

Rio Grande Sierran



NEWS OF THE RIO GRANDE CHAPTER OF THE SIERRA CLUB

MARCH/APRIL 2006

NM Solar Tax Credit Bill Passes, Supplements Federal Incentives

With the recent passage of the Solar Market Development Act at the New Mexico State Legislature (SB 269), the Energy Policy Act of 2005 at the federal legislature, and the recent approval of a new buyback incentive for PNM customers at the Public Regulation Commission, homeowners and businesses who purchase photovoltaic (PV; solar-electric) systems will now benefit from two to four different financial incentives. The number depends on whether or not they live in PNM's service area, and whether or not their system is tied into the grid ("net-metered").

by Ben Luce

Likewise, buyers of solar thermal systems will now have two incentives (federal and state), which are designed to provide a uniform level of support over the next 10 years.

All of this is expected to create a very significant increase in the New Mexico solar industry and in the use of solar power by residents.

Overall Effect of Incentives

The combined effect of the various incentives now available will be to decrease the "payback time" for grid-tied (net-metered) PV systems in PNM's service area from more than 100 years (with no incentives), to about 25 years, making PV a reasonable investment from a financial standpoint, for those who want to help promote renewable electricity.

Direct solar heating systems, by contrast, are already arguably cost-effective. The effect of the state and federal tax credits will be to decrease the payback time for these systems from roughly 8 to 10 years to 5 to 7 years, making them even more attractive. The resulting increase in demand should stimulate the growth of the solar installation sector.

Be Patient, Be Careful!

Solar is booming worldwide. There is, accordingly, a shortage of PV modules and service providers. We suggest moving cautiously. Take some time to learn about solar, visit existing installations, and speak with owners if you can. Watch for solar tours.

Be patient with our small but developing industry. The North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners certifies and trains installers (see www.nabcep.org). Please report serious problems with installers or equipment to the New Mexico Solar



Investing in solar energy helps preserve places like Otero Mesa (from oil and gas), the Valle Vidal (coalbed methane), the Four Corners (coal), and the Valles Caldera National Preserve (industrial-scale geothermal), shown here. In late 2005, SB 212 retired the threat of geothermal development in the Caldera (see www.vallescalderacoalition.org). (photo by Don J. Usner)

Energy Association (www.NMSEA.org) or the Renewable Energy Industries Association of New Mexico (www.REIA-NM.org).

New Federal Solar Tax Credits

The Federal Energy Policy Act of 2005 established a federal income tax credit for both homeowners and businesses. For 2006 and 2007 only, these credits are worth 30% of the system cost, up to \$2,000 for homeowners. There is no cap for businesses.

For businesses, these new federal credits, when combined with other federal tax incentives for accelerated depreciation of solar equipment, reduce the cost of solar equipment up to 60%!

For homeowners, only PV and direct solar hot-water systems are eligible (including those that

ultimately heat air). Systems to heat swimming pools and hot tubs are not eligible. Solar hot-water heaters must be certified by the Solar Rating Certification Corporation (www.solar-rating.org).

For commercial operations, most types of systems are eligible (including direct solar hot air systems).

For both homeowners and businesses, an excellent guide for navigating the fine details of the federal credits is the Guide to Federal Tax Incentives for Solar Energy (see www.seia.org).

New State Solar Credits

Senate Bill 269, sponsored by Senator Dede Feldman of Albuquerque, and strongly supported by Governor Richardson, is designed explicitly to

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The Club has three structural levels. The National Board of Directors determines the overall direction of the Club. The National Organization is subdivided into Chapters, and each Chapter is further divided into Groups. One representative from each Chapter reports to the National Board through the Council of Club Leaders.

The largest part of the Chapter's budget goes toward the printing and mailing of this newsletter.

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A Note from the Vice-Chair

Susan Martin, our Chair, is recovering from recent hip-replacement surgery. We wish her a speedy recovery and rejuvenated mobility so that by summer she will be able to enjoy a walk in the Valle Vidal again!

It promises to be a busy year for the Chapter. We have been selected as one of three chapters across the country to engage in a Leadership Development Pilot Project. Led by Marshall Ganz, the renowned organizer-turned-Harvard-sociologist who helped the Club undertake a two-year examination of its organizational effectiveness and whose concepts sparked last September's Sierra Summit, these pilot projects should enable Executive Committees to achieve better leadership skills so they are more effective. There will be five to six workshops over a period of 18 months. For this project to be successful, Ex Com members and activists at the Group level will have to be as involved as the Chapter members. Be sure to stay tuned for further developments in this exciting venture.

The Building Environmental Communities (BEC) project is in the process of hiring an Associate Regional Representative for Carol Weahkee's vacated position, which will help to strengthen the BEC's presence here in the state and its work on the Valle Vidal and other energy-related issues. It looks like the Chapter will be able to send three representatives to



the annual Chapter Chairs' training near San Francisco in mid-March. With some serious fundraising, we should be able to keep our great lobbyist/grassroots organizer Dan Lorimier on full time for the whole year.

And a brand-new Sierra program called Building Bridges to the Outdoors has picked our Chapter as one of its sites, and will hire an organizer to build a constituency around the issue of outdoor environmental education for underserved populations. This program was in part inspired by the writings of Richard Louv, who was recently in Albuquerque discussing his latest book, *Last*

Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder, as the keynote speaker at the Quivira Coalition's January conference.

And then there are the legislative and congressional primaries coming up in early June. The just-ended, somewhat-disappointing legislative session underscores the need to work hard statewide to elect progressive, forward-looking candidates.

Challenging and demanding, but exciting times. Times that provide multiple opportunities for you, our membership, to get involved. Without your strong activism and power in numbers, we will not get far. Check out your local Group and see what volunteer possibilities await....

—Norma McCallan

An Open Letter to Senator Domenici: Rescind Your Plan to Sell Doña Ana Land

2 February 2006

Dear Senator Domenici:

I am writing on behalf of the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club to oppose your plan to introduce legislation that would mandate the sale of 65,000 acres of public land in Doña Ana County and reduce protection for potential wilderness areas in the county, for the following reasons:

- BLM planning and management should follow existing federal law, and should be guided by the forthcoming revised Resource Management Plan.
- Decisions to dispose of BLM lands should conform with the county comprehensive plan, scheduled to be developed in 2006.
- Any Congressional designation of wilderness in the county should include all wilderness study areas as well as citizen-proposed wilderness areas for Broad Canyon/Robledo Mountains and East Potrillo Mountains.
- If BLM land is sold, at least 50% of the proceeds should be allocated for open space, wildlife conservation, and farmland preservation in Doña Ana County.
- The great potential for redevelopment, as manifest in the Downtown plan for Las Cruces, coupled with the planned development of thousands of acres of State Trust Lands on the City's east side, provide ample development opportunity absent wholesale sprawl that 65,000 more acres would mean.

Sincerely,
Ken Hughes
Chapter Conservation Chair

Priority Setting: Chapter Asks Members for Ideas and Help in '06

In December 2005, the Executive Committee (Ex Com) of the Rio Grande Chapter adopted four priorities for 2006:

- Develop organizational strength in fundraising, communications, and membership
- Provide for a strong legislative/political program
- Develop and implement a state and local energy/global warming program
- Protect America's Wild Legacy

The Chapter's Priorities Solicitation Committee (Priorities Committee) recommended these priorities to Ex Com on the basis of many suggestions gathered from members in late 2005. These priorities mesh well with the 2006 priorities adopted by the Sierra Club's national board of directors (see www.sierraclub.org).

Growing the Chapter

For the first time in our history, the Rio Grande Chapter will provide for year-round staff support in 2006. For this reason, we are motivated to substantially increase our fundraising efforts, membership, and member participation at the Chapter and Group levels.

Active in the Legislative Session: Addressing Global Warming

The Chapter, some of the groups, and many individuals were involved in legislative and local community initiatives that aimed to reduce fossil-fuel use and global warming. These initiatives included increasing reliance on alternative energy sources and energy conservation. Examples were advocacy of improved building and community designs and active lobbying on energy bills (see feature on page 1, and both articles below) in the just-ended 30-day legislative session. Dan Lorimier, the Chapter's legislative lobbyist, led the effort in the legislature, which adjourned February 17.

Advocating for America's Wild Legacy

The Chapter and the Pajarito Group are actively engaged in issues pertaining to the management of the Valles Caldera National Preserve by providing Chapter and Group representatives at meetings of the preserve's trustees. These representatives advocate for increased public access to the preserve and science-based integrated management of all the preserve's assets.

In addition, the Northern Group, Pajarito Group, and a branch now forming in Taos, are active in improving and supporting the Carson National Forest's management plan for the Valle Vidal Unit. Their objectives are to support management that is protective of the Valle Vidal's large elk herd and its bristlecone pine forest, as well as its high-purity waters under the state's provisions for maintaining the quality of Outstanding Natural Resource Waters.

The Priorities Committee's goal was to expand member involvement in the ExComm's annual planning for attaining conservation goals. The Chapter's goal is to engage even more members in advocacy, because the Sierra Club is founded on the strength of its volunteers, and we are dedicated to building the communities that will continue to be effective in achieving these goals.

For more information, contact Dexter Coolidge, Chapter Chair Susan Martin, and your Group chair (see the masthead on page 2 and the Group pages).

—Marty Peale,
and Dexter Coolidge

NM Legislature Passes Two Key Environmental Initiatives

The Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club, working closely with other advocates for New Mexico's environment, won some major victories in the 2006 session, thanks to the support of the Chapter's Activist Network and other grassroots efforts.

Thank you to the Chapter's legislative activists!

We lobbied actively and helped organize your grassroots support for the legislative priorities that the Chapter Executive Committee identified in December 2005. Two of the five initiatives we championed successfully passed through the legislature and await the governor's signature. Others made significant headway; we will continue to work to build support for those initiatives between now and the 2007 legislative session.

Here, in brief, are the outcomes for our five priority legislative issue areas:

- **Solar Market Development Income Tax**

Credit • SB269 (Feldman) and HB295 (Gonzales) – This bill was designed to vigorously stimulate the purchase of direct solar heating systems (for both water and air) and photovoltaic systems by homeowners, small businesses, farmers, and ranchers. It passed the legislature and is expected to be signed by the governor (see feature, page 1)! The House bill was bundled with 14 other bills into an omnibus energy bill that included some very bad bills, but SB269 passed both houses without major stumbling blocks.

