



The fight of our lives

Just when our children and grandchildren need us most to preserve their air, water and land, polluter money is driving political attacks on protections already in place. On every front, the Rio Grande Chapter and concerned citizens are standing strong, sometimes succeeding even where failure seemed likely. We're not winning every battle, but we will not give up. Learn more inside:



Photo by Emilio Rodriguez

More than 200 teen-agers converged on the Roundhouse and a meeting of the Environmental Improvement Board at Santa Fe's PERA Building on Dec. 7. They held a funeral procession for their futures, protesting the potential repeal of a New Mexico law that would reduce carbon pollution.

Carbon pollution

In 2010, New Mexico's Environmental Improvement Board approved two laws to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases from the state's largest polluters. The Martinez administration's new Environment Department has appealed to her all-new Environmental Improvement Board members to repeal both plans. **Page 6**

Victory on dairy discharge

What started as an attempt to quash a common-sense groundwater protection ended in a compromise between industry and many citizen groups, including the Rio Grande Chapter. When the dust finally settles, our state will have the most comprehensive dairy-discharge regulations in the nation. **Page 7**

Cost-saving building codes

The Albuquerque City Council voted 5-4 to repeal a strong energy-efficient building code in favor of the unfinished state code. This decision follows a similar one by the state. While we lost this battle after a big effort, the chapter ended up stronger for the alliances we formed with other groups and citizens. **Page 8**

MORE

New Mexico fracking rules

What did the state's decision on rules for fracking disclosure really mean? **Page 4**

Groups fight for Four Corners air

Sierra Club and other groups filed a motion in federal court to block an effort by PNM to evade the Clean Air Act. **Page 3**

EPA releases rule for mercury

The EPA made a landmark announcement in support of clean air and health in December. Find out how it affects New Mexico. **Page 8**

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Explore, enjoy, and protect the planet



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Groups act to protect air in Four Corners

In a push for healthier air across New Mexico and the Southwest, a coalition of environmental groups including the Sierra Club has filed a motion in federal court, approved in October, to block an effort by New Mexico power company PNM to evade requirements of the Clean Air Act. In August, the Environmental Protection Agency ordered the installation of adequate pollution controls at PNM's San Juan Generating Station. PNM is appealing the EPA ruling, even though the company had years of warning to bring

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the coal-fired plant into compliance.

The Coalition will support EPA's goal of greatly reducing the pollution the

plant sends into the air that finds its way into the skies over national parks and into the lungs of Four Corners residents.

San Juan power plant is one of America's largest single sources of harmful air pollutants such as nitrogen oxides (NOx) and sulfur dioxide (SO₂). Each year, this inefficient, antiquated facility emits more than 8.5 million tons of carbon pollution and consumes more than 9.3 billion gallons of clean water. EPA is requiring selective catalytic reduction, a cost-effective technology designed to reduce NOx

emissions by more than 90 percent that is already used at more than 208 coal-burning plants nationwide.

"The Sierra Club is involved in this case to protect clean air for New Mexicans. The pollutants from the San Juan plant cause many breathing-related health problems, such as asthma and heart attacks. PNM and the other owners of this plant need to define a clean energy plan that meets the needs of New Mexicans," said New Mexico Energy Chair David Van Winkle.

Coalition applauds Interior report

The newly formed New Mexico Outdoors Coalition applauds the "America's Great Outdoors" state report for New Mexico released today by the U.S. Department of the Interior. The report identifies two project priorities for New Mexico: establishment of the Middle Rio Grande National Wildlife Refuge (Price's Dairy) and construction of a trail linking Aztec Ruins National Monument with the City of Aztec.

"We are pleased that the Administration has identified these two projects," said Kristina Ortez de Jones of the Sierra Club. "But more must be done to protect our public lands for the next generation."

Last July, hundreds of New Mexicans from around the state gathered at the Albuquerque "America's Great Outdoors" listening session hosted by Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to let the administration hear what the priorities are for protecting New Mexico's public lands and connecting people with the outdoors. In addition to supporting the new wildlife refuge, New Mexicans called for wilderness and other protected-area designations, "national monument" status for Otero Mesa, more trails, and expanded programs to employ youth in green jobs, teach environmental education, and connect families with the outdoors.

"Now, more than ever, we need magnificent initiatives to rally around like those envisioned by America's Great Outdoors. The recommendations from the report speak to the interdependence of a healthy environment and a strong economy," said Bruce Ward, founder of Choose Outdoors.



This legislative session, Senator Cynthia Nava from Las Cruces and Representative Mimi Stewart from Albuquerque will each introduce a memorial for a Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights.

The right to be outdoors

By Kristina Ortez de Jones
Mission Outdoors

Last legislative session our leaders almost did the right thing. They very nearly passed a Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights, which would set the stage for connecting every New Mexico child with the outdoors. There was no real reason this bill didn't pass, other than lack of time.

Why do we even need a Bill of Rights that gets our children moving outside?

Many of you may remember what it was like when you were a kid—running among the sage and cactus or hiking near an arroyo. You might have played hide-and-seek using pine trees and boulders as cover. You ran and played until the street lights came on. Those treasured outdoors experiences are just not the norm for many of New Mexico's children.

Increased classtime hours and more time in front of a TV or computer screen means that fewer children get outdoors to connect with the state's natural heritage. The statistics have not changed in the last year. One third of New Mexico's children are overweight, and diabetes rates are rising. Children spend less time outside than ever before—50 percent

Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights

- A. play outside and explore freely;
- B. watch wildlife in the outdoors;
- C. wade in a river, creek, lake or pond;
- D. catch a fish and hunt for food;
- E. camp out under the stars;
- F. plant a seed and visit farms and ranches;
- G. travel a trail;
- H. explore public parks, open spaces, nature centers and wildlife sanctuaries;
- I. actively care for land, water and wildlife;
- J. dig in the dirt and learn about the world from the ground up; and
- K. use their imaginations to draw, dance, sing and play outdoors.

less time than 20 years ago. On average, children are in front of a TV or computer screen for nearly eight hours a day. That's a full-time job.

This legislative session, Senator Cynthia Nava from Las Cruces and Representative Mimi Stewart from Albuquerque will each introduce a memorial for a Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights. The memorials encourage state agencies, including the State Land Office and state parks, to advertise and promote programs that connect children

with the outdoors and get them moving. Just as it was last year, this memorial does not have a fiscal impact.

An exciting development for the memorial this year is that Wild Friends, an advocacy group that takes young people to the Capitol, will take this up as its legislation issue.

We do need volunteers to help shepherd these young leaders through the halls of the Capitol. If you are interested in helping out, please contact Kristina. ortez@sierraclub.org.

Stay apprised of the Legislature and more

Radio has been my college course over the last year—with a quiz every Friday. Chris Diestler interviews me every Friday morning on local rock 'n' roll station 101.5 FM.

A steady diet of hikes from leaders in the Northern Group is complemented by updates on our activism. As a volunteer, campaign finance rules don't stop me from providing a very candid view of politics and endorsements. Some of the listener base is from the dawn of rock in the '60s, but I am sure much of the audience is much younger, and not one the Club traditionally reaches.

The weather is always a factor in our discussions, as it has an impact on the suitability of outdoor events over the weekend. Global warming and the predicted variability of weather is upon us. The arctic oscillation is providing the weatherman a wild ride this winter. But for now I need to keep focused every Friday on things I can have an impact on, like reporting on the Legislature.



John Buchser,
Chapter chair

This legislative session will require primarily a defensive stance for us. We know that one of the dynamics of this session will be an increasing presence of bills that come from the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a national conservative coalition with many members that are large corporations. The Club endorses candidates with ideas that protect the environment. ALEC promotes candidates and ideas that support business as usual. We don't want business as usual. We want to stop the risky business of modifying our planet's weather. We want to provide the opportunity for those companies who will create products based on collecting today's solar energy and transitioning our economy.

A primary focus this year for the Rio Grande

Chapter will be assisting our endorsed candidates. In Washington, it has been the most negative legislative session in history for environmental issues. Although this underscores the need for progressive candidates, it is next to impossible to get things done. In many respects the best thing that has happened to national politics is the Occupy Wall Street protests. The shift in concentration of wealth over the last decade to the top 1 percent does not benefit our workers or our environment.

Our website, www.nmsierraclub.org, offers you the opportunity to get engaged and stay apprised of our latest endorsements. The Legislature starts slowly and picks up quickly. Joining our online community will give us the chance to alert you when the need arises to help. You can contribute online now too. You don't have to be in the Santa Fe area at 9:20 a.m. Friday to hear me; a link on our website to Project 101.5 will send you to both the live stream or past recordings of the weekly interview.

What did the state's fracking decision mean?

By **Gwen Lachelt**
Oil and Gas Accountability Project

It's back to your granddaddy's oil and gas days in the Land of Enchantment. The state's oil and gas regulator is once again cozy with industry.

And when it comes to requiring the disclosure of the chemicals used in fracking, New Mexico is the laughing stock of America's oil- and gas-producing states.

Before the Gov. Martinez roll-everything-back era, the state had started crawling out of the dark ages by requiring some common-sense safeguards like making sure toxic oil and gas waste pits were properly lined to protect soil and groundwater.

In November, despite testimony that other states and the industry-friendly Department of Energy are trending toward the full and public disclosure of all the chemicals and additives used in fracking operations, New Mexico's Oil Conservation Commission deliv-

ered a big fat nothing. They adopted a rule requiring nothing more of industry than what companies already report on Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS).

