GOING GREEN

NM Clean Cars and Trucks standards promise major health, climate, economic benefits. Page 3.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham drove an electric vehicle to the July 3 event announcing proposed Clean Cars and Trucks standards in New Mexico.

ETA rate credits coming: Check your PNM bill for a monthly credit averaging $9 reflecting coal-to-clean transition. Page 5.

Cougars, bears at risk again: New Mexico Game and Fish proposing unjustified bear and cougar kill quotas. Page 7.

Court ruling a win for enviros, PRC: PNM plan would likely have kept Four Corners coal plant open years longer than scheduled. Page 4.

EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET

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

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Two-member households can each vote, using both boxes. Please also vote for candidates for the group executive committee where you live.

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Northern NM Group Executive Committee
(4 seats — vote for 4 only)

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Shannon Romeling

Central Group Executive Committee
(5 open seats)

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Michelle James
Diane Reese
Ray Shortridge
David Ther

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Caja del Rio: Luis Guerrero
Chaco Coalition: Mya King-Flaherty, Teresa Seamster
Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy: Karl Braithwaite, Camilla Feibelman, Monica Blaber
Dairy Coalition: Dan Lorimier
Donia Ana County Coalition: Howie Dath
Otero Mesa Action Team: Antoinette Reyes
Valles Caldera Coalition: Teresa Seamster, Tom Ribe

Vote for chapter, group leadership
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 in November; ballots will be emailed to members. To vote on paper, mail this completed ballot to: Sierra Club Election Committee, 1807 2nd St., #45, Santa Fe, NM, 87505. Ballots must be received by Dec. 15.

Note: El Paso Pan Groups ballot and candidate statements will be mailed separately, but El Paso members may vote for chapter executive committee using this ballot.

Vote for chapter, group leadership

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OCTOBER | NOVEMBER | DECEMBER 2023

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Rio Grande Chapter Executive Committee
There are three candidates running for three open positions.

- Jody Benson
- Anita Gonzales
- Susan Martin

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- Compliance Officer: Frank Katz
- Sierra Student Coalition: Open

Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter

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Stronger EPA oil & gas safeguards would save lives in NM

By Mono Blaber
Chapter Communications Director

In July, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham proposed updated Advanced Clean Cars and Clean Trucks standards that can save lives and money — and you can help ensure a state board finalizes them in November and makes a major dent in New Mexico’s climate pollution.

If adopted by the state Environmental Improvement Board in November, Clean Cars and Trucks will require auto and truck manufacturers to deliver an increasing number of zero-emission electric vehicles and plug-in hybrid vehicles for sale. Clean Cars requires 42% of new cars sold in New Mexico by 2032 to be zero-emission vehicles or plug-in hybrids. Clean Trucks would require that an increasing percentage of medium- and heavy-duty trucks be electric.

Both would go into effect starting with the 2027 model year if adopted before 2024.

These standards would reduce climate pollution by hundreds of millions of metric tons by 2050, about the same amount as the total pollution New Mexico produces in a year, making these among the most effective climate policies New Mexico could adopt.

Clean Cars II

These are the updated version of the standards New Mexico adopted in 2022, which won’t go into effect unless updated to the most recent version. A July New Mexico-specific study commissioned by Sierra Club, Western Resource Advocates and NRDC found that Advanced Clean Cars alone would provide New Mexico up to $44 billion in economic benefits. That includes health and climate improvements, savings to drivers and utility savings — with full adoption to 100% EVs by 2035. The benefits include:

- Avoiding 85 to 93 premature deaths a year in New Mexico from breathing polluted air;
- Reducing up to 116 million metric tons of greenhouse-gas emissions, 38,000 metric tons of nitrogen oxides, and 3,200 metric tons of particulate matter; Creating nearly 1,000 additional jobs, many in well-paying positions in electrical-component manufacturing and construction;
- Saving individual EV owners between $16,000 and $16,800 during the life of their vehicle and delivering more than $30 billion in total savings for drivers through 2050.

Reducing electric bills.

Clean Trucks

A 2023 study found that New Mexico can generate $3.3 billion in health, air and economic benefits and prevent more than 28,000 respiratory illnesses by 2050 through transitioning to zero-emission electric trucks.

Reducing vehicle pollution from trucks will particularly benefit the communities closest to transportation routes, which tend to be disproportionately low-income, Black, Brown and Indigenous.

A recent Environmental Defense Fund analysis found that by 2027, the purchase price alone will make many electric medium- and heavy-duty vehicles (including transit and school buses, shuttles, delivery vehicles and refuse haulers) less expensive than their fossil-fuel counterparts. Federal $7,500 tax credits are available for new EVs and $4,000 credits for used cars. In 2024, these will be transferable to dealers so they can be taken off your purchase price.

New Mexico utilities have begun rebate programs that provide up to $2,500 for ratepayers to upgrade their electrical, install chargers and purchase EVs.

Plug-in hybrids, which are included in these standards, use battery charge for the first 30 to 50 miles and then switch to gas. Most drivers rarely have to buy gas, because their daily driving doesn’t exceed 30 miles.

Because EVs remain parked most of the time, EV load is highly flexible and has proven to reduce electricity rates in other states.

Electric vehicles are expected to reach upfront cost parity by the year this rule is implemented. EVs benefit customers who finance on Day 1 in most cases. Low-income customers spend a larger portion of their income on fuel, so Clean Cars and Trucks will have disproportionate benefit for low-income customers.

Many New Mexicans have had trouble finding EVs, and these standards would help make many more available in New Mexico. See below for ways you can support them.

