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you can't change
the world?



Earth Day
April 22, 1990

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The Rio Grande Sierran

April/May 1990

The Rio Grande
SIERRAN



THE RIO GRANDE CHAPTER OF THE SIERRA CLUB

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Making Things Happen



By Steven Flint
Chapter Chair

The Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club includes all of New Mexico plus three west Texas counties around El Paso. With some 5,500 members and a high growth rate, the Chapter is an important force for environmentalism in the Southwest. Presently, four groups are active in the Chapter: Albuquerque, El Paso, Santa Fe, and Southern New Mexico. While most of our members live in the urban areas where those groups are centered, a sizable and crucial contingent also dwell in smaller cities and rural areas. As a dispersed, grassroots organization for environmental action, the Chapter's potential is boundless. As an all-volunteer organization with limited funds and a very broad, ambitious conservation agenda, the Chapter sorely needs development to meet its challenges.

Leaders for the Chapter are elected by the members. Executive Committee (ExCom) members are chosen by ballot for staggered three-year terms. In addition, each group appoints its own representative to the ExCom. The ExCom selects the Chapter chair from its ranks at the start of each year. For 1990, the honor and obligations of that post have come to me. ExCom members are listed in this newsletter; call us when you wish to express concerns or ideas, and to offer your help toward meeting the Club's goals.

The Chapter does much good, but needs to do much better. At the February Chapter ExCom meeting, we contemplated opportunities for organizational development and chose our priorities for the coming year. Six top priorities emerged as a consensus from a strategic planning session. Teams of ExCom members were formed around each priority to invent strategies and prepare plans. These plans will be a major focus of the next ExCom meeting scheduled for April 21-22 in El Paso. All members are welcome to attend the ExCom meetings, and are invited to contribute ideas and energy to the process. Call an ExCom member with your ideas - Please!

Before I review the priorities we have chosen, let me make a couple of points. First, this dialogue concerns our organizational development priorities, not our conservation agenda. We are focusing on how we promote the Chapter's goals rather than developing conservation goals. For instance, we have already created a Conservation Committee to deal with conservation issues on the Chapter level. The Conservation Committee will meet every other month in Socorro. Be there! This new Conservation Committee will draft our Chapter's conservation agenda. My other prefatory point is this: the Chapter's ExCom has many ideas for Chapter development. In fact, we have more ideas than people, time or resources to make things happen. Our strategic planning has to aim toward a few specific, doable priorities for the coming year. While we will attend to other issues this year, our main emphasis will be on our chosen priorities.

Our priorities for the coming year are:

1. **Activist Development:** Everyone involved in Sierra Club leadership activities gets calls all the time from members and others who ask "Why isn't the Sierra Club doing something about X?" The unsatisfactory answer is: No one has volunteered to come forward to do it. Often the caller is unwilling to take up the challenge.

We all miss out in this process. Members do care, members want to make a difference, but too often they lack confidence in their own powers and abilities. They feel they lack the technical background, or they feel isolated and lacking in support systems. The ExCom believes that these obstacles can be overcome with good strategies. I believe that nothing could move the Chapter's causes forward more impressively than a surge of new activists coming forth from our membership.

2. **Financial management:** Your Chapter is not a wealthy organization. By all means we need to use our limited financial resources as effectively as possible toward our goals. Furthermore, we need to raise new funds. The Chapter needs a solid, realistic budget process, careful attention to cash flow management, and a financial plan. No one is happy with our present method of handling money. Can you help?

3. **Paid Staff Member Plan:** Many other Sierra Club chapters have a paid staff member either full or part time. Typical duties do not replace volunteer work, but rather support volunteer work, such as recruiting folks to go to hearings, providing suggestions on tactics to activists, funnelling information. The ExCom will prepare a job description for such a person, decide whether and how that person should come on board, and come up with some means of paying for the position.

4. **Legislative Effort Development:** The Chapter needs to be far more assertive, disciplined, and sophisticated in dealing with the legislative process. The enormous popular support for action on environmental problems has yet to have much effect on our laws or political leaders. This inadequacy can change. We need only to find ways to keep the firehose aimed steady on its targets.

5. **Committee Structure Development:** The Chapter has many areas of activity: conservation, outings, politics, wildlife promotion, activist training, membership support, and more. A Chapter-level committee exists for these domains (see the reference list of committee chairs in this newsletter). Many of the committees have a proven history of accomplishments while other exist more as a name than as a force for good. All of these committees can and must develop towards even greater effectiveness.