MSDS are required by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to protect workers. But even the DOE knows that:

"The restriction to MSDS data means that a large universe of chemicals frequently used in hydraulic fracturing treatments goes unreported. MSDS only report chemicals that have been deemed to be hazardous in an occupational setting.....MSDS reporting does not include other chemicals that might be hazardous if human exposure occurs through environmental pathways."

—Secretary of Energy Advisory Board Shale Gas Production Subcommittee 90-Day Report

One of the most profound statements in the DOE reports reads:

"The Subcommittee believes that the high level of

public concern about the nature of fracturing chemicals suggests that the benefit of immediate and complete disclosure of all chemical components and composition of fracturing fluid completely outweighs the restriction on company action, the cost of reporting, and any intellectual property value of proprietary chemicals."

So what did New Mexico do? It ran out and developed rules to require...nada—with the exception of making staff develop a form that companies have to fill out and submit to the state. And the information that they have to fill out is what's already on their MSDS.

The disclosure rule that was adopted in November was proposed by industry and supported by the Oil Conservation Division. Earthworks' OGAP proposed meaningful disclosure rules, which both industry and OCD opposed. Interestingly, the OCD opposed OGAP's disclosure proposal stating it was too much work. The final rule will be posted in January.

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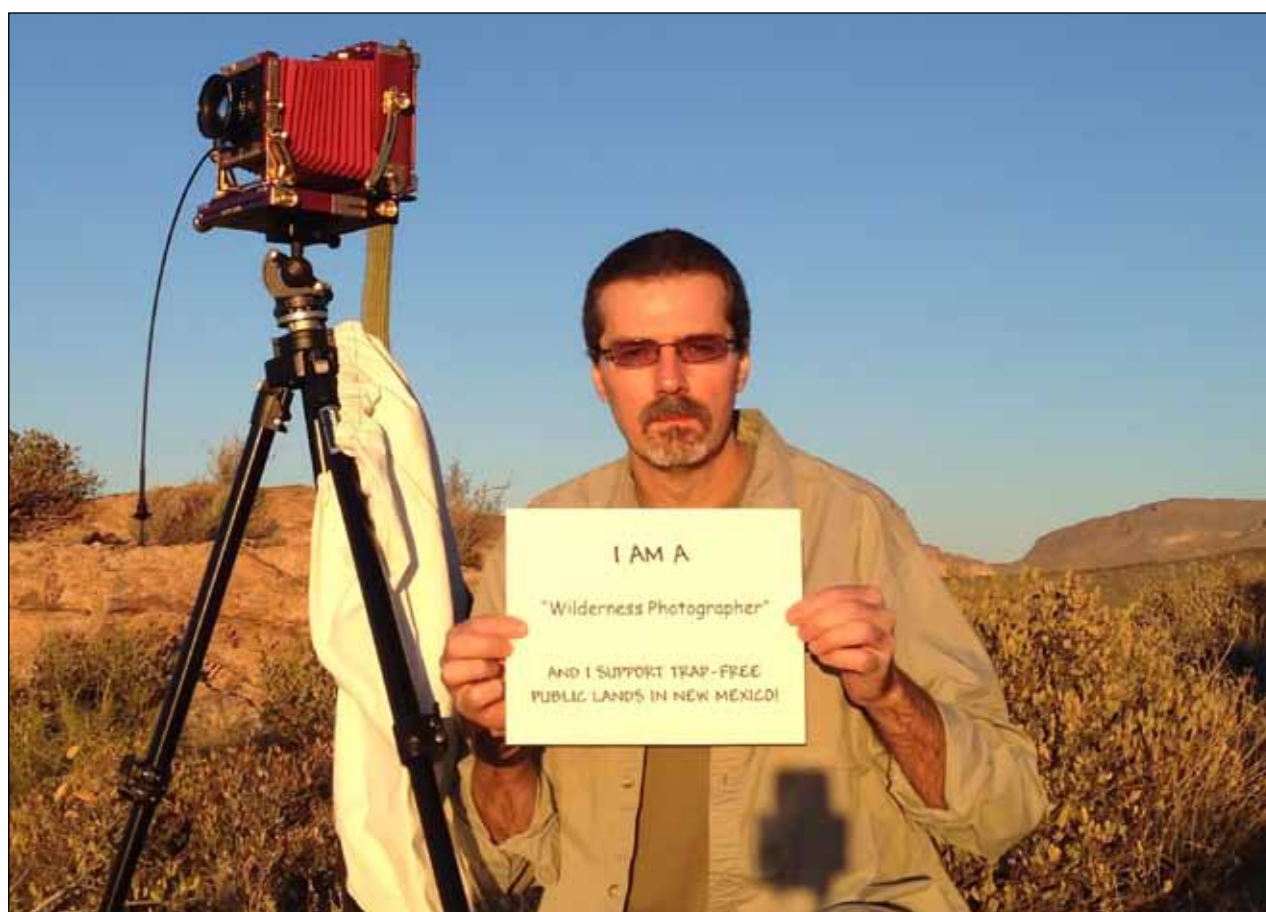
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We are creating a video montage to show the diversity of the faces who support a trap-free New Mexico. We need YOU to be a part of this project. Go to www.nmsierraclub.org/wildlife and download and print the trap-free poster. It says "I am a _____ and I support a trap-free New Mexico". Fill in the blank with words that describe you! Whether you are a musician, a teacher, a veterinarian or any of the myriad traits we know our supporters possess, we want to show the breadth of our trap-free movement. You don't have to use our sign; you can make your own sign, too. Then take your picture holding the sign and email it back to Mary Katherine Ray at mkrscrim@kitcarson.net.

Let your voices be heard and your faces be seen! Gather the kids, the dogs, the horses and everyone and create your trap-free New Mexico identity today!

We want your photo!



Get your nontrapping license!

By Mary Katherine Ray

The Trap-Free New Mexico coalition, of which we are a part, is offering these wonderful, wallet-sized, laminated non-trapping licenses. Your purchase of \$20 is all it costs to help us build support for ending brutal and indiscriminate trapping on New Mexico public lands.

That is the same price as an actual trapping license issued by N.M. Game and Fish that allows the unlimited slaughter-for-profit of our wildlife. Purchase of this license supports living wildlife and recreation in wild places unhindered by traps. All proceeds will help the Trap-Free NM cause. These make a great gift—you can buy more than one! Kids especially love them!

Please visit our website to get yours: nmsierraclub.org/buy-non-trapping-license.

Santa Fe endorses trapping ban

By Teresa Seamster and Phil Carter

On Sept. 27, the Santa Fe City Council unanimously endorsed a citizen resolution to ban the use of leghold, snare, and other traps on public lands. The resolution was sponsored by Councilors Chris Calvert and Patti Bushee, who has had two of her dogs caught in traps around Christmas one year, as well as Santa Fe Mayor David Coss.

"Santa Fe City Council has now joined many other town, city and county governments around the state in voicing support for a publicly endorsed ban on public-lands trapping," said Teresa Seamster, Executive Committee member Northern New Mexico Group of Sierra Club. "The actions of elected officials to support a ban on these types of traps are a positive move forward."

Similar resolutions have been passed unanimously or nearly unanimously in the past year by 11 other local governments, including the Town of Silver City, The Animal Service Center of Mesilla Valley (operated by Las Cruces and Doña Ana County), Town of Mesilla, Doña Ana County, City of Las Cruces, City of Deming, San Pedro Neighborhood Association, and the City and County of Taos. On Sept. 19, the Albuquerque City Council passed a memorial to endorse a trapping ban on public lands by a 7-1 vote.

Why N.M.'s carbon cap matters

The Sierra Club supports the existing carbon-cap law passed by the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Board (EIB) in 2010.

Gov. Martinez made campaign promises to end these safeguards, and she started by firing the old EIB in her first week on the job. She replaced them with members who do not support environment improvement as the name of the board indicates.

The Sierra Club opposes the Petition to Repeal Rule 20.2.100, the regulations to reduce greenhouse gases. The overwhelming consensus among climate scientists is that rising global temperatures are primarily the result of human activity—specifically, the result of increased heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere, primarily carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels. Climate scientists predict that with rising temperatures, New Mexico will experience increased frequency of drought, which we are already seeing. With increased drought, there will be inadequate water to support agriculture and our cities. Forest fires will become more frequent.

Far from eliminating these rules, New Mexico and other jurisdictions should move with haste to reduce greenhouse-gas pollution consistent with what the best science indicates is needed to avoid catastrophic climate change.

One chapter member's testimony to the EIB:

Excerpts of Dec. 7 public testimony to EIB by Mona Blaber:

I'm not here for the environment. I'm here for my 5-year-old daughter, and every child.

I've seen the economic analyses. The Environment Department, back when it was true to its name, and New Energy Economy had economists who found these plans would help the economy and create jobs; PNM and the plaintiffs found economists who said they would hurt the economy.

What none of them refer to are studies done this year showing that coal costs far more than its value added to the economy. The *American Economic Review* in November published a study saying that health and pollution damages from coal cost up to 5.6 times its value added (<http://bit.ly/sVVBai>), making coal likely the most expensive source of energy. Transitioning to renewables would save New Mexicans far more money than business as usual would.

Plaintiffs say this plan won't matter much to the Earth. I hope and believe that's because they don't know the scope and urgency of this crisis. Most people don't, and none of us want to believe it. It sounds crazy to say we may be forcing Armageddon on our children. But the Earth doesn't care what we believe. It just keeps hurtling toward disaster as the warnings of nearly every climate scientist fall on deaf ears because we don't want to believe them.

