



Volume 63, Issue 1

News of the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter: New Mexico & West Texas

JAN | FEB | MAR 2025

New Mexico has critical role in protecting the climate

State legislation needed in light of national outcomes



Chapter grassroots lobbyists at the Roundhouse for the 2024 Legislative Session. Photo by M. Bernardin.



Hundreds of grassroots lobbyists joined together for Environment Day at the Roundhouse during the 2024 legislative session. Photo by D. McGahey.

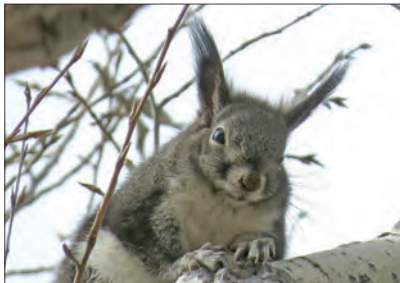


Photo by Mary Katherine Ray

Squirrel killing contest trounced
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Photo by Earthworks

Modernizing oil and gas bonding rules
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Photo by Miya King-Flaherty

Call for Caja del Rio National Monument
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EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET



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Page 1 banner: Photo by Mary
Katherine Ray.

Donate your vehicle today!

Support our efforts to protect and preserve water, wildlife, lands and climate in New Mexico and West Texas by contributing to our vehicle donation program. It's easy, pick up is free and your donation could be tax deductible.



Members elect group and chapter leaders

The Rio Grande Chapter, like all the Sierra Club's 63 chapters around the nation, is run by elected volunteer leaders of our executive committees, "excoms."

The chapter has a 13-member excom. The chapter has four regional groups: Northern New Mexico, Central New Mexico, Southern New Mexico and the El Paso Group, which includes El Paso, Hudspeth and Culberson counties in

Texas.

Chapter excom members serve three-year terms; group terms are two years. Members serve staggered terms.

Chapter and group members vote each fall to elect or re-elect excom members.

This fall, 15 chapter and group excom members were elected and begin their terms in January.

• **Chapter:** Alissa Keny-Guyer, Sequoia Rudolph,

Valari Taylor.

• **Northern New Mexico Group:** Chris Calvert, Craig Hammond, Ken Hughes, Norman Norvelle, Joe Wells.

• **Central New Mexico Group:** Debbie Bryant, Fred A. Helms, Sherry Noone, Laurie Zunner.

• **Southern New Mexico Group:** David Baake, Karen Boehler, Gayle Eads, Mary Katherine Ray.

Congratulations to all!

Rio Grande 'Sierran' publication information

The Rio Grande Sierran, Sierra Club Communication Excellence Award winner in 2023, is published four times a year, in January, April, July and October, by the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter.

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The opinions expressed in signed articles in the Sierran are the opinions of the writers and not necessarily those of the Sierra Club.

Products and services advertised in the Sierran are not necessarily endorsed by

Sierra Club.

Contributions are welcome. Send them to riogrande.chapter@sierraclub.org at any time. Issues are published quarterly.

Submissions by Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter members will take precedence.

Articles chosen to be published are subject to editing.

Letters to the editor may be up to 400 words, subject to editing, and are printed at the discretion of the editorial board.

Editorial practices as developed and adopted by the chapter will be used in production of the Sierran.

Gearing up for the legislative session

RIO GRANDE CHAPTER LOBBY TEAM

The specter of a systematic dismantling of our country's bedrock environmental laws can drain the heart in a flash. The climate crisis that is in full display can cause the same heart to despair at the thought of rolling back our federal energy work. But we've fought back before against Bush and Trump policies. Here in our Democratic trifecta state, however, we have a governor and legislature who have for years led the nation with climate and environment policies. With the incoming Trump administration, our policy makers will have to lead like never before.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham is heading into the last 60-day legislative session of her term. For the first time, our legislature comes in with a female majority in both houses and a progressive majority at that. There will be lots of urgent action to take on many fronts, but the climate, water and wildlife conservation will take center stage.

This year Senate President Pro Tempore Mimi Stewart (D-Albuquerque), is introducing a suite of three bills curbing climate pollutants and funding a community and worker transition, top priorities for the Sierra Club.

The Clear Horizons Act will take the next steps we need to reduce our state's greenhouse gas emissions. New Mexico has taken real action to reduce our emissions from the electric, oil and gas, transportation and buildings sectors, but with the Permian Basin oil boom, we need to take the next step in further reducing our emissions. This legislation will put the governor's GHG reduction goals into law and ensure rulemaking and enforcement.

Stewart's Community Benefits Fund bill will generate money for an array of existing funds that support our climate transition, from paying for



Former chapter legislative organizer Luis Guerrero and chapter grassroots lobbyists take their message to Governor during the 2024 legislative session. Photo by Melissa Bernardin.

weatherization of low-income homes, to building out the green infrastructure we need to transition away from fossil fuels, to helping to pay for workforce development in new sustainable fields.

Lastly, the Innovation in State Government bill will help ensure that the agencies supporting these climate safeguards and programs will have the resources they need to effectively implement them. These three bills lay the groundwork to truly lead our region and country in complying with our Paris climate commitments even if our federal government refuses to protect our communities and people.

These are not the only bills that will be heard this session and we'll keep you posted as the session approaches. The following bills are being considered for introduction in the next legislative session

- **The PowerUp NM Act** – ensure the buildout of our distribution grid, making sure renewable electricity can make it efficiently to where it will be used.
- **The Appliance Standard Act** – ensure that the most efficient appliances are sent to our state.
- **Building Code Updates** –

require regular updates to energy conservation building codes to provide the most energy savings for building occupants.

- **EV Battery Second Life** – support the reuse, repurposing and recycling of EV batteries as the market for these batteries grows.
- **Electric School Buses** – create the financial and technical support for school districts bringing on electric school buses.
- **Low Income Utility Protections** – would let utilities to do low-income rates while another bill would protect net-metering for income limited families.
- **Oil and Gas Setbacks from Schools** – to protect kids from industrial pollution
- **State Land Office Royalty Rate** – allows the state land commissioner to increase royalty rates on the state's highest production lands, asking a minimum of market rate for extraction off these lands.
- **Game Commission Reform** – to protect all New Mexico species, not just those that are hunted for sport.
- Ensure that appropriations for water rights for the river can be

used over the course of several years.

- Two bills will ensure that New Mexico can regulate waters left unprotected by the US Supreme Court.
- Budget items would provide funds for updating air conditioning and solar panels on schools and provide incentives for companies bringing on clean trucks.
- Funding to clean up groundwater spills from sources like dry cleaners.

And even with all of the positive forward-thinking legislation, we'll need to look out for the bills of concern. Legislation to facilitate the storage of CO2 underground as an alternative to stopping the extraction or combustion of fossil fuels is not the best alternative. We are concerned about proposals to use treated produced water outside oil and gas operations, even though state rules don't allow such a use. Last year, severance tax breaks for certain oil and gas producers for certain pollution equipment passed but was vetoed, so we'll be on the look out for that again.

This is an ambitious portfolio of legislation to protect New Mexico's air, land, water, climate and communities. It's a portfolio we can't achieve without you.

Here's how you can get involved:

- Join our NM Climate Corps, which meets every Thursday during the session to learn about bills and how to help act on them.
 - Fill out our grassroots lobby survey to share the ways you want to get involved using the QR code below.
 - Join Lands, Water and Wildlife Day at the Roundhouse on Feb. 20.
 - Join Climate Crisis Day at the Roundhouse on March 6
- Email melissa.bernardin@sierraclub.org for more information.

Prepare small communities for climate disasters

BY D. REED ECKHARDT RIO GRANDE SIERRAN TEAM

It was hard to live in New Mexico last summer and watch the profound impacts climate change has on residents. From wildfires that ate up parts of Ruidoso in the south to floods that overwhelmed the tiny community of Medanales in the north, officials are being forced to see that something has to be done.

That's especially true because smaller communities find it impossible to prepare for such disasters.

Larger cities, like Albuquerque, have plans and funding. But the tiny towns are not ready.

So far, the state has offered little to help these communities adapt. An inter-agency working group is developing a Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan, but its timelines stretch far into the future.

New Mexico Professionals for Climate Action is offering a two-part proposal in the upcoming legislative session. First, the Statewide Public Health and Climate program would provide staffing in the state Department of Health to help with climate issues. Second, the group proposes a \$10 million Extreme Weather Resilience Fund that communities and other entities could use to make plans and act.