6. **Public Awareness Development:** Members know that the Sierra Club is and does. Most other people in our area have only vague, confused, or wrong notions of who we are and what we stand for, if they have even heard of us at all. Educating the public about ourselves and our issues will draw new members and allies. It will also give our activists more credibility with politicians and the press. It's important.

You'll hear more about the ExCom's six priority areas in the next issue of the *Sierran*, and the actions we are taking to advance our priorities. What actions are you taking on your priorities?

Conservation Groups Protest BLM Attempts to Lease the Cahone Wilderness Study Area and Hovenweep National Monument

By Barry Ashenfelter, Legal Extern SCLDF Docket

Four times a year, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Colorado auctions off hundreds of thousand of acres of public lands for oil and gas exploration and development. Conservationists have long criticized BLM's leasing program because the agency leases lands unsuitable for development and fails to adequately analyze the impacts of leasing. Yet in this past February's lease sale, BLM attempted the unprecedented: BLM proposed to lease 320 acres of lands that are unquestionably unavailable for leasing -- the Cahone Wilderness Study Area in southwestern Colorado.

The 1987 amendments to the Mineral Leasing Act provide that the Secretary of the Interior cannot issue any lease on "lands within the Bureau of Land Management wilderness study area." Wilderness study areas (WSAs) are lands which BLM has determined meet the Congressional definition of wilderness and are being evaluated to determine their suitability for preservation. Several of the necessary wilderness characteristics include roadlessness, naturalness, and an outstanding opportunity either for solitude or for primitive and unconfined recreation.

According to Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund (SCLDF) attorney Fern Shepard, "Congress could not have been more clear in telling BLM that wilderness study areas are off-limits to leasing." On behalf of the Colorado Environmental Coalition, The Wilderness Society, the National Parks and Conservation Association, and the Rocky Mountain Chapter of Sierra Club, SCLDF has submitted a formal protest to BLM calling into question the legality of its decision to lease the Cahone WSA for oil and gas development.



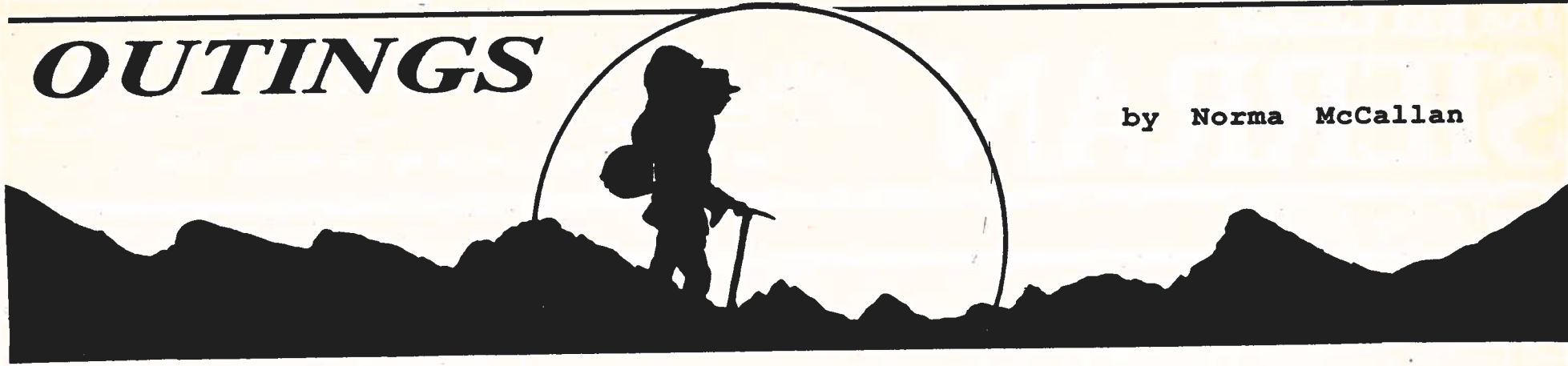
BLM asserts that it must lease the Cahone Wilderness Study Area to secure royalties from subsurface carbon dioxide reserves being drained by wells on adjacent lands. However, the statutorily prescribed mechanism for recovering royalties when unleased federal lands are being drained is to negotiate a compensatory royalty agreement with adjacent land and mineral rights owners," said Shepard.