- **Tax Increment for Development Act • SB495 (Papen) and HB462 (Lujan)** – This bill provides financing tools for public infrastructure in specific development areas, especially blighted urban districts (see *Sierran*, January/February 2006). The House version passed through the legislative process and will likely be quickly signed by the governor!

- **Land, Wildlife and Clean Energy Act • SB407 (Sanchez) and HB188 (Martinez)** – This legislation aimed to save some of New Mexico's most beautiful places, protect and restore vital wildlife habitats, and rescue farm and ranch lands from sprawling development, as well as to promote solar energy use. Both House and Senate versions stalled in the House Taxation and Revenue Committee. Senate President Dianne Denish cast the tie-breaking vote for SB407; that close vote revealed which senators we need to educate, as we advance another version of this legislation again in the 2007 session.
- **Surface Owners Protection Act • SB631 (McSorley) and HB437 (Nuñez)** – This legislation attempted to strike a more balanced package of rights and responsibilities between landowners and owners of subsurface oil and gas deposits. It was gutted by the New Mexico Oil & Gas Association (through their legislative advocate, Rep. Sandra Townsend, R-Aztec). Stripped of meaningful protections for landowners, Rep. Nuñez dropped the bill. Stakeholders will continue to work for a meaningful bill between now and the next session.
- **New Mexico Renewable Energy Transmission Authority • SB317 (Sanchez) and HB111 (Campos)** – This legislation was bold. It would have created a quasi-governmental agency to plan, coordinate, and finance transmission lines to carry New Mexican renewable energy to huge new markets in California and other western states. The Senate and House bills were well received, especially considering that this was their first time before the legislature. Each bill passed successfully through its own house, but neither completed the arduous legislative process this session. We will see another campaign for this legislation next session.

For more information about these bills, see the New Mexico Legislative website (<http://legis.state.nm.us/lcs/default.asp>). For more specific information about how your legislators voted on these bills in committee and on the floor, contact Chapter Conservation Coordinator Dan Lorimier (see the masthead page 2).

—Dan Lorimier

Albuquerque City Council Approves Mesa del Sol Level A Master Plan

In mid-January 2006, Albuquerque's City Council unanimously approved the Level A Master Plan for Mesa del Sol – a 12,000-acre development south of Albuquerque that is to be built out over 50 years. Considering the scope of the development, public comment and discussion by the Council were minimal. The Chapter's Urban Issues Committee was among the few organizations that made comments to the Council.

We remain extremely concerned that the modeling used to forecast the need for roadways at Mesa del Sol does not adequately consider transit, pedestrian, and bicycle trips (see *Sierran*, January/February 2006). The proposed modeling results call for more road lanes than necessary, reducing the pedestrian friendliness, making transit less effective, and thereby inducing increased car traffic with its accompanying air pollution and greenhouse-gas emissions. We plan to work with Forest City Mesa del Sol (FCMDS) and the City to ensure

that proper modeling parameters are used to create a more pedestrian- and transit-friendly roadway system. This is an area where our vigilance and our involvement will continue to be needed!

FCMDS may now proceed to the next level of planning. According to Harry Relkin of FCMDS, Phase 1 will focus on the construction of a building for Advent Solar in the Employment Center, development of the Community Center, and residential development on the east and west sides of the Community Center. FCMDS is encouraging UNM to build a small campus between the Employment and Community centers. As FCMDS develops Level B and C Plans, we'll review them and continue to advocate for good urban development.

For more information, contact Urban Issues Committee Co-chair Susan Gorman (see the masthead page 2) and visit the Chapter's website (<http://riogrande.sierraclub.org/mesadel.html>).

—Susan Gorman

The Time Is Right for New Energy Efficiency Programs

In December 2005, the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission finally approved an application by PNM to roll out gas Demand Side Management (DSM) programs. In other words, PNM is now supposed to actively start helping customers improve their energy efficiency and reduce their gas consumption by offering rebates to customers who upgrade the insulation on their hot-water heaters; the insulation in their walls, floors, and ceilings; the sealing of heating ducts; and more.

What's more, in mid-February 2006, PNM kicked off a study to evaluate the best way to also do electric energy efficiency, and we can expect them to start offering electricity programs sometime in late 2007.

You might ask, shouldn't we all be saving energy anyway, and why do we need PNM to jump on the efficiency bandwagon? The answer is complicated and raises many other questions, which I will attempt to answer in a series of articles on New Mexico's fledgling efforts to use energy more efficiently.

Basically, however, energy efficiency can be thought of as one more "source" of power, cheaper in many cases than other forms of power we might build or buy to meet our needs. It doesn't increase the supply side of the equation. Rather, it reduces the demand for power, such that the other generation resources and fuel supplies can meet the current demand, so we don't need to build a new power plant or drill a new gas well. The environment wins big, because efficiency doesn't increase carbon dioxide emissions or create nuclear waste. And, in many cases, efficiency even creates a more comfortable home or a more cost-effective industrial process.

Combine PNM's Rebates with Federal Tax Incentives in 2006

This is the year to insulate your home and replace leaky windows and inefficient furnaces! PNM rebates (other utilities are not yet offering programs) are available as of February 2006, and federal tax credits are available for 2006-2007. You could get a \$568 rebate from PNM if you take advantage of all their offerings plus a \$500 tax credit on your federal tax return, for a total of \$1,068 in savings off a \$5,500 investment in your home. The PNM rebate is for contractor-installed measures, while the federal tax credit is for do-it-yourselfers as well as contractor-installed weatherization. Insulation must meet the minimum code requirements for the area in which you live. The detailed IRS rules for the federal tax credit are still being developed, but some guidance is available on the web.

To make these new efficiency incentives a bit more personal, let me try and walk you through the simple, back-of-the-envelope thinking that my household is doing about how to improve our home this year. My home in Santa Fe is 40 years old, with

no insulation under the floors (crawl space) and unknown insulation in the ceiling and walls. The gas-fired boiler is also 40 years old, and assuredly less than 60% efficient. We have several leaky skylights, although, thankfully, almost all the windows are double-paned. We used 114 therms of gas in January 2006, which was 30% less than we used in 2005. Since the month was about 20% warmer than usual, I can only claim to have achieved about a 10% savings with all the plastic over my windows and skylights, but it was a cheap fix and definitely cost-effective for this winter. But next year, I would like to further improve on this situation.

If I spend \$2,000 on insulation and weatherizing such as caulking and \$3,500 on a new boiler (and possibly solar-hot-water preheat), I will maximize my PNM insulation rebate (25% of \$2,000) and I will also get the full \$500 tax credit, for total out-of-pocket expenditures of roughly \$4,500. (Not to mention that my boiler is so old, it has to be replaced, anyway.)

Is this really cost-effective and a good use of household funds? Here is my thinking: It is likely that we will use roughly \$800 worth of gas for heating per year (when gas is almost \$1 per therm). By improving my boiler to a unit that is about 95% efficient, I will cut my gas bills by around 40%, or \$320 per year. I would conservatively guess that my insulation improvements will reduce heat loss by at

least 20%, which is a savings of about \$96 per year (20% of \$480 after the new boiler). Thus, my total yearly savings will be about \$416 per year, for a payback period of about 10 years, and possibly faster, if the price of gas continues to increase (which it will), or if the insulation does an even better job than I think it will.

Frequently, a better way to consider this calculation is to consider the case when you must replace a furnace anyway, because it is broken or too old. Then one can consider the cost-effectiveness of buying a more efficient (more expensive) furnace, and evaluate the cost-effectiveness of just the differential cost. Thus, if I consider that I must spend \$2,000 at a minimum to replace my worn-out boiler, the differential for a super-efficient new one may only be \$1,500, and then my payback is closer to seven years.

Of course, economists do more complex calculations to figure out the net present value of the savings and whether other investments would make more sense. But the bottom line for my household is that we need a new furnace, and we want to save as much energy as we can for a reasonable investment, because we think gas prices are going to go up over the next 10 years. So this is the year!

For more information, contact Chapter Energy Issues Chair Gail Ryba (see masthead page 2).

—Gail Ryba

PNM Incentives

To learn more about PNM's programs, visit <http://PNM.com/rebates>, or call 866/REBATES. Two kinds of rebates are available to all PNM residential natural-gas customers.

1. Retail rebates, with rebate forms available at participating retailers or at PNM.com, including \$10 back for the purchase of a water-heater insulation blanket, and \$25 back for the purchase of an Energy Star-qualified programmable thermostat.
2. Rebates for products installed by a participating contractor listed at PNM.com, including 25% back (up to \$500) on insulation and weatherization measures, including attic and wall insulation, and ductwork-leakage testing and sealing; and on contractor-installed efficiency products, including Energy Star-qualified programmable thermostats (\$40), water-heater insulation blankets (\$15), hot-water-pipe insulation (\$5 for as much as 10 feet), and low-flow showerheads (\$8).

Federal Incentives

Federal tax credits outlined in the Energy Policy Act of 2005 are available for many types of home improvements, including adding insulation, replacement windows, and certain high-efficiency heating and cooling equipment. See the chart at www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=products.pr_tax_credits#chart. The maximum amount of homeowner credit for all improvements combined is \$500 during the two-year period of the tax credit. This tax credit applies to improvements made from 1 January 2006 through 31 December 2007. The PNM rebate is for 25% of the cost, capped at \$500; the federal tax credit is for 10%, also capped at \$500. You'd have to spend \$5,000 to reap the maximum benefit. (Or, possibly, you'd have to spend \$5,500, because it is likely that you will have to deduct the PNM rebate, before you get to make the federal tax credit calculation.)

Future Topics

- May/June 2006:** What is energy efficiency, including what is a therm and a kilowatt-hour?
- July/August 2006:** How much energy will efficiency efforts and utility programs save?
- September/October 2006:** How do Building Efficiency Standards improve energy efficiency? What do appliance standards do, and what are the new federal standards?
- November/December 2006:** How can I save more energy? What other programs at the state and federal level promote energy efficiency?
- January/February 2007:** Why does it require regulatory approval for a utility to offer energy efficiency incentives?