Take action

Ensure New Mexico’s Environmental Improvement Board adopts these standards by speaking at the board’s November hearing or sending a written comment at addp.sierraclub.org/campaigns/clean-cars-nm (or scan the QR code below). The Environment Department is holding meetings to inform the public; the final meeting is Oct. 16 in Albuquerque. Contact riogranderi.chapters@sierraclub.org for more info or to learn how you can help!
Talking about it — and getting results

**BY MONA BLABER**
Chapter communications director

**New Mexico Supreme Court decision has — for the moment — stopped a plan that could have kept coal-fired Four Corners Power Plant polluting far beyond its potential 2031 closure date.**

The court on July 6 rejected PNM's appeal of a Public Regulation Commission decision to deny PNM's proposal to transfer its 13% stake in Four Corners. Sierra Club attorney Jason Marks and a PRC staff attorney argued the PRC case at the Supreme Court. PNM in 2021 proposed to become coal-free by transferring its share of Four Corners (and PNM's vote on the company's board) to the owner of the coal mine that supplies the plant. That company, NTEC, had expressed its intention to keep the plant running as long as possible for the sole customer for its coal.

The commission in 2021 denied PNM's proposal, in part because the utility had not suitably identified replacement power and because of financial questions about PNM's 2016 ownership renewal and the transition.

The commission had also ruled that in PNM's next rate case, it would review the proposed CO2 costs and expenses at Four Corners. PNM asked the Supreme Court to limit whether and how the commission can review PNM's Four Corners expenses, the Supreme Court rejected that request.

The court's ruling leaves the way for the commission, in PNM's pending rate case, to consider that evidence. (see sidebar)

“Our communities have sacrificed much with the Four Corners Power Plant open for over half a century,” said Wendy Atcitty, Indigenous Energy Program manager for Navea. “Our elders and children are the most sensitive to health and environmental impacts that emissions spew into the atmosphere. The extreme heat from global warming is hurting our elders. The polluted air from burning coal drives asthma rates in our kids. NTEC wanted to run this toxic pollution from Four Corners with coal from their mine. That idea stops now as the decision will ensure the protection from NTEC’s conflict of interest to our tribal communities.”

“The Court's decision is a victory for PNM’s customers. PNM had tried to prohibit the commission from reviewing the hundreds of millions of dollars in customer money that PNM has poured into the expensive and polluting Four Corners power plant,” said Matt Gerhart, Sierra Club Environmental Law Program Senior Attorney. “The commission can now lift that roadblock, and will hopefully hold PNM accountable for its wasteful spending at Four Corners.”

**PNM had proposed to pay $75 million to offload its 13% stake in Four Corners coal plant to the owner of the feeder mine. The PRC rejected PNM’s plan, and the Supreme Court in July affirmed that decision.**

**In PNM’s pending rate case, Sierra Club has continued its long-standing efforts to hold PNM accountable for its bad decision to continue to own the expensive and polluting Four Corners coal plant. In its current rate case, PNM is asking the Public Regulation Commission to recover nearly $300 million in Four Corners costs through rates and earn a full profit on those costs. These costs are due to PNM’s decision to continue to own Four Corners after 2016 – despite the fact that El Paso Electric and some other utilities exited Four Corners in 2016. Sierra Club submitted testimony from Dr. Jeremy Fisher, who showed that PNM’s decision to continue to own a share of the Four Corners power plant after 2016 was unreasonable and imprudent.”

“PNM tell me to back the plan running as long as possible (see accompanying article).”

**The decision to reject PNM’s transfer of shares to NTEC was a huge win for Tribal sovereignty not only for the Navajo Nation but throughout Indian Country. The time has come to prioritize Tribally owned and operated clean energy projects — meaning from the top-down. This also means prioritizing community input and engagement. New Mexico is bravelly stepping forward and committing to the clean energy transition, and now Tribes can lead this effort and stop investing in fossil-fuel economies,” said Catherine Zingg (Ho-Chunk Nation), Director of Indigenous Partnerships at Vote Solar.**

“Today’s decision prevents PNM from passing off its responsibilities to see this coal plant all the way through decommissioning and cleanup so that we aren’t living with its pollution for decades to come.”

PNM is basically charged that the utility knew that the right way to exit its interest in the uneconomical and polluting Four Corners plant would be to see the plant fully or partly retired, but under pressure from Avangrid to ink a deal, PNM engineered a transaction that did the opposite, making it much harder to retire the plant,” said Jason Marks, a former PRC commissioner who has argued the case for Sierra Club at the Supreme Court and the commission.

PNM may be planning to freshen up its plan and bring it back to the PRC. It is critical that the utilities that own Four Corners (the major owner is Arizona Public Service) retire it as soon as possible, and that the company that admits its interest in Four Corners is running for decades not wind up controlling PNM’s part of the plant.
PNM customers to see $115M in ETA rate credits

BY MONA BLABER
Chapter communications director

I f you’re a PNM ratepayer, look for a credit averaging $9.28 on your next electricity bill.

On Sept. 21, the Public Regulation Commission approved a settlement between PNM and multiple environmental and consumer groups to deliver $115 million back to PNM customers.

These credits represent expected savings from Energy Transition Act bonds. The bonds were meant to finance PNM’s previous investments in the plant that had not yet been paid off when the plant shut down.

The Public Regulation Commission approved PNM’s abandonment and power-replacement plans in 2020 with the understanding that PNM would issue ETA bonds when the coal-fired San Juan Generating Station closed in September 2022. PNM, however, later revealed it would delay the bond issue until its next rate case. This meant PNM would continue to collect operations, maintenance and debt costs, plus a 9%-plus rate of return, from customers for several years after the plant closed.

After the PRC last year ordered PNM to honor the intent of the ETA and issue rate credits in the absence of Energy Transition bonds, PNM appealed to the state Supreme Court.

Intervenors, including Attorney General Raul Torres, Western Resource Advocates, Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy (which includes the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter) and New Energy Economy, negotiated the new settlement with PNM to obtain a monthly rate credit averaging $9.28, titled “San Juan ETA Settlement Credit.”