If you knew that our children and grandchildren face a constant struggle to secure water and food and avoid pandemic illnesses and violence, if you knew how quickly and aggressively every state, including New Mexico, must act—within about five years—to avoid the worst catastrophic impacts, you'd be trying your hearts out to find ways to reduce emissions as quickly as possible. That is what a group of people called the Environmental Improvement Board would do, if you truly knew the consequences.



Photo by Emilio Rodriguez

More than 200 teens from United World College in Montezuma, N.M., and Santa Fe urged the EIB to keep laws that would reduce New Mexico's carbon pollution. The Dec. 7 mock funeral for their futures at the Capitol and PERA building was planned by a UWC group and Earth Care's Youth Allies of Santa Fe. Many of the students testified at the hearing that night.

Our stand on carbon plans

David Van Winkle, Energy Chair for the Rio Grande Chapter, testified on behalf of the Sierra Club and Coalition for Clean, Affordable Energy before the Environmental Improvement Board in December:

My name is David Van Winkle. I represent both the Sierra Club and the Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy, a.k.a. CCAE.

We support maintaining the 2010 EIB carbon-cap rule.

New Mexico's energy strategy needs to be revised to meet the needs of the residents and ratepayers of New Mexico.

1. Electricity rates have been increasing at an incredible rate over the past few years. From April 2008 to August 2011, a period of only 40 months, PNM raised residential rates by 40% for the average ratepayer. This can easily be confirmed by comparing the customer fee, energy rates, and fuel-adjustment factors for the typical user of 600kWh/month. This 40% rate increase is driven by required investments in their existing fossil-fuel energy sources and infrastructure, not renewable investments. The PNM Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) that was submitted in July 2011 to the PRC continues the same strategy of maintaining existing resources, so we should expect continued rate increases in the future.

2. The existing fleet of fossil-fuel-based electricity energy sources, specifically coal-fired power plants like the San Juan Generating Station, produce significant air pollution. While pollution reductions have been realized at San Juan due to the 2005 Consent Decree actions, carbon and nitrogen-oxide pollution continue at high levels.

a. In 2010, the San Juan plant produced 16,000 tons of nitrogen oxide. The American Lung Association states that "nitrogen dioxide causes a range of harmful effects on the lungs: 1) Increased inflammation of the airways; 2) Worsened cough and wheezing; 3) Reduced lung function; 4) Increased asthma attacks; 5) Greater likelihood of emergency department and hospital admissions; 6) Increased susceptibility to respiratory infection, such as influenza." Asthma attacks, heart attacks, premature deaths and hospital visits from San Juan Generating Station's pollution add up to an estimated \$255 million a year in health-care expenses passed on to the public, according to the independent Clean Air Task Force.

b. The state of New Mexico has been realizing significant climate disruption, with drought and wildfires and

is expected to have continued and worsening drought in future years. The San Juan plant is one of the largest sources of carbon in the state. With 97% of all climate scientists in agreement that climate change is real and is human-caused, it is in the best interest of this state to take action to address climate change, as we are experiencing the early stages of its effects.

3. Actions should be taken to conserve our precious water resources. The San Juan plant consumes 677 gallons of water per MWh produced, per the PNM IRP. This is annual usage of about 9 billion gallons, or about 2 times the total water consumption of the City of Santa Fe.

4. New Mexico has significant opportunity to create job growth by rapidly developing clean energy sources.

a. New Mexico has the 12th-best wind resources in the U.S. Significant development has taken place in eastern N.M., and the potential to continue is quite large. Southern N.M. also has significant opportunities in wind. On Nov. 11 Tucson Electric announced it has completed a 50-MW wind farm near Deming that created 150 construction jobs. (The residents of Deming, who are in PNM's service territory, are probably wondering why PNM has not built a wind farm there.) In Colorado, Xcel produced 55% of its energy from wind on Oct. 9. If utilities in these other inter-mountain states are finding it cost-effective to produce wind energy, we should also.

b. New Mexico has the 2nd-best solar resources in the country. Solar energy is growing but is still a minuscule share of the total. PNM will install 22 MW of utility-owned solar in 2011. PNM has 1,000 MW of coal-fired capacity and 400 MW of nuclear power that is imported from Arizona. The solar capacity is a drop in the bucket. The cost of solar is declining rapidly, yet the PNM IRP that defines its energy sources for the next 20 years has no more solar additions. In addition to electricity, solar energy is also cost-effective for water-heating applications, especially in rural New Mexico where propane is used.

5. Energy efficiency is the most cost-effective way to serve energy needs. It is well known in the utility industry that energy-efficiency programs save ratepayers money and produce energy for less than half the cost of new production. Efficiency programs should be aggressively pursued in utility-based programs, community-based weatherization/retrofit programs and new building construction. All of these programs are proven to save building owners money.

Hard-won victory on dairy discharge

By Dan Lorimier
Conservation coordinator,
Southern and El Paso groups

After roughly two and a half years of effort, the Rio Grande Chapter has successfully helped protect New Mexico's precious but highly threatened groundwater that 9 out of 10 of us rely on for drinking.

A coalition of citizens groups, including the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club, Amigos Bravos, Caballo Concerned Citizens, Food & Water Watch and others, were expertly represented by the New Mexico Environmental Law Center from early in the process and helped assure a new, comprehensive dairy-discharge rule for New Mexico.

In 2009 it was clear that the existing regulations and dairy practices were failing to protect our groundwater. Two-thirds of the 150 or so dairies operating in New Mexico were exceeding, sometimes wildly exceeding, the pollution limits they were permitted to stay within. New Mexico is a huge producer of dairy products; somewhere around the fifth- to eighth-largest in the country, depending on who you ask; the average herd size of 2,000 head is one of the highest averages in the nation. This powerful industry was in a state of denial over its incapacity to operate within its permitted limits.

At the same time, the dairy industry approached the Legislature hoping to simplify the groundwater-discharge permitting rule, which, because it was cobbled together from other industries' groundwater-discharge permit regulations, seemed cumbersome and poorly matched to that industry in New Mexico. That year, with both the Chapter and the Environment Department's support, a law was passed that required the Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC) to adopt new rules that were specific to dairy discharges into groundwater. The Environment Department and its Groundwater Quality Bureau were tasked with developing the new rule, working with the industry and the citizens groups, including the Rio Grande Chapter.

The Department held six "Advisory Committee" meetings and a similar number of "Stakeholder Negotiation" meetings across the state over the next 18 months. The Chapter and other members of the Citizens Coalition participated in all of these. Initially, the industry's goal was aimed at simplifying the existing regulation by weakening it. When the dairy industry realized the goal of the Environment Department and the Citizens Coalition was to craft a far more comprehensive rule, their response was to boycott the first few of these meetings.

Major points of disagreement revolved around requiring synthetic liners for all lagoons (the dairies protested that clay liners were good enough and that synthetic liners involved extra costs to them), monitor



Photo courtesy Rivertracks/Dreamstime.com

When the dust settles after more than two years of negotiations and input, our state will have the most comprehensive dairy-discharge regulations in the nation.

wells to identify sources of pollution (again, the industry complained about the expense and even suggested that monitor wells cause groundwater pollution) and notification of neighbors within a mile radius of a proposed new dairy (industry felt that a proposed dairy was no one's business but the owner's).

In June and August of 2010 the WQCC held a hearing on the proposed new rule. The industry's expert witnesses failed to persuade the Commission that weaker rules were good for dairies and good enough for New Mexicans. The Department and the Citizens Coalition convinced them that adequate groundwater protection requires a thorough and comprehensive regulatory approach. Late in 2010 the WQCC adopted the rule proposed by the Department and the Coalition and sent the new rule over to the Department of Records to be officially put on the "books."

Meanwhile, the industry appealed the adoption of the new rule to both the WQCC and the New Mexico Court of Appeals. This set off several more rounds of negotiations between the Citizens Coalition, the Department and the industry. During this period New Mexico's governor took office and immediately tried to block the new rule from being published (the final step in becoming law). This attempt by the governor to sidetrack the new dairy-discharge rule was halted by the New Mexico Court of Appeals when, again represented by the New

Mexico Environmental Law Center, some of the Citizen Coalition groups cried foul.

As negotiations between the stakeholders progressed, it became clear that economic pressures on both the agency and the industry would help move things toward an agreement. In the end, the industry got an easier and improved permit-application process and an easier-to-understand regulation to do business under. Because of the work done by the Citizens Coalition with its expert witnesses and the New Mexico Environmental Law Center and by the Environment Department and its Groundwater Quality Bureau, key elements of the new rule like requirements for synthetic lagoon liners, thorough monitor wells, and much improved public notification were retained in the rule.

In October the WQCC adopted the negotiated changes to the regulation and the industry dropped its appeal in the New Mexico Court of Appeals. The Environment Department will begin processing the groundwater-discharge permit applications for the more than half of New Mexico dairies currently operating without a permit.

When the dust finally settles, our state will have the most comprehensive dairy-discharge regulations in the nation. New Mexicans and Rio Grande Chapter members can enjoy another victory for groundwater quality. We believe it was well worth the effort it took to get us there.

Volunteers needed

Hike Book Sales

Need one large covered storage space or several smaller spaces for boxes of our new Day Hikes in the Santa Fe Area arriving late February or early March. Chuck Deucy also needs help in distributing, invoicing and follow up on sales of the books. Contact him at 505-204-6859, deucyiii@yahoo.com.