Optimize Your 2006 Weatherization Plans

Here are some useful websites to help you optimize your weatherization plans for 2006.

www.eere.energy.gov/consumer/tips/insulation.html

The U.S. Department of Energy analyzes how much insulation is cost-effective in each part of the country. In most of New Mexico, attic insulation should be at least R-38; walls, at least R-13; and floors, at least R-19.

www.energytaxincentives.org

The Tax Incentives Assistance Project (TIAP) helps consumers understand the federal tax credits available through the Energy Policy Act of 2005.

www.simplyinsulate.com/content/tax_credits/existing_home.html

The North American Insulation Manufacturers Association assesses federal tax credits for adding insulation.

www.efficientbuildings.org

The Commercial Building Tax Deduction Coalition focuses on energy efficiency for businesses.

www.xcelenergy.com

At press time, we were informed that Xcel Energy (formerly SPS) is reinstating three efficiency programs for commercial and industrial customers. Check the website for more information.

Otero Mesa Case Goes Before the Court

In January, the Federal District Court in Albuquerque heard oral arguments in the lawsuits brought by Governor Richardson and a coalition of environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, to block the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) plan to drill Otero Mesa. At stake are 1.2 million acres of irreplaceable Chihuahuan Desert grassland – one of the most threatened ecosystems in the world.

Grasslands were once a prominent feature of the Chihuahuan Desert, but they have largely disappeared or been reduced in size to the point where they can no longer support as wide a variety of plants and animals as before. So it was a good thing in 1998 that after natural gas was discovered on Otero Mesa, which contains one of the last remaining large sections of Chihuahuan Desert grassland, the BLM decided to amend their Resource Management Plan for the area to ensure that it would protect enough of the grassland. A change in Washington with the 2000 presidential elections, however, brought a change in attitude to the BLM.

In 2005, the BLM issued a final Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) that would

restrict oil and gas development to 5% of the area at any one time, but would allow 95% of Otero Mesa to eventually be drilled. The RMPA also calls for restoration of well sites after operations cease, but there are no known instances where such restorations have been successful, and the black grama grass seed needed for such work is not commercially available.

The lawsuits by environmental groups and the governor charge that in developing the RMPA, the BLM did not adequately consider potential impacts to Otero Mesa, such as harm to rare plant and animal species, damage to groundwater, habitat fragmentation, and destruction of archaeological and paleontological resources and sites important to Native Americans. In addition, the RMPA is not protective of habitat for the Aplomado Falcon, a federal endangered species that has recently been documented at Otero Mesa.

A decision by the court is not expected before mid-March.

For more information, contact Margot Wilson (see masthead page 2).

—Margot Wilson

Forever Wild 2006!

A Multi-Media Celebration of Wild Lands, Wildlife, and Wild Rivers

Featuring nature photographer/ folksinger Jim Stoltz and guests!

**April 4, 7:00 pm
Santa Fe
Admission is free!**

Come experience Jim's inspiring photographs and original backcountry ballads from over 26,000 miles of hiking through America's last wild places. Enjoy performances from local musicians and dancers, learn about local conservation efforts, and hear from Congressman Tom Udall (invited) about New Mexico's natural heritage.

Visit www.foreverwild.info or call Lisa at 248-0118 for more info.

Solar Tax Credit *(continued from page 1)*

overcome the deficiencies of the new federal credits. This is a great breakthrough! Please thank the governor, Senators Feldman, and Senator Sue Wilson Beffort and the Legislature for their support!

The new state credits are retroactive to 1 January 2006 and will be available for the next 10 years – far longer than the federal credits. PV, direct solar hot air, and direct solar hot-water systems must be certified by the NM Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department. The department will be issuing guidelines soon.

The department can issue up to \$5 million per year in solar credits – \$3 million per year for PV, and \$2 million for direct solar thermal.

The NM solar credit value is 30% of the system cost minus any applicable federal credits, up to a maximum credit of \$9,000. This cap is *much* higher than the \$2,000 federal cap. If a taxpayer's state tax is less than the full amount of the state solar credits in the first year, then the taxpayer can carry over the credits into subsequent years, for up to 10 years.

Suppose that a solar hot-water system costs \$5,000. Thirty percent of this is \$1,500. Because this is less than \$2,000, the federal credits will be \$1,500, and the state credits will be zero. If the system is a direct solar hot-air system, then it is not eligible for federal credits, and the state credit would fill in the gap at \$1,500.

Suppose a much larger solar hot-water system to heat a radiant floor costs \$20,000. Thirty percent

of this is \$6,000. In this case, if the system is purchased in 2006 or 2007, then the federal credits will be \$2,000, and the state credits will pick up the additional \$4,000. If the system is purchased after 2007 when home federal credits expire, then the state credits will fill in the gap for the full \$6,000.

The effect of the new state credits is to increase the cap from \$2,000 (federal) to \$9,000 and extend them for an additional eight years – just what solar energy development in New Mexico needs.

Net-Metering for PV Systems

Since 1998, owners of PV systems living in the service territories of PNM, Southwestern Public Service Company, El Paso Electric, and in Rural Electric Cooperative areas have been able to connect to the electric grid and literally spin their meters backwards. Over 25 years, net-metering can recoup as much as 145% of the system cost.

Besides the financial incentive it provides, net-metering has some distinct advantages over "off-grid" or battery-based systems: all the solar power is used, because any extra power is fed back into the grid and used by others. Moreover, because these systems don't use batteries, they tend to be cheaper, more environmentally friendly, and much easier to maintain.

Net-metering increases local generation, local control, and clean air! It also leads to a less-expensive electric grid for everyone.

PNM Photovoltaic Power Buyback

In December 2005, the Public Regulation Commission approved a PV-power buyback program, which will begin after 1 March, 2006. PNM will purchase renewable energy credits (RECs) from willing PNM customers who own net-metered PV systems, for \$0.13 per kilowatt-hour (significantly higher than PNM's retail power cost). They will purchase these RECs through 2018, for each and every kilowatt-hour of PV power generated by the customer, regardless of whether the solar power is utilized by the customer or fed back into the grid.

The financial value of this incentive for customer-generators in PNM's area who begin participating in 2006 with a system at today's costs is about 25% of the system cost.

Combined Effect of Incentives for Net-Metered PV in PNM's Service Area

When the incentives described above are combined, net-metered systems in PNM's area that are installed in 2006 will approximately break even in 25 years. Tax Credits (30%) + Net-Metering (45%) + PNM Buyback (25%) = 100%.

For more information, contact Ben Luce, Chair and Policy Director for the New Mexico Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy (CleanEnergyNetwork@cfcae.org), or visit the Coalition's website (www.NMCCAE.org).

WILDLANDS ART!

**Exhibit and Fundraiser
for
NM Wilderness Alliance**

Opening March 3rd
Arts Alliance Gallery in ABQ
1100 San Mateo Suite 10

www.nmwild.org 843-8696

Mary Silverwood

March 3- Reception
Opening 5 - 9 pm

March 9 Slideshow
Mogollon Rock Art
Anthony Howell 6:30 pm

March 16 Presentation
Arctic Refuge
Stephen Capra 7:00 pm

March 18- Reception
Meet the Artists 3-8 pm

March 23- Slideshow
New Mexico Then & Now
William Stone 6:30 pm

March 30 Presentation
Doña Ana Wild! 6:30 pm

Open M-F, 9-5pm or
by appt. thru March 31st

Help Organize Bike Week Events

The Bicycle Coalition of New Mexico is planning events for Bike Week (12–21 May 2006), including Bike-to-Work Day. Would you like to help organize an earth-friendly bicycle transportation event in Albuquerque, Las Cruces, Santa Fe – or anywhere else? Contact the Coalition (info@bikenm.org, www.BikeNM.org), or Gail Ryba in Santa Fe (820-1365, gnyryba@cybermesa.com).



PAJARITO GROUP NEWS

Post-Cerro Grande: Five Years of Data

The Forest Service and Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) have six years (1999-2005) of LandSat (satellite) images to track and document post-Cerro Grande Fire rehabilitation. At February's Pajarito Group meeting, Forest Service Hydrologist Greg Kuyumjian presented data to tell "the rest of the story" about the rehabilitation effort.

Greg came to northern New Mexico during the Cerro Grande Fire and since then has made Los Alamos his home base. In addition to working on Cerro Grande rehabilitation, Greg has assisted with emergency response on many of the forest fires in the western U.S. that have made the news in recent years. Improvements of the national remediation techniques came from lessons learned with Cerro Grande.

Because the fire so thoroughly burned watersheds above the community of Los Alamos and portions of LANL, concerns about expensive and dangerous flooding as well as movement of contamination at LANL required many different rehabilitation approaches. These included aerial seeding, aerial hydromulching, contour felling of burned trees, placing of straw wattles (long straw "sacks"), and spreading of straw mulch.

Greg's LandSat images show the progress of revegetation in rehabilitated areas. On the almost 43,000 acres of burn, aerial seeding (21,000 acres) and concurrent treatments (8,600 acres) treated a total of 29,600 acres of the burn. Field surveys and LandSat images measured the effectiveness of the treatments.

So what treatments worked best at stabilizing the watersheds and helping to restore vegetation? Spreading mulch on the ground surface, either by field crews or by aerial spreading, gave the greatest value. Straw mulch proved of such value during the Cerro Grande Fire that it was emphasized as the primary treatment at other fire-rehabilitation efforts, such as at the 468,000-acre Rodeo-Chedeski Fire in Arizona. However, rather than hand-spreading, as our community volunteers and USFS crews did, Greg's research showed that the most efficient way is to spread huge, rolled bales by drop-releasing them from nets hung beneath helicopters.

Contour raking and seeding also proved effective. Some far-less-valuable treatments were the use of straw wattles and contour felling. Felling trees at an angle to the slope is effective in the Northwest where there is other vegetation. It does not work in arid New Mexico. In addition to understanding the effectiveness of treatments, the lessons learned from Cerro Grande helped develop better ways of applying the treatments to the ground, and also provided cost information that has proven valuable in planning rehabilitation efforts elsewhere.

Greg, his team, LANL scientists, and those from other agencies developed so much new information during and after the Cerro Grande Fire, that their data led to improved rehabilitation techniques for fires throughout the U.S. West.