The settlement also includes a cap on the interest rate customers will pay once the bonds are issued.

The EDA has led to 100% renewable and battery replacement for the San Juan’s coal-generated electricity, all located in the impacted community. PNM did pre-fund the $440 million in worker payments and community investments that were also to be funded by ETA bonds. (See article at right.)

Customers have seen some savings already because of reduced fuel charges from exiting coal. But ratepayers should now receive the full benefits due them. “All of the arguments against paying what was due to customers in the ETA settlement disregarded the urgency of nearly half of its ratepayers who struggle every day to meet their basic needs,” said Ona Porter of Prosperity Works.

“PNM tried to withhold Energy Transition Act savings after the San Juan plant closure, but now we’ll each see our fair credit on our bills,” said Camilla Feibelman, Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter director. “The PRC twice directed PNM to credit customers for the ETA bonds the company delayed, but instead, they kept collecting a profit. This settlement allows customers to see the true savings of moving away from coal and toward renewable energy.”

Join the Sierra Club

You can join the Sierra Club (your membership is to both the national group and the Rio Grande Chapter) for only $15 to riograndsierrclub.org/join or send a $15 check with your name, address and the code 1700 in the memo line to

Sierra Club, Atm. Member Services, 2101 Webster St., #1300, Oakland, CA 94612.

Scan the QR code at right on your cell phone to join the Rio Grande Chapter using our online form.

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太阳能工作在四个角落

太阳能、水和风力公司（简称Renewable）的“太阳能、水和风力公司（简称Renewable）”在确认了太阳能和风力发电的可行性后，决定将投资100%太阳能和风力发电的项目。这些项目将使天然气的发电量达到100%。

太阳能新经济公司（简称Solar New Economy）在与PNM的协商中，同意设立一个基金，被称为“Solar and Wind Settlement Credit”。该基金将为PNM的用户提供每月2.84美元的信用，相当于太阳能和风力发电的年收入。

太阳能、水和风力公司（简称Renewable）计划在702-699-8407上发布这些信息，同时鼓励人们订阅其月刊《Sierran》。

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如果您是Sierra Club的会员，您可以通过电话或邮件订阅《Sierran》月刊。电话：702-699-8407，邮件：sierran@sierraclub.org。

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New Mexico to court overRoxy’s Law.

The kill reports from trappers for last winter are in. This was the first trapping season in which traps could not legally be set on New Mexico public lands, and the numbers suggest that Roxy’s Law not only prevented hikers and their dogs from being harmed, but also saved bobcats, foxes, and other wildlife from being killed and exploited for their fur.

Compared to the previous winter, after Roxy’s law had passed but was not yet in effect, the number of foxes killed was down by 58%, the number of bobcats killed was down by 31%, and the number of beavers killed was down by 47%. Overall, killings of animals exploited for their fur were down by 40%, which just about equals the proportion of public land to private land in New Mexico. Not only that, but compared to the 14 incidents involving hikers and their dogs in the year Roxy was killed by a trap, we only learned of one dog being trapped, illegally now, in the Santa Fe National Forest while out recreating with his people last winter.

The downturn trend began even before Roxy’s Law was passed because pelt prices have been falling as fashion houses and designers have stopped using real fur. Consumers’ values are changing as people don’t want to be associated with cruelty in their choice of apparel. Trapping is all about money. It has nothing to do with wildlife “management” or any beneficial role for the biome. Lower prices mean that with cruelty in their choice of apparel, Trapping is all about commerce. The lawsuit claims this violates the trappers’ equal-protection rights to attempt to undermine the will of the people of New Mexico and that Roxy’s Law will sustain this legal challenge and remain in effect.

As the numbers show, however, animals that “bear fur” are still being trapped on private land, and they can also be shot on public lands. There are no bag limits for any of these animals, and the seasons are long, November to the middle of March and for some even longer. New Mexico Game and Fish is disconcertingly still reviewing the 2023 season trapping regulations. Don’t deny these important animals vital regular public input and reconsideration.

Please join us in asking the Game Commission to keep the current four-year furbear rule-review cycle. Do not deny these important animals vital regular public input and reconsideration. It isn’t enough to let the agency director unilaterally decide if any changes are needed or to let these animals languish in a restored, dead zone. Email your comments to DGF-Furbearer-Rules@state.nm.us.

New Mexicans March in NYC, at Home

In September, I joined more than 75,000 people across all ages, faiths and backgrounds in downtown Manhattan to demand President Biden declare a climate emergency, stop approving new fossil-fuel projects and phase out oil and gas drilling on public lands.

The march took place ahead of the U.N. General Assembly session in New York and coincided with other climate actions around the globe, including with the climate strike and march organized by YUCCA, the No False Solutions Coalition, and UNM Advocates and organizers. The New Mexico delegation called for an end to energy sacrifice zones and for the use of full climate action. The march included leaders and prominent environmental activists led the march, closely followed by a delegation of more than 40 New Mexicans representing frontline communities, advocates and organizers. The New Mexico delegation called for an end to energy sacrifice zones and for the use of full climate action.

Around the world, people showed up to demand more action on climate change, voicing their concerns with their signs, chants, and banners. The march in New Mexico challenged technologies being discussed that week at the Advanced Energy Conference, calling out polluting industries and their greenwashing proposals that ultimately perpetuate fossil fuels and make the climate crisis worse. Our chapter and partners brought those

BY MARY KATHERINE RAY and TERESE SEAMSTER
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BY MIYA KING-FLAHERTY
Our Wild New Mexico organizer

We must also address the larger issue of fossil fuels and their production. Oil and gas production is already occurring in our state, and it must stop.