Executive Director Shelley Mann-Lev says things are looking positive so far:

- The State Department of Health has included funds for the climate program's staffing in its 2025 budget. The governor then could add the money to her executive budget.
- Legislative sponsors and backers for the \$10 million fund are lined up.
- Several groups, including the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter, Conservation Voters of NM, NM Voices for Children, and the NM Alliance of Health Councils, also support the bill.

Of course, passage is not guaranteed. This is the bill's third shot, having been turned away in 2023 and 2024.

One objection in 2024 was that the state Homeland Security Department should handle these matters. However, Mann-Lev points out that the agency is not tasked with chronic problems like heat-related illnesses. Its focus is on rolling out support after disasters like forest fires.

The plan needs Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's support. Mann-Lev says her group has contacted the governor but has not yet heard back.

Mann-Lev says that with a climate-denying president waiting in the wings, state programs like this will be needed more than ever. **Editor's note:** Early reviews of the governor's budget do not indicate the program was included.

Four ways to take action on climate:

- Contact your legislators. Write, call, meet with your representative and senator.
- Volunteer for a phonebank.
- Lead an in-district team or host an in-district meeting.
- Share your climate story.

Sign up to take action with this QR code.



We know how

I'm at the point now with the federal election results where I can momentarily forget what happened and find little snippets of joy with my kids and family. Then someone will say "Trump" and there's that melting feeling that brings me back to the day after the election.

The known and unknown harms that are to come felt so heavy that my body hurt. It's been hard to open the newspaper. And yet, if you can believe it, I've been working for the Sierra Club for 25 years. So I remember that times have been hard before and that we have overcome.

In my first job with the Sierra Club, leading our student coalition nationally, I spoke with young people about the impact of a vote for Ralph Nader. And



CAMILLA FEIBELMAN
Director's
Column

as we predicted, we got George Bush.

The Arctic Refuge was at risk from oil drilling. But our communities, led by Gwich'in people, suffered the worst impacts, though the fight continues.

I supported Environmental Justice communities from Arizona and Memphis to Appalachia and Detroit in my role on the Sierra Club media team. These communities fought back against coal and chemical companies alike, demanding protections and never ceasing because there was no choice.

At the Puerto Rico Chapter of the Sierra Club, we protected a big swath of leatherback-turtle nesting beach called the Northeast Ecological Corridor, at first by executive order. But when Gov. Luis Fortuño, sweetheart to luxury developers, was elected, he tried to secretly revoke the protection. We were tipped off about the move, convened protesters overnight, and worked for four years to block the rollback.

Then finally in 2013, we protected the area by law.

In 2016 Trump moved to cancel Obama's methane rules born of the Paris Climate Agreement. But through careful and strategic advocacy we blocked these and many other rollbacks, all while we worked with

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham to establish our own New Mexico methane and smog rules, giving ourselves the protections the Trump Administration would not.

We know how to fight back. We won't always win and the harms will be real. But we'll slow the attacks, we'll expose the hurt, we'll keep standing up like we always have. We must pay attention, read the paper, face the reality, and step out of our comfort zone. Under the new administration, we'll keep fighting for the climate, but we'll also have to stand up for women's health, LGBTQ rights, and our immigrant families. We will fight for love, protection, safety and a planet where we can all thrive.

In case you missed it: news highlights

BY REED ECKHARDT
RIO GRANDE SIERRAN TEAM

Southern NM fish could be added to list

Federal officials are considering adding the Pecos pupfish to the threatened or endangered species lists.

The small freshwater fish appears lost from most of the Pecos River basin but has been found in the Bitter Lake refuge in southern New Mexico and Salt Creek in Texas.

US Fish and Wildlife is seeking comment until Jan. 21 on a proposal to list the fish as threatened. The agency would like to include 136 miles around the Pecos River, 26,555 acres of wetlands and sinkholes in Chavez and Eddy counties, and parts of west Texas.

<https://bit.ly/4eW51fQ>

Appeals Court upholds ozone rule

The New Mexico Court of Appeals has upheld rules adopted in 2023 by state regulators to reduce the pollutants that create ground-level ozone.

The Independent Petroleum Association of New Mexico opposed the regulations, saying they harm the industries with a "death of a thousand cuts." The regulations apply in Chavez, Doña Anna, Eddy, Lea, Rio Arriba, Sandoval, San Juan, and Valencia counties.

Fossil fuels' pollutants react with sunlight to create ozone at ground levels. This can cause problems like chronic bronchitis and asthma.

<https://bit.ly/3OBRJ48>

Slimmed-down water proposal offered

After seeing a \$500-million plan fail in last year's legislative session, state officials are proposing legislation for a smaller plan to support strategic water supply projects.

The money would be used to provide grants and contracts for pilot and industrial-size projects to treat brackish and produced water for other

uses.

Although this is part of the state's 50-year water plan to ease a water shortage expected to worsen in the coming years, water advocates have recommended focusing on conservation of freshwater rather than tapping nonrenewable brackish water and toxic produced water. Aquifers and rivers are expected to decline by one-fourth. The state hopes to substitute fresh water with treated water for use in data centers, solar panel manufacturing and green hydrogen production.

Environmental groups have multiple concerns about the plan, including the effect of pumping deep, brackish water on potable shallow aquifers, disposal of the toxic brine that will remain after treatment, and reuse of produced water from oil and gas pumping that may contain toxic chemicals.

<https://bit.ly/3ZJ9wgh>

Tent Rocks monument reopens

After a four-year hiatus, the Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument has reopened to public use. Cochiti Pueblo, where the site is located, is handling daily operations, and the US Bureau of Land Management will provide oversight.

The monument has opened under tighter restrictions to control the wear and tear of the site. Only 75,000 people will be allowed each year. Reservations are required, and entry fees are \$10 for those ages 2 to 16 and \$20 for those above that age. Reservations can be made at www.recreation.gov.

Jamie Garcia with the BLM had previously told the Santa Fe New Mexican that the site was being loved to death, adding, "The increased visitation has resulted in resource impacts seen within the monument as well as to the Pueblo of Cochiti."

<https://bit.ly/4iaeOIN>

Progress on community solar is slow

Three years ago, the state legislature approved a community solar program

to make sun-driven power more available to state residents. Yet not one of the 47 approved projects is underway.

A report from the Public Regulation Commission says, "Community solar is moving forward, but not as quickly as expected." It also makes recommendations for speeding things up, such as a sustainable funding stream.

The report explains that the approved projects have not begun because of pending financial disputes with utilities. The utilities play a key role because community solar subscribers would be given credits of up to 30% of their utility bills.

<https://bit.ly/3ZiQWtD>

Lawsuit to protect Pinyon jays in the works

Delays from US Fish and Wildlife in whether to protect the pinyon jay in New Mexico are spurring threats of a lawsuit from environmental groups.

Said to be the fastest-declining land birds in the West, the jays play a key role in keeping the state's pinyon trees healthy. They distribute the seeds and help create habitat for other species

Deb Haaland, secretary of the Interior Department, received a petition in 2022 to add the bird to the threatened species list under the Endangered Species Act. The department had 12 months to decide, and now the advocates seek to force a decision.

<https://bit.ly/3CW3ekK>

Pollution controls in the Permian Basin may be lost

The Environmental Protection Agency has been promising state officials for a year that it would step in to ease air pollution in the Permian Basin.

Now, NM officials are fearful those controls will never come. They point to former President Donald Trump's election as a potential reason for their concern. He promises he and his EPA nominee, US Rep. Lee Zeldin, R-NY, will reverse regulations begun under President Joe Biden.

"(The controls) no longer are imminent," James Kenney of the state Environment Department told the Santa Fe Reporter.

<https://bit.ly/43gNaRf>

Settlement reached in effort to save silvery minnow

It was in 1994 that the silvery minnow in the Rio Grande was declared an endangered species. Now, it has won a victory in court.

In 2022, WildEarth Guardians filed a suit, saying officials were not doing enough to protect the species amidst river management efforts. Now, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation, and the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District have to come up with a new plan to do more to protect the fish. Also protected would be river-dwelling birds.

Daniel Timmons of the Guardians told the Santa Fe New Mexican, "We remain extremely concerned by the plight of this species. ... (we) hope that there is a path forward to protect these species in a meaningful way ..."