—Mat Johansen

Outings

Saturday, April 1 • Jemez Mountains exploratory hike – 6 miles. Moderate. All off-trail, some boulder hopping. Page Press (946-0169 – Northern Group).

Saturday, April 8 • Frijoles Canyon/Upper Crossing loop hike in Bandelier National Monument – 1000' gain. 13 miles. Strenuous. Tobin Oruch (820-2844 – Northern Group).

Thursday, April 20 • Valles Caldera spring highway cleanup – Meet at Ponderosa Campground at 4:30 pm and carpool to our stretch of road at the Valles Caldera. Bring work gloves (bags supplied). David Gemeinhart (662-6267 – Pajarito Group).

Saturday-Monday, April 22-24 • Bandelier backpack – Basecamp in Capulin Canyon; moderate day hike from there on middle day. Bob McKee (471-0005 – Northern Group).

Saturday, April 22 • Apache Springs/Upper Frijoles Canyon loop hike in Bandelier – 1200' gain. 11 miles. Strenuous. Call before Thursday, 9:00 pm. Michael Di Rosa (663-0648 home, 667-0095 work – Northern Group).

Sunday, April 23 • Red Dot Trail hike – Moderate, rough trail. Dogs okay. Leave at 9:00 am. Eliza Schmid (474-5846 – Northern Group).

Saturday, April 29 • Cerro Grande hike – 1300' gain. 2 miles. Steep climb to the 10,199' peak. Bring sunscreen, appropriate clothing, lunch, and water. David Gemeinhart (662-6267 – Pajarito Group).

Saturday-Monday, May 27-29 • Valle Vidal issues outing – Co-sponsored by the Pajarito Environmental Education Center. Ilse Bleck (662-2368 – Pajarito Group) or Randall Ryti (662-7392 – PEEC).

Meetings

Wednesday, April 5, 7:00 pm • Governor Richardson's Environmental Policy • Ned Farquhar

Ned Farquhar, the governor's senior advisor in energy/environment, will present the governor's environmental accomplishments thus far, and the policies that are proposed for the remainder of his term. Governor Richardson has stood with environmentally concerned citizens on several issues lately, most notably in protecting the Valle Vidal and much of Otero Mesa from oil and gas development, and in supporting the effort to create Ojito as a wilderness area. Last June, the governor joined the effort to cut greenhouse-gas emissions in New Mexico from both energy use and production. New Mexico is the first major coal-, oil-, and gas-producing state to set targets for cutting global-warming emissions. This is an unmatched opportunity to not only hear about policies, but to have a voice in supporting or creating them. Held in the upstairs meeting rooms in Mesa Public Library.

Pajarito Group Directory

<http://riogrande.sierraclub.org/pajarito/>

Executive Committee

Ilse Bleck, Chair ibleck@yahoo.com	662-2368
Jody Benson, Vice-Chair bensonj@lanl.gov	662-4782
Betsy Barnett, Secretary betsybar@comcast.net	662-9581
David Gemeinhart, Treasurer ddgem@losalamos.com	672-6267
Mat Johansen matjohansen@cybermesa.net	662-9763
Julie Pearson juliepearson@msn.com	661-1121
Chuck Pergler pergler@att.net	661-6169

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Mat Johansen, Water matjohansen@cybermesa.net	662-9763
Rob Pine, Webmeister bobdaddy@spinn.net	281-6076

Group Sponsors Science Fair Awards

Julie Pearson organized the first annual Pajarito Group "The Power of One" awards for Los Alamos Science Fair projects pertaining to the environment. Mat Johansen presented four \$30 checks, as well as a certificate for a \$25 Student Sierra Club Membership to each winner. Anna Zerkle, of Barranca fourth grade, won the Elementary category, with "Water Water Everywhere." In the Junior category, Miriam Barnum and Maura Taylor, Barranca sixth grade, won for their project, "Hot Rocks." Aubrie Powell, Los Alamos Middle School seventh grade, took the Mid-School prize for "Fire

and Earth." The Senior prize went to Tom Witherell, Los Alamos High School 10th grade, for "The Effects of Modern Pollution on Plant Growth." We awarded three Honorable Mentions to David Stroud and Ryan Kniss, Barranca sixth grade, "Reaching for Light"; Emily Funsten, Barranca sixth grade, "Dense Forests: The Competition for Light"; and Sophie Click, Mountain sixth grade, "Pollution Solution."

The Pajarito Group judges were Don Machen and Mat Johansen. Ilse Bleck, Julie Pearson, and Ted Mockler helped judge for other Special Awards in several categories.



NORTHERN GROUP NEWS

Focus on Energy Series #1: Solar and Wind

Tuesday, March 21, 7:00 pm

Ben Luce, Director of the Coalition for Clean, Affordable Energy (CCA) and Jeff Burks, PNM's Director for Environmental Sustainability, will present a slideshow on the many aspects of wind and solar energy, including their current status in New Mexico's power grid, new and anticipated technologies, pitfalls and problems, solutions and incentives, regulations and tax credits.

General meetings are held at the Unitarian Church, 107 W. Barcelona St. (between Galisteo and Don Gaspar), Santa Fe. All meetings, outings, and activities are free and open to the public.

Wild Utah: America's Redrock Wilderness

Tuesday, April 18, 7:00 pm

Bob Brister from Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance will present their traveling slideshow, "Wild Utah," a multimedia event documenting citizen efforts to designate over 9 million acres of Utah's spectacular canyon country as federal wilderness. Enjoy the striking photographs of this rugged, remote and magnificent slickrock landscape, and learn from Bob how you can help to preserve its stark beauty and fragile soils from impending threats of ORV abuse and rampant oil and gas exploration.

Forever Wild 2006

Singing for America's Wilderness Heritage: Wild Lands, Wild Rivers and Wild Lives

Tuesday, April 4

Musicians United to Save the Environment will present this award-winning, free, multimedia concert that combines live music, stunning photographs, stories and poetry celebrating our nation's wild lands and rivers. Join Walkin' Jim Stoltz and local musicians and poets in saving our precious wilderness legacy!

Volunteers needed to man our Sierra table and letter writing tables and serve on a planning committee. Call Norma McCallan (471-0005).

Hosted by the Sierra Club, Defenders of Wildlife, NM Wilderness Alliance, New Mexico Audubon, Valles Caldera Coalition and many other local organizations.

Outings

Saturday, March 4 • Raven's Ridge snowshoe, near the Ski Basin – Strenuous. Probably to the Nambé River valley lookout. Marcia Skillman (474-7414).

Sunday, March 5 • Singles hike – About 6 miles. Moderate. Hike location suited to weather. Gourmet potluck lunch; call to coordinate food. Singles only, please. Lavi Malhotra (995-8547, lavim@ix.netcom.com).

Sunday, March 5 • Tor hike – Easy/moderate. Hike to Tor (volcanic knob) and the Blowhole in the Caja del Rio, mostly on dirt roads. Dogs okay. High-clearance vehicle useful. Leave 9:00 am. Bob McKee (471-0005).

Saturday, March 11 • Hike – Moderate hike to place suited to weather; ask about dogs. Les Drapela (438-3306).

Sunday, March 12 • Hike – Easy hike near town in lower elevations, maybe Glorieta Ghost Town or Rail Trail. Dogs okay. Eliza Schmid (474-5846).

Sunday, March 12 • Red Mesa hike • 1400' gain. 6 miles. Strenuous. Off-trail, rough in places, fence crossing, but worth it. Hike to Red Mesa, 20 miles northwest of Bernalillo, or other hike of similar difficulty. Ask about dogs. Stephen Markowitz (797-5833 before 8:00 pm, stephenmarkowitz@comcast.net).

Saturday, March 18 • Cerrillos Hills Park hike – 750' gain. Moderate. Hike to Cerro de la Cosena, most easterly of the Cerrillos Hills. Dogs with leashes okay. Norma McCallan (471-0005).

Saturday, March 18 • Birdwatch walk – Easy. With Audubon Society. Bring binoculars. Ron Duffy (982-2890).

Sunday, March 19 • Dome Wilderness hike – Moderate/Strenuous. Dome Wilderness, Dixon's Apple Orchard, to Sanchez Falls and beyond. Some rough, steep, off-trail sections. Norbert Sperlich (474-4354).

Saturday, March 25 • Santa Fe River cleanup – 9:00 am to noon. John Buchser (820-0201).

Saturday, March 25 • Wild River Scenic Area hike, near Taos/Questa – 1500' gain. 9 miles, Moderate/strenuous. See the upper Rio Grande with snowmelt. Call by 9:00 pm Thursday. Michael Di Rosa (667-0095 work, 663-0648 home).

Sunday, March 26 • St. John's to Dale Ball Trails – 6-7 miles. Easy/moderate. Now-connected trail. Dogs with leashes okay. Eliza Schmid (474-5846).

Saturday, April 1 • Hike – Easy. Gail Bryant (757-6654).

Saturday, April 1 • Jemez Mountains exploratory hike – 6 miles. Moderate. All off-trail, some boulder hopping. Page Press (946-0169).

Saturday, April 2 • White Rock Canyon hike – 1200' gain. 12 miles. Strenuous. Mostly off-trail; some steep, rough sections. Norbert Sperlich (474-4354).

Saturday, April 8 • Frijoles Canyon/Upper Crossing loop hike in Bandelier National Monument – 1000' gain. 13 miles. Strenuous. Tobin Oruch (820-2844).

Sunday, April 9 • Eldorado hike – Easy. Dogs okay. Leave at 9:00 am. Eliza Schmid (474-5846).

Saturday, April 15 • Birdwatch walk – Easy. With Audubon Society. Bring binoculars. Ron Duffy (982-2890).

Saturday, April 15 • Ladron Peak climb – 3000' gain (we hope). Strenuous. All off-trail; some scrambling. Steep slopes, sharp cacti, loose scree, big rocks. Blood, sweat, tears. Meet 7:30 am at trailhead. Camping at trailhead or stay in nearest motel recommended. Call no later than Thursday, April 13. Lavi Malhotra (995-8547).

Sunday, April 16 • High-country hike – Moderate. Marcia Skillman (474-7414).

Saturday to Monday, April 22-24 • Bandelier backpack – Basecamp in Capulin Canyon; moderate day hike from there on middle day. Bob McKee (471-0005).

