressure and fight for our right to clean air, water, and a habitable environment.

How NM can regain climate leadership

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham spoke at the Politico Energy Summit in May and said that she'd vetoed five climate tax credits passed by the Legislature because they were too small. Taking her at her word, we still have real opportunities to take on the climate crisis and improve New Mexicans' lives and livelihoods.

Here are some significant policies New Mexico can adopt to make real climate progress:

Double the tax credits: While the five climate credits — for electric-vehicle purchases, home heat pumps, geothermal and battery storage — would have had a tiny budget impact, they would have made a real difference to the businesses and thousands of families wanting to protect the climate while saving energy and money. We can provide families and small businesses with bigger incentives to transition quickly to climate-friendly and money-saving vehicles and technologies in their home, including electric vehicles and plug-in hybrids, home battery storage and heat pumps.

On an equitable transition: Transformational planning, community engagement and long-term investment to create opportunities for oil and gas workers for more sustainable, safe, good-paying jobs and a thriving economy for all New Mexicans. Ensure that the \$50 million earmarked in the state budget for advanced energy and energy transition is not used for fossil-fuel technologies in disguise, like methane-fueled hydrogen production or carbon capture and sequestration that prolongs dirty coal



CAMILLA FEIBELMAN
Chapter director

large sources, like oil refineries, gas-processing plants, compressor stations, manufacturing plants and landfills, to slash their health- and climate-harming pollution. Ensure that methane gas and smog safeguards are working and that state agencies have sufficient budgets to inspect and enforce them. Even with these safeguards, oil and gas methane emissions are creating untenable climate damage, so we must identify next steps to eliminate this pollution. Most importantly, we must map out the path to end our dependence on oil and gas, as the world's scientists are desperately urging decisionmakers at every level to do.

On hydrogen: Study after study has demonstrated that methane-fueled hydrogen causes more climate damage than burning gas directly. We cannot expend public resources to make the climate crisis worse. The state's "Hydrogen Hub" proposal should not include fossil-fueled projects. Even renewable-fueled hydrogen poses risks, is energy-intensive and is only beneficial as a last-mile solution for

and gas production. Instead, those funds can be used for job training for renewable industries, geothermal studies and cleanup of thousands of orphaned oil and gas wells.

On oil and gas extraction (60% of New Mexico's emissions): Require

a few hard-to-decarbonize sectors. Public investments should instead focus on reducing our dependence on oil and gas by fostering new industries and jobs in renewable energy, battery storage and other proven technologies.

On transportation (14% of New Mexico's emissions): Pass Clean Trucks standards and updated Clean Cars standards in 2023 so that they are effective for the 2027 model year. The majority of New Mexicans want better access to money-saving zero-emissions electric vehicles and plug-in hybrids. New Mexico passed Clean Cars standards in 2022, but they will not go into effect because they were passed just months before California updated its standards to Advanced Clean Cars, and state emissions standards that are cleaner than federal standards must be similar. Clean Trucks standards will bring cleaner air to breathe, especially for the thousands of New Mexicans who live near highways or major roads.

On electricity (11% of NM emissions): Give the Public Regulation Commission more authority to build on current law and speed utilities' shift from polluting electricity sources. Require utilities to support bolder investments to electrify our cars, homes and buildings.

On buildings (3% of NM emissions, plus electric use): Move now to update energy-efficiency building codes to the latest versions available. Require that all new buildings and parking facilities have solar. Update the 2006 Executive Order and require any General Services Department or Higher Education Department new building to operate on

renewable energy. New Mexico has made big gains in addressing climate emissions, especially through the Energy Transition Act, which requires utilities to provide 50% of their electricity from renewable sources by 2030 and 100% carbon-free by 2045. But there are many other sources of climate pollution in New Mexico, and every major scientific organization tells us that the magnitude of this emergency demands we urgently reduce all of them. If not, climate change threatens agricultural collapse, skyrocketing food prices, increased allergies, lung and heart disease, dwindling supplies of clean drinking water and escalating wildfire and flooding. The impacts we've already experienced demonstrate that no amount of income from oil and gas can justify exposing our families to the damages they cause.

Let's come together to build a thriving and healthy world for all our communities. We can do it.

Learn how to save on EVs, heat pumps and more

Check out 350 New Mexico's great new website that offers information on Inflation Reduction Act and state and utility incentives for climate-friendly products like heat pumps, battery storage, electric vehicles, electrical upgrades and much more. Go to 350newmexico.org/electrify-new-mexico/ to get step-by-step instructions on accessing money-and energy-saving products. Thanks to climate advocate Stefi Weisburd for putting this invaluable resource together!

GWE: A call to action and to stillness

BY GENIE STEVENS
Global Warming Express

On June 12, two major climate events occurred, 2,000 miles apart.

In Montana, the first Our Children's Trust case, in all of the eight years of cases, was permitted to go to trial. It is the first-ever constitutional climate trial in the U.S. See more at www.youthvgo.org/held-v-montana.

In Massachusetts, I joined a full theater in Cape Cod, where Bill McKibben, Søren Hermansen of the Danish island of Samsø (the world's first net-zero island) and Melissa Hoffer, who is the newly appointed Climate Chief of Massachusetts and a personal friend, reported on the updated good and bad news about climate.

McKibben reminded us that we have six. Six years, exactly, to get done what we need to get done. Sobering to be sure.

The Global Warming Express (GWE or Global W.E.) has been running for 10 years. It was 10 years ago that Marina Weber-Stevens wrote a book to give to President Obama in hopes that he would stop the Keystone Pipeline and "fix the problem of global warming." He received her book and stopped the pipeline, but he didn't fix the problem.

It took 8 years for Our Children's Trust to have a lawsuit come to trial.

Six. Six years is not very long. The GWE program works with children ages 8-12. GWEers who are 10 years old will still be in high school and not able to vote yet.

Why even try to educate kids now? What good will it do, with climate change now unstoppable?

The curriculum for the GWE program contains changes every year, because the children's needs and the climate developments change each year. Currently, our mentors bring earth science, climate science, solutions to the climate crisis, sustainability practices, visual arts, performing arts, public speaking, letter writing, and community engagement to the children in our weekly program, with remarkable results. But it's not enough.

It's time to think about what the children of today, who will be the young adults of tomorrow, will need. They will be living in a new world — one with which none of us had any experience.

They will need more than climate science and solutions. They will need to carry inner resources and practices that help them to feel solid and calm during a crisis and continue to fuel their well-being when things outside them are not well.

For this reason, the GWE will incorporate training in mindfulness, compassion,

empathy and connectedness into the program, weaving it throughout the weeks of science, arts and action.

As a bonus, the GWE mentors will learn these skills for themselves, to incorporate into their mentoring and their own lives.

We believe that everyone, not just the children, can benefit from training which begins with mindfulness and ends with concrete, real-world community action, creating tangible results.

The world is not out of time, and as Bill McKibben says, with his Third Act Movement, it is the "Experienced Americans" (who are the fastest-growing demographic in the country) who have an opportunity to be the most engaged and the most useful. The great news about mindfulness and inner wellness is that it is contagious. Good things happen faster when people's motivations are grounded in calm and resilience.

If you're an "experienced American" and you want to make a real shift in your inner and outer world, take a look at the GWE ad and consider jumping onboard the Global Warming Express — for your own well-being and for the future of the children.

Learn. Dream. Do. Inspire.
Kids change the world.

Join the GWE/ Global W.E. solution



Join us in mentoring climate science, regeneration and becoming part of the solution with leadership training, public speaking, letter-writing and performance skills grounded in nature-awareness and mindfulness practices.

Apply today to mentor with the Global W.E.-Global Warming Express program, now in its 10th award-winning year, in partnership with the Rio Grande Sierra Club.

Train to co-mentor students in grades 3-6 once a week for the 2023/24 school year. Generous stipend.

Send inquiries to: genie@theglobalwarmingexpress.org



Is NM on the road to Clean Cars and Trucks?