In New Mexico, the oil and gas industry is a significant polluter, producing more air and water pollution than any other industry. It is also a major contributor to climate change, with the production of methane, a greenhouse gas with 84 times the warming potential of carbon dioxide. The oil and gas industry is also a major source of water pollution, with significant impacts on water quality and quantity.

In addition to the environmental impacts, the oil and gas industry has a significant impact on public health. Oil and gas production is linked to a variety of health problems, including respiratory issues, headaches, and skin irritation. The industry also contributes to air pollution, which can exacerbate existing health conditions.

In order to address these issues, it is crucial that we take action to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and transition to cleaner sources of energy. We must also hold the oil and gas industry accountable for their impact on the environment and public health.

BY MIYA KING-FLAHERTY
Our Wild New Mexico organizer

New Mexicans March in NYC, at Home

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Some believe that if New Mexico Game and Fish claims a thing to be valid, then it must be valid. This is not science. It is a thing to be valid, then it must be valid. This is not science. It requires that everyone who says they know what constitutes actual science. Some believe that if New Mexico Game and Fish claims a thing to be valid, then it must be valid. This is not science. It is a thing to be valid, then it must be valid. This is not science. It requires that everyone who says they know what constitutes actual science. Some believe that if New Mexico Game and Fish claims a thing to be valid, then it must be valid. This is not science.

In 2017, the agency used the 2010 model, and thus the kill quota in that zone. Not only were the previous results for Zone F verified, but the population of Zone B was found to have been underestimated by 73%. And the kill quotas were actually allowing hunting of over three times the number of cougars that would be sustainable. The agency’s response was to combine zones F and B into one zone (the current Zone B) and reduce the kill quotas to match the new population estimate in that zone. In 2021, the new, peer-reviewed methodology was applied to cougar Zone Q. Not surprisingly, once again, the cougar population was found to be much lower than estimated using the 2010 model, and thus the kill quotas were again found to be too high. This is why in the new cougar rule being proposed this year, the kill quota for Zone Q is being reduced by 50%.

Thus, three studies in three separate cougar-management zones that all used the same peer-reviewed scientific methods to produce accurate and precise results, all of which were conducted within the last six years, have overwhelmingly demonstrated that the population estimates from 2010 are seriously inaccurate, grossly unreliable, and have consistently underestimated local cougar population sizes and the quotas based on these population sizes have been far too high. Yet the agency continues to rely on that unvalidated 2010 methodology that was never externally or independently peer-reviewed to derive cougar population sizes and prescribe hunting limits for the 16 other cougar-management zones. To say that the cougar hunting allowed in these 16 zones is based on valid science, or is conservation-minded, is patently false. To estimate the population of black bears, New Mexico Game and Fish has begun to use the accepted methodology of collecting bear hair samples as bears pass through baited stations rimmed with barbed wire set up at intervals in the study area. However, while the methodology is sound, its application may not be.

The agency won’t reveal how the density determinations have been used to produce a population estimate. What is the size of the area? Instead, we are told that bear-management Zone 10, which encompasses the greater Gila bioregion, despite the drought and destructive fires of recent years, can support the killing of 35% more bears. The agency is also proposing to allow the killing of 6% more bears in Zone 1 in Northern NM.

In neither instance can the public see the scientific details or justifications for these proposals. We are to take them on faith. This is not science. The hallmark of science is that the way population estimates are derived and kill quotas set are transparent. There should be a management plan with clearly stated measurable objectives. It should all be open to external review especially by experts. In the case of the bear kill quotas and most of the cougar kill quotas, these hallmarks are missing. Except for three cougar-hunting zones, everyone who says they support the use of science when it comes to setting bear and cougar kill quotas in New Mexico by definition cannot support what NM Game and Fish is proposing to allow for the next four years.

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Take action
The final decision won’t be made until the Oct. 27 Game Commission meeting. To participate via Zoom, go to www.wildlife.state.nm.us/commission/webcast/ for instructions a few days beforehand.

You may also still submit written comments about the hunting proposals until Oct. 27 at DGF-Bear-Cougar-Rules@state.nm.us or bit.ly/NMbear — or point your phone at the QR code below for the link.

The proposal to administratively withdraw the Buffalo Tract and Crest of Montezuma will provide strong interim safeguards as we work toward permanent protection. The Biden administration deserves credit for listening to the community and initiating a process to protect these sites. Now it’s up to us.

Take action
The BLM will host a public meeting from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Wed., Nov. 14 at the Placitas Library, 453 NM-665, and is taking public comment through Dec. 19. Go to risgrandesiemichurr.org or buffalo-tract to learn more and submit a comment.
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We often write about healthy soil, clean water and unpolluted air, but until we sample it and analyze its components with lab testing and recorded site conditions, we don't accurately know what we are describing.

Currently, we have some new and ongoing monitoring efforts being conducted in northern New Mexico. This coming 2024 season, volunteers will be measuring soil moisture and nutrients in the Santa Fe National Forest, while others are testing river water and tributaries for contaminants in the Pecos River. Also, advanced air-quality monitoring equipment has been installed in Counselor to record the emissions affecting the health of Navajo chapter residents near the Chaco oil fields.

Soil health

Soil and vegetation health and moisture levels are critical indices in agriculture, forestry and firefighting to monitor especially in times of drought, intense heat, high wind and fire danger. A new team under the direction of Lisa Markovchick, PhD (Northern Arizona University) has developed a sampling plot map and protocol for volunteers to start collecting soil and vegetation samples from the Santa Fe National Forest and process them in the Evans Science Lab at St. John’s University. (Contact: lseamster@gmail.com for more information)

Water quality

A combined group of volunteers from the Sierra Club New Mexico Water Sentinels, Amigos Bravos, Trout Unlimited and NM Wild has been collecting water samples and recording conditions on the Pecos River since July. Water collected from four sites is being tested at the New Mexico Department of Health Scientific Laboratory Division for gross Alpha (measures overall radioactivity in drinking water), total metals (including manganese and iron) and nutrients (often in runoff from fertilized agricultural fields adjacent to the river), and additional samples are collected to measure e Coli, and streamside conditions are recorded to assess sediment, dissolved oxygen, electrical conductivity, water temperature and pH.