Saturday, April 22 • Apache Springs/Upper Frijoles Canyon loop hike in Bandelier National Monument – 11 miles. 1200' gain. Strenuous. Call before Thursday, 9:00 pm. Michael Di Rosa (663-0648 home, 667-0095 work).

Saturday, April 22 • Santa Fe River cleanup – 9:00 am to noon. John Buchser (820-0201).

Sunday, April 23 • Red Dot Trail hike – Moderate. White Rock Canyon. Rough trail. Dogs okay. Leave at 9:00 am. Eliza Schmid (474-5846).

Friday-Sunday, April 28-30 • Chaco Canyon tour – Full-day tour Saturday with guest archaeologist Larry Baker, director of the Salmon Ruins Museum. Visit numerous sites including Una Vida, Hundo Pavi, Chetro Ketl, Pueblo Bonito, and Casa Rinconada. Meet at the visitor center at 9:30 am. Group campsite reserved for Friday and Saturday; vehicle parking limited; \$2/person/night, plus \$8 entrance fee and a donation to the Salmon Ruins. Dogs okay on leash in campground (only). Reservations required if staying overnight. Norma McCallan (471-0005).

Saturday, April 29 • Sierra Negra hike, near Abiquiu – 1000' gain. 9 miles. Moderate/strenuous. All off-trail; some rough, steep sections. Dan Rusthoi (690-8967).

Sunday, April 30 • High-country hike – Moderate. Leave at 8:00 am. Art Judd (982-3212).

Saturday, May 6 • Grass Mountain hike, near Pecos – 1500' gain. 12 miles. Strenuous. Call before Thursday, 9:00 pm. Michael Di Rosa (663-0648 home, 667-0095 work).

Sunday, May 7 • Tesuque Creek hike – Easy. Dogs okay. Leave at 9:00 am. Eliza Schmid (474-5846).

Friday-Sunday, May 12-14 • Valle Vidal carcamp – See page 9. Norma McCallan (471-0005).

Saturday, May 13 • Nambe Lake hike – 2100' gain. 7 miles. Strenuous. Steep. Lester Drapula (438-3306).

Sunday, May 14 • High-country hike – Moderate. Leave at 8:00 am. Art Judd (982-3212).

Saturday, May 20 • Santa Fe River cleanup – 9:00 am to noon. Lynn Morrow (473-5168).

Saturday, May 20 • Birdwatch walk – Easy. With Audubon Society. Bring binoculars. Ron Duffy (982-2890).

Saturday, May 20 • Ghost Hotel hike – Moderate. Gail Bryant (757-6654).

Saturday, May 20 • Tunnel Springs Trail hike in the Sandias – 3240' gain. 14 miles. Strenuous. Dan Rusthoi (690-8967).

Sunday, May 21 • Atalaya hike – Moderate. Dogs okay. Leave at 9:00 am. Eliza Schmid (474-5846).

Saturday, May 27 • High-country hike – Moderate/strenuous. Marcia Skillman (474-7414).

Sunday, May 28 • Los Griegos Ridge hike, in Jemez – 2000' gain. 9 miles. Strenuous. Norbert Sperlich (474-4354).

Unless otherwise noted, all outings leave from the Sierra Club office, 1472 St. Francis Drive, Santa Fe. Carpooling will be arranged. Each hiker should come prepared to pay \$0.10 a mile if one to two riders, \$0.05 if three or more, to the driver. Bring lunch, water, sturdy hiking boots or shoes, and clothing suitable for weather. Leader reserves the right to turn away anyone whose equipment or experience appears unsuitable. Leader has right to alter destination of hike or cancel trip due to weather, unfavorable conditions, or insufficient numbers of participants. Unaccompanied minors must have written permission from parents or guardians to participate; permission forms are available at the Sierra Club office. Dogs not permitted unless noted otherwise. Call leader for details of the individual hike. To participate, you need to sign a liability waiver. To read the waiver, see www.sierraclub.org/outings/chapter/forms or contact the Outings Department at 415/977-5528 for a printed version.

Please *always* call the outings leader prior to a hike for confirmation and details.



NORTHERN GROUP NEWS

From the Chair

As we head into spring after an extraordinarily dry winter, we are reminded again of the importance of living within our means. With the steady population growth of the world, I am personally unconvinced that people can survive the next century.

A recent moment of enlightenment for me was the recognition that the construction industry holds a major card – the card of hope. By building and remodeling homes and businesses in an energy-efficient way, here in the Southwest we can improve our energy efficiency by 50% within the next 20 years. Our ample solar can help provide energy to both our homes and to the electric grid.

We plan to have four general meetings this year to focus on different aspects of energy. Your political activism is needed to elect officials who understand and support the decisions that need to be made.

—John Buchser

Conservation Note

I want to thank Paul Paryski for his four years of service as the Group Conservation Chair. He has promised to continue to help with conservation matters, and I plan to use his wide knowledge of issues and players in the months ahead.

These are serious times for the environment, but thinking globally and acting locally is a positive way to start. There are numerous examples of cities and states taking the lead on issues that the current administration and Congress have shown no interest in, or worse, have come up with policies further degrading our planet. I have initiated several new subcommittees: clean energy, urban issues, and forests. I extend an invitation to members to get involved in exciting new endeavors by coming to our Conservation meetings, every fourth Tuesday at 7:00 pm, at Eleanor's house (820-6401), or by contacting one or more of our issue chairs for information.

—Norma McCallan

Quest for Action Plans 2006

By working within the framework of principles for sustainability – economic, ecological, social – a broad range of individual efforts can move toward a sustainable society.

Short-Range Tasks and Campaigns

Focus on specific, attainable actions, including:

1. Location Efficient Mortgage project, to advance the concept of affordable lifestyles
2. St. Michaels/Cerrillos/St. Francis redevelopment triangle
3. Neighborhood eco-footprint reduction contest; lesson plans for schoolteachers, neighborhoods
4. Water @ Train Park: Get surrounding neighbors to "donate" their acequia, cistern, gray, and potable water to the park
5. One Train Revolution: A passenger train car running back and forth from Railyard Depot to Rodeo Road
6. A living Santa Fe River
7. Local food production
8. Santa Fe as a water-, energy-, and location-efficient Mecca

9. General Obligation Bond Finance Campaign
10. Gentrification taming strategies
11. Energy back to grid
12. Green building
13. Xeriscape, native landscaping
14. Contact all Northern Group members (approximately 2,800) and establish
 - ♦ The best way to get them info(e.g. newsletter, *Sierran*, email, postal, phone, website)
 - ♦ One-on-one process to access their area of concern, inspiration, involvement
 - ♦ What help they need, to take action steps, feel supported

Medium- and Long-Range Tasks and Campaigns

1. Sierra Clubs 5 Flows regional/citywide project
2. Establish City Centers for better transit system
3. Mixed-use City Centers
4. Employer-assisted, perpetually affordable housing pool

For more information or to participate, contact Brian Skeele (310-1797, brianvida@nm.net).

—Ken Hughes and Brian Skeele

Events and Meetings

Saturdays, March 25, April 22, and May 20, 9:00 am to noon • Santa Fe River Cleanup and Vegetation Maintenance – Meet at Closson Street footbridge over the Santa Fe River. Park on Lower Alto Street, at the north end of Closson. Bring work boots, gloves, and drinking water. Our focus will be picking up ever-present trash and removal of smaller dead trees. We need a better vision of what we want our stretch of river to look like in a few years, and in 20 years – so everyone's participation is needed to help create this vision. Contact John Buchser (820-0201, jbuchser@comcast.net) or Lynn Morrow (473-5168).

Tuesday, May 9, 6:30 pm • Water Potluck – After a four-month break, the water potlucks will resume, featuring water-rights GIS coordinator Christina Noftsker, from the State Engineer's Office. Christina is integrating mapping technologies into the daily operations of permitting wells. The Buchsers' house (820-0201 or jbuchser@comcast.net).

Saturday, May 13 • Take a Llama to Lunch in the Valle Vidal #2 – Join the Northern Group and

Wild Earth Llama Adventures again for a fun day of easy hiking, exploring, and education in the Valle Vidal, one of our most endangered special places. The gentle, sure-footed llamas will carry a gourmet lunch, and experienced naturalist guide Stuart Wilde will share his knowledge of the flora and fauna, natural history, geology and folklore of the region. A delightful way to learn more about this "Yellowstone of New Mexico" and why coalbed methane-gas development would devastate its beauty and local economy. The group will camp at McCrystal campground Friday and Saturday nights, meet Stuart on Saturday morning, and explore more on our own on Sunday. Cost of \$35 includes lunch. Reserve by calling Norma McCallan (471-0005) or Wild Earth Llama Adventures (800/758-5262).

Wednesday, March 8; Wednesday, April 5; Tuesday, May 2; 7:00 pm • Group Executive Committee – At Eleanor's house (820-6401).

Tuesdays, March 28 and April 25, 7:00 pm • Group Conservation Committee – At Eleanor's house (820-6401).

Northern Group Directory

<http://riogrande.sierraclub.org/santafe/>

Executive Committee

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Committee Chairs

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Citizens File Lawsuit Against NM Environment Department

If the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) have their way, 100,000 cubic feet of radioactive and hazardous waste located at Sandia National Laboratories' Mixed Waste Landfill will be poised above Albuquerque's sole source aquifer as a part of DOE's "Accelerated Clean Up" program.

Accelerated Clean Up may sound like a good thing, but at Sandia it's not clean up at all, it's a cover up of radioactive and hazardous waste with a few feet of dirt, then implementing something called "long-term environmental stewardship" that both the NMED and the DOE believe will effectively protect citizens as long as the waste is hazardous – which in the case of the Mixed Waste Landfill is virtually forever.

This "stewardship" of waste leftover from the making of nuclear bombs during the Cold War years consists of fencing off sites, putting up No Trespassing signs, monitoring the site for signs of off-site contamination, and restricting public access by imposing land use restrictions. The idea is to limit human access to these waste sites in the hopes it will decrease people's risk of contracting cancer.

The same plan is being implemented at dozens of other federal facilities nationwide. The DOE hopes the program will save the federal government billions in cleanup costs. The real cost will be borne by communities who are left with the risks associated with significant amounts of contaminants in the air, water, and soil. The National Academy of Sciences warns against the program, citing failures within the first few years.