<https://bit.ly/4gh0ht2>

Taos Council moves on green hydrogen

In its efforts to keep moving forward in its initiative to run a green utility, the Town Council has approved a resolution to add green hydrogen to its operations.

The hydrogen would be created in combination with the town's wastewater treatment facility and its solar initiative, which already allows Taos to power itself during the day with solar energy. The plan is to develop long-duration storage through the development of green hydrogen and its storage.

"We think we're going to start to really make an impact on climate change in our area," Kit Carson Electric Cooperative CEO Luis Reyes told the council.

<https://bit.ly/4fW7Fm>

Clean bill of health for Pecos River

BY TERESA SEAMSTER
NORTHERN NM WATER SENTINELS

“Truth lies at the bottom of a well” (Democritus) and to uncover it takes investigation below the water’s surface. The clear waters of the upper Pecos River reflect a picture of clean healthy water which is mostly true, but not always.

Water sampling conducted in 2023 showed some alarming spikes of E coli in the river during August and September at the site of the old Tererro Mine and at the Bridge on Highway 223 in the town of Pecos.

This year, with the removal of some portable toilets close to the river at two picnic sites, the contaminant levels dropped from 209.8 MPN (most probable number) in 2023, to 12.0 MPN at Tererro, and from 133.4 MPN to 9.7 MPN at the Pecos Bridge over the same time period.



Water Sentinels leader Ginny Seamster, and John Lopez from Trout Unlimited collect samples at Dalton Camp. Photo by Teresa Seamster.

Any level less than 10 MPN is considered low risk in drinking water and a level of more than 100 MPN is considered high risk.

Other contaminants such as metals

(aluminum, iron and lead) were also detected in 2023 but at levels below surface water standards. Radionuclides (gross alpha & beta) were detected at all three test sites but all were below National Water Level standards of

15 picocuries per liter (pCi/L is the measure used for exposure to radon gas and to determine health risk).

2024 results in total metals show similar results with slightly elevated levels of calcium and magnesium and consistent levels of aluminum.

So far in 2024, the upper Pecos is showing a clean bill of health. The monitoring being done by the combined volunteers from the Water Sentinels, Amigos Bravos, Trout Unlimited and RiverSource will soon be expanded in 2025 with a new group of volunteers being trained by the Upper Pecos Watershed Association. A continuing focus will be on monitoring the emergence of E coli and any elevated metals and radioactive elements in tributaries and main stem of the upper Pecos River.

Water Sentinels volunteers hit 18 years monitoring New Mexico rivers

BY SHANNON ROMELING
NORTHERN GROUP VICE CHAIR/
WATER SENTINELS

Since 2006, the Sierra Club’s Water Sentinels, in partnership with Amigos Bravos, has been training volunteers and gathering water quality data from dozens of sites on five Taos rivers – the Rio Fernando de Taos, the Rio Pueblo de Taos, the Rio Grande, Red River and the Rio Hondo, and on the Rio Embudo and the Pecos River since 2021.

We test these sites three times a year, and each year we perform a public training and coordinate volunteers to collect data.

Without the Water Sentinels program, the New Mexico Environment Department would be monitoring these rivers only once every 9-10 years. With our support, rivers are monitored yearly.

Over the years, data from this program has brought to light an E. coli impairment on the Rio Fernando and the on-going aluminum impairment on the Red River.

It also has provided baseline data of water quality on the upper Pecos River for use in the campaign to stop the Tererro Mine and has contributed to improvements to the Rio Pueblo through upgrades to the Taos Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Long-time partner organization Amigos Bravos provides a match in the form of staff time to: conduct the training, organize the volunteer sampling days, analyze the E. coli samples in their lab, cover lab costs

not covered by the grassroots grant support, and drive the other samples to an EPA-certified lab.

All data are sent to the NM Environment Department for use in the development of the state’s list of impaired waters (303 (d) list) and has resulted in several new impairments being recognized and listed. These listings are important to garner funding that can improve water quality on these rivers.

In 2024, 10 volunteers collected data at 31 sites. Constituents sampled depend on the needs of the community and concerns at each site.

Information collected included E. coli, nutrients (nitrate, phosphate, ammonia), temperature, pH, electrical conductivity, dissolved oxygen, aluminum, total hardness, calcium, boron, iron, aluminum, antimony, arsenic, barium, beryllium, cadmium, chromium, cobalt, copper, lead, manganese, mercury, molybdenum, nickel, selenium, silver, thallium, uranium, vanadium, zinc, BTEX (benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, and xylene), and radiation levels (gross alpha and gross beta).

Data collected that is over water quality standards is reported to NM Environmental Department and potential solutions are included in a report that summarizes the results each year. “If you would like to join the Water Sentinels team, please email sromeling@amigosbravos.org.



Filmmaker, John Grabowska and Northern Group volunteer hosted a viewing of his movie “Sky Island” on Dec.14 at Travel Bug in Santa Fe to a full house. Thanks to John Buchser and the Northern group for organizing and for providing the beer for Sierra Club members. Grabowska spoke about what it’s like to be an environmental filmmaker and about the difficulty of raising funds for documentaries. His film examines the natural history of the Jemez Mountain range and is narrated by Meryl Streep, featuring Pulitzer Prize-winning Native American writer N. Scott Momaday. Learn more at www.johngrabowska.com. John Grabowska and Cinematographer Steve Ruth on the south rim of the Valles Caldera. Photo by Hilary Grabowska.



Join us as we celebrate and work to protect the Earth! The global theme for Earth Day 2025 is “Our Power, Our Planet.” It is a call to action for all of us to embrace renewable energy and make a lasting impact on our planet’s future. We’ll continue making Earth Day a way to deeply engage with our Climate Solutions — from insulating your home to installing solar to purchasing an EV.

Save the Date

Sunday, April 13, 2025 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Balloon Fiesta Park, Sid Cutter Pavilion

Sponsorships are available now! The sponsor information packet is on the Festival home page: earthdayfestivalnm.org.

Vendor booths are available. Information, and the vendor application form can be found on the booths page: earthdayfestivalnm.org/booths. The application deadline is April 1, 2025. Questions? Contact Caroline at caroline.funk@sierraclub.org.

New Mexico election results analysis

BY RICHARD BARISH
CHAPTER POLITICAL CHAIR

New Mexico did not completely escape the rightward winds of this past election, but all in all we escaped relatively unscathed.

Progressives did lose a seat in both the state House and Senate. On the House side, Tara Jaramillo won a difficult seat in the center and south of the state in 2022 after Rebecca Dow resigned the seat to run for governor that year, but Rep. Jaramillo could not hold off Dow in her return this year.

In the Senate, progressives picked up one seat and lost two. After Sen. Siah Correa Hemphill's late withdrawal, Dems could not find a candidate who commanded Hemphill's support, and we lost that seat in the southern part of the state. Sen. Jerry Ortiz y Pino in Bernalillo County retired after a very distinguished career, and that seat was redistricted to make it much more conservative. Michelle Sandoval narrowly lost that Senate race.

On the other side of the ledger, Angel Charley, D-Acoma, an accomplished young Native candidate was uncontested after Republican blunders, and she picked up that seat. She joins Pauline Abeyta, D-To'hajilee, and Joseph Hernandez, D-Shiprock, on the House side as a new generation of progressive Native leadership in the legislature.

Sen.-elect Cindy Nava, D-Bernalillo, became the first DACA recipient to win a legislative race anywhere in the country. Progressives gained some other great newcomers as well, including Sarah Silva, a community organizer from Las Cruces, Heather Berghmans, D-Albuquerque, Marianna Anaya, D-Albuquerque and Anita Gonzales, D-Las Vegas, a Chapter Excom member. Some of our established champions survived well-funded challenges, including Rep. Nathan Small, Sen. Carrie Hamblen, and Sen. Martin Hickey.

We should also acknowledge and offer our thanks to some outstanding candidates who worked very

hard and ran great campaigns for tough seats in a tough year but came up short. In addition to Jaramillo, there is Vicky Estrada-Bustillo, Athena Christodoulou, and Gabby Begay. Hopefully, we haven't seen the last of them.

My bottom-line assessment is because of the turnover in Democratic seats due to retirements and incumbent losses in primaries, we have a more progressive and environment-friendly legislature. You can see the full results for our endorsed candidates at our website, <https://www.riograndesierraclub.org/elections/>.