BY NM CLEAN AIR COALITION

A broad coalition of New Mexico climate, environmental-justice and business groups is advocating for the state to adopt Advanced Clean Cars and Trucks standards by the end of 2023 to save lives and money and create climate solutions in New Mexico.

The standards would limit air pollution from vehicle tailpipes and require auto and truck manufacturers to deliver an increasing number of zero-emission electric vehicles for sale in the region, providing considerable consumer savings on gas and maintenance.

A new analysis has found that these standards would reduce fine particulate matter and prevent dozens of premature deaths and thousands of cases of respiratory illness in the next few decades. These rules would reduce climate pollution by hundreds of millions of metric tons by 2050. That’s about as much greenhouse pollution as the entire state emits in a year, making these among the most effective climate policies New Mexico could adopt.

Advanced Clean Cars II requires auto manufacturers to make zero-emission vehicles a gradually increasing percentage of sales through 2035 and reduce pollution from gas vehicles sold in the interim.

Advanced Clean Trucks establish annual zero-emission sales requirements that vary by vehicle type and increase over time. The Heavy-Duty Low-NOx Omnibus, a third standard, would significantly reduce smog-forming pollution from new diesel-fueled trucks by strengthening the standards for nitrogen oxides and particulates.

Air pollution from cars and trucks is the second-largest source of climate pollution in New Mexico. Transportation pollution is also public-health crisis



Photo courtesy Toyota

A recent report found that New Mexico’s adoption of Clean Trucks and Advanced Clean Cars II standards would reduce pollution enough to prevent dozens of premature deaths and thousands of cases of respiratory illnesses by 2050.

in New Mexico, disproportionately impacting lower-income communities, communities of color, children, elders, and anyone with respiratory conditions like asthma. Zero-emission cars and trucks are the fastest way to reduce the transportation sector’s toxic air pollution and climate emissions.

“Right now, Gov. Lujan Grisham and Albuquerque Mayor Keller can adopt common-sense, ready-made policies to accelerate zero-emission vehicle deployment in New Mexico to improve our health, protect our climate and save us money: the Advanced Clean Cars and Trucks standards,” said Ona Porter, Clean Energy Leader and Founder Emerita at Prosperity Works. “These standards are the only way to guarantee that clean cars and trucks will come to New Mexico.”

If the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Board approves the standards this year, the Advanced Clean Cars and Trucks standards will go into effect for model-year 2027 cars and trucks, arriving in showrooms in 2026.

“Adopting the Advanced Clean Cars and Trucks standards in the midst of a once-in-a-lifetime influx of federal funding for clean vehicles from the Inflation Reduction Act means that New Mexico will be able to make the most of federal dollars to support the deployment of clean cars and trucks, boosting the state’s economy and creating clean tech jobs,” said Susan Nedell, Mountain West Advocate for E2 – Environmental Entrepreneurs. “These standards will further secure an affordable and healthy clean transportation future while helping the state chip away at the root cause of increasing costs from climate-fueled weather disasters.”

“Studies show that adopting Clean Cars and Trucks standards will literally save lives in New Mexico. It will also help us address the climate emergency and help New Mexico access millions in federal funding to boost EV infrastructure and make clean cars more accessible, affordable and convenient,” said Camilla Feibelman, Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter director.

“Advanced Clean Cars and Trucks rules will expedite access to zero-emission vehicles while providing tremendous benefits to New Mexico’s economy and improving its air quality,” said Aaron Kressig, Transportation Electrification Manager for Western Resource Advocates. “These standards will save drivers money at the gas pump, increase availability of zero-emission vehicles for consumers to purchase, and promote equitable access to these vehicles for all New Mexicans. The state should seize the opportunity to adopt these standards together in 2023 to get cleaner trucks and cars on our roads sooner.”

In 2019, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced that New Mexico would join the U.S. Climate Alliance, a bipartisan coalition of 23 governors committed to reducing climate pollution by at least 26 percent from 2005 levels by 2025 — a goal consistent with the Paris Agreement. The governor also signed an executive order directing state agencies to develop a State Climate Strategy and identify policies to reach these goals.

Adopting Clean Cars standards is a pillar of that plan. In 2018, Albuquerque Mayor Keller signed the Climate Mayors pledge, committing the City to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and help meet the Paris Agreement’s goals. In 2022, the New Mexico Clean Air coalition of over 35 organizations supported the first Clean Cars standards passed by the state and the City of Albuquerque. However, those standards are moot because they weren’t passed early enough to go into effect before California passed updated standards. State vehicle-emissions rules that exceed federal standards must be substantially similar. Passing the updated Clean Cars standard along with Clean Trucks and the Heavy Duty Omnibus NOx standards will bring New Mexico back in line with life-saving pollution standards.

More Navajo chapters rejecting hydrogen

BY JESSICA KEETSO

Tó Nizhóní Ání

Despite receiving little to no community engagement from the Western Interstate Hydrogen Hub (WISHH) participants (New Mexico, Colorado, Utah and Wyoming) and their private partners, more and more communities on Navajo Nation have passed resolutions against hydrogen development.

Out of 110 Navajo chapters, 35 have passed resolutions opposing hydrogen produced from a methane source or blue/gray hydrogen.

Chapter resolutions are voted on by community members within a chapter boundary and reflect the will and democratic process of the Navajo people.

This means that almost one third of the Navajo Nation doesn’t agree with using their land, their water, and their gas resources to support an endeavor that ultimately won’t benefit Navajo communities directly anyway. Ideally, this process should guide Navajo leaders like Navajo Nation Council delegates and President Buu Nygren in deciding whether to support a project.

Yet, hydrogen developers have submitted their bid for funds from the Department of Energy, without giving Navajo communities the time or courtesy of understanding the full scope of projects that they will be hosting.

Out of the eight hydrogen projects identified by WISHH, three will be within San Juan County in New Mexico, which overlaps the Navajo reservation. Sure, WISHH has shared their hydrogen concept paper, albeit a redacted version, and yes, WISHH has done approximately 2 roundtable meetings with stakeholders where questions were asked but never really answered. All of which indicates that there seems to either be a lack of understanding of what community engagement means or WISHH and state leadership like New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and her whole administration simply don’t care about being good neighbors to Indigenous Nations. While New Mexico can claim they’re addressing climate change with “green” projects like hydrogen development,

Indigenous communities, yet again, become the state’s trash bin and a means of hiding their addiction to fossil fuel.

Because the Navajo Nation EPA doesn’t have the resources to monitor greenhouse-gas emissions and New Mexico won’t count upstream or imported emissions, a Tribal Nation like the Navajo Nation becomes the perfect place to hide New Mexico’s dirty secrets and further a fossil-fuel agenda. If the Department of Energy funds WISHH, then they are a part of the problem too, enabling a state that is doing the opposite of what the Biden Administration says are its goals, funding projects that will harm already impacted communities, without getting proper community consensus or ensuring the projects will provide direct community benefits.

Invest in better options, such as cleaning up the hundreds of abandoned oil and gas wells, sustainable and regenerative farming and solar energy — not climate-damaging hydrogen or risky carbon sequestration in San Juan Basin geologic formations.

Organizations urge federal agencies to tighten standards for hydrogen incentives

BY THE SIERRA CLUB

In New Mexico and around the nation, companies are lining up for “clean hydrogen” tax dollars that could make our climate crisis worse and pose dangers to communities.

Western Environmental Law Center has filed a Freedom of Information Act request to view New Mexico’s unredacted four-state Hydrogen Hub application. Few details have been released about the projects in the New Mexico-Utah-Colorado-Wyoming \$1.25 billion application, including how or where the projects’ hydrogen will be produced.

The Biden Administration is determining how to calculate the lifecycle emissions for hydrogen under the 45V Hydrogen Production tax credit that was created last year in the Inflation Reduction Act, and the Treasury Department is expected to issue tax-credit guidance this summer.