Citing high excavation costs, DOE opposes excavation of waste sites like the Mixed Waste Landfill at Sandia. Yet Sandia receives about \$2 billion a year for its primary mission of maintaining the existing nuclear weapons stockpile and developing new nuclear weapons. And new weapons means new waste.

Ron Curry, Secretary of the NMED, is on record as being a staunch environmentalist and an opponent of the Accelerated Clean Up program. Yet he approved Sandia's request for a permit to cover the Mixed Waste Landfill, sanctioning the very program he has publicly opposed.

Like many other names for well-meaning programs conceived by the DOE, the Mixed Waste

Landfill is technically not a landfill, but a dumping ground where workers haphazardly disposed of nuclear-weapons waste in unlined pits and trenches over a period of about 30 years. Contrary to statements made by Sandia representatives, an unknown volume of liquids were disposed of in the dump. Historic records also indicate that 73 cubic yards (approximately 200 55-gallon drums) of transuranic (TRU) waste was disposed of in the dump, along with another type of highly radioactive waste known as "greater than Class C" waste from experiments simulating nuclear meltdowns conducted through the years at Sandia.

Citizen Action New Mexico, an Albuquerque-based public interest group, has filed a lawsuit on the grounds that the decision made by Secretary Curry violates federal law by leaving TRU waste and "greater than Class C" waste in shallow burial. Both types of waste present a long-term risk to human health and the environment, and both wastes must be disposed of in a properly engineered, deep geologic repository, not in shallow pits.

Citizen Action's lawsuit contends the NMED is in violation of the federal law that requires deep geologic disposal of such wastes. In addition, in 1994 a decision made by the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit concluded that "the State of New Mexico can impose conditions addressing the presence and disposal of mixed waste containing radionuclides and hazardous materials at federal government-owned facilities." However, Secretary Curry has chosen otherwise.

A third issue is the continuous release of volatile organic chemicals at the dump. The state permit is based on out-of-date sampling data: no sampling for volatile and semi-volatile organic compounds had been conducted at the dump for more than a decade. It's highly unlikely that the three feet of dirt proposed for the cap on the dump will stop toxic pollutants from being released into the air.

Interestingly, both the Hearing Officer who presided over the public hearing for the Mixed Waste Landfill and Secretary Curry failed to address the TRU waste and "greater than Class C" in their reports and final decisions. Nor did the Secretary acknowledge the comments submitted by some thirty members of the public who testified at the hearing in support of excavation and cleanup of the

dump. Citizen Action has filed a second complaint citing the state's failure to provide responses to those who testified at the hearing. That lawsuit is being combined with the original case which is pending before the New Mexico Court of Appeals.

Has there been contamination to the groundwater under the dump? To date, not according to Sandia's studies. However, both Sandia and the NMED acknowledge that both mice and vegetation found at the dump are contaminated with tritium and radon. As an added measure of protection the state has ordered Sandia to place a layer of rocks (known as a bio-intrusion barrier) under the dirt cap to deter animals from burrowing into the waste and spreading contamination. However, several studies of bio-intrusion barriers show that their long-term effectiveness remains unproven.

The chain-link fences that Sandia has erected around the dump as another added measure of safety will do little to keep contaminated rodents and blowing contaminated "native vegetation" at the dump separated from a rapidly encroaching urbanized environment of houses, roads, businesses, schools and playgrounds. One last question: How long will DOE pay to keep watch over the dump at a cost of \$120,000 per year?

With the exception of excavation, there is no long-term plan that can guarantee to keep the public, our precious groundwater, and the estimated 100,000 people who will someday be living at the Mesa del Sol, less than two miles from the dump, protected from the threat of toxic waste that will functionally be hazardous forever. Where will families at the Mesa del Sol get their drinking water? From wells drilled into the same aquifer that lies beneath the Mixed Waste Landfill.

Citizen Action will be hosting discussion groups with interested members of the public to discuss additional issues of interest and concern at Sandia such as groundwater contamination, air pollution, development of nuclear weapons, sustainable energy, and many others. We invite you to join us!

For more information, contact Citizen Action New Mexico at 262-1862, sd Dayton@swcp.com, www.radfreenm.org, or write to P.O. Box 262, Sandia Park, NM 87047.

—Susan Dayton

Executive Committee Openings

The Central Group has two openings on its Executive Committee. We need a Secretary to take minutes at our monthly meetings, and we also need an "at-large" member to participate on conservation issues. Both are voting positions.

If interested, please contact Jennifer deGarmo (224-9393, degarmo@swcp.com).

Paseo del Sprawl: On the Verge of Reality?

You can call it Paseo del Sprawl, or Paseo del Sacrilege; either fits. But whatever you call it, with two recent court decisions, hopes for stopping the road through Petroglyph National Monument are dwindling...but not gone.

At the end of January, the Bernalillo County District Court ruled that the City had taken all possible steps to minimize harm to the Monument and the historical district, even though the City never seriously considered the alternatives of either using Unser Boulevard to meet its traffic objectives, or of a tunnel under the Monument. The court of appeals subsequently denied a motion for an emergency injunction on technical grounds, allowing construction to proceed.

The only purpose of the extension of Paseo del Norte is to permit more sprawl development on the

far-west side. The only beneficiaries will be developers on the far-west side. The road might provide some short-term relief for a few west-side commuters, but within a few years, the additional traffic resulting from the new development that the road will permit will leave things worse than ever for west-side commuters.

The Club, along with its partners, The National Trust for Historic Preservation and three individuals, will continue to fight the road in the courts as long as there is something to save. Although we feel we have strong – and correct – legal arguments, construction is proceeding, and there is a very narrow window before there is nothing left to save. In February, the mayor said, "It's over," referring to the Paseo litigation. We want Sierra Club members to know, however, it's not over yet.

—Richard Barish



A Desirable Streetcar: Is Reviving Streetcars the Way to a Real Transit System?

Once upon a time, Albuquerque had a transit system consisting of streetcar lines that served the whole town. The lines ran across Central from UNM to Old Town, from south 1st Street through downtown, from north on 12th Street to Sawmill, and south on Edith from Central. But in 1927, the system was torn out!

Now the City has announced its intention to bring streetcar transit back to Albuquerque with a line running along Central from Old Town to Nob Hill. If all goes as intended, we'll have modern streetcars running along Central, along with Rapid Ride buses, regular Route 66 buses and, of course, cars! According to Mayor

Chavez, "If everything were to go right, we could be riding it within three and-a-half years."

One of the core principles for good urban development is to provide and strengthen a variety of transportation choices that promote walking, bicycling, and public transit usage. We should be overjoyed at this announcement. So, why aren't we?

First, we believe that Albuquerque needs a "whole transit system" – one that enables people to get out of their cars and onto a bus, train, or streetcar and yet arrive at their destination in approximately the same time it would take them to reach that destination in a car. If we had such a real transit system, riders from any part of the region would have the choice of riding the bus, train, or streetcar; saving gas; and reducing air pollution and greenhouse-gas emissions. Envisioning just how a streetcar that runs from Old Town to Nob Hill will be an integral component of a whole transit system is proving elusive.

We realize Albuquerque will not be able to build a whole transit system all at once, so perhaps we

Albuquerque needs a "whole transit system" that enables people to get onto a bus, train, or streetcar and arrive in the same time it would take in a car.

should begin somewhere – like building this snippet of rail. But wouldn't it make more sense to wait until more planning has been done to make sure that this snippet becomes a logical element of our future whole transit system? To us, the mayor's plan just doesn't seem to be the best approach to transit system planning.

Secondly, as we understand it, this project is to be financed without federal funds, meaning the entire estimated cost of \$120 million will be financed by the City, unless the mayor is successful in convincing the governor and the legislature to also contribute. The fact that the City will not obtain a grant from the Federal Transportation Administration to help with the project cost doesn't make us feel better.

So, before moving forward with this streetcar plan, we suggest that the City wait until the new Mid-Region Regional Transit District Board has developed service and financial plans for a real regional transit system. Also, we recommend that the City complete and publish the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) that was being prepared as part of the Rapid Transit Project. The DEIS document will provide valuable and essential information that should be considered before we rush to break ground on this project.

The Sierra Club wants a real transit system for Albuquerque and the whole region that will really work! Let's take the time to plan it right, and get it right!

(Check out "Imagine a City with 30 Percent Fewer Cars" on page 48 in the January/February issue of the *Sierran*. It could work for us, too!)

— Susan Gorman and Blair Brown

Central Group Directory

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David Ther, Outings grelbik@worldnet.att.net	260-1553

Meetings

All meetings begin at 7:00 pm at the First Unitarian Church on the corner of Carlisle and Comanche.

Thursday, March 16 • Rail Runner Preview

Tony Sylvester, the Special Project Planner from the Mid-Region Council of Governments, discusses the upcoming Rail Runner service, including station locations, equipment being used, and just why a commuter rail is an important part of Albuquerque's future. He'll also talk about connections to and from final destinations, schedules, and fare policy.

Thursday, April 20 • Status of the Endangered Species Act

Lisa Hummon, the New Mexico Outreach Representative from Defenders of Wildlife, will speak on the recent efforts in Congress to dismantle the Endangered Species Act.

First Thursdays, 6:30 pm • Executive Committee

We meet at various locations, so please contact one of us for the meeting location. We also encourage you to contact us if you have issues you would like to discuss. Meetings are free and open to all members.

Outings

Sunday, March 19 • Ojito Wilderness

Moderate loop hike through New Mexico's newest wilderness area. Much of this hike will be off-trail but cross-country travel is not difficult. 400' elevation gain. Approximately 5 miles. David Ther (260-1553).

Sunday April 9 • Magdalena Crest Trail

Moderately strenuous hike from South Baldy to North Baldy. Up to 1800' elevation gain. Approximately 10 miles. Extensive views along much of the route. David Ther (260-1553).