Finally, I want to offer my heartfelt thanks to our volunteers who called and walked for our candidates. You are the source of our power in the legislature. You not only help us elect good legislators, but legislators pay attention to us because they know that with your efforts, we can influence the outcome of elections. Without you, we could not accomplish our legislative agenda. Thank you.

STUDENTS

Fall Global W. E. gardening, recycling

BY GENIE STEVENS
CHAPTER CLIMATE EDUCATION DIRECTOR

Classroom teachers in Albuquerque, Santa Fe and White Rock, and mentors in Tijeras, Taos, Raton and Santa Fe took part in the end-of-summer teaching training for the Global Warming Express 2024/25 school year.

Returning Global W.E. students in Raton, Santa Fe and Tijeras are excited to be back enhancing the work they accomplished last year.

Raton students are launching the recycling initiative they started last year, gaining support from the city to pick up their school's recycling on a weekly basis with support from their Rotary Club to purchase the recycling bins.

Also in Raton, Global W.E. students took a field trip to Sugarite Canyon State Park, east of Raton Pass.

Apart from being a beautiful, four-mile stretch of wilderness with ponderosa pines and gambel oak forest, the park is also the site of the remains of a coal mine constructed in the park in 1894. At least one of the Global W.E. students is a descendant of a coal miner from that mine.

In our Global W.E. classroom, the children learn about how coal and fossil fuels are created with our curriculum picture book, "Buried Sunlight," read aloud on our curriculum app at



Paul Biderman and Global W.E. students discussing how lobbying affects legislation. Photo by Jim Eagle.



Acequia Madre students begin their school year with Global W.E. programs in the garden. Photo by Jim Eagle.

<https://gwelearn.org/#/s9/p1> by former Global W.E. student, Magnificent Farrell.

Farrell joined the GWE at age 9 and is now a Climate Science major at UNM.

This winter, students in Taos will learn how the Global W.E. curriculum

ties in with their experience of the garden and the soil beneath their feet, with our mentor in Taos, combining classes in and about the garden with the Global W.E. weekly sessions.

Last year, the Global W.E. introduced a new component to our year-long training with the introduction of the "Global W.E. Civic Engagement Road Show".

Led by sixth-year mentor Paul Biderman and fifth-year mentor Adam Wasserman, the Road Show travels to our various program locations to bring the students fun, intensive role-play workshops on various aspects of civic engagement. Last year's training theme was "Getting a Bill to the Governor".

This year, the Road Show has added a "What does Lobbying Mean?" training to its traveling offerings. Students at Acequia Madre Elementary School keenly followed Part 1 of that training in November and will learn Part 2 in January.

The Road Show's next stop will be Raton Elementary School in January 2025.

Fellow to strengthen legislative team

CAROLINE FUNK
CHAPTER COORDINATOR

We have another set of hands for our legislative work this session.

Jacqueline Walsh is joining the chapter as an Endeavor Fellow.

She'll be with us in January and February, making calls and hustling at the Roundhouse. The Endeavor Program

provides funding for student fellows to spend 6-7 weeks on the ground with organizations fighting for environmental action. Over the course of the program, fellows learn the fundamentals of organizing and advocacy.

From Jacqueline: Hi, I'm Jacqueline! I'm originally from the South Bay Area of California and I attend Bennington College in

southern Vermont.

I'm a junior studying political theory and action, as well as Spanish. In addition to environmental and climate issues, I have worked on and am passionate about labor and migrant rights.

I'm super excited to work with the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter, and I hope to learn more about what the

world of environmental action looks like on a day-to-day level so that I can figure out where I will fit into it.

I am deeply appreciative of this opportunity and will work hard to be of service to the issues that we're working on! And, of course, it is a great privilege to spend my winter in the beautiful state of New Mexico and I can't wait to explore the landscapes here!



Photo by: Selife

2024 Year in Review

JANUARY

■ With Sierra Club testifying in support, the New Mexico Construction Industries Commission votes to adopt the 2021 International Energy Conservation Code. It requires builders to design and construct new buildings with improved performance. The code includes requirements for new buildings to have infrastructure that supports charging for electric vehicles.

■ Albuquerque City's Sustainability Office and FUSE Corp start a Citywide Composting Initiative with federal grant money. This year-long initiative includes stakeholder interviews and public listening sessions across the city. It concludes in October with a Draft Program Plan to establish six strategically located food waste drop-off sites.

■ The Public Regulation Commission adopts the hearing examiners' finding that PNM acted imprudently in extending its participation in the Four Corners Power Plant beyond 2016. As a result, the commission disallows roughly \$84 million from the amount PNM can recover from customer rates. This comes as part of the commission's final order in PNM's pending rate case.

FEBRUARY

■ The National Nuclear Security Administration and Los Alamos National Laboratory host a public meeting to hear about the proposed transmission line across 14 miles of the irreplaceable Caja del Rio Plateau. The Caja del Rio Coalition and the Sierra Club submit over 23,000 public comments opposing the project.

■ With the passage of the Clean Fuels Act and the Clean Cars Tax Credit, combined with the Clean Cars and Trucks rules that passed in the Fall, more individuals, utilities, governments, and tribes will be able to invest in buying and building out the infrastructure to clean up transportation pollution.

MARCH

■ Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signs the omnibus tax bill with seven climate-related tax credits. Three of these create incentives for everyday New Mexicans to buy electric vehicles, heat pumps, and rooftop solar. The governor vetoed some of these last year, but thanks to your support, she expanded and strengthened the credits.

■ A national coalition of partners, including Rio Grande Chapter staff, gathers in Washington, DC, to celebrate the Environmental Protection Agency's finalized oil and gas methane rules and meets with congressional champions U.S. Sens. Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Lujan, U.S. Rep. Melanie Stansbury



Volunteers, members and staff gathered for the annual Appreciation Potluck hosted by the Central Group on Dec. 6, 2024. This year the Rio Grande Chapter celebrated Director Camilla Feilbelman's 25 years with the Sierra Club. Photo by Mark Flaherty.

and the administration.

■ The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announces the wild Mexican Wolf population has grown by 6% over the previous year with a minimum of 257 Lobos across southeast Arizona and southwest New Mexico. The genetic diversity of the population remains dangerously low.

APRIL

■ The BLM releases its final "Public Lands Rule" that re-balances the agency's multi-use mandate for managing public lands. For decades, the agency favored resource extraction over any other use. The Sierra Club submitted thousands of comments supporting the rule.

■ Interior Sec. Deb Haaland protects more than 4,200 acres of New Mexico landscapes known as the Buffalo Tract and the Crest of Montezuma from gravel mining and other extraction for the next 50 years.

■ BLM issues its final Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Rule, the first comprehensive update to the federal onshore oil and gas leasing program in decades. The rules will help mitigate the impacts of oil and gas development, but continued work is needed.

■ The Environmental Improvement Board votes to reject a challenge from auto dealers seeking a stay of the Advanced Clean Car II rules. The Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Air Quality Control Board also votes to reject the challenge. These standards bring more electric vehicles to the state and directly benefit New Mexicans.

■ Over 4,500 visitors learn about cost savings through climate-friendly actions on Earth Day at Balloon Fiesta Park. Volunteer Energy Guides with the Sierra Club and 350 New Mexico's Energy Experts help hundreds of festival-goers get information on how to find cost savings with utility, state and federal incentives.

■ The EPA announces that New Mexico is awarded \$156,120,000 in funding through the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund's Solar For All program.

MAY

■ A coalition of environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, submits comments to the BLM on the draft plan for the Rio Grande Del Norte Monument. Though the plan is conservation-oriented, it proposes expanding rights-of-way for transmission lines across the Rio Grande Gorge.

■ Global Warming Express students in Raton, NM, start a recycling program in their school, accomplishing their Big Goal. Raton does not have curbside recycling, but through a series of meetings, the fourth graders at Raton Elementary get permission. The city will pick up recycle bins donated to the school by the Rotary Club.

■ The Water Quality Control Commission holds hearings to consider rules proposed by the NM Environment Department to prohibit the discharge of produced oil and gas wastewater to ground and surface waters. It has not been proven that introducing produced water – treated or untreated – is safe or protective of water resources. The Rio Grande Chapter and Amigos Bravos, represented by Western Environmental Law Center, intervened in the environmental department's rulemaking and sponsored expert testimony.

JUNE

■ Mayor Tim Keller signs Albuquerque City's New Sustainability Resolution after it is passed unanimously by the Albuquerque City Council. The resolution outlines the city's commitments to sustainability in economic development, energy, transportation, the built environment, and beyond. The Central Group supported the resolution and attended the signing event.