This is a lucrative credit for developers, and robust qualification requirements for both electrolytic green

hydrogen and fossil-based hydrogen are critical to avoiding billions in public dollars incentivizing millions of tons of climate pollution.

Sierra Club and partners have long been advocating that the energy-intensive electrolytic hydrogen-production process must meet three principles to count as truly low/zero emissions: 1. Additivity (building additional renewables to power hydrogen production rather than creating additional draw on existing resources; 2. regionality/deliverability, and 3. hourly time matched with renewable generation. Additionally, tax credits based on faulty accounting practices for fossil-based hydrogen and tax credits for hydrogen that is vented or flared must not be allowed.

In June, dozens of organizations sent letters to Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, the White House and the Treasury, again outlining these principles as crucial for the upcoming Treasury guidance.

NM reviews bear, cougar hunting

BY MARY KATHERINE RAY
Chapter Wildlife chair

The New Mexico Game and Fish Department’s proposed revisions to its hunting rules would result in more dead bears and possibly more dead cougars. We now know that as large carnivores, both of these species are extremely important for the functioning and integrity of the ecosystems to which they belong. We also know that killing them at random does not prevent conflict or depredation. Modern research instead suggests the opposite. Conflict caused by bears and cougars can be exacerbated in areas where hunting of these animals occurs.

Both species may be pursued by dogs in New Mexico. Upon exhaustion, the animal will seek refuge in a tree where the dogs will hold it. Antennae on the dogs’ collars allow the hunter to find and shoot the weary and frightened animal at very short range. In the case of bears, the Sierra Club’s *Sierra Magazine* recently highlighted the work of Ben Kilham and others about bear behavior and intelligence. Kilham concludes that bears may be as smart as chimpanzees and are much like humans in their social interactions, where they know and recognize their neighbors, develop friendships, express gratitude, remember transgressions, and also punish those who commit them. Overall, much less is known about the social interactions of cougars, but recent research shows that while cougars are mostly solitary, they do interact with each other in meaningful ways (see <https://bit.ly/43L13Zb>). They will share their kills with others and remember who shared with them. Large males behave as governors over their territories, forming networks with the other mountain lions in their area and structuring how they behave.

Killing these animals for



Photo by Anne-Marie Kalus

Bears and cougars are essential to the integrity of the biomes where they live. The NM Department of Game and Fish is considering how many of each species hunters will be able to kill yearly in its rule review.

trophies or sport or even food, has larger ecological costs than previously known. Moreover, when allowing for this killing, surely there should be some consideration for the intensity of drought and destruction caused by wildfires that have beset the habitat of bears and cougars in New Mexico in the last few years. Both can be predicted with certainty to continue to do so.

However, in the case of bears, as of this writing, New Mexico Game and Fish Department is proposing to allow MORE to be killed. It is suggesting that the quotas be increased in the Gila region, where 500 square miles burned last summer, and also increased in northwest New Mexico. The agency wants to provide more lottery permits in the bear-hunting



Photo by Mary Katherine Ray

zone where the Hermit’s Peak/ Calf Canyon fire was the largest in state history. More hunters means higher likelihood that dangerously high quotas will be met. Four years ago, the beginning of the bear-hunting season in the Sacramento mountains in Southern New Mexico was moved from mid-August to Sept. 1, with dog pursuit not allowed until Sept. 25, which is after the bow season for deer and elk ends. The reason given

then was that it’s too hot in August to be chasing wildlife with dogs in southern New Mexico. But now, despite this and the likelihood that it is going to be getting even hotter in the coming years, the agency wants to start the bear season in the middle of August again, allowing two weeks of dog pursuit until Sept. 1. Hunter opportunity appears to be prevailing again. The agency is planning to hold public meetings around

Take action

You can comment to the New Mexico Game Commission on its bear- and cougar-killing quotas and rules by going to bit.ly/NMbear or scanning the QR code below. The Game and Fish Department will also hold public meetings. We will alert you at that link when meetings are announced.



the state to present more details about the proposals and to gather in-person comments. Dates have not yet been announced. But you can comment at bit.ly/NMbear (or scan the QR code). Also bookmark bit.ly/BearcougarNM to follow the bear and cougar hunting proposal details as New Mexico Game and Fish adds them.

Southern NM Group connects with nature on Earth Day

BY LUIS GUERRERO
Chapter Legislative and Political Organizer

“Keep close to Nature’s heart... and break clear away, once in a while, and climb a mountain or spend a week in the woods. Wash your spirit clean.” —John Muir Earth Day offered a beautiful morning in Southern New Mexico for a hike and remembering the importance of spending time outdoors, breathing fresh air and connecting with the beautiful landscapes of the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument. The hike and picnic, which was organized by the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter’s Southern New Mexico Group and Friends of the Organ Mountains

Desert Peaks along with the Bureau of Land Management, drew a crowd of about 45 community members, activists, and representatives of U.S. Sen. Ben Ray Luján and U.S. Rep. Gabe Vasquez, as well as state Sen. Carrie Hamblen, state Rep. Joanne Ferrary, Doña Ana Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor Gill Sorg and Las Cruces city councilors Becky Graham and Yvonne Flores. Friends of the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks led a hike to Fillmore Canyon, and Bureau of Land Management led the one to La Cueva, each with about 10-15 eager hikers, while a group stayed behind at the picnic site and enjoyed time with Sierra Club staff and other members, all while soaking in the beautiful weather of

Southern New Mexico’s spring. One attendee said she loved hearing stories about the Fillmore Canyon cave and waterfalls, some of which she had never heard before. No scraped knees were reported, but many smiles were observed! Special thanks to Gayle Eads, political chair of the Rio Grande Chapter Southern New Mexico Group, for her hard work organizing and working logistics; volunteer and member Craig Severy, Patrick Nolan of Friends of the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks for co-organizing with our chapter and leading a fun and informative hike, and the staff at the Bureau of Land Management for leading and educating throughout the La Cueva Hike.

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Protect Rio Chama watershed

BY SIERRA CLUB

New Mexicans sprang into action in June when they learned of a USDA plan to spray a highly toxic insecticide over 39 square miles in the Rio Chama watershed on July 7 to kill native grasshoppers that are competing with cows for grass.

The USDA's plan is to spray 25,000 acres of the Rio Chama watershed with carbaryl, which in addition to killing grasshoppers, is also highly toxic to fish, earthworms, honeybees, and other pollinators.

The spraying was supposed to start June 26, but public opposition led by the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, state Senate Pro Tem Mimi Stewart, who has also sponsored key pesticide legislation, and many concerned New Mexicans has helped delay the spray to July 7 to allow for more public input.

The Chama is special to many New Mexicans. It's bird-nesting season now, and grasshoppers are an important food source for nestlings — as well as adult birds. The pesticide will kill their food source and them.

The USDA needs to be transparent and engage the community in a participatory decision-making process.

The Santa Fe New Mexican published an editorial on June 27 opposing the action. “Human interference often will make what is happening on the ground worse, with unintended consequences — a lesson we seem unable to learn,” the editorial said.



Photo by Anni Hanna

The USDA plans to spray a highly toxic insecticide over 39 square miles in the Rio Chama Watershed on July 7 to kill native grasshoppers.

The spray area includes a portion of the Rio Chama Wilderness Study Area, including Navajo Peak. A buffer of only 500 feet would be given to campgrounds and recreational areas, even though drift has been found to travel 1000 feet.

EPA has indicated that the insecticide liquid carbaryl is likely carcinogenic to humans. The Rio Chama will not be

directly sprayed but could be contaminated from drift and/or runoff. Downriver communities, Pueblos and Tribes have not been consulted.

Take Action: Bureau of Land Management Taos Field Office Manager Pamela Mathis can stop this project; much of the spraying will occur on BLM land. Write to Mathis at blm_nm_taos_admin@blm.gov

or call (575) 758-8851 and ask Mathis to use her authority to stop the spraying.

State law prohibits any local regulation of pesticides. Cities and schools can refuse to use pesticides on their own property (and should do so) but can't otherwise regulate the use of pesticides. Changing this law would be a good start toward protecting people and our air, water and wildlife.