Results from this summer’s sampling in July, August and September are showing good water quality throughout the upper Pecos River from Tererro down to the town of Pecos with: a) water temperatures falling within the cool 6.6-16.3 degrees Celsius range, b) dissolved oxygen levels from 7 to 9 ppm, well above 5 ppm DO needed for healthy fish and other aquatic life, and c) low-risk eColi levels well below 10MPN/100ml at all four sites.

Air quality

Air monitoring at the Chapter level around Chaco has evolved from an initial network of 16 donated Speck air monitors in 2018, for a one-month data collection period, to a continuous air monitor nationally networked with PurpleAir installed at Ojo Encino Chapter House in 2021. This summer, a highly sophisticated AQ Sync air monitor paired with a weather station that records simultaneous conditions of wind speed, direction, precipitation, temperature, PM 2.5, NOx and O3 was installed at the Counselor Chapter House. This powerful monitoring system designed by 2BTechnologies is part of a $3 million air-quality monitoring project funded by National Institutes of Health Small Business Innovative Research program to address pollution impacts affecting public health in urban and rural communities.

Northern Group supports AES project

BY JOHN BUCHSER and CHRIS CALVERT
Northern New Mexico Group

Sancho Viejo has proposed an AES solar/storage project on private land bordered by Eldorado and San Marco for 96 megawatts of solar panels and 48 megawatts of battery storage. Sancho Viejo has partnered with AES Corp. to pursue permitting from Santa Fe County.

This development is 1.5 miles from any homes but is close to existing PNM high-voltage power lines, minimizing transmission losses. Hopefully PNM won’t drag their feet on the needed interconnection. Solar collectors on this scale is a good option for Santa Fe, where the wind is not as pervasive as in the eastern plains of New Mexico. Santa Fe County, which has limited staff with the appropriate expertise to evaluate a large solar/storage project, has hired Terracon Consultants of Albuquerque to provide input to the county Planning Commission.

The grasslands and pitoons-juniper forest at this elevation are frequently very dry. The county needs to be assured that it has the capacity and resources to control fires. AES should have appropriate on-site control chemicals for use by county firefighters. No on-site water is planned, so the county must assess a worst-case need for water to prevent fire spread outside the facility.

The Sierra Club Northern New Mexico Group supports this proposal’s inclusion of storage, as we need nighttime renewable energy in addition to daytime solar. Should it be approved, it will join even larger solar projects proposed for sites in Bernalillo County and San Juan County. Together, they point to a future where renewable energy can be counted on for a majority of our electricity needs.

The Sierra Club Northern New Mexico Group supports the AES solar/storage project, but we are aware of some residents’ concerns about the potential for fire from the batteries. However, solar facilities generally have robust fire protections, as shown by three other Northern New Mexico facilities.

The first is a facility in Hyde Memorial State Park installed by Positive Energy Solar. This facility consists of a 200-panel, 80-kilowatt PV system with 22 lithium-ion batteries for storage. Positive Energy Solar is confident that with its multiple built-in safeguards, the building that houses the batteries can contain any fire that might occur within the building, as well as protect the batteries from any external fire, especially given the onsite building setbacks. This is important because this facility is in a heavily wooded area. Granted, this project is considerably smaller than the proposed AES project, but this technology is scalable. In addition, given its size, AES would probably choose a slightly different technology that would incorporate even more safeguards and redundancies.

The other two are solar/ storage facilities in the Kit Carson Electric Coop system. One in Taos entails 12.5 megawatts of lithium-ion battery storage that has been in operation for a year. The other in Angel Fire entails 3.5 MW of lithium-ion battery storage and it has been in operation for 3 - 4 months. No fires have occurred at either facility. The safety features are robust. Three independent entities monitor these batteries 24/7.

The storage facilities have sophisticated control systems with automatic features that could shut down the battery(ies) under set parameters, with manual overrides as well.

The batteries are compartmentalized in steel containers (think shipping containers) to isolate and contain any fire that might start. These containers also have generous setbacks from vegetation and property boundaries.

Kit Carson has coordinated with and conducted training with all fire departments in these areas.

Kit Carson has 15 more MW of battery storage on the drawing board for three other sites as well, a good indication of its confidence in the safety of these facilities.
City Council District 1
Alma Castro
Castro’s lifelong embrace of the environment and her pledge to electrify city equipment, increase transit frequency, offer rebates for energy- and water-efficient appliances to income-constrained Santa Feans, and support gas-free new construction, won our support.

Council District 2
Michael Garcia
Councilor Garcia chairs the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Group, which has produced a pathbreaking strategic plan that can lead toward a city much safer and enjoyable to walk and bike. The Rio Grande Chapter is proud to endorse him for another term.

Council District 3
Pilar Faulkner
Pilar Faulkner is a small-business owner who was born and raised in Northern New Mexico. She pledges to protect open spaces, conserve natural resources, and protect Santa Fe’s night skies by limiting light pollution.

Council District 4
Jamie Cassutt
Cassutt chairs the Metropolitan Planning Organization, where she has consistently advocated for funding projects that provide more trails and sidewalks as well as connections among them. She has been a strong advocate for equitable climate solutions.

Ballot measure:
Yes
The Rio Grande Chapter supports the Santa Fe affordable housing initiative, which would provide a dedicated funding source for the City’s Affordable Housing Trust Fund by imposing a 3% tax on the portion of the sale price of Santa Fe homes that exceeds $1 million.