■ Twenty-five of the 29 candidates endorsed by the Chapter win their primary elections for the NM House and Senate and county commission and clerk races.

■ A coalition of environmental groups, including the Rio Grande Chapter, petitions the NM's Oil Conservation Commission

to modernize outdated laws governing oil and gas cleanup, financial accountability, and more in the oil and gas industry.

JULY

■ The Interstate Stream Commission launches open houses in 16 regions throughout the state to hear from communities about the values to be reflected in state water management and planning. The Water Security Act passed in the 2023 legislative session changed how the state does regional water planning.

■ Global Warming Express students headline the Western Environmental Law Center's Summer Soirée. Global W.E. students from Acequia Madre Elementary give their speeches and speak passionately about the need for people to reduce their meat consumption.

AUGUST

■ All four stacks of the coal-fired San Juan Generating Station are demolished. The plant was a major source of pollution when operating at full capacity, emitting more than 12 million tons of greenhouse gases annually. "We are hopeful that after the demolition of San Juan Generating Station, the Four Corners area and its communities will no longer have to sacrifice our health and safety for fossil fuels," says Rose Rushing, attorney at Western Environmental Law Center.

■ In partnership with Dreams in Action/The Semilla Project, the Sierra Club hosts "Climate Solution-Just Transition" Town Halls in Albuquerque, Las Cruces, Taos, Santa Fe, Silver City, and Deming, all of which are packed.

SEPTEMBER

■ Santa Fe National Forest releases a draft decision approving Los Alamos National Laboratory's proposal for a 14-mile transmission line across the Caja del Rio Plateau. The Forest Service's draft decision ignores opposition from tribes in the region, the All Pueblo Council of Governors, and the tens of thousands of public comments.

■ State Land Office

Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard announces her decision to transfer 212 acres of state land to Valle de Oro Urban National Wildlife Refuge in southwest Albuquerque. The office hosted three public meetings in the spring. The Central Group supported and engaged in this effort.

OCTOBER

■ New Mexico's Court of Appeals denies a request from a group of auto dealers to block the Advanced Clean Cars II rule in New Mexico. The court allows the rule to take effect and ensures more electric vehicles are delivered to New Mexico. Sierra Club helped defend the rule on appeal.

■ The U.S. Supreme Court rejects an effort by industry polluters to stay the EPA's Clean Air Act standards that cut methane and other harmful pollutants from the oil and gas industry.

■ The U.S. Supreme Court agrees to review a low court decision vacating Nuclear Regulatory Commission Licenses to operate high-level nuclear waste storage facilities in NM and TX.

NOVEMBER

■ The Oil Conservation Commission hears arguments on a petition filed by WildEarth Guardians to ban the use of PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) in oil and gas extraction. The Sierra Club spoke in support of the petition to ban PFAS.

■ We get a pro-environmental majority elected to the New Mexico state legislature with the help of our members and volunteers.

■ A district judge orders a private landowner, who blocked Kingston residents from using road access to the Aldo Leopold wilderness, to stop obstructing public access or face public nuisance claims. Kingston residents have been fighting for public access since December 2023. Southern Group volunteer leader David Baake is one of the lead lawyers who made this happen.

■ New Mexico's Court of Appeals rejects a challenge to the methane emission standards adopted by the Environmental Improvement Board. Western Environmental Law Center and Sierra Club were key supporters of the rule and helped defend the appeal.

DECEMBER

■ Asha the wolf remains in captivity throughout the year. She has accepted a mate and they are penned together, but she is still not pregnant and the US Fish and Wildlife Service has not released them.

Volunteer highlight - Susan Gorman

BY MIYA KING-FLAHERTY
CHAPTER PROGRAM MANAGER

What is your volunteer role with the Rio Grande Chapter? I'm the chair of the Central Group of the Rio Grande Chapter. This is a multifaceted position and involves much more than one might imagine.

How did you get involved with the Sierra Club? In 1989, my partner, Blair, and I moved from Chicago to Los Angeles. We began camping and hiking, and our awareness of the environment expanded. We joined the Sierra Club and sought local activist opportunities. In 1991, we relocated to Albuquerque and immediately became involved in Rio Grande Chapter. Finding opportunities was easy. We just asked and were put to work. Fascinating.

What is your background/professional background that helps

you in your Sierra Club work? Both of us had corporate careers, Blair's in the airline industry and mine in the chemical industry. Then, in 1991, we decided to start our own business, PioneerWest (www.pioneerwest.net). As part of this business, we ran water learning fairs for school kids. This evolved over the years and in 2000, we became nomads, writing about our lifestyle.

We moved into a fifth-wheel trailer hauled by a big pickup truck. We were still working, using the Internet and a mobile phone, returning to park in Albuquerque when necessary.

Then, we had an epiphany. We made the decision to take a sabbatical from our business commitments to take a journey around the world in the spring of 2006. We began with a flight to Frankfurt and on to India.

We continued on to Thailand and

China. After a 10-week journey, we finally returned to New Mexico. Our nomad life continued internationally until 2020 when the pandemic forced us to perch back in Albuquerque. Blair has since passed. I selected Sierra Club as one of my areas of focus for involvement.

Why do you like to volunteer for the Sierra Club? The Sierra Club thrives on the dedication and work of volunteers. The opportunities are boundless. There are many organizations that thrive on volunteers. Why select this one? Our focus is the natural world, especially the climate and biodiversity. The opportunities to make a difference are boundless. As with any occupation, one must continue to evaluate its effectiveness to be certain that one is truly accomplishing useful goals. Sierra Club work is no different. One must be



Susan Gorman hugs a tree in Taylor Park, Albuquerque. Photo by M. King-Flaherty.

thoughtful.

What would you tell someone who would like to get involved but doesn't know how? If you would like to get involved, just raise your hand, and get in touch. Visit the chapter website at www.riograndesierraclub.org. Before long you will discover plenty of opportunities. It's easy.

Potluck caps busy 2024 for Sierra Club and Beer

BY SUSAN GORMAN
CENTRAL NEW MEXICO GROUP CHAIR

Our Member Appreciation Potluck brought our busy 2024 to a close as we celebrated the Chapter Director Camilla Feibelman's 25th anniversary with the chapter with more than 50 members, supporters, staff, and volunteer leaders from Central Group and Northern Group.

We featured yummy enchiladas and an amazing array of appetizers and desserts from the kitchens of our chapter and group members.

Now, we're determined to present great speakers for 2025.

The first program will be on Friday, Feb. 7, featuring Acts of Love.

Laura Paskus will share highlights of her just published book, "Water Bodies," an anthology of essays and poems from some of the West's best writers.

Laura is an engaging speaker and accomplished journalist. Laura is senior producer of "Our Land: New Mexico's Environmental Past, Present and Future" on NMPBS and author of the 2020 book, "At the Precipice: New Mexico's Changing Climate."

She has reported on environmental issues in New Mexico and the US Southwest since 2002, when she began her career at High Country News. She has worked for print, online, radio, and television outlets, covering climate change, forest fires, water challenges, wildlife, and more.

- **DATE:** February 7, 2025
- **TIME:** 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
- **PLACE:** St. Mark's Episcopal Church
431 Richmond Pl NE, Albuquerque, NM 87106
- **RSVP** at <https://www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar/>

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WILDLIFE

Game management to coexistence

BY KEVIN BIXBY
WILDLIFE FOR ALL, FOUNDER & SENIOR ADVISOR

In a world where coexistence with nature is the goal, what would wildlife management look like?

- It would be democratic, so that everyone has a voice in shaping our shared commitment to living with nature.
- It would place a premium on justice, recognizing the intrinsic right of wild animals to exist for their own sake.
- It would emphasize science as a tool for understanding what wild animals need in order to survive and thrive.
- And it would prioritize the protection of biodiversity at all levels above any particular human use of wild animals.

Unfortunately, those are not realities in New Mexico.

Our wildlife laws and institutions are little changed from when they were established more than a century ago. They reflect an era when the value of wild animals was measured by their usefulness as

"resources" to humans.

Most New Mexicans probably assume that our state government is doing a good job of safeguarding the state's wildlife heritage for the benefit of all people.

The reality is that wildlife management has evolved to become an industry geared toward producing a harvestable crop of certain game species and sportfish for the benefit of the small percentage who buy hunting or fishing licenses.