Taking action on pipeline safety

BY ANTOINETTE REYES

Southern New Mexico organizer

There are tens of thousands of miles of oil and gas pipelines crossing our state, from gas gathering lines on the oil fields, to gas lines that feed our homes, to interstate pipelines pumping extracted fossil fuels across the country, to Mexico, Canada, and other export hubs. And these pipelines are leaking the potent greenhouse gas methane, just like other oil and gas facilities. Because of that, in the bipartisan PIPES Act of 2020, Congress directed the US Department of Transportation, Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) to create a rule to improve pipeline safety.

In early June, PHMSA finally released its proposed rule. This proposal establishes more protective safety standards for our communities by requiring operators to routinely check natural gas pipelines for leaks. Gas pipeline leaks contribute to the climate crisis by releasing methane, and these leaks harm the health of our communities through the associated pollutants that are emitted with the methane.

PHMSA is accepting comments on the rule through July 17. The proposed rule is a great start. We are advocating for it to be strengthened by increasing inspection frequency, repair frequency, and requiring leak-detections technology. You can help by sending your comment to the agency through our action alert at sc.org/methane.

Big oil and gas kills El Paso climate charter

BY LAURENCE GIBSON
El Paso Group Chair

Every two years, El Paso holds municipal elections on the first Saturday in May. In 2021, Sierrans and other quality-of-life advocates scored a huge surprise victory on the ballot when we finally managed to save a thousand acres known as Lost Dog from development.

May 2023 was a totally different story: a new Climate Charter was on the ballot, and the fossil-fuel industry was ready to fight it. Austin's Ground Game Texas and El Paso's Sunrise Hub were branded as “outsiders” with a radical agenda. These groups did a great job with the requisite petitions, gathering more than 34,000 signatures on the last one for the Climate Charter known as Proposition K, intended to guide City Council's future work. However, the mere mention that the council should study municipalization of El Paso Electric Co. awakened the petroleum giant in our midst.

Only a few years earlier, a previous council had studied municipalization and deemed it too expensive. Now, after EPE's sale to JP Morgan and considerable capital improvements, the utility was worth more than twice as much and became even less affordable. Nevertheless, oil and gas targeted the mention of municipalization as the focus of its \$1.5 million anti-Prop K campaign.

The El Paso Group of the Rio Grande Chapter was enthusiastic about Proposition K and voted to support it, though El Paso's Chamber of Commerce (whose new president is a gas-company executive) had commissioned a negative study. Warning signs surfaced when we heard our district representative from City Council informally “bad-mouthing” it as something



Photo by Laurence Gibson

The oil and gas industry spent over a million dollars on mailers and ads with deceptive talking points opposing El Paso's climate charter, Proposition K.

cooked up by outsiders in Austin. Then came the weekly attack mailings (see photo). Then in the final week came an onslaught of oil- and gas-funded negative TV spots. When ExCom members Laurence Gibson and Jerry Kurtyka attended our respective East and Westside informational meetings presented by city staff, we knew Proposition K was in serious trouble. The public

comments, some of them from knowledgeable leaders, were loud and negative. Seemingly lost to most folks was the fact that much of Prop K was simply recommendations to City Council and would depend greatly on elected council members

for interpretation. It did not help that there were “cost unknown” line items, nor that City Council had only a few months earlier created an Office of Climate and Sustainability with its own multimillion-dollar budget, a move raising many eyebrows in town.

Sunrise El Paso and Eco El Paso did incredible groundwork and outreach to support this effort. But given what we were hearing, we pretty much expected Election Day to be depressing ... and it was. 81.5% of the 49,870 votes cast were “no” on Proposition

K, the Climate Charter. It cost the fossil-fuel industry over a million dollars to defeat it, or approximately \$25 per vote, in stark contrast to Ground Game Texas' \$19,000 expenditure and local groups' efforts.

Morals to this story: keep in mind your community and city council's recent history, move forward in baby steps, and lastly: Take on the fossil-fuel industry at your own peril. We may try something more modest in May '25.

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Photo by Teresa Seamster

Many outdoor and conservation groups are asking that a shooting range in the central part of the Caja del Rio be moved and modified.

New site urged for Caja del Rio shooting range

BY TERESA SEAMSTER

The Caja Del Rio mesa and wildlife corridor is a critical wedge of high ground between Santa Fe and Los Alamos. Traditionally, it has been the place of prehistoric petroglyphs and ceremonial sites, rangeland livestock and hunting. Today it is in the bull’s eye of competing interests from business and outdoor groups who look to possible intrusive recreational uses on Bureau of Land Management land. A large 400-acre shooting range in the central part of the Caja — proposed to be located on the boundary between BLM land and Santa Fe National Forest — is a project that many concerned outdoor and conservation groups are advocating be moved and modified. A growing Protect the Caja Del Rio coalition is working collaboratively with BLM to establish a well-run public shooting range on the edge of the plateau near the old Crego mine where shooters currently go for “free range” practice shooting that is still allowed. The proposal would move the range from the highly sensitive central location to an area already heavily impacted by shooters and visitors and reduce it from 400 acres to about half that size since there are natural hill buffers to reduce the sound of gunfire

and danger of overshooting. If the shooting facility is built where BLM is proposing, it will negatively impact a full range of values identified by the Santa Fe National Forest, the public and BLM itself, including:

1. Santa Fe National Forest Wildlife and Cultural Interpretive Special Management Area
2. Camino Real National Historic Route 66
3. Tetilla Peak viewing and hiking area
4. Important Bird Area and close to Golden Eagle nesting area visited by birders
5. Impact ecological “intactness” as identified by The Climate Atlas (2022) as an area of “national significance in providing a safe passage (for wildlife) from the Santa Fe River to the Rio Grande” and “migration corridors from lower elevations to higher elevation pastures.”

If the site is modified in size and moved to a location shooters currently use, the impact to the rich cultural and natural values of the Caja Plateau will be greatly minimized. The Caja del Rio is among the top 20% of identified unprotected public lands with the highest conservation value in the continental United States. For Northern New Mexico, it is an irreplaceable natural resource that we must protect.

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Land office bans new oil, gas leases near schools

BY MONA BLABER

Chapter communications director

On June 1, New Mexico Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard announced a moratorium on oil and gas leasing on state trust lands within one mile of schools or other educational facilities.

The order goes into effect immediately but does not apply to tribal, federal or private lands.

The executive order also mandates State Land Office staff to review all existing oil and gas mineral leases, business leases and rights-of-way within a mile of a school or other educational institution, and assess their compliance with applicable requirements, including the obligation to plug inactive wells, remediate spills and adhere to air-quality standards.

“As the first teacher to lead the agency responsible for generating revenue for New Mexico’s schools, I understand that this work is meaningless if we don’t protect our kids,” said Commissioner Garcia Richard. “There is no reason to greenlight operations that produce dangerous pollutants so close to schoolkids when we have millions of acres of state lands to work with. Ultimately, we need a public health buffer around schools enshrined in state law, and this order provides an opportunity to engage the Legislature, regulatory agencies and other stakeholders on developing a comprehensive and long-term solution. I’m grateful to the advocates here today who have been standing tall to defend the health and safety of kids across New Mexico.”