To find out what you can do about issues you've read about in *The Sierran*, or to stay updated on local issues of wildlife, natural resources and climate, go to nmsierraclub.org and subscribe to the chapter e-mail list. If you're not a member yet, go to nmsierraclub.org and join or clip the membership form on this page and mail a check!



Friend or Foe?

America's water, rivers and lakes are at risk from giant, corporate-owned factory farms which are fouling our water with pathogens and chemicals - not to mention being the largest source of toxic ammonia air pollution in the U.S. The air around factory farms is contaminated with suspended dust particles, which have been linked to asthma, bronchitis and other diseases. Our government wants to pass legislation which would exempt factory farms health and environmental laws. Support Sierra Club's effort to keep our water clean and our air friendly. The hogs have gone wild, now it's our turn.

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Albuquerque: Back to inefficiency

By Lora Lucero

This article was originally posted at democracyfornewmexico.com

On Dec. 19, the Albuquerque City Council voted 5-4 to roll back the Albuquerque Energy Conservation Code, which many of the same councilors had supported in 2009, and replace it with the unfinished state code.

Homes and office buildings account for a big chunk of U.S. energy use. The Rio Grande chapter helped get strong energy-saving rules adopted in 2009.

What has changed in the past two years to change councilors' minds and votes? Politics, pure and simple. This was a purely opportunistic vote that the building industry and its minions (NAIOP, NM Homebuilders Association and the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce) sought after the state weakened its building code in June. Both Gov. Martinez and Mayor Berry wanted to repeal those "pesky" regulations, to the delight of the building industry.

Why should anyone care about the R-value or the IECC code? One doesn't need to be an electrical contractor or engaged in the construction business

to know that the consequences will truly impact our children and grandchildren.

We're not only talking about their future utility bills, but the quality of life that we're consigning them to with our decisions today. Yep, the city's energy-conservation code and climate change are connected.

The city's current code (which resulted from the work of a task force where the building industry was well-represented) requires more expenditure upfront to obtain higher energy efficiency over the long term. The first home-purchaser realizes a direct savings in his monthly utility bill, as well as the final occupant in 30, 40, 50 years. Paying less to the utility company is a good thing, right? Not if your focus is on the pocketbooks of those industry folks in the audience.

Council President Trudy Jones made the point that rolling back the city's energy-conservation code would not prevent a homebuilder from using the highest energy-efficiency measures. She favored giving the builder the opportunity to choose. A marketplace free from regulatory burden was the chief concern of these five councilors, not our grandchildren's rights.

Sierra Club organizer Shrayas Jatkar said "The poli-

tics that shaped this vote were troubling—partisanship and campaign money rather than consideration of the real impacts of the decision (increased cost to consumers, preparedness for future code changes, continued dependence on coal-fired electricity and the pollution/water consumption that comes with it).

"The silver lining is that we came out of this fight stronger than before. Because of this fight, we have new partnerships with key organizations like the N.M. Green Chamber of Commerce (with 1,100 members), U.S. Green Building Council-N.M., Institute for Market Transformation and others. Sierra Club members and activists spoke up on this issue with hundreds of emails, scores of phone calls, dozens of people speaking at City Council, and organizing. The benefits of energy efficient buildings and building codes are more widely known in Albuquerque thanks to our work."

Councilors who voted to roll back the code: Don Harris (dharris@cabq.gov), Trudy Jones (trudyjones@cabq.gov), Michael D. Cook (mcook@cabq.gov), Dan Lewis (danlewis@cabq.gov), Brad Winter (bwinter@cabq.gov).

A group of activists turned up in costume for a Halloween event in Albuquerque to ask the EPA to protect New Mexicans from coal pollution. On Dec. 21, the EPA issued protections to reduce mercury from power plants. One New Mexico power plant is already in compliance; another was planning to close several aging units in anticipation of the EPA rule.



Mercury rule's effect on N.M.

On Dec. 21, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency released the first-ever federal protections against toxic mercury from power plants. Mercury is a dangerous brain poison that poses a particular threat to prenatal babies and young children. Exposure in the bloodstreams of pregnant and nursing women can result in birth defects like learning disabilities, lowered IQ, deafness, blindness and cerebral palsy.

Coal-fired power plants are the largest source of mercury pollution in the United States, pumping more than 33 tons into the air each year. Once in the air, mercury rains down and accumulates in the bodies of fish and shellfish. If people eat fish or seafood from polluted bodies of water, mercury accumulates in their bodies and can be passed from mother to child.

The Sierra Club applauds President Obama and EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson for protecting American families – particularly women and children – from this dangerous toxin and for standing up to polluters' attempts to weaken this life-saving protection. At the three hearings that the EPA held on this issue, Americans showed overwhelming support for protecting children from mercury.

So how will this ruling affect coal plants in New Mexico?

San Juan Generating Station: In 2005, the Sierra Club, Grand Canyon Trust, New Mexico Environment Department and the New Mexico attorney general won a consent decree with PNM that required PNM to make significant pollution reductions in several pollutants. Mercury was one of those pollutants. PNM made those

improvements by 2009 and the level of Mercury emitted by San Juan is down by about 90 percent and well below the new limits announced by the EPA.

Four Corners Power Plant: Arizona Public Service (APS) operates Four Corners and owns a significant portion of it. APS has proposed to the EPA that it close units 1-3, which are older and very bad from a mercury-pollution perspective. This ruling is important as the cost analysis that APS did to reach the conclusion that these three older units should be closed assumed that the new mercury limits would be imposed as announced in December.

The other two units, 4-5, are planning to continue to operate. Their mercury emissions are much better than units 1-3 and will probably require minimal investments in new control technology to meet the new limits.

Central Group

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Tammy Fiebelkorn, Political Chair

Executive Committee meets at 7 p.m. the first Tuesday of each month. Call for location.

Democracy School is coming to Albuquerque

By Kathleen Dudley

“If you take no other training this year, do the Democracy School. It is a superlative unfolding revelation of how corporations have hijacked democracy. It meticulously deconstructs the historical arc that brought us to this precipice. But most importantly, it then departs into the highly pragmatic and inspiring work now underway that is slowly turning the tide ... This Second American Revolution may be the most important political work going on anywhere in the country or the world.”

—Kenny Ausubel '05, Founder and Co-Executive Director, Bioneers

On Thursday, Feb. 2, Thomas Linzey, senior legal counsel for the Community Environmental Defense Fund (CELDF) will present at the UNM on community rights and challenging corporations. On Feb. 3-4, CELDF will present a statewide Democracy School in Albuquerque for citizen leaders and elected officials. This will be the first time CELDF has presented in Albuquerque, yet they are not new to New Mexico, having presented in Taos and Santa Fe County, and Mora County, as recently as this past spring.

The Democracy School is a powerful course that trains activists to claim their intrinsic right to self-actualization in a democracy.

It does not rely on the regulatory system for its legal base, and therefore the prohibitions on local self-determination that have clustered around the regulatory system do not directly apply. And yet it is new, to an extent untried, and there are risks inherent in taking bold action when industry and other pressures are great to conform, to yield, to assume the entire local risk to public health and the denigration of natural environments.

Whatever your community faces, whether it is large water extraction, factory farming, GMO contamination, food sovereignty, hard-rock mining, oil and natural gas extraction, or smart-grid development, the Democracy School presents solutions for communities.

For more on the upcoming presentation by Thomas Linzey and the Democracy School, contact Drilling Mora County at drillingmora-county@gmail.com or 575 666 2529 to register. Participants limited to 30.



Photos by Michael Richie

Achieving Special Recreation Management Area designation for the five BLM-administered badlands west of Cuba is a doable first step in protecting these economic and cultural treasures.

The art of the possible

By Michael Richie

The Art of the Possible” is a recent expression of that well-known axiom “think globally, act locally.” On the national level, political posturing and gridlock have halted any real solutions to America’s diverse problems. Understandably, many of us have transcended despair and graduated to numbness.

Achieving Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) designation for the five BLM-administered badlands west of Cuba is a very doable first step and quantum leap in this state where public lands are used primarily for short-term exploitation such as oil & gas development, mining, off-road vehicles and woodcutting. We can score a real victory for New Mexico’s natural heritage while keeping our eyes on the greater goal of encouraging the BLM to adopt long-range, sustainable management practices for all our public lands.

The Rio Grande Chapter first addressed the issue of the five Cuba-area badlands’ conservation in June 2009. These considerable scenic, ecological and recreational resources were virtually unknown, even to the BLM Rio Puerco Field Office that manages them. I took 10 Field Office staffers, including Manager Tom Gow, on a Sierra Club-sponsored hike to Ceja Pelon’s petrified forests in September 2009 with immediate positive response. This hike coincided with the office’s 20-year Resource Management Plan Review process.

The Rio Puerco Field Office will begin a 90-day Public Comment period for its new Resource Management



The BLM’s recent study shows that a mind-boggling 1,200 live, old-growth junipers have been cut this past year within the Rio Puerco Field Office’s jurisdiction.

Plan (RMP) as soon as it is published (currently scheduled for March 1) We recommend choosing Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) status for the five Cuba-area badlands, including much-needed extra funding for enhanced protection. SRMA status will support the BLM’s efforts to stop the illegal wood-cutting in this area. The BLM’s own recent study shows that a mind-boggling 1,200 live, old-growth junipers have been cut this past year within the Rio Puerco Field Office’s jurisdiction. Two of the badlands, Cejita Blanca and Ceja Pelon, have been tragically affected.

Tourism is New Mexico’s second-largest economic activity. Managed properly, it is environmentally

sustainable. The potential economic and cultural benefits from five well-protected recreation areas west of Cuba are significant, not only for local residents but for the whole state.