Hunters and anglers enjoy a privileged status in wildlife matters because they directly contribute nearly two-thirds of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish annual budget and indirectly generate additional federal dollars for the department.

Under this "user pay" system, the views of non-licensed buyers tend to be dismissed.

This problem is not unique to New Mexico. Reform is difficult, however, not just because of the funding and other structural issues but also because powerful interests, including hunting and gun groups (the lines between the two are increasingly blurred) benefit from the status quo and vigorously oppose

any change.

Wildlife for All is working with our partners in New Mexico (including the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter) and other states to bring wildlife management in line with modern science, norms of democratic governance, and changing public attitudes. These reforms include:

- Rewriting outdated state laws to reflect the truth that all species are important as part of the public trust, and that all people deserve a voice in wildlife matters, not just license buyers.
- Reforming state wildlife commissions to fairly represent the broader public interest in wildlife.
- Establishing new sources of broad-based funding that are not tied to hunting, fishing, or shooting.

The system itself is the problem, but it can be fixed. With a few key changes, such as the reform legislation introduced by Rep. Matthew McQueen, D-Santa Fe, New Mexico's antiquated wildlife management system could be transformed, and the promise of coexistence achieved.

Squirrel killing contest backlash

BY DENISE FORT
PROF. EMERITI, UNM LAW &
SIERRA CLUB MEMBER

I was a little surprised to be mocked in a national magazine for thinking squirrels are cute and shouldn't be shot for fun.

Apparently I am a batty older woman because I told a reporter my grandmother used to feed squirrels in Chicago and that my young daughter was more excited by squirrels running over the grounds of the National Zoo than by the exotic animals.

Environmental lawyer types like me prefer to be thought of as hard-nosed, acerbic warriors (or something like that as I'm no longer an active member of the bar). But my reaction to the news that the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish was putting on a squirrel killing contest sprang from genuine concern.

A state agency encouraging

the shooting of these comical creatures for fun? Especially ones our state is focusing on protecting?

While scrolling Facebook around 10 at night, I came across this (now deleted) post from NM Game and Fish:

Harvest one of each of the four small-game squirrel species (Abert's squirrel, fox squirrel, gray squirrel and red squirrel) within the state of New Mexico. Take a photo of each. Submit all four photographs to the Department. Hunters who complete the challenge in New Mexico will receive special awards, and their photographs will appear on this page.

I shot off a few messages to other animal lovers encouraging emails and calls to the Governor's Office and within 24 hours the contest was canceled.

Other Facebook posts

immediately appeared, some with nostalgic stories about families eating squirrels. Yes, hunting squirrels is permitted in New Mexico and indeed some well-known hunters enjoy eating them.

But encouraging killing squirrels and photographing the carcasses to "collect them all" is not the same as family heritage, and frankly, is not an ethical program for the department to promote.

It was truly inspiring to see how quickly members of the public rose up to object to this contest. Many of us love wildlife. I see enthusiastic responses on my neighborhood listserv every

day noting a bobcat or even a raccoon sighting.

The culture around wildlife has changed, but we are not yet managing wildlife to help all species thrive. We can learn a better way.

Read the full story on Wildlife for All's website at <https://wildlifeforall.us/new-mexico-squirrel-killing-contest>. And thanks to the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter for its ongoing advocacy for wildlife.



An Abert's squirrel in Bandelier National Monument feeds on a pinecone. Photo courtesy of US National Park Service.

A bill to protect wildlife for the 21st century

BY MARY KATHERINE RAY &
TERESA SEAMSTER
RIO GRANDE CHAPTER
WILDLIFE COMMITTEE

New Mexico is the fourth most biodiverse state in the country with six unique ecoregions making up an astonishing natural heritage.

Our wildlife encompasses over 7,000 documented native and migratory species that are facing an onslaught of climate disruptions, wildfire events, decline in habitat, invasive species, and exploitation.

Hundreds of species are in known decline and over 500 are candidate Species of Greatest Conservation Need to be listed in the upcoming 2025 State Wildlife Action Plan.

The NM Department of Game and Fish manages the state wildlife conservation programs and regulates all hunting and fishing with oversight by a seven-member game commission appointed by the governor.

There is an urgent need to modernize the rules for the State Game Commission and to expand the department's funding, statutory authority and priorities to address species and habitats in decline. A large coalition of conservation, agricultural, wildlife, and hunting and fishing organizations have come together to support legislation coming in January 2025 sponsored by Rep. Matthew McQueen.

In McQueen's recent presentation of his draft bill to

the Water and Natural Resources Interim Legislative Committee he highlighted three areas of reform:

1. Create a Wildlife Commission selected from qualified candidates chosen by a nominating committee and appointed by the governor with three at-large members from diverse counties and political affiliations and four positions filled by a rancher or farmer, a conservationist, a hunter or angler and a scientist with a master's degree or higher in wildlife biology or similar field. Commissioners would serve six-year staggered terms and could only be removed by the State Ethics Commission for incompetence, neglect of duty, or malfeasance.
2. Broaden the mission of what would be a renamed Department of Wildlife to address non-game and declining species with additional staff and funding.
3. Increase hunting and fishing license fees, which have been unchanged for 20 years, to catch up to inflation while also allowing future increases to track with the Consumer Price Index. It would also secure additional funding so the department can better meet the



Burrowing owls like this one may look fierce, but they are declining in number owing to habitat loss from development, drought, agricultural practices, and declines in burrowing animal populations like prairie dogs upon which they depend. Passage of the wildlife bill sponsored by Rep. McQueen will help the Department address the conservation challenges faced by these species and stem the cascade of loss. Photo by Mary Katherine Ray.

conservation challenges to all wildlife species.

In January, when the legislature convenes, New Mexico's wildlife will need your help and support by attending committee hearings and reaching out to your legislators to urge the passage of this important bill. Read more information at <https://www.wildlifeformn.org/>

Thank you!

The Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter would like to recognize two members of our volunteer leader community.

Thank you to **Karl Brathwaite** for more than 10 years of service on the Chapter Executive Committee and for continuing on as our conservation chair.

Thank you to **Conseulo Walker** for more than five years of service on the Chapter Executive Committee and for sharing the message of environmental protection with your congregation.

Learn more about Rio Grande Chapter Leadership and the work we do together at www.riograndesierraclub.org/full-chapter-listings/

Calls grow for Caja del Rio national monument

BY MIYA KING-FLAHERTY
CHAPTER PROGRAM MANAGER

With only a few weeks left in the Biden administration, calls for protecting the Caja del Rio landscape in Northern New Mexico are growing.

In September, the Santa Fe National Forest released a draft decision approving Los Alamos National Laboratory's proposal for a 14-mile transmission line across the Caja del Rio Plateau west of Santa Fe despite the tens of thousands of public comments submitted opposing the project.

Caja del Rio runs across US Forest Service, BLM, and state land.

The Forest Service's decision to approve the project ignores the opposition of tribes, the All Pueblo Council of Governors as well as various advocates, organizations and environmental groups, including the Sierra Club.

The Santa Fe County Commission recently passed a resolution calling for Caja del Rio to be designated a national monument. State Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard issued an executive order

banning mining and the construction of large transmission lines on state lands within part of the Caja del Rio landscape.

The order takes immediate effect and runs through 2044. Thank you, commissioner, for taking bold action to protect our culturally and ecologically sensitive landscapes.

US Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-NM also called on Interior Secretary Deb Haaland to designate the Caja del Rio as a national monument, which would permanently protect this region from mining and other destructive land uses.

With only a few weeks left of the Biden administration, we need your help to call on our members of Congress to support a Caja del Rio monument designation. Use our action alert at <https://shorturl.at/CHqO7> or scan the QR code below.



Join the Rio Grande Chapter

You can join the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club for only \$15! Membership includes both the national Sierra Club and the local Rio Grande Chapter.

Online: Go to sc.org/JoinNM

By phone: Call Membercare at (415) 977-5653.

By mail: Send a \$15 check with your name, address and phone number to: Sierra Club, Attn: Member Services, 2101 Webster St., #1300, Oakland, CA 94612 (Please include the code F94QB17041 in the memo line of your check!)

With your phone: Scan the QR code to join online:



Northern New Mexico Group contacts

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Reality check on advanced small modular reactors as solution to climate change

BY PATRICIA CARDONA
NORTHERN GROUP

The Department of Energy (DOE), in coordination with the nuclear industry, is promoting the use of small modular reactors (SMRs) as a climate change solution.