Albuquerque

District 1: Janelle Astorga
Astorga is a young organizer who has worked on education issues from a community perspective since she was in high school, including opposing the privatization of education. She is now co-director the Learning Alliance of NM and development director at SWOP.

District 2: Ronalda Tome-Warito
Tome-Warito is a Native woman who for 25 years has advocated for Native students with disabilities. She will bring a knowledgeable voice on special education and the needs of Native students to the board.

District 4: Heather Benavidez
Benavidez is CEO of The Arc of New Mexico, which advocates for New Mexicans living with disabilities. She emphasizes the accurate teaching of science so that students will be prepared to address climate change and have a place where they will be able to thrive and raise their families.

Las Cruces

Mayor:
Kassandra Gandara
Gandara says Las Cruces needs to aggressively address climate change, and the two-term councilor walks the walk. She supported the city’s climate action plan, which has allowed it receive 25% of its electricity from solar, and a plastic-bag ban, electric bikes, and the City’s PowerUp Expo to educate citizens about electrification.

District 1: Patrick Nolan
Nolan has been involved with the Green Chamber since he joined as executive director of the Friends of Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks. He also served as union representative for American Federation of Teachers NM.

District 2: Cassie McClure
McClure is a city Parks and Recreation Advisory Board member. She is a cyclist who enjoys seeing the agricultural side of Las Cruces through its ditchbanks and trails. She supports moving away from fossil fuels as fast as possible.

District 3: Tessa Abeyta
Incumbent Abeyta’s career has been dedicated to advocacy for children, public health and the environment. She was Las Cruces Green Chamber of Commerce director and an advocate for the formation of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument.

District 4: Johana Bencomo
Incumbent Johana Bencomo is a New Mexico Environmental Law Center board member and has been executive director for NM CAFÉ. She is proud of her votes to end use of plastic bags in Las Cruces and to create the crisis intervention team.

District 5: Edward Frank
Frank, an incumbent, supports diversity, equity and inclusion in our schools and beyond. He believes that outcomes improve when students feel respect for their cultures in the curriculum.

Disclaimers
Las Cruces municipal endorsements listings authorized and paid for by 2023 Las Cruces Sierra Club PAC, 505-232-3013. Albuquerque City Council endorsement listings authorized and paid for by Sierra Club ABQ MFC, Susan Homer, Chairperson. Top Five Donors: Rio Grande Sierra Club Healthy Communities (sole donor). Not authorized by any candidate or candidate’s campaign committee. Printed by the Santa Fe New Mexican, PO. Box 2048, Santa Fe, N.M., 87504.

Listings of endorsements and ballot measure for the Santa Fe City Council, the Albuquerque Public School Board, and the Las Cruces School Board authorized and paid for by The Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club Political Action Committee.
NM to update energy-saving building codes

BY TAMMY FIEBELKORN
Southwest Energy Efficiency Project

The energy that buildings use, and often waste, makes up a big percentage of New Mexico’s climate pollution. Energy conservation codes minimize the energy waste in buildings by ensuring that new structures are built to require the least amount of energy possible while maintaining safety and comfort. As part of Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham’s Climate Executive Order in 2019, the state committed to regularly update these codes. In 2020 the state updated the 2009 codes to 2018, and now, as New Mexico is updating to the 2021 version, 2024 code templates are coming out. It’s great news that we’re moving towards the 2021 update this year, but the climate and our energy savings would benefit from legislation to keep up with codes that come out every three years and bring us the best building science and technology to minimize energy use.

The proposal going before the Construction Industries Commission for approval in November includes the 2021 International Energy Conservation Code that updates the energy efficiency of buildings, along with an amendment to require all new buildings be EV-ready, making it easier for homeowners, residents of multifamily units and users of commercial parking lots to charge their electric vehicles. Conservation codes help reduce emissions from buildings, help make them more comfortable and save money on electricity, but to ensure their adoption, we need your help.

Take action

Please make a difference by joining public hearings on Nov. 15 and 16 to speak up for healthy buildings. Email camilla.fobelkorn@sierraclub.org for more details on how to participate.

E-bikes great way to get around

BY DIANE REESE
Rio Grande Chapter vice chair

I got an e-bike for my birthday! This had been on my wish list for a long time — something to use not just for exercise but also as an alternative to my car. I particularly wanted it for camping trips — something I could carry on the RV and use to get to trailheads or around the state parks that I love so much. After test riding a number of options, I chose the Velotric Go: 500 watts, 58 miles on a charge, 65 pounds and fun to ride! I can pedal all I want but get that zippy boost on the hills — it is terrific! Sustainable transportation modes are low- to zero-emissions, energy-efficient, affordable, accessible and healthy ways to get around. E-biking is a great example. E-biking has many benefits in addition to sustainability — using one can improve your fitness because while pedaling is assisted, the bike still provides excellent physical exercise by increasing the rate at which your body burns calories. When I exercise outside, I find my stress level goes down, and I feel happier and sleep better, too. E-bikes are environmentally friendly — as an alternative commuting option, e-bikes are better for us all as they don’t consume fossil fuels or pollute the air. And with minimal maintenance and fuel cost (you do need to charge the battery), an e-bike is a very cost-effective mode of transport. And did I mention that they are fun? Let’s talk about the broader topic of sustainable transportation — something that should be available to everyone. Access to sustainable transportation is still a struggle — both nationwide as well as here in the Southwest.

E-bike Fair

What: E-bike Fair
When: Saturday, Oct. 28, 10 am to 12 pm
Where: Snow Park Community Center, Albuquerque
Who: Central New Mexico Sierra Club and you!