In announcing the order, the Land Office said it has broad constitutional and statutory authority to determine the best uses of state lands, including prohibiting activities if the commissioner feels it is in the best interest of the trust. State law also charges the New Mexico Land Office and other relevant agencies with ensuring that communities are free from pollution and its

harmful effects. New Mexico law does not currently specify a minimum required health and safety setback — or the distance between oil and gas drilling and other structures — for operations near schools, a requirement that has been codified into law in around a dozen other states. The executive order issued by Commissioner Garcia Richard provides an administrative solution to the problem on state lands for now. Codifying a permanent minimum setback in state law would require statutory changes by the New Mexico legislature. “It’s outrageous that kids at schools like Lybrook Elementary are exposed to toxic emissions from oil and gas every day,” Samuel Sage, community services coordinator of the Navajo Nation Chapter of Counselor, said in a statement. “These are vital protections for communities like ours. We hope all state agencies get the message that they need to do more to protect kids and communities.” “Let’s hope this order puts an end to kids paying for their education with their health,” said Kayley Shoup, Citizens Caring for the Future community organizer. “Kids growing up in the Permian Basin will all live with the consequences of climate change, but they shouldn’t also have their bodies harmed from the start by toxic oil and gas pollution. I’m hopeful that lawmakers and decisionmakers will all follow the State Land Office in putting children’s health first.” “Children are especially vulnerable to a wide range of environment-related health concerns, and the pollutants that are often released from oil and gas production cause disproportionate harm to children’s well-being. Land Commissioner Garcia Richard’s actions are important steps forward towards creating healthier environments for New Mexico’s kids to grow and thrive,” said Amber Wallin, executive director for New Mexico Voices for Children.



Courtesy Earthworks

Clearing and seeding Frenchy’s Field

BY TERESA SEAMSTER

Sierra Club and other Santa Feans spent a nice day on Memorial Weekend clearing weeds and reseeding parts of our Santa Fe City Park for Wildlife, called Frenchy’s Field. Pat Carlton and Teresa Seamster asked local friends and family to help, and we obtained permission from Santa Fe Parks & Open Space to arrange several workdays to clear invasives

and reseed native pasture grasses and a big patch of flowering clover to enhance pollinator and plant-eating wildlife (mainly prairie dogs and rabbits!) at the Park. The next workday will be in July as soon as monsoon rains start. All are invited to help and we’ll announce a Saturday morning (8-11) soon. Contact Teresa Seamster at ctc.seamster@gmail.com if you’d like to join us!



The Low-Flow Conveyance Channel was built in the 1950s to get water to Texas and avoid the Rio Grande. Sedimentation forced its abandonment in the 1980s, but it might be seeing a revival.

No more plumbing of the Rio Grande

BY DENISE FORT

Getting water to Texas down the Rio Grande has been the primary goal of water engineers since before many of us were born. In 1951 the engineers of the era came up with the idea of creating a new channel to get water to Texas, thereby avoiding the meandering Rio Grande. The “Low-Flow Conveyance Channel” was born, and it was used until sedimentation forced its abandonment in the mid-1980s. The Low Flow ran approximately 60 miles, drastically transforming the river’s ecology, the floodplain and the valley as a whole. After its abandonment, the Rio once again flowed, creating and preserving one of the most diverse wildlife habitat corridors in New Mexico. The river does dry up entirely in certain stretches, but water from both the inactive Low Flow (which drains fields and the river) and the river eventually reaches the delta created by Elephant Butte Reservoir, our delivery point of Texas’

Rio Grande water. Climate change is decreasing the flows in the Rio Grande, and Texas is not standing by. The product of the ‘50s is again being pushed by the state of New Mexico water agencies and the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District. But our understanding of the importance of a living river has changed, and further drying of the river is no longer acceptable to many New Mexicans. Using plumbing to solve water shortages isn’t the preferred approach in the 21st century for a variety of solid reasons. Water managers generally avoid proposing new dams and new pipelines and even caution about the costs of workable but expensive options like desalinization. Working with nature instead of against it is now federal policy with the adoption of the idea of “natural infrastructure” as a guiding concept. In New Mexico, we have an opportunity to explore the more fruitful question of what we want for

the lower river, as well as the farms and communities along its banks. The Bureau of Reclamation has initiated an environmental impact statement process that will examine many of these choices for a stretch of the river called the Lower San Acacia Reach. It is an opportunity for interested people, including scientists and engineers, to see how the river’s functioning can be restored in this forgotten stretch of the river. You can follow the agency’s work at www.virtualpublicmeeting.com/mrg-lsari-eis-project-overview. Citizens have an important role to play in talking to our elected officials about the Low Flow. If you’re a member of the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, get involved in upcoming elections to replace three new vacancies, attend meetings, and talk to other members. And everyone can ask the governor, legislators, and the Office of the State Engineer to restore the Rio Grande, not put it into a channel. We can do better.

\$70M enterprise fund directed toward non-polluting projects

BY ROSE RUSHING

Western Environmental Law Center Thanks to robust public input, a \$70 million state enterprise fund will follow guidelines that prioritize climate-friendly and community-supported projects. The Opportunity Enterprise Fund is a \$70 million program passed in the 2022 legislative session that provides funding to private enterprises in New Mexico. The Opportunity Enterprise Review Board was required to draft rules for awarding this funding. The board’s initial proposed rule did not provide necessary guardrails to ensure that funded projects support economic diversification, environment, and just and equitable investment. Many New Mexicans commented at the board’s March 3 and 7 public hearings about why we need investment in just, equitable diversification. The board then provided a draft rule and policy, including

all the public comments, which were overwhelmingly in favor of environmental, equity, and diversification guardrails. The draft rule and policy adopted many of the changes requested by a coalition of groups led by Western Environmental Law Center. The changes included: adding points for depth of community consultation, for projects diversifying local economies dependent on “environmentally unsustainable industries for economic development,” and for taking into account workforce development and training programs. At the April 12 meeting, the board unanimously voted to adopt most of our amendments. Board members, in particular Auditor Joe Maestas, strongly supported using the Opportunity Enterprise Fund to help diversify New Mexico’s economy away from fossil fuels. The board approved changes to elevate loans targeting non-fossil-fuel

industries and to require community benefits. The policy also now prioritizes “projects located in frontier and rural communities” and projects “diversifying local economies dependent on environmentally unsustainable industries.” And it clarifies that projects benefitting “disadvantaged, marginalized or otherwise underserved populations” needs to be “evidenced by [the] populations served; equity, diversity and inclusion policies; and workforce development and training programs.” The policies also now require that “local support” needs to be evidenced by “the depth of community consultation and support included in the application including public meeting records and/or public body resolutions.” WELC will be monitoring applications for funding to support projects that support an equitable transition to a healthy climate and economy and oppose harmful ones.

Commercial nuclear waste: What’s next?

JOHN BUCHSER
Chair, Nuclear Waste Committee

The passage of SB53 was a huge victory for New Mexico. Blocking New Mexico permitting for Holtec’s interim high-level radioactive-waste repository is just a step toward the much-needed long-term solution for decades of nuclear reactor waste. Until a long-term repository is in place, the problem is growing, as our nation continues producing 20% of our electricity from boiling water with uranium fuel. The problem with long-term disposal is that the US Congress must fund and ultimately approve one or more sites for study and potential construction of permanent disposal locations. Most communities don’t really want something nearby that remains dangerous for a million years. The baby step was to provide funding to determine if there are locations where the community supports interim storage. But this allows Congress to “kick the can down the road” and not fund long-term storage. The Department of Energy has just announced the distribution of \$2 million each to 13 different collaborations across the US. The entities receiving the money are dominated by industries that produce nuclear waste and research universities like UNM that educate our next generation of engineers. Arkansas is an example of a state that is banking on next-generation technology, where the waste generated is “re-processed” into nuclear fuel that can be used by newer reactor technology. Only 5% of the uranium is depleted by fission. Given that taxpayers and ratepayers are paying for nuclear power plants that typically cost 2-3 times more than what originally was estimated, there are many who don’t hold a lot of hope for the next generation of nuclear reactors. New Mexico has thousands of sites where uranium mining occurred, and although decades have passed, we are just now seeking to understand the scope of the remaining radioactive contamination, much less addressing the health issues. Our state can’t afford to now be the legacy location for the waste too. The transition to renewables has come a long way with respect to cost. Overnight storage is one of the challenges now facing us. Storage technology is fast advancing, and technologies like iron-flow batteries look very promising and offer a lower impact alternative to nuclear. Instead of creating interim storage sites for nuclear waste, we need to focus on finding a permanent solution. It will take 10 years to study appropriate long-term disposal, and another 20 years to build. The casks currently storing used nuclear waste will start to fail. Interim storage sites may not be suitable for long-term underground disposal. We need to urge our U.S. Congress to fund the Environmental Protection Agency to develop new technical standards for repositories and do what is required: Find a permanent storage facility for the country’s radioactive waste.