When the RMP comes in, the Chapter and its allies will critique it and create a series of bullet points to make it easy for members to send comments in favor of SRMA designation and related issues. Just think, in these turbulent, frustrating times, a half hour will make a lifetime’s difference. There are likely to be public meetings scheduled, which we urge you to attend. If interested, please send your e-mail address to mrichie@comcast.net and Norma McCallan, nmccallan@mindspring.com, for future alerts.



Help us make decision on proposed LANL facility

By Jody Benson

Southern Group newsletter editor

Should the Pajarito Group take a stand on the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Building?

The outsized construction project as planned for the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Building (CMRR) will degrade the Pajarito Plateau and affect, for better or worse depending on one's view, the environment of Los Alamos. Our question to membership is whether or how the Pajarito Group should voice concern over the little-studied and little-questioned aspects of the CMRR given the allegiance of our at-large citizenry to the area's largest employer, LANL, which will host the CMRR.

Briefly, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) wants to replace the current CMR. Built in 1952, the CMR is an aging facility that has had, in the past decade, multiple accidents and safety violations. The CMRR would be a state-of-the-art facility that would, as one of its missions, maintain old and manufacture anew plutonium pits, for use in thermonuclear weapons.

In October, the NNSA issued an Amended Record of Decision (ROD) concerning the Nuclear Facility portion of the CMRR. This decision finalizes the CMRR location at TA-55 on Pajarito Mesa. Although the project has significantly expanded—more parking lots on Pajarito Mesa including one in Sandia Canyon, one or more cement-mixing batch plants; 67 acres in “spoils” piles to contain the excavated rock, and the obvious need for up to 1,000 workers and associated family members for housing, classrooms, and services—the only Environmental Impact Statement was a supplemental, rather than an entire site-wide EIS.

The new NNSA ROD is being contested by the Los Alamos Study Group. This delay will give Pajarito Group members the opportunity to discuss the project and decide whether it is an issue that we want to be involved in and, if so, to what extent.

For almost two years, members of the Pajarito Group Executive Committee have attended scoping sessions and submitted formal comments to the NEPA environmental process. Most of these comments regarding environmental concerns have not been adequately addressed in the approved SEIS, specifically the request for a data-driven analysis of alternative sites.

The ExCom puts this to its membership: Is it time for our group to take a formal stand on what appear to be the unaddressed, deleterious environmental impacts of the CMRR in its current form?

The ExCom understands that many members are/

were LANL employees whose jobs depend on the Lab, and that some members are actually working on the project. ExCom understands that the mission of the Lab is stockpile stewardship, which involves maintaining the integrity of the nuclear stockpile, including ensuring reliable triggers for nuclear weapons.

While LASG argues that we don't need more new triggers for nuclear weapons, and therefore, the \$6 billion project should be shut down, the ExCom proposes that, rather than question NNSA's decision, we would require that damage to Pajarito Mesa be minimized. One option, and one not clarified in cost, would be to build the CMRR through renovations to the existing CMR or atop a demolished CMR.

To require building on the current location would challenge NNSA to actually define CMRR's mission. Despite the project having spent \$450 million since 2002 (up \$75 million from the original budget of \$375 million), the CMRR's reason seems only vaguely known by the NNSA, which offers it as a general facility that will house “a wide range of scientific and technological capabilities including nuclear materials handling, materials processing, fabrication, stockpile management, manufacturing technologies, nonproliferation programs, special nuclear material storage, and waste management capabilities” (DOE/EIS-0350, November 2003).

The completion date for CMRR could be as late as 2022 (Wikipedia: “Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Facility”). Curiously, for all the “wide-ranging scientific capability” planned for the CMRR, the CMR is not slated for demolition. As it stands today, the CMRR would not replace the CMR's “hot cell” (actinide) research capabilities. Locating the CMRR on the current (CMR) location, thereby forcing the demolition and then replacement of the aging CMR, would ensure the new manufacturing plant would also be a scientific replacement for the CMR.

In addition, the most efficient area for waste-disposal “spoils pits” if CMRR construction were in TA-3 would be the multiple “brown fields” around TA-3, rather than the proposed 67 acres of mesa in various “green field” areas along Pajarito Road and Canyon.

We would also insist that prior to building the new plant, there would be funding escrowed for the cleanup of the construction and second the restoration of the Pajarito Plateau in the affected areas. Restoration includes: (1) the safe and secure cleanup of construction areas after completion of the building, (2) at the end of the plant's 50-year projected operational span, the demolition of the entire manufacturing facility and safe recycling of all radioactive materials, and (3) the environmental restoration of the area. Though behind guard gates and fences, the

Pajarito Group Directory

riogrande.sierraclub.org/pajarito/mainpaj.asp

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Pajarito Plateau is still public land, on loan to the DOE and not theirs to gouge and pave and spoil recklessly, needlessly, and irrevocably.

The ExCom proposes to create a subcommittee to study the CMRR issues and come up with a position. One of the positions could be to support the lawsuit against proceeding with the project without a sitewide environmental impact statement. If the membership concurs to participate in the court action, the Pajarito Group would ask the Chapter to approach National to see if this action meets the Club's criteria for an issue to fight. If National concurs, it may offer legal aid. There may also be the opportunity to be “a friend of the court,” that is, somebody who is not a party to the case, but who has some kind of expertise in the area (i.e., environmental), and gives advice on that issue.

The committee will be formed in January. Please attend the January Members Potluck on Jan. 11 for more information.

Meetings and Announcements

All meetings, unless otherwise stated, are held at 7 p.m. in the Upstairs Meeting Rooms, Mesa Public Library.

Wednesday, Jan. 11, 1007 Big Rock Loop: Executive-Committee Organizing Potluck

There will be no speaker in January. Instead we will have our annual Group potluck to review the National Sierra sheets and volunteer for tasks

and committees. We will also discuss the formation of a subcommittee to study whether the Pajarito Group should become involved in the issue of the Chemistry Metallurgy Research Replacement project. Everybody is invited. This is your opportunity to become an active volunteer or a member of the ExCom. Even if you don't want to volunteer, you're welcome

to attend the best potluck in Los Alamos. Please contact Ilse Bleck at ibleck@yahoo.com, 505/662-2368

Wednesday, February 8, 3540 Orange St. at 7p.m.

Please note change of date and venue! We are joining the Pajarito Environmental Education Center in this presentation by Christine Chavez, Los Alamos County's Water and

Energy Conservation Coordinator.

Chavez's talk will focus on the energy audit that is free for Los Alamos residents to help uncover new and easy ways to conserve water and electricity in the home.

Wednesday, March 7, Upstairs Meeting Rooms: To be announced.

Outings: Please check the Outings Listings for adventures in our area.

Mexican wolves endure more losses

By Mary Katherine Ray

The most recent lethal removal of Mexican wolves occurred in mid-December with the blessing of reintroduction project officials when a lone female consorted too closely with ranch dogs.

She had previously mated with a domestic dog and birthed a litter of hybrids. All of those puppies save one were killed by the project last spring. (The last one has not been found.) Alone and unable to find a mate of her own kind because there are not enough wild wolves on the ground, she set her eyes on a ranch dog and for that, under pressure as always from the livestock industry, she was shot dead. The fearful account from the ranch wife aside, she harmed none of the dogs with whom she interacted and showed no interest at all in the young children who were nearby.

This unwelcome tidings adds to a yearlong list of deceased wolves. The Hawk's Nest pack in Arizona, which has never been known to prey on livestock, lost three members. Two dispersing pups were killed last spring, one by illegal gunshot and the other possibly a road kill. The alpha female was struck and killed by lightning last summer.

Two wolves were captured with injuries of as yet undetermined cause that resulted in their deaths while on the way to veterinary help. One was a disperser pup from the Middle Fork pack in New Mexico and the other from the Bluestem pack in Arizona. Another Middle Fork disperser died also of as yet unknown cause, as did two from the Rim pack. The latter two survived the Wallow fire but perished



Photo courtesy U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Mexican wolf in captivity at the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge. Another wolf was killed in December, making the 2011 death toll nine.

separately this fall.

In a list of bad news, there was a bright spot. The alpha male of the Paradise pack in Arizona went missing in the spring of 2010 and surprised everyone by turning up again in the summer of 2011, over a year later.

Nevertheless, nine known wolf deaths in a year is too many. There are eight collared pups born this year, and it is hoped more will be found in

the official aerial population count in January. Yet it is undeniable that more releases into the wild would help this population enormously.

There are many eligible wolves just waiting in captivity for release. The investment in captive breeding is wasted if the program continues to refuse them their freedom in the wild. Only one has been added to the wild population in the last five years! The

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service needs to hear from you that it is time for wolves to be released directly into New Mexico. Let no more wolves die needlessly and tragically.

Write U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southwest Regional Director Dr. Benjamin Tuggle at RDTuggle@fws.gov and Senators Udall and Bingaman, whose contact information is on Page 4.

Columbine-Hondo close to permanent protection

By Eric Patterson

I came across an article by Matt van Buren on the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness Study Area in the *Taos News* on Nov. 17 that really struck a nerve.

Almost 40 years ago, when I was teaching at Taos High School, I went backpacking for the first time with two good friends who were very experienced and capable hikers. We went up Long Canyon and camped overnight at Goose Lake.