Learn more about e-bikes and check out different styles. Everyone who gets to the fair by sustainable transport instead of a personal vehicle will receive a gift. Contact DianeAbqRM@gmail.com for more info.

Central New Mexico Group monthly get-togethers

BY SUSAN GORMAN & TERRY OWEN

Calling all Sierra Club Central New Mexico Group members and friends to join us for our resumed October, November and December membership meetings.

October will be the Central Group’s first in-person general membership meeting in over two and a half years, and we’re excited to get back together with you. The meeting will be held at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, 431 Richmond Place NE, Albuquerque, from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Friday, Oct. 6. Joining us will be Cliff Giles of Friends of the Sandia Mountains and Ranger Crystal Powell from the US Forest Service Sandia Ranger District. They’ll be sharing views about the health of our Sandias, new ways to enjoy them, volunteer opportunities, and Sandia fun! Also, circle Nov. 3 (one year post-Inflation Reduction Act) and Dec. 1 (Member and Volunteer Appreciation Potluck Party) on your calendar as we continue our monthly meetings that will include speakers discussing topics that we all care about.

Free, light refreshments including beer and wine will be served. Contact sginanb@aol.com for more info.

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Photo by Laurie Zunner

Owner Carolyn Richter in her People & Planet Refill in Albuquerque.
Becoming a more sustainable adventurer

BY TERRY OWEN
Outings co-chair

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when you’re planning your next adventure, do you sometimes forget to consider your impact on the planet? Or perhaps, it’s a consideration, but it’s not front of mind? Being a sustainable adventurer allows you to have a smaller footprint, save money and feel good about living your life. This may seem daunting at first, but take some of the stress out of this idea, know that you won’t do it perfectly — no one can — but we can let perfectionism get in the way of progress.

Now that we have that out of the way, let’s talk about how you can easily reduce, reuse and recycle to become a more sustainable adventurer.

The main inputs into any adventure are transportation, food and lodging, and gear and equipment. Of the greenhouse-gas emissions related to tourism, transportation accounts for 49% per Sustainable Travel International. It’s often one of our biggest expenditures when we’re embarking on that epic trip to the mountains, a national park or a body of water. But there are a few things we can do to reduce our impact. The obvious ones are to carpool with others, drive an efficient vehicle, and look for areas closer to home for our adventures.

Transportation

We’re lucky, because no matter where we are in New Mexico, there are myriad possibilities within 100 miles of home where we can see new sights and have new experiences. For those far-flung adventures, try to combine several trips into one. Instead of making three separate trips to see the Grand Canyon, go mountain-biking in Sedona, and backpack a section of the Continental Divide Trail, make it one phenomenal trip.

Also, consider taking your e-bike or mountain bike, then set up a basecamp in one area, campsite or lodge and ride your bike to see the city sights or trails. Seeing a new place on the way, let’s talk about how you can easily reduce, reuse and recycle to become a more sustainable adventurer.

For lodging, look for facilities that have been certified green by a third party such as Trip Advisor’s Green Leaders, Audubon Society’s Green Seal or Google’s Green Certified. Those facilities must comply with high standards to obtain and maintain their certifications. Tent camping is my favorite way to reduce my carbon footprint and save money. There are many commercial campgrounds all over the U.S., as well as a slew of non-commercial and free camping areas to choose from. HipCamp and Harvest Hosts offer great camping solutions on out-of-the-way property owned by private landowners. Freecampsites.net and the Campmendium app can help you find free dispersed camping all over the U.S. I make a game out of my trips to see how little I can spend on a per-day basis on food and lodging. That also results in fewer carbon emissions. It’s fun and economical.

Gear and equipment

Gear and equipment can account for upwards of 12% of tourism-related carbon emissions. High-quality gear can last years, even with a lot of abuse. It’s also an opportunity to not only reduce the amount you purchase, but increase the amount that you reuse and recycle. If you do buy new gear, look for companies that make a solid commitment to the environment and have a great warranty. Look for companies like Patagonia and Cotopaxi that make recycling an integral part of their product lifecycle. There are certain items I will only buy new, such as rock-climbing gear, diving equipment and any other item upon which my life will depend.

Interested in becoming an outings leader?

BY TERRY OWEN
Outings co-chair

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

Join Chapter Outings Co-Chair Terry Owen on Saturday, Oct. 21, for this eight-hour course that 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 amble. You don’t have to be a super-outdoorsperson 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 approximately four years since you last attended this course, you should also consider joining us.

This course will be conducted virtually, and all persons who register will be required to download the instruction packet, which includes the training materials, handouts and reference materials along with a Zoom link, about one week before the course start date. Note that this particular training will provide some additional focus on risk management in the desert and Mountain West, including high-altitude outings. Register by Oct. 17 at www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar.

Sierra Club’s motto is “Explore, Enjoy and Protect the Planet.” We do our best to protect while we explore.

Photo of Kitchen Mesa hike by Ann Maes

Rio Grande Sierran 11
**BY TERRY OWEN & DEBBIE BRYANT**

**SATURDAY, OCT. 7**

*Cerro de Amado Ramble.* The landscapes will be pleasing in this geologically interesting area. With no forest cover, the rock strata and their contours are laid bare. We walk up and down through millions of years. This hike is 6 miles with an elevation gain of 800 feet. Kids ages 14 and up allowed with parent or legal guardian. No dogs.

*Register by Oct. 4.*

**Leader:** Jim Nelson, (575) 517-7001

**Location:** East of Socorro, NM

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

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**FRIDAY, OCT. 13**

*Bosque Walk at Durand Open Space.* Welcome to the beautiful South Valley! Durand Open Space provides excellent access to forest paths and river views. We’ll do a 2-mile loop and take a break at the covered picnic area. Meet at the Durand parking lot by 9:55 a.m. No dogs please. 10 a.m. to noon.