Refilleries are bustin’ out all over!

BY LAURIE ZUNNER

Zero Waste Chair

Sorry but I couldn’t resist parodying the old Rodgers & Hammerstein song. I initially intended to feature one storefront in Albuquerque but soon learned of several more refilleries. The concept of refilling isn’t new. We’ve been refilling our gas tanks for over a century. In the 1950s came an explosion of new products offering greater convenience; just pick them up and go. When the first oil embargo hit in the ’70s, transportation costs skyrocketed. Packaging soon switched to lighter and more durable plastic, which at the time was considered more environmentally friendly. We were saving trees by not using so many paper products and packaging.

Now, of course, we have become more aware of the dangers inherent in plastic. It is very hard to recycle. Even what can be recycled usually isn’t — only about 6% of all plastic is. What isn’t landfilled ends up littering our land and water, breaking down into micro- and nanoplastics. Winds pick them up and spread them to every place on Earth from the Himalayas to Antarctica to the deepest oceans. We breathe and ingest these nanoplastics which contain toxic chemicals added in their production. These include endocrine disruptors and potential carcinogens, which are commonly found in human blood and fetal placentas.

Plastics are so ubiquitous that it is impossible to avoid them completely. However, this is where refilleries come in. These are fairly new businesses, so new in fact that I couldn’t find the word refillery in the dictionary. They focus primarily on refilling containers (yours or theirs) with bulk liquid or dry goods (mainly personal care and cleaning products) thereby avoiding all those plastic bottles, jars and tubes that can’t be recycled. Here are the New Mexico refilleries I’ve learned about so far. If you know of others, let me know and I’ll put them on the Rio Grande Sierra Club website under Zero Waste.

People & Planet Refill (Albuquerque, NM; peopleplanetrefill.com) opened on Earth Day 2022. This tiny storefront



Photo by Laurie Zunner

Owner Carolyn Richter in her People & Planet Refill in Albuquerque.

(150 square feet) is packed floor to ceiling with hundreds of refill and non-refill products ranging from laundry soap to toothpaste tablets (even fluoride ones!) to bamboo bandage strips. It’s impossible to see everything all in one visit.

But this is more than a retail store offering alternatives to plastic packaging. In her mission statement, owner Carolyn Richter describes it as a profit-for-purpose retail operation with a vision of growing “into a resource center that builds community around consuming fewer resources and rallying for social and environmental justice.” To this end there is a collection box for donations to the ABQ Free Fridge, and one for donating unused, packaged toiletry items. Also a portion of the profits are donated to local and national social and environmental justice organizations.

Rio Refills (Rio Rancho, NM; riorefills.com) opened Earth Day 2022 as well. Her pop-up trailer is the most convenient refill option on the west side, and she does tons of pop-ups.

Gabrielle’s Greenery: (Albuquerque, NM; gabriellesgreeneryrefillery.com) started in April 2021 when Gabrielle was still in high school. She describes her business as “New Mexico’s first Mobile Refillery, plant shop, and thrift center all in one Airstream!” She typically pops up on Saturdays (and sometimes Sundays) outside coffee shops around Albuquerque.

Los Poblanos: (Albuquerque; lospoblanos.com/shop/town-and-ranch) opened a refill station for their most popular lavender body products last month in the farm shop at Town & Ranch. Hopefully more businesses will follow their lead and open refill sections in their stores.

Soap & Supply — Refill: (Santa Fe, NM; soapsantafe.com) celebrated their third anniversary in November. They moved into a larger space last April and they certainly have the largest variety of refill products in New Mexico. Its mission statement is to: “reduce single-use plastic waste.” Santa Feans are fortunate that Soap and Supply — Refill fulfills that statement with aplomb. Located in a store graced by its landlady’s chandeliers, the store’s many offerings all feature one thing: no plastic. While customers are encouraged to bring their plastic bottles to be refilled with all sorts of organic soaps and suds, it also has some containers folks can use on the spot. Ken Hughes highly recommends this store: “I am so happy to not ever have to buy a plastic container again for household items and avoid plastic in products such as dental floss and shaving cream.”

Taking forever chemicals out of our daily lives

BY ANTOINETTE REYES

Southern NM & El Paso organizer

PFAS, also known as “forever chemicals,” are everywhere! PFAS come in many forms and were once considered a miracle discovery as they are water-, stain-, heat-, and grease-resistant. They are in everyday products from makeup to nonstick pans, in our food thanks to packaging, waterproof clothing, and in many other parts of our daily lives.

This constant exposure places us at greater risk of serious disease. PFAS from these products has contaminated the air, water, and soil of countless communities since it was invented in the 1930s. It is so prevalent that PFAS have even been found in our blood! So how are we trying to address this problem?

Federally, the EPA is working to designate certain types of PFAS as hazardous substances so that cleanup can begin. We are collecting comments from our members and supporters for this comment period ending on Aug. 11. Sierra Club is asking the EPA to go a step further and list the entire PFAS class as hazardous. This will make polluters responsible for cleaning up PFAS-contaminated sites and water bodies.

Here at home, at the end of May, the New Mexico Attorney General joined the Environment Department in filing a lawsuit against prominent PFAS manufacturers for damages they’ve caused to our environment and communities. It is imperative

that industries are held accountable for the harms they have caused and ultimately that they stop manufacturing PFAS.

Finally, our partners at WildEarth Guardians have petitioned the Oil Conservation Commission to ban PFAS from oil and gas operations. Oil and gas operations are exempt from complying with hazardous-substance regulations, so it is important that we not only work to get PFAS listed as hazardous by the federal government but also make sure that industry stops using thousands of gallons of PFAS in New Mexico as part of their extractive processes. The commission will make a decision on whether to move forward with the petition at its July 13 meeting. They will also consider getting rid of the “trade secret” exemption that allows oil and gas companies to not report all of the chemicals they use in their operations.



Water Advocates speaker series

The Middle Rio Grande Water Advocates are hosting talks on a comprehensive approach to statewide water planning for adaptation to increasing water scarcity. Go to mrgwateradvocates.org/speaker-series/ to learn more. The next workshop is scheduled for July 20. More monthly workshops on state water issues are available at mrgwateradvocates.org/7433-2/.

Central New Mexico Group contacts

Executive Committee

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

Susan Gorman, sbginabq@aol.com

Other Responsibilities

Political/Bosque: Richard Barish
richardbarish@gmail.com

Volunteer coordinators: Open

Wildlife: Open

Military Outings: Terry Owen

The Central New Mexico Group will host a picnic at Doc Long Camping Area on July 2: Sign up at riograndesierraclub.org

Outings powered by volunteers

BY TERRY OWEN

Outings co-chair

In 2022 the Rio Grande Chapter offered more than 80 outings, in which nearly 700 people participated. These outings included hikes, bike rides, zero-waste tours, snowshoe hikes, cross-country ski outings and backcountry backpacking trips. None of this would have been possible without the passionate volunteers that offer their time and talent to make it all happen. They spend hours in advance of each outing planning, analyzing risks and scouting the route before anyone even signs up for the event. They do this work because they love doing it and to a great extent, out of pure altruism.

Because of that, it's time to acknowledge them and thank them for all of their efforts to provide fun, safe and interesting outings.

The outings chairs for each group include: Alan Shapiro in the Northern Group, Debbie Bryant in the Central Group, Howard Dash in the Southern



Sierra Club outings leaders Debbie Bryant, John Link and Terry Owen were among the crew joining the City of Rocks State Park trail-maintenance project led by Rose Rowan.