It was incredibly difficult for me, but unbelievably beautiful. The scenery was spectacular! The June wildflowers were in full, breathtaking bloom, while much of the north and east slopes were still covered with snow. When we returned the next day, we sat at my kitchen table and wrote letters to the National Forest Service, urging them to consider this beautiful, pristine, roadless area for wilderness designation. A few years later, this area was designated a "Wilderness Study Area" (WSA), to be considered by Congress for permanent wilderness protection. After all these decades, numerous public hearings, and public-comment periods, it is heartwarming to know that a broad-based local coalition is working with our legislators to finalize permanent protective designation of this pristine place as a Wilderness Area.

After almost 40 years of hoping, I am elated that this may finally come to pass.

I currently live in Valdez and get my acequia water

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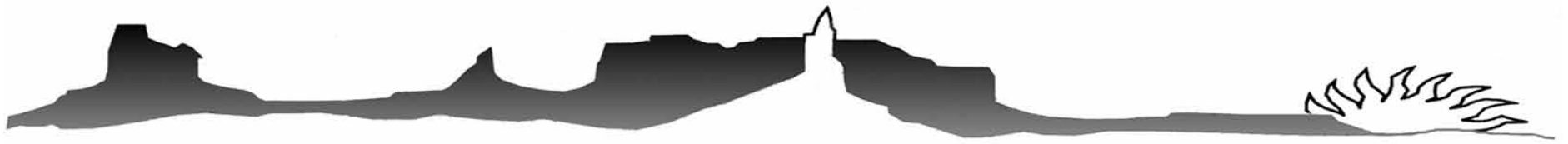
from the Rio Hondo watershed, much of which is located in the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness Study Area. Permanent wilderness designation will protect both the source and purity of my irrigation water that is used to grow organic fruit and vegetables. As a resident of Taos County, I want the hunting, fishing and hiking possibilities of this wilderness area to bring vacationers here to enjoy the wonders of Northern New Mexico and to help drive our largest industry—outdoor recreation. As a fisherman, I want the waters of the Rio Hondo to be clean and pure enough to support a healthy trout population. As a parent and grandparent, I want my children and grandchildren to be able to spend time in that pristine place that I first enjoyed almost four decades ago.

Contrary to what some would have us believe, wilderness designation does not lock people out

from their public lands but, rather, ensures that very special places like the Columbine-Hondo will be permanently protected from development and inappropriate uses that may do great harm to this fragile ecosystem. Wilderness designation will guarantee that those of us living in Northern New Mexico—and the many visitors to our area—will continue to be able to take pleasure in the Columbine-Hondo just as we do today—hiking, horseback riding, hunting and fishing, watching wildlife, and getting away to a special place of peace and beauty. Any level of protection less than full wilderness designation will not provide the level of protection needed to ensure these lands will remain forever as they are for our children and grandchildren to enjoy.

I understand the effort to make the Columbine-Hondo WSA into permanent wilderness has very widespread support, including more than 300 local businesses, acequia associations, village councils, grazing permittees, land-grant associations, and Taos Pueblo, as well as over 300 letters of support from local residents.

Once a wilderness is lost, it is lost forever. Let's all support the effort to preserve this wonderful area so that we and our children may enjoy its benefits for years to come.



NORTHERN GROUP

Prairie dogs return to Galisteo Basin

By Teresa Seamster
Wildlife Contact, Northern Group

After decades of extirpation, several hundred healthy Gunnison's Prairie Dogs have been reintroduced to the Galisteo Basin. This key "eco-engineer" of the short-grass prairie is a mammal on the state's list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need and a recent addition to the National Endangered Species list.

Like most projects to re-establish wild populations, this effort started small, with 58 adults placed in eight burrows in the fall of 2009. Volunteers from the Northern Group closely monitored and fed the tiny group over the first winter and saw a small increase in numbers in the summer of 2010. This year the story has greatly changed. More animals have been released and the colony has taken take off despite the drought and the disruption of more site-building. Now there are more than 250 active burrows naturally dispersed over 20 acres surrounding the original two-acre site.

The reintroduction is the result of the City of Santa Fe working with three volunteer groups under the direction of biologist Paula Martin and a local landowner who agreed to set aside the land for conservation purposes. Volunteers from the Northern Group along with People for Native Ecosystems took responsibility for assisting with capture, release, quarantine care and building nesting boxes for relocation, while WildEarth Guardians provided the heavy equipment for site preparation and installation. Over the past two years, Sierra Club members have provided the relocated prairie dogs ongoing food and monitoring.

What makes this small, intelligent, burrowing colonizer so valuable and so vulnerable?

Dozens of species benefit from the burrowing and feeding habits of prairie dogs. Their grazing patterns promote the growth of forbs and vetches that increase a more diverse and nutritious land cover than just grass, and their deep burrows capture water and let it permeate and enrich the soil rather than sheet off and cause erosion. Many other species, some highly threatened, such as black-footed ferrets, burrowing owls, many carnivores and raptors directly benefit from the enriched vegetation, stored water, and



Above: Teresa Seamster is one of the Sierra Club volunteers who have provided relocated prairie dogs with food and monitoring in a successful effort to re-establish a wild population on a site in the Galisteo Basin.

increased insect, rodent and small wildlife populations found in prairie-dog colonies. Also, the prairie dog is an ancient species that has survived thousands of years by matching its rate of reproduction to the changing climatic patterns and availability of food. In drought years, few litters are born, populations drop and the grassland ecosystem is not overly stressed.

Unfortunately, prairie dogs cannot migrate out of danger. Their vulnerability lies in their immobility if threatened by development, disease or shooters using them for target practice. Only capture and release to safer environments can save these vital animals when their habitat is threatened. Once relocated, only time, suitable soils and vegetation, low predation and lots of luck can help them thrive in their new homes.



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Office Location

The Northern Group Sierra Club office is at 1807 2nd Street, Unit 45, Santa Fe, NM 87505. See website at nmsierracub.org for map and directions.



What's Happening

Northern New Mexico Group's Holiday Party

We had a very successful holiday party on Dec. 4 with 80 attendees. Bandelier Superintendent Jason Lott talked about Bandelier National Monument. He highlighted how they dealt with the fire and the problems that resulted from the fire, including flooding. He also reported that Bandelier National Monument has reopened almost all of its trails.

Santa Fe office meetings notice

Northern New Mexico Group Excom/Conservation: 6-8 p.m. on the first Tuesday of every month: Jan. 3, Feb. 7, March 6; 7-9 p.m. April 3. Conservation topics will be addressed in the first hour.

Northern New Mexico Group Political Committee: 6 p.m., second Tuesday of each month: Jan. 10, Feb. 14, March 13, April 10. Contact Susan Martin at 988-5206

The Rio Grande Chapter Legislative Committee meets in the Santa Fe office each Monday from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. during the New Mexico Legislative session. Jan. 16, 23, 30; Feb. 6, 13, 20.

Rio Grande Chapter Communications Team meets in the Santa Fe office at 7-8 p.m. monthly on

a Monday – Jan. 16, Feb. 13, March 12

Santa Fe Office

The Sierra Club office in Santa Fe is open each Wednesday from 1 to 4 p.m. The address is 1807 Second Street, Unit 45.

It is just north of El Patio restaurant, formerly Cloud Cliff. It is on the small unnamed street just south of Lena St., 2nd floor of the building with trees, benches & sculptures in front. See website for a map.

Sign up for Outings e-mail newsletter

Tobin Oruch, the Outings Co-Chair for the Northern New Mexico Group, has created an excellent weekly e-mail on outings, Sierra Trail Mix.

It provides information on near-term outings plus useful outdoor information, like trail conditions.

He also includes photos from recent hikes to the beautiful locations that our outings leaders have recently visited. Send an e-mail to northern.group.nm@sierraclub.org requesting to be added to the list. We now have more than 240 people signed up for the e-mail; come join the fun.

Santa Fe County building codes

The following letter appeared in The Santa Fe New Mexican on Dec. 15:
The Santa Fe County

Commissioners will soon decide the future of building codes for new construction. Santa Fe County staff has proposed building codes that provide flexibility to builders to make common-sense decisions resulting in 30 percent lower energy usage for new homeowners. County staff has estimated that the cost of implementing these improvements is less than 1.5 percent of the cost of the home. The net effect of these codes is to save new homeowners money by reducing electricity and gas bills more than the mortgage increases.

In addition to saving new homeowners money, these codes reduce our dependence upon fossil fuels and improve air quality. These new building codes also provide inflation protection to the homeowner. Public Service Co. of New Mexico has raised electricity rates to the typical residential user by 40 percent in the past three years. We encourage the Board of County Commissioners to vote for better building codes.

—David Van Winkle, chairman, Northern New Mexico Group Sierra Club

Energy programs save cash for S.F.

More letters from group members in The New Mexican:

Lisa Randall, who is the Energy Conservation Program Coordinator for Santa Fe Public Schools (SFPS),

reports that SFPS reduced its natural gas consumption in fiscal year 2011 by 12 percent (during a very cold winter) and reduced its electricity consumption by 8 percent. The energy-conservation program at SFPS reduced its utility bill by \$233,000 in fiscal year 2011. We should all thank Lisa and the leaders in the Santa Fe Public Schools system for supporting these programs that save taxpayers significant money, and also reduce the community's dependence upon energy produced at the dirty coal plants in northwestern New Mexico.

—Alice Davis

The City of Santa Fe, led by energy specialist Nick Schiavo, will realize recurring savings in excess of \$340,000 each year from energy-conservation and renewable-energy projects. We should all thank Nick and the city leaders who have supported these efforts to save taxpayers money, generate local jobs and improve the environment.