The conservation groups also are concerned that leasing the Cahone Wilderness Study Area will increase pressure to drill wells adjacent to these lands to fully deplete the carbon dioxide reserves. Currently, nothing prevents gas field development up to and along the borders of the WSA.

See Cahone Wilderness (page 3)

OUTINGS

by Norma McCallan



The following list of outings has been compiled from the Group outings schedules so that any Sierra Club member living anywhere in the Chapter can take advantage of our many and varied Group outings. In some cases, as noted, prior reservations are required. Hikers should bring lunch, sturdy hiking shoes, and clothing appropriate for the weather. Radios are never allowed; dogs are allowed only if noted. Leaders reserve the right to turn away anyone whose equipment, experience, or health conditions appear unsuitable for the particular outing.

SAT-SUN APRIL 14-15 GILA WILDERNESS

Easter weekend backpack, moderate +. Wes Leonard 915-581-0284.

SAT APRIL 14 SANTA FE AREA

Moderate hike. Leave PERA Lot 8am. John McClure 988-1751.

SUN APRIL 15 BANDELIER NATIONAL MONUMENT

Strenuous hike on western side: Pumice Mine Road - San Miguel Ruins - Painted Cave -Turkey Springs Loop, partly exploratory. Leave 7 am, call for reservations. Merrill Goodwin 471-5442.

SAT-SUN APRIL 21-22 SAN MATEO MOUNTAINS

Car camp & day hike each day, dogs allowed. Between Socorro & T or C. Margo Wilson 744-5860.

SAT APRIL 21 BANDELIER NATIONAL MONUMENT

Moderate day hike. Leave PERA Lot, Santa Fe 8am. Joe Whelan 984-0746.

SAT APRIL 21 PROPOSED PETROGLYPHS NATIONAL MONUMENT

Big clean up (and tour) of Rinconada Canyon to celebrate Earth Day. Meet at end of Unser Blvd., Albuquerque at 10am (take Unser north from I-40 until pavement ends, about 2 1/2 miles). Ike Eastvold 255-7679.

SUN APRIL 22 ORGAN MOUNTAINS

Moderate key exchange hike over Baylor Pass. Jim Owen 915-598-9332.

SUN APRIL 22 SANTA FE AREA

Moderate to easy hike. Leave PERA Lot, Santa Fe 9am. Arnold Keskuller 982-9570.

FRI-SUN APRIL 27-29 GILA WILDERNESS/GILA RIVER

Backpack/fishing trip, moderate. Call for reservations. Ted Mertig 915-852-3011.

FRI-SUN APRIL 27-29 (OR MAY 5-7) GRAND CANYON, NORTH PARK

3 day backpack on Hermit-Boucher trails or South Bass trail. Must be experienced backpackers. Awaiting confirmation from backcountry reservation office for dates and trail. Norma McCallan 471-0005.

(SAT APRIL 28 SACRAMENTO MOUNTAINS)

Rescheduled to May 5, see below.

SAT APRIL 28 GHOST RANCH, GLORIETA NM

Easy hike. Dogs allowed. Leave PERA Lot, Santa Fe 9am. Charles Crooks 471-0005.

SUN APRIL 29 GUADALUPE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

Day hike on Geology trail, moderate +. Dan St. Germaine 915-751-7363.

SUN APRIL 29 ESPANOLA AREA

Day hike to Window Rock, moderate. Leave PERA Lot, Santa Fe 8am. Norbert Sperlich 983-1962.

SUN APRIL 29 SANTA FE AREA

Easy day hike to Diablo Canyon / Buckman Wells. Leave PERA Lot, Santa Fe 9am. Ron Mitchell 438-3803.

SAT MAY 5 SACRAMENTO MOUNTAINS

(Note date change from April 28)

Moderate day hike near Cloudcroft. Meet at Allsup's store on Hwy 82 at 10am, or car pool from Las Cruces at Hwy 70 K-Mart at 8am. Jack Zirker 682-2751, or Storm Sermay 521-3348 for car pool.

SAT MAY 5 PROPOSED PETROGLYPHS NATIONAL MONUMENT

Easy hike in Piedras Marcadas. Meet at Dunkin Donuts, corner Coors & Sequoia, Albuquerque, 10am. Ike Eastvold 255-7679.

SAT-SUN MAY 5-6 WHITE MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS, NM

Beginners' backpack. Betty Fisbeck 915-581-0174 or Carol Morrison 915-598-7552.