Group and Laurence Gibson in the El Paso Group. They help ensure that outings leaders are properly trained and are following club policies for the various types of outings. They're also available to answer questions from outings leaders within their respective

groups and help out when needed. Best of all, they are some of the most qualified and experienced outings leaders in New Mexico with thousands of hours on the trail. Our volunteer leaders are absolutely essential to the entire outings program. In the

Northern Group they are: Hart Pierce in Aztec; Mike Foster in Farmington; Doug Spray, John Buchser, Nancy Harverkos, Sandra Corso and Ray Greenwell in the Santa Fe area. In the Central Group Albuquerque area you'll find outings led by John Link, Diane

Owens, June Parsons, Debbie Bryant, Diane Reese, Candice Stanford and Rose Rowan. Jim Nelson leads outings for the Central Group in the Socorro and Magdalena area. In the Southern Group, our newest outings leader in the Las Cruces area is Holly Thomas. Our outings program is powered entirely by these amazing volunteers. We are extremely grateful for them and all that they do to keep the program running so successfully. If you join one of them on an outing, which I encourage you to do, or happen to encounter them around town, please tell them thanks. Lastly, if you or someone you know would like to become an outings leader, contact the outings chair for your area to get started. The requirements are: Be at least 18 years old and a Sierra Club member, complete outings-leader training, complete a basic first-aid course and successfully complete a provisional outing with one of the certified leaders. We hope you'll join us. teowen@comcast.net

July • August • September outings continued from page 12

SATURDAY, SEPT. 23

Yoga in The Mountains. Celebrate the first days of autumn with us. We'll meet at the trailhead at 9 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! Easy, 3-mile hike incorporates a one-hour outdoor yoga and mindfulness break midway. Includes 260 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 the age of 12 are welcome when accompanied by parent or legal guardian. A \$7 cash donation for the instructor appreciated. Well-behaved dogs permitted. Register by Sept. 20. **Trip Leader:** Debbie Bryant bryade@gmail.com / Terry Owen, teowen@comcast.net
Level: Easy
Location: East Mountains of Albuquerque, Ponderosa Trail Loop
Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/

FRIDAY, SEPT. 22 TO SATURDAY, SEPT. 30

Escalante Petrified Forest State Park Utah Service Project. The Rio Grande Chapter is co-sponsoring a week-long service trip to Escalante Petrified Forest State Park Utah for a Service Project in conjunction with the Austin (Texas) Group of the Sierra Club. Additional information and registrations are being handled by the Austin Group. This park is seven miles from the famed Hole-in-the-Rock Road, which takes you deep into Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument. There are numerous gorgeous hikes in the



Photo by Alan Shapiro

Hikers took in the vista on Aspen Vista Trail to Rock Garden in May.

National Monument, including Coyote Gulch. State Park Manager Chad Jones has given us Saturday, Tuesday and Friday off to give us a chance to do some serious hiking. This means we will work all day Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Thursday. At the State Park, we will have access to showers, water and power. **Leader:** Stan Peyton stanpeyton@gmail.com
Level: Moderate
Location: Escalante, UT
Sign-up: meetup.com/austin-sierra-club-outings/events/291880228/

SATURDAY, SEPT. 30 TO SUNDAY OCT. 1

Wilderness First Aid Course two-day event. 8 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 30, to 5 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 1. Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter is sponsoring a Wilderness First Aid course geared toward our members. This course is in high demand and typically fills up months in advance. The SOLO Wilderness First Aid Course is a two-day first-aid course that

provides training for anyone who spends time hiking, skiing, engaged in other outdoor pursuits, or just wants to know what to do when things go south. The course is a blend of lectures, demonstrations, and scenarios. Attendees must participate in all portions and hours of the course to obtain certification. By learning a few basic skills, you can make the difference between a good outcome and a bad one — and maybe even save a life. The price for the course is \$200 per person. Participants must attend both days. Class times: 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Sept. 30 and Oct. 1. Payment instructions will be sent in late July requesting a \$65 deposit to hold your seat to the first 24 who have signed up. Applicants will be taken in the order that they register and make payment by the deadline. Maximum class size is 24. **Leader:** Terry Owen, 505-301-4349 teowen@comcast.net
Location: Tijeras, NM
Sign up: bit.ly/3G22WqL

SATURDAY, SEPT. 30 TO SATURDAY, OCT. 7

Island in the Sky District —

Canyonlands National Park Service Project
The Rio Grande Chapter is co-sponsoring a week-long service trip to Island in the Sky-Canyonlands National Park for a Service Project in conjunction with the Austin (Texas) Group of the Sierra Club. Additional information and registrations are being handled by the Austin Group. This park is divided into three parts, and we will be in the Island in the Sky District. There are numerous gorgeous hikes at Island in the Sky. Volunteer Coordinator Sofia Nicholson has given us two days off to hike, including Sunday. We will have access to showers and toilets. We will not have electricity at our campsite. And we will be camping alone in a Service Area, so we might find heavy equipment parked nearby. **Leader:** Stan Peyton stanpeyton@gmail.com
Level: Moderate
Location: Canyonlands, UT
Sign-up: meetup.com/austin-sierra-club-outings/events/291912034/

SATURDAY, OCT. 7

Cerros de Amado Ramble. The landscapes will be quite pleasing in this geologically interesting area. With no forest cover, the rock strata and their contortions are laid bare, and we walk up and down through millions of years. This hike is 6 miles with an elevation gain of 800 feet. Ages 14 and up with parent or legal guardian. No dogs. Register by Oct. 4. **Leader:** Jim Nelson, 575-517-7001 jcnelson@gilanet.com
Level: Moderate
Location: East of Socorro, NM
Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/

SATURDAY, OCT. 21

Sierra de la Cruz Scramble. Looking from Socorro to the east across the Rio Grande, you'll see a rounded formation 10 miles distant. This hike will take us to the top of this cap of Permian marine limestone, a scramble of 4.6 miles and 600 feet of elevation gain, with panoramic views of the Rio Grande Valley and the broken and uplifted country on its east side. Take I-25 to Escondida, which is the last exit north of Socorro, and drive east and then north following the paved road 1.5 miles to the turnoff east to Escondida Lake, where we'll meet in the parking lot and, ideally, share rides. The 18-mile drive from there is for moderately high-clearance vehicles. Ages 14 and up with parent or legal guardian. No dogs. Register by Oct. 19. **Leader:** Jim Nelson, 575-517-7001 jcnelson@gilanet.com
Level: Moderate
Location: East of Socorro, NM
Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/

July · August · September outings

SATURDAY, JULY 8

Arroyo del Tajo Scramble.

A Quebradas hike featuring strata exposed by millions of years of water erosion, and the eponymous tajo or gash, cut through ancient redbeds. We'll scramble east up the arroyo to an elevated basin and then back down across the Quebradas Backcountry Byway to the lower part of the arroyo with more impressive formations from a quarter-billion years ago. Hike is 6 miles with 500 feet of elevation gain and a little scrambling over rocks. Ages 14 and up with parent or legal guardian. No dogs. Register by July 5.

Leader: Jim Nelson, 575-517-7001
jcnelson@gilernet.com

Level: Moderate

Location: East of Socorro, NM

Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

SATURDAY, JULY 8

Yoga in The Mountains.

Come celebrate the day with us. We'll meet at the trailhead at 9 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 3-mile hike that incorporates a one-hour outdoor yoga and mindfulness break midway. Includes 260 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 the age of 12 are welcome when accompanied by parent or legal guardian. A \$7 cash donation for the instructor would be appreciated. Well-behaved dogs are permitted. Register no later than July 5 at the link below.

Trip Leader: Debbie Bryant
bryade@gmail.com / Terry Owen,
teowen@comcast.net

Level: Easy

Location: East Mountains of Albuquerque, Ponderosa Trail Loop

Sign-up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/

WEDNESDAY, JULY 12

Zero Waste E-recycling Tour.

10-11:30 a.m.

Come find out what you can e-recycle beyond just computers and cell phones and how these items are recycled.

Location: Albuquerque Computer & Electronics Recycling Company in Albuquerque. Meet in their parking lot by 9:50 a.m. to sign in. We will be standing the whole time, so wear comfortable shoes. Register by July 10. Limit: 12 people.