Many of the energy-conservation projects are not very visible to the public, but save real dollars every day by reducing energy bills. The solar projects are more visible and you can see some of these projects as you drive around the city. They are located at: Waste Water Treatment Plant – 1,130 kilowatts; Buckman Diversion Project – 1,100 kilowatts; City bus terminal —163 kilowatts.

—Tom Gorman

Events

Sierra Club 'n' Beer

5:30-7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 28
Second Street Brewery, 1814 2nd St, Santa Fe, NM 87505. This event is open to the public.

Buckman Restoration Project hike

We will hold a tour of the proposed Buckman Restoration Project with guest leader Alan Hamilton, Conservation Director for New Mexico Wildlife Federation, on Sunday, March 11.

We will look at enhancements to the Diablo Canyon area then drive down to the Rio Grande, take a new loop trail along the old Chile Line RR, view the Buckman townsite, and check out proposed riparian restoration along the river corridor. Easy hike, 5 miles, little elevation change. Norma McCallan 505-471-0005

The Northern New Mexico Group recently sent in comments strongly supporting this restoration project, which has been in the works for six years.

For the complete proposal and our comments, see our website at nmsierraclub.org/buckman-restoration-project

Volunteer Recognition Event

This special event (invitation only) will recognize the many members from the Northern New Mexico Group of the Sierra Club that have volunteered in 2011.

The event will be held from 6 to 8 pm, Friday, April 27, at the Hilton Santa Fe, 100 Sandoval St., Santa Fe. Food will be provided.

Yard Sale

The Northern New Mexico Group Yard Sale is coming up in early May. It is not too early to start saving those still-useful items you were thinking of giving away!

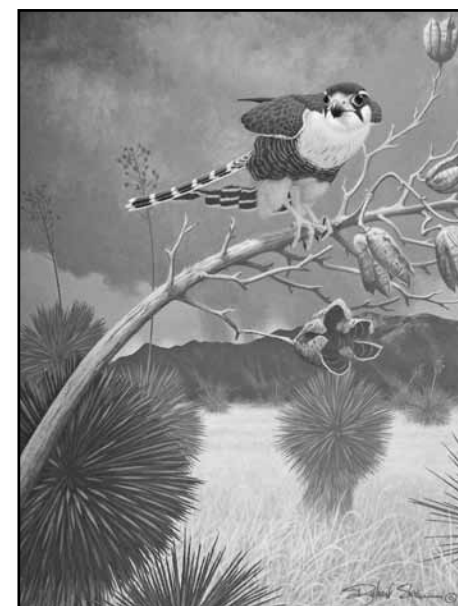
Carole Owens has graciously agreed to again host this popular event, for which we will also need helpers to price and sell. For further info, call Carole at 577-2682 or Norma McCallan at 471-0005.

Bring Nature Indoors with This Beautiful Richard Sloan Print

Support the Rio Grande Chapter and enrich your home's ambiance by ordering this or another of the seven striking prints offered only by the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club. These stunning 17-by-22-inch representations of some of our high desert's endangered raptors are numbered and signed by the artist, Richard Sloan, the world-renowned master wildlife painter. To see full-screen color pictures of the seven Sloan prints (Burrowing Owl, Aplomado Falcon, American Kestrel, Spotted Owl, Swainson's Hawk shown here, Ferruginous Hawk, and Golden Eagle) reserved as a thank-you for contributors to the Rio Grande Chapter, visit the Chapter's website (<http://riogrande.sierraclub.org>). A contribution of \$140 will be recognized with the delivery of your choice of a signed and numbered Sloan print, shipped flat and ready for framing. Contact Dan Lorimier (575/740-2927, daniel.lorimier@sierraclub.org) to make your donation and get a Richard Sloan print.

—Dan Lorimier

Swainson's Hawk



Otero Mesa: New hopes, new threats

By Dan Lorimier
and Nathan Newcomer

New Mexico's Otero Mesa is the largest and wildest Chihuahuan Desert grassland left on public lands in America. The area is located southeast of Alamogordo, west of Carlsbad and straddles the Texas border.

At more than 1.2 million acres in size, the area is home to 1,000 native wildlife species, including mule deer, mountain lion, black-tailed prairie dogs, golden and bald eagles and more than 200 species of migratory songbirds; it boasts the state's healthiest and only genetically pure herd of pronghorn antelope.

Otero Mesa is able to nourish such a wide variety of species because of the expansive black grama grasslands. Grassland expert and former New Mexico State University professor Walter G. Whitford notes that the soils, which support the black grama grasses, are remarkably shallow and as a result are particularly sensitive to any type of activity that would alter the composition.

Thousands of ancient petroglyphs and archaeological sites can be found on the volcanic Cornudas Mountains, including several ruins from the Butterfield Overland Stagecoach Route. Additionally, Otero Mesa sits above the Salt Basin Aquifer, which is suspected to be the largest untapped fresh-water aquifer left in New Mexico. Preliminary findings suggest that there are at least 57 million acre-feet of groundwater and that due to the fractured nature of the geology, the aquifer could be vulnerable to the rapid spread of contamination.

Your Rio Grande Chapter has been deeply involved in protecting Otero Mesa from the threats of oil and gas drilling as well as rare-earth exploration and mining, working for more than 10 years with and through the Coalition for Otero Mesa (www.oteromesa.org). In recent years our efforts to permanently protect the Mesa have focused on gaining National Monument designation from the president through



Photo courtesy New Mexico Wilderness Association

Otero Mesa sits above the Salt Basin Aquifer, which is suspected to be the largest untapped fresh-water aquifer left in New Mexico. Preliminary findings suggest that there are at least 57 million acre-feet of groundwater that could be vulnerable to the rapid spread of contamination.

SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO GROUP

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Robert Gray, Secretary

the Antiquities Act. However, renewed efforts to remove protections from gas and oil drilling are afoot at the state level, and 183 claims for rare-earth elements have been filed by a Colorado company on Wind Mountain, in the heart of the Mesa. After years of holding the line, the coalition is again bracing itself for a new wave of threats to this unique New Mexican landscape.

Your support will be critical in deflecting this new set of mineral exploitation plans on the Mesa—watch for Otero Mesa Alerts this winter!

The coalition is organizing a mining forum for Alamogordo in March. This follows an economic forum some coalition members sponsored earlier this year. The first event highlighted the economic benefits to local economies of

National Monument lands. The mining forum will focus on the risks to communities posed by nearby mining projects and will examine the threats of rare-earth mining on Otero Mesa specifically. These forums are designed to help educate Otero County residents and leaders about the risks and opportunities Otero Mesa holds for them.

Historic recognition: Fort Monroe now; Otero Mesa next

Here is an opinion editorial submitted to Otero County newspapers by Margot Wilson, southern representative to the Chapter Public Lands Team:

Recently, President Obama announced the first national-monument designation of his presidency, Fort Monroe in Virginia. As both the landing place for the first enslaved people brought to North America and the birthplace of the Civil War-era freedom movement, the Fort bookends an important part of our nation's history. Fort Monroe is a national treasure worthy of national-monument protections.

President Obama was right to use his authority under the Antiquities Act to protect it for future generations and help create jobs in the region. We appreciate this important move by the President and recognize that this designation contributes to the powerful legacy he can build on public lands' protections throughout our country.

Here in New Mexico we too share in notable landscapes, rich in history and opportunity. Otero Mesa is an irreplaceable natural treasure, our nation's last

intact Chihuahuan Grassland. Unfortunately, today Otero Mesa is under increasing threat from mining operations and the landscape-scale molestation they would bring. Better protections are needed before this unique place is lost to us.

Our country has a long history of protecting our wild and historic places, from the Yellowstone National Park to Fort Monroe. Americans recognize the value of our national legacy in public lands. Over the years, the Antiquities Act has been used by presidents from both parties to better protect our most precious lands and waters.

It is thanks to the Antiquities Act that national treasures like the Statue of Liberty and the Grand Canyon exist as icons today.

We've seen that protecting special places like the Grand Canyon and Otero Mesa grow tourism economies and increase recreation opportunities. In the 21 years after the 1987 designation of El Malpais National Monument up in Cibola County, population grew by 15 percent and real per capita income rose 67 percent.

Conserving public lands helps grow the economy, create jobs and attract new residents.

The future of our outdoor heritage depends on decisions made today. We need to preserve these places for future generations to enjoy through recreation and employment opportunities. A monument designation for Otero Mesa would help grow tourism locally while also protecting important habitat for the grassland's 1,000-plus species of plants and animals as well as multiplying recreational opportunities.

The Antiquities Act was created to protect and conserve our public lands and waters. These resources define our history and provide exceptional cultural, historical and natural value. In keeping with deserving places like Fort Monroe and El Malpais, Otero Mesa certainly fits the bill.

Thank you, President Obama, for highlighting Fort Monroe; I hope your administration will continue to look for places worthy of national monument protection.

Outings, continued from Page 16

prominent peak in the Cerrillos Hills. Short but steep, 1,000' gain, less than 3 miles RT, partially off trail. Proposed route will go by some old turquoise diggings. Bill Baxter, local historian, will accompany us part way. Outing weather-dependent. Norma McCallan (505-471-0005).

26 Moderate hike or snowshoe. Les Drapela, (505- 438-3306).

MARCH

3 Moderate hike to Tor and Cerro Rito, in the Caja del Rio: 7.5 miles, 900 ft. Daisy Levine (505- 466-8338)

4 Moderate loop hike in La Bajada area, weather permitting. 4-5 miles, mostly off-trail, stream crossings, some rough areas, approx 500' gain. Geology, pre-history, history. Dogs OK if leashed or under voice control at lunch or if we encounter cows. Mary Thompson (mary14er@gmail.com).