SAT MAY 19 PROPOSED PETROGLYPHS NATIONAL MONUMENT

Easy hike to Geology Windows. Meet at Dunkin Donuts, corner Coors & Sequoia, Albuquerque, 10am. Ike Eastvold 255-7679.

SAT-MON MAY 26-28 CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK, UTAH

3 day backpack in Salt Canyon. Moderate. Norma McCallan 471-0005.

PHOTOGRAPHERS AND SKETCHER WANTED

We need photographers and sketchers to contribute original work to the Chapter Newsletter. Contact the Editor at the address in this issue.

Sierra Club's Nepal Trek
By Jack Zinker, Mountain Park, NM

We stood at last in the Annapurna Sanctuary, stunned into silence.

For seven days we had trekked from Pokhara, Nepal's second largest city, to reach an incredible view. The route had taken us across the "grain" of the land - uphill and down, from one river bottom to another. We had climbed the famous Gurung stairways, steep flights of massive flagstones that rise thousands of feet against the hillside, which have been built over hundreds of years by the Gurung Tribe to ease the labor of the porters who carry most of the goods in the high country.

Through bamboo forests, through endless terraces of ripening millet, through rhododendron forests, through cloud forests completely draped in moss we had trekked, 18 Westerners accompanied by 36 Nepali porters and cooks.

The trail was heavily used in the dry November weather. We often met other porters or trekkers and passed Nepali teahouses about every five miles, so it was not a wilderness experience - but there were compensations.

We followed the Modi Khola, a turbulent, glacier-fed river, for three days, periodically crossing flimsy suspension bridges. Almost always in view was Machupuchare, the "Fishtail" mountain, a superb spike of red stone draped in blazing white snow, 23,000 feet high. In front of us, constantly looming, was Annapurna South. Annapurna is not a single mountain but an arc-like chain that folds around an enormous basin, the Sanctuary. Annapurna I rises over 26,000 feet and her satellites II through V are only slightly lower.

In perfect weather we arrived at the Annapurna base camp at 13,500 feet and spent the next two hours communing with these beautiful mountains. From a distance of only a few miles we could see delicately fluted snow fields, corrugated glaciers, sheer ice walls and serrated ridges. A light breeze ruffled the snow at the tops of the Annapurnas.

Nobody spoke for awhile - it would have seemed sacrilegious in such a place. We simply drank in the view, feeling the power and majesty of these enormous mountains. After awhile, we scrambled to photograph the view, laughing and whooping with pleasure at the climax of an excellent Sierra Club trip.

I've seen many impressive mountains in Colorado, Chile, and Alaska, but nothing to compare with the Himalayas. If you can visit them, I urge you to go - soon!





RIO GRANDE GROUP REPORTS



El Paso Group
By Gary Williams

The El Paso Group continues to remained focused, perhaps more than at any other time in our 20 year history, on urban problems. Our efforts include:

(1) Urban Environmental Agenda: The Group has developed a 16 point plan covering air quality, open space, water and energy. The plan was presented to El Paso City Mayor Susie Azar at the January general meeting (which was attended by over 200 El Pasoans).

Although the agenda does not present a total solution in any area, it does represent action that can be implemented during the current term of mayor and city council to improve the environmental quality of El Paso. Thus far, the Group has received very favorable reactions both from the Mayor and from other environmental organizations. The agenda will be further refined and than referred back to the Mayor and City Council for action.

(2) Metro Recycling Program: The El Paso Group has submitted a proposal to the Texas State Governor's Office of Budget and Management for a grant to operate a comprehensive community-based recycling program. The Group expects a favorable response in March. If funded, the proposal would do much to improve local recycling efforts.

(3) New Group Office: The El Paso Group is taking a quantum leap in its role as principle player in the local scene by establishing our first office. The office will be located in the old El Paso Energy Information Center Building. The City of El Paso will rent the space to the Group for a nominal cost. The facility will provide permanent meeting and work space, a special interest library, an education outreach program, and a community-based recycling program. The office will be staffed primarily by volunteers, but we also hope to employ a half-time person to manage the office and its programs.

Southern New Mexico Group
by Valerie Horton

1. Our membership chair, Maryanne Thaeler, is organizing Sierra Singles and Sierra Seniors meetings.

2. The Southern New Mexico Group is an active participant on the Coordinating Committee for Las Cruces Earth Day 1990. Speakers, slides shows, awards banquets, and a fair on the New Mexico State University (NMSU) campus are all planned.