Trip Leader: Laurie Zunner
505-440-5337, lmzunne@gmail.com

Level: Easy

Location: 3726 Hawkins St. NE, Albuquerque

Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

THURSDAY, JULY 13

Ride the Cool Ditches of the North Valley.

This is a North Rio Grande Valley Loop. Riding mostly on dirt, these trails are flat, can be narrow and we will do some waterway crossings on narrow bridges. There will be some sand and bumpy roots, which require moderate riding skills. Ride is 10 to 15 miles total on mostly flat terrain. Needed are mountain bikes in good condition and knowledge of flat tire repair. Helmets required. Meet at Harnett Park on Rio Grande



Photo by June Parsons

Participants took a break to enjoy the view during a June hike to Los Conchas.

Boulevard for departure at 8 a.m. sharp. Limited to 10 participants. Children 16 years and over accompanied by parent or legal guardian are welcome. Register by July 10.

Trip Leader: Rose Rowan
rose.rowan7@gmail.com

Level: Moderate

Location: Albuquerque

Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

SATURDAY, JULY 22

Arroyo del Alamillo Scramble.

This scramble, or off-trail hike, covers 6 miles with 600 feet of elevation gain and loss. The terrain is of ancient uplifts of mostly Permian-age sedimentary strata, being washed down into what's now the Rio Grande Valley over many millions of years. You don't have to know any geology to marvel at this colorful and sometimes precipitous terrain, but you do need to be ready to pant up a rocky slope as the price of a view from the highest point we'll reach. Ages 14 and up, no dogs. Register no later than July 19 at the link provided below.

Leader: Jim Nelson, 575-517-7001
jcnelson@gilernet.com

Level: Moderate

Location: East of Socorro, NM

Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/

TUESDAY, AUG. 8

Zero Waste Tour of the Southside Wastewater Reclamation Plant. 9-11 a.m.

We will meet at the Education building at 8:50 a.m. to sign in and hear an orientation. This will hopefully include a slideshow of activated sludge and the live critters that consume it, followed by a tour of the extensive facility showing the stages of wastewater reclamation. This will be mostly outside and includes walking and standing, so comfortable shoes are recommended. Long pants and closed-toed shoes are required. Hard hats will be provided. Register by Aug. 5. Limit 12; children aged 10 and up accompanied by parent or legal guardian may participate.

Trip Leader: Laurie Zunner,
505-440-5337, lmzunne@gmail.com

Level: Easy

Location: 4201 2nd St. SW, Albuquerque

Register: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

THURSDAY, AUG. 10

Ride the Cool Ditches of the North Valley.

This is a North Rio Grande Valley loop. Riding mostly on dirt, these trails are flat, can be narrow and we will do some waterway crossings on narrow bridges. There will be some sand and bumpy roots, which require moderate riding skills. Ride is 10 to 15 miles total on mostly flat terrain. Needed are mountain bikes in good condition and knowledge of flat-tire repair. Helmets required. Meet at Harnett Park on Rio Grande Boulevard for departure at 8 a.m. sharp. Limited to 10 participants. Children 16 and over accompanied by parent or legal guardian are welcome. Register by Aug. 6.

Trip Leader: Rose Rowan
rose.rowan7@gmail.com

Level: Moderate

Location: Albuquerque

Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

SATURDAY, AUG. 12

Yoga in The Mountains.

Come celebrate the day with us. Meet at the trailhead at 9:00 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 3-mile hike that incorporates a one-hour outdoor yoga and mindfulness break midway. Includes 260 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. Children over 12 are welcome when accompanied by parent or legal guardian. A \$7 cash donation for the instructor would be appreciated. Well-behaved dogs are permitted. Register by Aug. 9.

Trip Leader: Debbie Bryant
bryade@gmail.com / Terry Owen,
teowen@comcast.net

Level: Easy

Location: East Mountains of Albuquerque, Ponderosa Trail Loop

Sign-up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/

SATURDAY, AUG. 19

Making Connections from West Albuquerque Bike Ride.

Transportation from the west side doesn't have to be car-dependent! Learn about the extensive off-street paved bike trails throughout the west side and connections across the river! We will travel from Mariposa Basin Park to Bike-In Coffee, renowned for catering to bicyclists and asking patrons to avoid parking that disrupts the neighborhood. This 16-mile roundtrip route will go through 300 feet of elevation change, most of it from the riverbed up to the west mesa via a bike and pedestrian bridge adjacent to the interstate. Children 16 years and over accompanied by parent or legal guardian are welcome. Sign up by Aug. 16.

Leader: Patrick Burton, 505-550-5534, patrickburton9@icloud.com

Level: Moderate

Location: Albuquerque, Mariposa Basin Park

Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

SUNDAY, AUG. 20

Mindful Birding Walk to Fillmore Falls, Dripping Springs Natural Area. 7:10-10 a.m.

Meet at the Trailhead at the La Cueva Recreation Site turnout (not the Visitor's Center; please pay for your parking ahead or get a pass from the Visitor Center beforehand). Our pace will be about two miles per hour, with frequent pauses to listen for birdsong and notice wildlife, so bring binoculars if you wish and enjoy the beauty of the Organ Mountains and Fillmore Canyon. It is unlikely there will be water in the falls at this time of year, but the cool canyon walls provide a lovely point to rest, snack and contemplate. The trail has a few stretches with larger rocks but is otherwise well maintained. Wear comfortable shoes that provide good support and use trekking poles if you like. We may encounter snakes. Bring along a snack for the "falls," and please carry water, sunscreen and insect repellent. This is a relatively easy 2.1-mile out-and-back hike with 450 feet of elevation gain. No dogs.

\$5 per vehicle or National Park Pass required. Restrooms near trailhead or at Visitor Center. Sign up by Aug. 17 at the link provided.

Trip leader: Holly Thomas

htbern1@sbcglobal.net

Level: Easy

Location: Las Cruces, NM

Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

SATURDAY, SEPT. 9

Cerrillos del Coyote Scramble.

See absorbing rock formations on the Cerrillos del Coyote hike and walk up and down some of them. It's enough to make you interested in geology and deep time. These rocks were laid down long before the dinosaurs came along, so the most we might see would be small marine fossils. Ages 14 and up with parent or legal guardian. No dogs. Register by Sept. 6.

Leader: Jim Nelson, 575-517-7001
jcnelson@gilernet.com

Level: Moderate

Location: East of Socorro, NM

Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 13

Zero Waste Tour of Soilutions Compost and Soil Yard.

10-11:30 a.m.

Come tour this facility that makes regular and organic compost and soil in Albuquerque's south valley. Walter will be our knowledgeable and engaging tour guide, so be ready with questions. Tour is outdoors. Close-toed comfortable shoes recommended, as we will be standing the whole time. Parking is very limited, so please contact Laurie if you can offer or need a ride. Meet at 9:50 a.m. No dogs. Register by Sept. 11. Limit 12.

Trip leader: Laurie Zunner,
505-440-5337, lmzunne@gmail.com

Level: Easy

Location: 9008 Bates Road SE, Albuquerque. Limited parking along side of facility.

Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

FRIDAY, SEPT. 15

Las Conchas Trail Hike along the Jemez River East Fork. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Join us for a dose of nature and camaraderie. This outing includes one hour of driving each way, along the lovely winding mountain Highway 4 with a photo stop at the Gilman tunnels and waterfall. This easy pine forest hike alongside the mountain stream is about 3 miles round trip with 50 feet of elevation gain. Bring your brown bag lunch as we will enjoying lunch by the Jemez River, halfway through the hike. 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. Recommended carpool driver donation is \$15. Bring your own water, and wear outer layers as mountain air may be chilly. Appropriate for children over 12 accompanied by a parent or legal guardian. No dogs. Register by Sept. 11.

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

Level: Easy

Location: Jemez Mountains, North of Jemez Springs

Sign up: riograndesierraclub.org/calendar

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