Saturdays, April 1, 15, and 29 • Desert Exploratory Hikes

Come and visit some of New Mexico's most incredible and beautiful landscapes hidden in its desert places. Strangely eroded and colorful rocks, badlands, precipitous cliffs, outstanding vistas, mysterious narrow and winding canyons, archaeological sites, petrified forests and other fossils, historic inscriptions, stone tools, pottery, pictographs and petroglyphs are some of the discoveries we

have made on the desert exploratory hikes in the past. These hikes are not physically difficult, but will require a sense of adventure on the part of participants. There will rarely be a trail, and the route will be very rocky and uneven at times. Sometimes we scramble (easy climbing) over rock surfaces and walk narrow ledges, though this is always optional. We usually gain less than 1000' elevation. Typical distance traveled is 4 to 8 miles.

Contact the outings leader by the previous Wednesday for information on hike details and meeting time. You may also request to be included on an email list for advance information, so you won't have to call. Meeting time will vary from 8:00 am to 9:30 am. Meeting place will always be Smith's, at Carlisle and Menaul, nearest to Carlisle. Sierra Club and Outdoor Adventures For Singles joint outings. For more information, contact Tom Petencin (271-9928, tompeten@juno.com).



Southern Group Directory

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Executive Committee

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The Mexican Wolf “Recovery” Program

Wolf managers are facing a declining wolf population. In 2003, there were 50 Mexican wolves in the wild. In 2004, the number dropped to 44. At the end of 2005, there were 35-49 wolves roaming across Arizona and New Mexico. Biologists had projected that there would be 15 breeding pairs in the wild by now, but as of the second week of January 2006, the total is a dismal five. Where has the wolf recovery program gone wrong?

In the first five years of the program, 41% of the wolves have had to be removed from the wild, and another 21% have perished. About 4% have just disappeared.

The known causes of death are most often human-related: some wolves have been hit by cars, but most have been shot – some legally by the government and some illegally. In addition, in New Mexico (unlike Arizona), leg-hold traps are still legal for furbearers. The alpha female of the Luna pack was caught in a trap set for a coyote. She was seen dragging the trap and was captured for medical treatment. Most of her front foot had to be amputated, but she has been returned to her pack and is doing the best she can on three legs. Other causes of death have been parvovirus, snakebite, and a mountain lion attack.

Wolves are removed from the wild when they fail to follow the rules their human managers set for them. Most commonly, a wolf has strayed beyond arbitrary boundaries. This is probably the single most important reason the program is failing, and it is also the easiest to fix. As it stands now, any wolves that stray, must be recaptured – usually in a leg-hold trap,

which along with the stress, can be risky to the animal – and relocated or placed back into captivity. As far back as 2001, biologists recommended relaxing the boundary rules.

Wolves have also been removed from the wild for preying on livestock. Elk comprise about 75% of the diet of Mexican wolves. Other mammals including deer comprise 21%. Only 4% has been livestock.

Human behavior exacerbates the problem with livestock. When a domestic animal dies of natural causes and its carcass is left in wolf territory, wolves will scavenge it. Studies have shown that wolves that scavenge cattle are much more likely to go on to kill other cattle than those who have never tasted that meat. Yet, there are no requirements for public land ranchers to monitor their range for cattle carcasses, much less to remove them. This is a recipe for wolf recovery failure.

At a January 2006 meeting in Silver City to discuss the wolf-recovery program, wolf supporters outnumbered their detractors by about 8 to 1. There is no shortage of human advocates for wolves, but as of this writing, there are no plans to release more wolves into the wild or to change the rules that sabotage their success.

For an update on wolf recovery, visit the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Wolf Recovery website (www.fws.gov/ifw2es/mexicanwolf/index.shtml). For more information on trapping in New Mexico, contact Mary Katherine Ray (notraps@kitcarson.net), and see the Chapter’s trapping website (<http://riogrande.sierraclub.org/trapping/Index.htm>).

—Mary Katherine Ray

Court Stops Robledos Blasting

In early February 2006, the Friends of the Robledos received notice from the judge for the Federal Appeals Board in Virginia that the “Friends of the Robledos Request for Reconsideration of the Denial of Stay” was granted. The Robledo Mountains are just northwest of Las Cruces. The stay stops the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) from proceeding with its decision to blast away one of the Robledo Mountains to provide decorative rock. The stay was granted because BLM had neither applied for nor received a stormwater permit required by the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). The stay is to be in effect until BLM gets that resolved. While this is cited as “a very unusual decision,” it is only one part of this whole issue.

In an exciting new development regarding the Robledos, a new group is forming to protect the pre-dinosaur trackways which are adjacent to the area that BLM wants to blast. In January 2006, the Trackways Committee sponsored a slide/lecture by Jerry Paul MacDonald, the discoverer, main excavator, and writer for the Trackways. Fifty enthusiastic supporters, including community leaders and others from many disciplines, gathered for this educational event. The committee has also met several times to address preliminary organization. Jerry’s book *Earth’s First Steps* is available at Mesilla Book Center and the Shalam Colony Museum in Mesilla, and at Hastings in Las Cruces.

Senator Bingaman co-sponsored the original congressional legislation introduced years ago to protect the Trackways. Please thank him for the support he continues to provide for this renewed advocacy for protection (see contact information page 3).

For more information, contact Jo-an Smith in Las Cruces (see directory above).

—Jo-an Smith

Meetings

All Sierra Club members are encouraged to attend the Southern Group Executive Committee meetings held at 6:00 pm on the second Tuesday of the month at the Southwest Environmental Center, 275 N. Downtown Mall, Las Cruces. Your comments, suggestions, and presence are greatly appreciated. Learn about the activities of your local Sierra Club group. You can make a difference! Call Margot Wilson for details (744-5860).

Wednesday, March 15, 7:00 pm • Otero Mesa Wilderness Proposal

Nathan Newcomer will give an update on the very day when Judge Black is scheduled to render a judgment regarding Otero Mesa and the Nutt Grasslands of Doña Ana County. Southwest Environmental Center.

Wednesday, April 19, 6:30 pm • Watershed Planning: The Taylor Creek Project

Stephanie Bason, resource management specialist at Sierra County Soil and Water Conservation District, will discuss watershed management on a landscape scale and across a variety of boundaries, for the benefit of landowners and users. St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, 407 Cedar Street, TorC.

Wednesday, April 26, 7:00 pm • Bats of the Southwest and the Las Cruces Area

Marikay Ramsey, Forest Service biologist, has served as chair of the New Mexico Bat Working Group and is a member of the Western Bat Working Group and the American Society of Mammalogists. Southwest Environmental Center.

Outings

Saturday-Sunday, March 25-26 • Turkey Creek carcass, in the Gila National Forest near the wilderness boundary – Meet at the end of F.R. 155 on Friday night or Saturday before 9:00 am. Includes a trip to Turkey Creek Hot Springs, a beautiful riparian area, a trout stream, and interesting geology. Shorter hike on Sunday morning. Rick Anderson (612/518-5632).

Saturday, April 1 • San Mateo Mountains hike – A 5-mile, easy-to-moderate walk from Tool Box Spring to the head of West Red Canyon for views of East Red Canyon, and back around via Indian Creek. Bring lunch, and meet in the parking lot at the Black Range District Forest office in TorC at 8:00 am. Mary Katherine Ray and Margot Wilson (744-5860).

Saturday-Sunday, April 8-9 • Animas Creek backpack, from the North Percha – 10 miles. Moderate. Explore a beautiful riparian area, a famous trout stream, Massacre Canyon graves and monument. Meet at the General Store in Hillsboro at 8:00 am. Rick Anderson (612/518-5632).

Sunday, April 23 • Dona Ana Mountains petroglyph hike – Identify some of the dominant desert flora. Come with a camera and lunch. Meet at the Rincon exit on I-25 (Exit 35). Margot Wilson and Dan Lorimer (744-5860).

Sunday, May 7 • Robinson Cave day hike, in the Black Range – Meet at 8:00 am for breakfast at the General Store in Hillsboro, and then take an easy hike to Robinson Cave near Percha Creek. Bring lunch and your camera. Margot Wilson (744-5860).



Urban Land Institute Visits El Paso

El Paso's mostly enlightened City Council and City Manager recently commissioned Washington DC's Urban Land Institute to do a study on the El Paso metropolitan area to see what is needed to bring the city into the 21st century in the area of development, redevelopment, and long range planning. El Paso has knowledgeable city planners who have long been held subservient to the "bidness" community and land developers. Bringing in the ULI was an effort to somehow change the status quo by educating those who are sure that smart growth means no growth.

For three days the ULI team surveyed the situation from older decaying areas close to downtown to the new "cookie-cutter" housing on the far-east side. Then there were meetings with the building community. At one of those, Tropicana Homes' owner Bobby Bowling insisted that El Paso was different from other cities in that building on the

fringes is profitable here. The visitors tactfully pointed out that the city is really subsidizing building at the edges heavily.

At the Friday afternoon wrap the ULI presented its recommendations in a powerpoint which will be followed with a full written report. The panel observed that we are still following 1950's models in El Paso, partly because of the city's subdivision codes. They urged the city to get ahead of development and become proactive instead of reactive, to take an overview of the area and determine how far the city limits should eventually reach, and to use progressive tools to deal with historic areas and abandoned buildings. City regulations need to be changed now. Action needs to be taken before the present window of opportunity closes, probably in the next few months, as thousands of new troops pour into Fort Bliss.

—Laurence Gibson

No Decision Made on ASARCO Permit

February 8, 2006, was to have been the day of decision that El Pasoans had worked toward for years. Those countless strategy sessions, the fundraising efforts to pay for the lawyers, the march to city hall to force the city to hire a legal team, they all led to victory at last July's two-week trial, held in El Paso for the first time by the State Office of Administrative Hearings.

This time, over a hundred concerned El Pasoans made the 600 mile trip to Austin, Texas to hear the three commissioners of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality make a final ruling on

ASARCO's permit renewal. Instead, these political appointees, some with industry connections, sent the people home empty-handed, deciding to begin their investigation all over again.

What now? The company, though bankrupt and foreign-owned, seems to have plenty of money for lawyers. Where will the city, which has already spent well over a half-million dollars, find the money to continue the litigation? Where will the Sierra Club and its supporters find the resources to refinance a battle once won?

Outings

Saturday-Sunday, March 4-5 • Otero Mesa rock art carcamp, Cornudas Mountains east of El Paso – 200' gain. Up to 2 miles. Easy. An hour's ride on dirt road from Border Patrol checkpoint on Carlsbad Highway to Otero Mesa by Alamo Mountain. See ruins of old Butterfield Stage station, then camp. View rock art in grand arroyo leading down the mountain on Sunday. Laurence Gibson (917/594-7342, lgibson@utep.edu – El Paso).