10 Moderate XC outing. Same as listed under Jan. 7. Alan Shapiro, (505- 424-9242 Nm5s@yahoo.com).

11 Easy Tour of proposed Buckman Restoration Project, with guest leader Alan Hamilton, Conservation Director for New Mexico Wildlife Federation. We will look at enhancements to the Diablo Canyon area, then drive down to the Rio Grande, take a new loop trail along the old Chile Line RR, view the Buckman townsite, and check out proposed riparian restoration along the river corridor. About 5 miles, little elevation change. Norma McCallan (505-471-0005).

11 Moderate hike on the Continental Divide Trail to mesa top near the monastery at Abiquiu, about 8 miles and 1500' gain, beautiful views. Daisy Levine (505-466-8338).

17 Strenuous snowshoe near Taos, maybe Bull of the Woods. Royal Drews, (505-699-8713).

18 Moderate hike or snowshoe. Les Drapela (505- 438-3306).

24 Moderate hike in Petroglyphs National Monument: Explore two canyons of petroglyphs and hike a couple volcanoes. 6-7 miles total, minimal elevation gain. Ranger talk included. Limit of 10 people. No dogs. Miguel Deluca, (505- 820-0042).

25 Moderate hike on Zuni-Acoma Trail

Chapter Meeting

The Chapter's Conservation and Executive Committee meetings will be held January 7 and 8 at the Sevilleta Wildlife Refuge Center.

Contact Conservation Chair Ken Hughes or Chapter Chair John Buchser (see Directory) for more information. Carpooling is encouraged.

Wilderness first-aid course

Outings Program leaders will be attending an eight-hour (basic) WFA course on Sunday, February 5 in Santa Fe. There should be room for a few non-leaders to attend at a very reasonable cost of \$35 or \$40.

To apply, contact Tobin Oruch, tobins.oruch@yahoo.com.

in El Malpais National Monument. 7 miles. A few hundred feet gain. Early start for long drive and car stationing. Return after dark. Dag and Lajla Ryen, (505- 466-4063).

31 Moderate exploratory hikes in Quebradas area near Socorro. Beautiful arroyos, pictographs, cool rocks. Optional stay-over for Sunday hiking. Dogs OK. Mary Thompson (mary14er@gmail.com 505-469 9499).

April 1 Strenuous snowshoe or hike if poor snow. 1-2 dogs. Tobin Oruch, (505-820-2844).

El Paso Group

Jan. 16 Moderately strenuous Baylor Pass Trail day hike in Organ Mountains. 7 miles RT, 1500' gain. Leave early at the western trailhead to hike Baylor Pass (west) at a moderate but steady 3.5-mile uphill, then turn downhill. Great views, different types of vegetation. Dress accordingly, there could be cold/windy conditions. Bring cameras for photo opportunities. Limit: 12. Harry Newman (swtraveller@aol.com).

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Support our communication with the public and reach 9,000 New Mexicans by advertising in *The Sierran*! Just \$100 for a business-card ad.

For other rates and inquiries, write to monablaber@gmail.com.

To Contribute to the *Rio Grande Sierran*

The Rio Grande Sierran is published four times a year—January, April, July and October—by the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club as a benefit for members living in New Mexico and West Texas.

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

Articles may be freely reprinted for nonprofit purposes, provided that credit is given to the author and the *Rio Grande Sierran*. (Please let us know if you reprint.) Products and services advertised in the Rio Grande Sierran are not necessarily endorsed by the Sierra Club.

Contributions—articles, photos, artwork, poems, letters to the editor, paid advertisements—are welcome. Send to the editor (see directory, Page 2).

Submissions by Rio Grande Chapter members will take precedence over others. Articles

are subject to abridgement. Letters to the editor may be up to 500 words. The contributor's name and email address will be printed as a source of more information, unless the contributor specifies otherwise.


Submissions must be received by the 10th of the month prior to publication.

Editorial practices as developed and adopted by the Rio Grande Chapter will be used in production of the *Rio Grande Sierran*.

Contents of the Group pages are the responsibility of the editor for that Group and any policies that are in place from that Group.

Nonmember subscriptions are \$10 per year. Notify Norma McCallan (nmccallan@mind-spring.com) of your interest and mailing address; send check to our Treasurer, Barbara Scheer, 28 Cedar Drive, Roswell, NM 88203. Please allow eight weeks for processing.

For extra copies, e-mail monablaber@gmail.com.



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By including Sierra Club in your estate plans today you are creating a way for future generations of Sierrans to steward the earth tomorrow.

There are many gift options available. We can even help you plan a gift for your local Chapter.

Sierra Club Gift Planning Program
85 Second St, Second Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105
(800) 932-4270 • gift.planning@sierraclub.org

El Paso Group

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texas.sierraclub.org/elpaso

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Bill Addington	915/539-4158	aguavida@valornet.com
Inner-City Outings:		
Ted Mertig	915/852-3011	tcmertig@sbcglobal.net
Outings:		
Laurence Gibson	915/309-5419	lgibson@utep.edu



Photo by Lajla Ryen

Hikers on Hamilton Mesa this autumn. A portion of this photo also appears in the banner on the front page.

Outings

January, February, March

Pajarito Group

JANUARY

1-28 Strenuous snowshoe in the Cerro Grande area. 9 miles RT, 1,500 ft gain. Michael Di Rosa, (w: 505-667-0095 or h: 663-0648).

Northern Group

JANUARY

12-31 Easy or Moderate Snowshoe near Santa Fe ski basin, maybe afternoon/early eve event, 3 hrs max. New leader: Marcia Skillman (505 699-3008, marciaskillman@hotmail.com).

7 Moderate XC ski outing. Not good for rank beginners, but at a leisurely pace with about 3 hours out on the snow. Location will be decided close to the date to find good snow. Possible spots include areas along US64 west of Tres Piedras, the Sandias, up by the SF Ski Basin, and in the Jemez. Alan Shapiro, (505- 424-9242 Nm5s@yahoo.com).

14 Easy urban hike along the new city Rail Trail extension, Alta Vista to Rabbit Road and return. 6 miles r.t. Minimal driving, doable even if weather not great. Norma McCallan (505-471-0005).

14 Strenuous snowshoe, maybe to Stewart Lake. 1-2 dogs. Tobin Oruch, (505- 820-2844).

15 Easy hike in Diablo Canyon,

Outings note

Check Group websites for updated information. All mileages are round-trip. Participants must sign a liability waiver. Bring water, lunch, sturdy hiking boots or shoes, and clothing suitable for the weather.

Leader reserves right to turn away anyone whose experience or equipment appears unsuitable. Leader may alter destination or cancel trip due to weather, unfavorable conditions, or insufficient number of participants.

Unaccompanied minors need written permission from a parent or guardian—ask leader for form. Dogs permitted only if so noted in write-up. Always call leader ahead to confirm participation and details.

Please see nmsierraclub.org/outings for the most up-to-date information. Tobin Oruch publishes a weekly e-mail with the latest information. If you would like to be added to the e-mail list, send an e-mail to northern.group.nm@sierraclub.org.

location for 2007 remake of 3:10 to Yuma. 6 miles. A few hundred feet gain. Dress warmly and bring thermos. Dag and Lajla Ryen, (505-466-4063).

21 Intermediate to expert cross-country ski/advanced snowshoers too, off the Winsor trail, near Puerto Nambe, partly offtrail, 7 miles, 1800' elevation gain, dogs who can deal with possible deep snow are OK. Meetup time 8 a.m. Page Press, (505-946-0169).

22 Moderate hike to edge of Alamo Canyon in Bandelier, 6 miles, 600 ft. Daisy Levine, (505- 466-8338).

28 Moderate hike/exploration of Otowi Peak and Rio Grande, 5-6

miles, 1100' gain. Limit of 10 people, one or two dogs. Miguel Deluca, (505-820-0042)

28 Strenuous snowshoe in the Cerro Grande area. 9 miles RT, 1500 ft gain. Michael Di Rosa, (w: 505- 667-0095 or h: 663-0648).

29 Strenuous snowshoe in Taos area. 1-2 dogs, sense of humor OK. Robert Reifel, (505-984-1253).

FEBRUARY

4 Moderate cross-country ski outing. Same as listed under January 7. Alan Shapiro, (505-424-9242 Nm5s@yahoo.com)

4 Strenuous snowshoe, maybe in the Pecos Valley. 1-2 dogs. Tobin Oruch,



Scan this QR code with your smartphone to go to the Rio Grande Chapter's Outings web page and see the latest updates!

(505-820-2844).

11 Strenuous snowshoe on Ravens Ridge. Royal Drews (505-699-8713).

11 Moderate hike on the Burro Trail in Bandelier, to Rio Grande overlook: 8 miles, 900 ft. Daisy Levine, (505-466-8338).

12 Strenuous hike on Red Dot-Blue Dot trails. Steep, rough terrain. 7 miles. 1,000' gain. Station cars. Views of Rio Grande, rock art. Dag and Lajla Ryen, (505- 466-4063).

18 Moderate mountain-bike ride along the Rail Trail to Eldorado and back. 24 miles, 400' elevation gain. Weather permitting. Limit of 6 riders, no dogs. Miguel Deluca, (505-820-0042).

19 Strenuous hike or snowshoe in Taos or Questa. 1-2 dogs OK. Robert Reifel, (505- 984-1253).

25 Easy/Moderate hike to the top of Grand Central Mountain, most

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