There are about 80 SMR designs, some of which date to the 1950s, though none have actually been built and operated in the US.

SMRs (not to be confused with Steam Methane Reformation, used to harvest hydrogen from natural gas), according to the industry, are intended to shrink the size of traditional nuclear power plants, create a smaller, more efficient plant by reducing construction costs and add the flexibility to locate them in small geographies. For example, Texas A&M has applied to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to construct five SMRs on a 2,300-acre University campus.

Reality Check 1: We have not resolved the technology for storage

of our current high-level nuclear waste nor have we selected sites for permanent storage of waste.

To make matters worse, according to recent analyses, SMRs are likely to increase radioactive waste 2-30 times more than fuel from the current nuclear power plants. This is because some SMRs need high essay low-enriched uranium (5% -20%) (HALEU) to increase their efficiency. This is fuel that is more intense than standard reactor fuel.

Reality Check 2: The process of creating enriched, near weapons-grade uranium increases health risks from radiation releases and terrorist acts. In 2024, DOE entered into 10-year contracts for up to \$2.7 billion with URENCO in New Mexico and three other companies for producing HALEU fuel.

DOE also contracted with six companies to split up to \$800 million to provide deconversion services for some HALEU waste. These projects

leave our communities at risk.

Reality Check 3: The promotion of HALEU fuel and SMRs ignores the high costs of electricity to ratepayers and taxpayers with no comprehensive planning for a robust storage system for uranium-rich fuel.

For example, TerraPower's small reactor in Wyoming is currently estimated to cost \$4 billion, half paid by DOE, for 60 MW of electricity. NuScale in Utah, had an estimated cost of \$9.3 billion for 460 MW before it was canceled because it didn't have enough customers at that price.

A solar farm costs around \$1 billion per 1,000 MW. Potential customers could be forced to pay for electricity at nine to 16 times more than solar or wind facilities that can be much more quickly available on the market.

The reality of nuclear at any size is that it's dangerous, expensive and leaves our communities exposed. Let's focus on the real climate solutions that are safe, durable, flexible, feasible and affordable.

Environmental responsibility is non-negotiable

BY LILIANA CASTILLO
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR FOR
SINGLE PLACE STRATEGIES

You are not alone if you believe oil and gas companies should pay for all of the clean-up and land restoration costs after drilling ends.

Recent polling shows that an overwhelming 90% of New Mexicans support requiring that the companies, rather than taxpayers, pay for all of the clean-up and land restoration costs after drilling is finished.

But the reality on the ground is that taxpayers are often left with the clean-up bill. The Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter has partnered with citizens, social justice and environmental advocates from across the state to change that. Under a second Trump presidency, it's critical that we ensure state rules protect our air, land, water, and health.

Clean-up after drilling prevents toxic chemicals like methane and benzene from seeping into groundwater and polluting the air.

We're asking the Oil Conservation Commission to update financial rules that would make sure oil and gas corporations are responsible for cleaning up old, unused and retiring wells to prevent pollution of our air, land and water.

Right now, the rules let some companies off the hook by not requiring enough clean-up insurance, potentially leaving New Mexicans to pay the costs when companies abandon oil and gas wells.

What's Happening with these new protections?

Currently, the bonds – or insurance – that companies pay before drilling often don't cover the actual cleanup costs when wells are no longer in use. The proposed updates would:



A "temporarily abandoned" oil well site in Eddy County, owned by Contago Resources, is seen emitting pollution in video captured by Earthworks in June 2024. Photo credit: Earthworks.



A "temporarily abandoned" oil well site in San Juan County, owned by Hilcorp. Temporarily abandoned designation allows operators to close a well and return it to production within 5 years. Photo credit: Earthworks.

- **Ensure companies cover cleanup costs.** These updates would make sure companies set aside enough money to fully clean up their wells instead of passing costs to New Mexico taxpayers.
- **Protect New Mexico's land and water.** Proper cleanup is crucial to prevent pollution, soil damage, and water contamination. 90% of New Mexicans depend on groundwater for drinking water.
- **Bring fairness and accountability.** Companies that profit from our state's resources should also be responsible for taking care of them when their operations end.

Here are two ways you can show your support for stronger protections:

1. **Show your backing for stronger protections and add your name to the petition.** Join over 500 New Mexicans who have already signed and express your support for stronger financial protections for oil and gas clean ups. Find the petition using the QR code.



2. **Stay tuned for the hearing.** Voicing your support in front of the commission is critical to securing stronger financial protections for our air, land, water, and health. The Oil Conservation Commission will hold a hearing in early summer. We'll be in touch with more information about how you can get involved.

Removal of PFAS by oil and gas protects state's residents

BY ANTIONETTE REYES
SOUTHERN NM
ORGANIZER

After a four-day hearing in November, the state's Oil Conservation Gas Commission said it will decide by early next year whether the oil and gas industry will face a ban on the use of "forever chemicals."

The chemicals, known as perfluoroalkyl or poly-fluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, don't naturally break down and can cause health problems, including cancer. The commission does not now require the industry to disclose trade secret information, so it is unknown which PFASs are used in their processes.

WildEarth Guardians has proposed that the commission ban such substances from being used in fossil fuel production and add disclosure rules.

I commented on behalf of the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter's 35,000 members and supporters. The rule,

if passes, would strengthen Oil and Gas chemical-disclosure requirements and end the use of per- and polyfluorinated substances in their operations.

Banning PFAS will better protect public health and reduce the future contamination of our state's soil, land, and dwindling freshwater resources. PFAS, commonly known as "forever chemicals," are known to affect every system in the human body, including the immune system and are linked to kidney and testicular cancer, thyroid disease, birth defects, and reproductive problems.

With an average of four oil and gas spills per day, NM must reduce the amount of produced water spilled, or short of that, reduce the toxicity of produced water, even if that means tackling the issue constituent by constituent in that water.

Annually dozens of fracking chemicals, including thousands of gallons of PFAS, are used in NM oil

and gas operations. And to make matters worse, oil and gas hides the full list of pollutants from those who stand to be harmed by them. These contaminants have already been detected in NM surface waters in oil and gas areas around the state, according to government and university tests.

The risks posed to our groundwater and surface waters cannot be understated as PFAS are highly toxic at minuscule levels. Numerous readily available, economically feasible surfactant alternatives that do not contain PFAS are already accessible to industry. We will find out early next year how the state will respond to the overwhelming support that showed up to get more transparency and accountability from industry while reducing the use of PFAS that affects our land and water.

Bring climate solutions with your skills

The Rio Grande Chapter is looking for volunteer leaders.

Compliance officer. The Chapter Compliance Officer advises Chapter political activists on questions about how to conduct our electoral activities in compliance with state and local campaign laws and Sierra Club policy.

This is an essential position. If we don't have a compliance officer, we can't have a political program.

This would be a great way for an attorney (active or retired) or any person comfortable reading statutes and regulations to help the Chapter accomplish its legislative goals. Contact Richard Barish, 505-232-3013, richard.barish@gmail.com.

Legislative Chair. The Legislative Chair represents the Chapter and works under the general direction of the Chapter Lobbyist to "trouble shoot" in getting priority

legislation passed or defeated in committees during legislative sessions.

This is a dynamic role and requires the ability to work as part of a team as well as independently.

This requires working with the Chapter staff and activists to understand legislation and its impacts, including its impacts on the different constituencies represented by our allies, as well as building relationships with those other allied organizations.

You will need to develop talking points that volunteers can use when they speak to legislators about why they should vote as we wish and provide feedback to our lobbyist about what we learn.

The duties include coordinating with other volunteers to ensure that there is a Sierra Club presence to present our position to committees. Contact Camilla Feibelman at camilla.feibelman@sierraclub.org.

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Rio Grande Chapter**
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Outings accomplishments for 2024

BY DEBBIE BRYANT
CHAPTER OUTINGS CHAIR

2024 was an exciting year for our outings program. Here are a few of our highlights.

Congratulations to Halea Meese, New ICO (Inspiring Connections Outdoors) Hike Leader. Halea successfully led her provisional hike in the Santa Fe area at Arroyo Hondo, mentored by Alan Shapiro. Halea has been working for some time to get ICO restarted in NM. On her provisional hike, Halea did an outstanding job of planning for all of the variables, including weather and inherent risk. Volunteers are needed to hike with Halea and children who don't normally have much access to outside activities. Please contact Halea at halea.meese@gmail.com if you would like to help. Volunteering even once or twice a year would make a difference!