**Trip leader: Diane Reese**

505-507-6416

Diane@bqdm@gmail.com

**Level:** Easy - no elevation gain; mix of shaded-unshaded, flat trail, root trip hazards.

**Location:** Durand Open Space, 4750 Isleta Blvd SW, Albuquerque.

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

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**SATURDAY, OCT. 14**

*More Fall Birds Along Animas River in Farmington.* Three miles round trip. 8 to about 11 a.m. This and the Sept. 16 trip aim to discover which of the 31 migrant species, who headed north last spring, hopefully finding a few wintering here. Righteous 70 miles old and up only. No dogs please. Use sunscreen, bring binoculars, water, snacks, and dress for the weather. Limit 12 people. Register by Oct. 11.

**Trip leader:** Mike Foster

303-594-9541

mike4foster@gmail.com

**Level:** Easy

**Location:** Farmington

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

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**SATURDAY, OCT. 14**

*Angel Peak Eclipse Peek-a-Boo.* The partial solar eclipse will pass directly over the Four Corners and Angel Peak Scenic Area 15 miles south of Bloomfield, NM. The eclipse will last for about three hours. Angel Peak and Kutz Canyon are in a remote area of beautiful, stark badlands nestled anywhere in the West. The Rio Grande Chapter will host an outing limited to 20 registrants, all of whom must be 18 or older. The fact that this outing will be in various stages of darkness, and the fact that rattlesnakes and other critters may still be out in mid-October presents much of a risk for pets and kids. The campground and picnic areas there have been built and are maintained by the Bureau of Land Management. Angel Peak Campground has nine sites suitable for tenting and small mid-sized RVs. No water or hook-ups are available. The campground is 6 miles off US 12 Rio Grande Sierra

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**Photo courtesy Diane Reese**

Above: Led by outings co-chairs Debbie Bryant and Terry Owen, Backpacking 101 graduates celebrate their successful ascent to Wheeler Peak — the highest point in New Mexico.

550 on County Road 717S. The road was well-maintained on our scouting visit and may be traveled by any vehicle with medium or high clearance. The leader intends to camp Friday night but cannot relay a specific location because camping is first come-first served. It is difficult to estimate whether the campground will be at capacity if you plan to camp, arriving a day or two early is advised. Dark Sky areas in the path of the eclipse will be very crowded. Mesa Verde facilities and motels in Mancos and Cortez are booked. Chaco Canyon will be overrun with campers and spectators, so plan ahead. Lodging and dining are available in Bloomfield and Farmington. As the event nears, this description will be updated and edited to reflect any new information. This is not a physically demanding outing. There is no planned hike. We will gather at a site to share the spectacle, hot beverages and snacks, and enjoy the eclipse. Contact the leader with questions.

**Trip leader:** Hart Pierce

505-320-1055

shpierce@comcast.net

**Level:** Easy

**Location:** Four Corners area

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

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**SUNDAY, OCT. 22**

*Hike Palomas Peak Via Faulty Trail.* This trail is about 7.5 miles long with 1,860-foot elevation gain and is rated as All Trails as moderate to strenuous. We will meet at the Sandia Man Cave parking area. If it is full, there is additional parking about 1 mile past it at a picnic area. We should be done in five hours if everyone who signs up has a 1.5-mph pace going uphill. This is a remote trail with some great views. We will stop for water breaks and a snack break along the way if interested. Afterwards we can arrange to stop at the Placitas Cafe for lunch.

**Trip leader:** Debbie Bryant

bryade@gmail.com

**Level:** Moderate-Strenuous

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**WEDNESDAY, NOV. 8**

*Zero Waste Tour of the Rio Grande Compost Facility.* 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. on the West Mesa. Come and see the process up close on how biodegradable food waste from the ABCWWA is mixed with green waste, stable bedding and wood chips to make nutrient-rich compost. Tour starts indoors with a brief orientation then moves outdoors and to an open warehouse, so dress accordingly.

MUST wear long pants and closed-toed shoes. Limited to 10 people, first come first served. Participants must be able to stand during the entire tour. Register by Nov 6. Meet at the facility parking lot, 7400 Jim McConnell Road NW.

**Trip leader:** Laurie Zunner

505-480-6337

lmzunner@gmail.com

**Level:** Easy

**Location:** Albuquerque

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

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**SATURDAY, NOV. 18**

*Beat the Black Friday Rush Bike Ride to Nob Hill.* Meet at Winrock Mall parking lot at 9:45 a.m. This eight-mile course includes 225 feet of elevation gain and will pass by city parks and destinations between Uptown and Nob Hill. Previous experience riding in mixed traffic is recommended. This ride is appropriate for children over 16 when accompanied by a parent or legal guardian. A road suitable bike and helmet are required. Tire sealant and bike lock are strongly recommended. No direct cost, but money for purchases at restaurants and shops is recommended. Maximum 10 participants. No dogs are allowed. Deadline for registering is Nov. 11.

**Trip leader:** Patrick Burton

505-550-5534

patrickburton@icloud.com

**Level:** Easy

**Location:** Albuquerque Winrock to Nob Hill

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

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**WEDNESDAY, FEB. 22**

*Night Stargazing Bike Ride.* 7:9 p.m. It may not seem so at first, but the middle of winter is actually a good time for a nighttime bike ride. It’s quiet with minimal traffic and clear skies overhead. Join us for a ride from Montgomery Park to Canteen Brewery. Five miles round trip with less than 50 feet of elevation gain. Road-capable bike with front and rear lights, helmet, and reflective clothing required. Participants must be 21 or over. No dogs are allowed. Deadline for registering: Feb. 12. Limit five participants.

**Trip leader:** Patrick Burton

505-550-5534

patrickburton@icloud.com

**Level:** Moderate

**Location:** Albuquerque

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