3. We are following NMSU's permit request to New Mexico's Environmental Improvement Division and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency requesting permits to allow evaporation of liquid toxic waste in open trays. NMSU would then combine the remaining solids in bulk containers for shipping. We are concerned not only about the airborne release of toxics, but also about the stability of the remaining mixed solid wastes. We have had difficulty obtaining copies of the application, and we are also requesting public hearings.

Santa Fe Group
By Randy Freeman

1. The next edition of "Day Hikes in the Santa Fe area" is nearing publication. The book, written and published by the Santa Fe group, provides several thousand dollars a year for local conservation efforts.

2. A group of environmentalists including many Santa Fe group representatives met with US House Representative Bruce Vento (D-MN; chair of the Public Land Subcommittee) and with Rep. Richardson. Virtually every environmental issue in northern New Mexico was covered. Richardson's apparent legislative priorities include the Pecos/Jemez Wild & Scenic Bill, purchase of the Forked Lightning Ranch surrounding Pecos National Monument, the Petroglyph National Monument, the Glorieta Battlefield, and the pumice mine in the Jemez.

3. A swift and massive public outcry helped kill a National Guard plan to fly over Santa Fe, Carson and Rio Grande Forests at heights as low as 100 feet as many as 360 times a month. People in Taos organized a turnout of several hundred folks at a public forum during which the plan was killed.

4. Southwest Regional Forester David Jolly has launched an investigation into the Los Utes timber sale. The Santa Fe Group has documented serious violations of the Environmental Assessment and the Forest plan in this completed sale. Problems on the ground include scarring of watercourses and mangling steep slopes.

5. The Dept. of Energy plans to construct a new plutonium processing facility at Los Alamos. The giant building (equal to four football fields) will be the single largest facility at the lab. Santa Fe activists are concerned that the project may open the door to full scale weapons production as Rocky Flats is retired. There will be scoping hearings in Santa Fe in preparation for an Environmental Impact Statement on 2/27/90.

CALONE WILDERNESS (from page 1)

Finally, conservationists fear the detrimental precedent that will be set if BLM leases the Cahone WSA. BLM currently is pressuring the Park Service to consent to lease lands within the Hovenweep National Monument for the same reason it wants to lease the Cahone Wilderness Study Area -- to recoup royalties lost by drainage. Likewise, BLM has repeatedly requested that the Park Service consent to oil and gas leasing in Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota, Big Thicket National Preserve in Texas, Big Cypress National Preserve in Florida, and Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area in Ohio.

The Mineral Leasing Act prohibits BLM from leasing in any national park or monument, including Hovenweep. By leasing the Cahone Wilderness Study Area, BLM is seeking to create defacto authority to lease protected lands whenever drainage is occurring. It is conceivable that other protected federal lands sitting atop oil and gas reserves could come under similar pressures to lease. Thus, it is very important to put a stop to BLM's illegal action and the potentially destructive precedent it may set.



Rattlesnake Roundup
By Mark Watson

Alamogordo kicks off Earth Week with a slap in the face to environmental awareness by sponsoring the Third Annual Rattlesnake Roundup, April 20-22, at the Otero County Fairgrounds. Touted as a service to mankind and livestock, this "roundup" upsets nature's checks and balances on the rodent pop-ulations, justifying more pesticide use. For instance, gasoline is often poured into dens to capture the snakes which can pollute ground water and leaves the dens uninhabitable. This "event" is ecologically unconscionable.

In an effort to stop rattlesnake exploitation in the future (Texas and Oklahoma also have roundups), a legal demonstration will be held at the Alamogordo Fairgrounds, 401 Fairgrounds Road, on Saturday April 21, from 10am to 6pm.

Show sensitivity for one of nature's least loved but equally valuable creatures, and honor Earth Week by defending nature's integrity.

For more information, contact Bob Young, Sangre de Cristo Animal Protection, Inc., Box 2153, Las Cruces, NM or Mark Watson at 897-2527. To complain, call Otero County Commission Chairman Joe Chambers at 437-7427.



RIO GRANDE SIERRAN

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We welcome contributions of articles, essays, prose, poetry, photographs, drawings, or other submissions. We request that all submissions be signed and accompanied by a phone number and address. SUBMISSIONS IN ELECTRONIC FORMAT ARE DESIRED. Contact the Editor for details or information. Editor: Valerie J. Horton, 2100 Desert Dr. #7, Las Cruces, NM 88001 (505) 526-1968

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MAY 1ST