Congratulations to New Outings Leader Glenn Wohl in the Northern Group. Glenn completed his provisional hike in November to be a Level 1 outings leader. We are all very pleased to welcome him aboard. Glenn worked with Alan Shapiro and did a successful job planning and executing his hike at Borrego/Bear Wallow/Windsor trails loop in the Santa Fe area.

Congratulations to John Buchser on his successful completion of the Level 2 Sierra Club Outings Leader certification. Level 2 outings leaders can lead overnight backpacking trips, bikepacking trips, or other similar outings away from vehicles. John led a challenging backpacking trip to Tapia Canyon that included packing in water for two days, hiking a slot canyon and locating petroglyph panels with the BLM archeologist. John did an outstanding job of balancing all variables, including weather and inherent risk.

Congratulations to John Pijawka in the Southern Group. John completed his provisional hike at Dripping Springs near Los Cruces in December. This was the last requirement he needed to complete to become a Level 1 outings leader. His hike was mentored by Holly Thomas, and they achieved a good turnout and had a great time.

All classes offered this year were full. These valuable and needed classes included Intro to Backpacking, Intro to Land Navigation and Wilderness First Aid. Spots go fast, so when you see a class offered, sign up quickly to ensure your place. Many thanks to Terry Owen for teaching the majority of the classes.

We are making progress on those goals that

carry over to 2025. We continue to encourage participation from people who are younger, older and from diverse cultural backgrounds. We have one more person almost finished with their Outings Leader requirements in the southern part of the state, and others who have expressed interest in completing the requirements. This means 2025 should be full of interesting events. Outings leaders are planning camping, service, cross-country skiing and backpacking trips for the coming year. Stay on the lookout for these as they are great fun. More news to come on our outings leader get together in January.

We Want You! We would like more folks to step up as there's never enough people to lead hiking, birdwatching and ambles. If you don't want to be the sole leader of an event, you can co-lead with a friend. Plus the training Sierra Club provides will make you feel more confident when you are out on your own hikes. If you like to get outside and you are interested in becoming an outings leader, please contact Debbie Bryant, Rio Grande Chapter Outings chair at bryade@gmail.com. This is a fun way to volunteer and can be as easy or hard as you want it to be.

JANUARY, FEBRUARY, MARCH OUTINGS

Sign up for outings at www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar and also see "Santa Fe Sierra Club Outings" at www.meetup.com/santa-fe-sierra-club-outings/ and www.facebook.com/NMSierraClub/events page for Southern group events! More outings will be added, so check back periodically.

SUNDAY, Jan. 26 Coffee Tasting Bike Tour through Downtown & Bosque, 9:30 am.

Chase the cold away with a bike tour of Downtown coffee shops! We will visit some local coffee roasters, tea shops and cafes in the vicinity of the bosque. Meet at the Hispanic Cultural Center at 9:30 a.m. for this 1.5-hour ride. Find out how easy it is to get around Albuquerque neighborhoods by bicycle and make new friends and enjoy delicious coffee. The route is approximately 10 miles long and relatively flat. Participants should be able to maintain a speed of 10-12 miles per hour on their road, mountain or gravel bike. This is not recommended for cruisers or similar single-speed bikes and is appropriate for ages 14 and up. Bike helmet, pump, tools, and patch kit or spare tube, with sealant in tires are required. RSVP no later than Jan. 22 at the link provided below.

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

Level: Easy-Moderate
Location: Albuquerque

SATURDAY, Feb. 8 Los Cruces' Lucero Canyon Petroglyphs trail, 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Let's meet to hike the Lucero Canyon Petroglyphs trail! This is four miles with very little elevation gain (229 ft) and normally takes an hour and a half to hike. This hike

up Lucero Canyon leads to ancient petroglyphs depicting hunters with bows and arrows, an antelope, a turtle, bulb-headed twins, abstracts, and other intriguing subjects. The path follows the arroyo, which is dusty with loose small rocks. There is no shade or water so plenty of sunscreen is recommended.

Trail map - <https://www.alltrails.com/trail/us/new-mexico/lucero-canyon-petroglyphs>

Driving directions: Meet at the trailhead parking lot. To get there from Las Cruces: Take I-25N, drive about 13 miles, take exit 19 towards Radium Springs. Turn right onto Ft. Selden Rd. Drive about 1/2 mile to the parking lot.

Bring: water, snacks, dress for the weather. Sunscreen is recommended. Kids over 13 can attend, must be accompanied by a parent. No dogs please

Leader: Antoinette Reyes 575-312-8332 antoinette.reyes@sierraclub.org

Holly Thomas 510-301-2814 htbern1@sbcglobal.net

Debbie Bryant 832-692 1881 bryade@gmail.com

Level: Easy

Location: Radium Springs (approx 13 miles from Los Cruces)

NEW! Tuesday, Feb 4. Zero Waste Tour of the Surface Water Treatment Plant, 1-2:30 p.m.

Learn how water from the Rio Grande is taken in and treated to become your drinking water. Tour entails a lot of walking, going in and out of buildings and climbing stairs, so dress appropriately and wear comfortable closed-toed shoes/boots. Limit 15 people. Register by Feb 1st.

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

Level: Easy

Location: 6000 Alexander Blvd. NE, Albuquerque

SATURDAY, Feb. 15 Snowshoe on the Sandia Ellis Trail, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

If you can walk, you can snowshoe! Meet at 9 a.m. at Smiths at Tramway and Central (on the Tramway side, close to the gas station and the edge of the parking lot) to carpool or at Ellis trailhead parking lot near the entrance at 9:50 a.m. This high-altitude, three-hour-long outing is approximately 3.5 miles round trip with 500 feet of elevation gain. We will only be doing part of the trail if snowshoeing. We will depart from the Ellis trailhead parking lot entrance and proceed along the Ellis trail with several stops to enjoy stunning views to the Continental Divide. We will cover tips for safely traversing on snowshoes and winter hiking as needed/requested. Appropriate for children over 14 with a parent or legal guardian. No dogs, please. Register no

THURSDAY, Mar. 13 Zero Waste Tour of BARCO Recycling Facility: 9 - 10:30 a.m.

See how all of our blue-bin recycling is sorted. Come find out how much is actually recycled and get answers to other recycling questions. Must be able to climb stairs and not be bothered by a very noisy environment. Vests, helmets, eye protection, and ear plugs will be provided. Dress warmly as buildings are not heated. Register early; space is limited to 10 adults. The deadline to register is Mar 11. Meet at 8:50 a.m. at 5029 Edith Blvd. NE, Abq. Contact trip leader if you need or can give a ride.

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

Level: Easy

Location: 5029 Edith Blvd. NE, Albuquerque



John Buchser introducing John Grabowska at the Travel Bug in Santa Fe Northern Group event. Photo by Debbie Bryant.

later than Feb. 11. Registration is limited to 10 participants. Recommended gear list and additional information will be provided one week beforehand.

Leader: Debbie Bryant 832 692 1881, bryade@gmail.com

Level: Moderate

Location: East of Albuquerque

SATURDAY, Mar. 29 Introduction to Backpacking, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

New Mexico has hundreds of miles of trails waiting for you. Whether you just want to get away for a weekend of solitude with your family or solo thru-hike from Mexico to Canada, adventure is right in our backyard. Perhaps you're merely



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curious and not quite sure how to begin backpacking or whether it's for you? This clinic is designed for those who have never shouldered a backpack as well as those who just want to learn more about how to safely hike in the backcountry. During this six-hour course, we'll take you from the basics to the essential things you need to know for an extended thru-hike. We will use both classroom and hands-on learning. Class runs from 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. with a one-hour break for lunch. Appropriate for children 10 and up with parent or legal guardian. Class size is limited to 16 attendees.

This class is sponsored by the Sierra Club Military Outdoors Program and everyone is welcome.

We'll cover the following topics: planning and preparing for a trip; risk management and safety; proper pack fit and pack loading; essential, optional and non-essential gear; care and uses of gear; self-care; leave-no-trace ethics.

Leader: Terry Owen, teowen@comcast.net

Level: Easy

Location: East Mountain Library, Tijeras, NM

Sign up for outings at www.riograndesierraclub.org/calendar or use the QR code to access the chapter events calendar.