Saturday-Sunday, March 11-12 • Tejas Trail backpack in Guadalupe Mountains National Park – 2100' gain. 8 miles. Moderate/strenuous. Carcamp at Dog Canyon; hike scenic loop up the Bush Mountain Trail to the Tejas campsite. Bring at least a gallon of water; be prepared for wind. Small user fees both nights. Harry Newman (588-7192, swtraveller@aol.com – El Paso).

Sunday, March 19 • Upper Sunset/Lower Sunset loop day hike in Franklin Mountains State Park – 1000' gain. 9 miles. Moderate. The 3-mile upper trail leads to a bluff with good views over the Franklins and El Paso's Upper Valley. The 6-mile lower trail descends sharply from end of access road and circles back through barren canyons and flat desert. Bring sturdy hiking boots, sun protection, plenty of

water, lunch, and snacks. Terry Sunday (915/584-9301, sundayt@zianet.com – El Paso).

Saturday-Sunday, March 25-26 • Chiricahua carcamp, Coronado National Forest, Arizona – Two hours west of Sunland Park on Columbus Hwy. Easy. World-class bird sanctuary where the tropical Mexican habitat pushes across from Mexico. We might encounter the elegant trogon or a troop of coatimundi. Laurence Gibson (917/594-7342, lgibson@utep.edu – El Paso).

Friday-Monday, May 26-29 • Gila Wilderness backpack – 2000' gain. 29 miles. Strenuous. We plan to hike into Iron Creek or Cooper Canyon on Friday afternoon. On Saturday, we will continue via Turkeyfeather Pass and Cub Mesa to White Creek Flat, where we will enjoy the swimming hole. On Sunday and Monday, we will retrace our steps back to Willow Creek and drive home. This is a long-distance hike for experienced and fit backpackers. We will need to cover many miles each day. However, this is a unique opportunity for experienced backpackers to see the heart of the Gila Wilderness and visit fabled White Creek Flat. Rollin Wickenden (855-6697, rwickgila@aol.com).

El Paso Group Directory

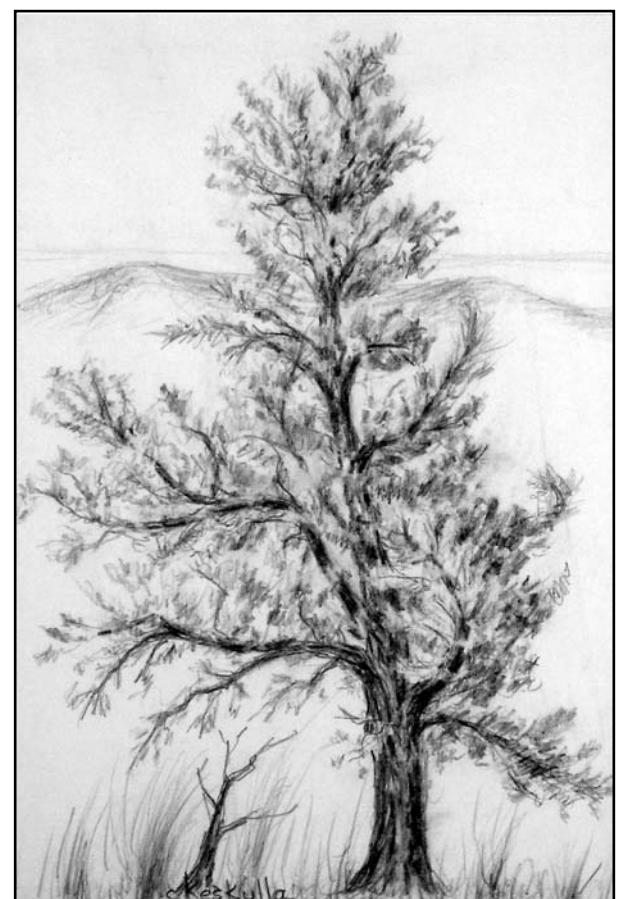
<http://texas.sierraclub.org/elpaso>

Executive Committee

Laurence Gibson, Chair	lgibson@utep.edu	915/594-7342
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Ann Falknor, Secretary	afalknor@sbcglobal.net	915/833-9162
Kathy Sunday, Treasurer	sundayt@zianet.com	915/584-9301
Bill Addington	aquavida@valornet.com	915/369-2541
Bob Geyer		915/834-8242
Gilbert Pinon	bifflehead@yahoo.com	915/307-3398
Rick Provencio	rpiidye4@yahoo.com	281/727-9945
Liz Walsh	ewalsh@utep.edu	915/584-1471

Committee Chairs

Bill Addington, Chapter Delegate	aquavida@valornet.com	915/369-2541
Laurence Gibson, Editor, Outings	lgibson@utep.edu	915/594-7342
Ted Mertig, Inner City Outings, Membership	tmertig@earthlink.net	915/852-3011
Terry Sunday, Webmaster	sundayt@zianet.com	915/584-9301
Liz Walsh, Chapter Delegate (Alt.)	ewalsh@utep.edu	915/584-1471
Rollin Wickenden, Outings	rwickgila@aol.com	915/855-6697



(artwork by Carolyn Keskulla)

Taos Branch Calls for Volunteers with “Monumental” Program

The Taos Branch is now in its sixth month and going strong. To kick off 2006, we screened the film *Monumental* in January at the Bareiss Gallery just north of town. Gallery owner Philip Bareiss graciously extended the use of his space along with state-of-the-art digital equipment for the event. More than 30 people attended, and you could feel the energy build.

Monumental tells the story of David Brower and the Sierra Club. As executive director, he helped

broaden the Club’s focus from mountaineering to monumental activism. In the film, Brower’s fight to save the Grand Canyon from flooding (like that caused by the Glen Canyon Dam) is simply awe-inspiring. Brower becomes the classic hero: independent, obstinate, dedicated almost to a fault, and able to overcome obstacles single-handedly (or so it seems). The thing is, winning political battles is not something one does alone. Brower was successful because he knew how to mobilize the public. He helped raise a groundswell of opinion that could not be stopped. “Would you flood the Sistine Chapel?” Brilliant media strategy! But he didn’t do it alone!

Here in Taos we’ve got a lot of battles to fight. We are close to the threatened Valle Vidal, upwind from open-air burning of radioactive waste at Los Alamos; we drive too much, we are punching wells into the already overtaxed aquifer, and we’ve got contamination from the Molycorp Mine in the Red River to our north, to name just a few.

Our small steering committee has some great ideas: why not call for the Taos City Council to sign on to the Kyoto Protocols to slow global warming? Why not lobby for our public transport to convert to biodiesel or other more ecologically sound fuel? Eric Patterson, our treasurer, is already investigating how the National Sierra Club Water Sentinels program can be used to test water in the Rio Hondo and the acequias to ensure that the water we drink and raise crops with is safe. We are continuing to work on



Taos marquee (photo by Eric Patterson)

educational programs with Rivers & Birds, a local environmental group that works with youth. But we need your help to succeed; we can’t do it alone!

Over the next few months we will alternate public programs (like film screenings and speakers) with planning/activist meetings. We need volunteers to come forward now. Please contact one of us with your ideas. Are you interested in working on any of the projects outlined above? Will you help coordinate a Conservation Issues Committee? What about Earth Day coming up in April? We are also looking for prospective outings leaders. We hope to hear from you soon.

For more information, contact Susan Ressler (artemis@newmex.com).

—Susan Ressler

Meetings

Tuesday, March 28, 7:00 pm

Film: *Oil on Ice* (tentative).

Tuesday, April 25, 7:00 pm

Conservation issues/planning.

Steering Committee

Susan Ressler, Chair • artemis@newmex.com

Heather Howitt, Secretary • heatherhowitt@hotmail.com

Eric Patterson, Treasurer • eepatt@gmail.com

Tom and Gwen Oaks, Valle Vidal • gtoaks@ispwest.com

Anna Walters, Publicity • anna@kitcarson.net

FOUR CORNERS BRANCH NEWS

Residents Share Goals for Northwest New Mexico

More than 30 interested individuals from various walks of life came together in January 2006 to chart a course for the new Four Corners Branch of the Sierra Club. (A Sierra Club “branch” is a subset of a “group” – in this case the Northern New Mexico Group – which is a subset of a “chapter.”) We found that we have many common goals and objectives for the San Juan Basin in the months ahead – including but not limited to addressing oil and gas impacts, and mercury mining.

Especially because we represent different social, economic, and political backgrounds, it has been important to affirm that we have common interests and goals. We recognize that the strength of any organization grows from the ability of the members to work together for a common goal, agree where we can, and leave areas of conflict for another day.

We will have meetings once a month and sponsor outings in the county so members can become better acquainted with the problems of our San Juan Basin. We will also actively promote the environmental concerns of other groups by publicizing their meetings and events on our website (www.riogrande.sierraclub.org/santafe/). Nick Cullander, a local attorney who is concerned about the environment and quality of life in San Juan County, has agreed to head up our motley group until we are ready for more organizational structure.

As one member, I have the concerns about the damage that the oil and gas industry causes on the federal, state, and private lands. My family has experienced the loss of our ranch, which sits in the fairway of the largest natural-gas field in North America. As ranchers, we have accepted responsibility for stewarding the lands we manage. Our ranch has been in our family for six generations, so it is evident that

we took our responsibility for stewardship seriously. Most of the ranch was federal land, the oil and gas industry was able to purchase the subsurface rights, and the Bureau of Land Management and state enforcement have not been anywhere near adequate. Our ranch has been destroyed by oil and gas drilling. Our ranch and federal lands were deemed a “sacrifice area” for the greater good.

Without a commitment to careful enforcement, the multiple-use concept will not work on public land. In the future, we will have to work on identifying areas that are to be commercial oil and gas fields, and those that are too precious to disturb for any commercial mining.

The Four Corners Branch schedules a public meeting, with speakers, on the fourth Thursday of each month, alternating between the San Juan College in Farmington and the Step Back Inn in Aztec. To subscribe to our email discussion group, send an email to sjcsierraclub-subscribe@yahoo.com.

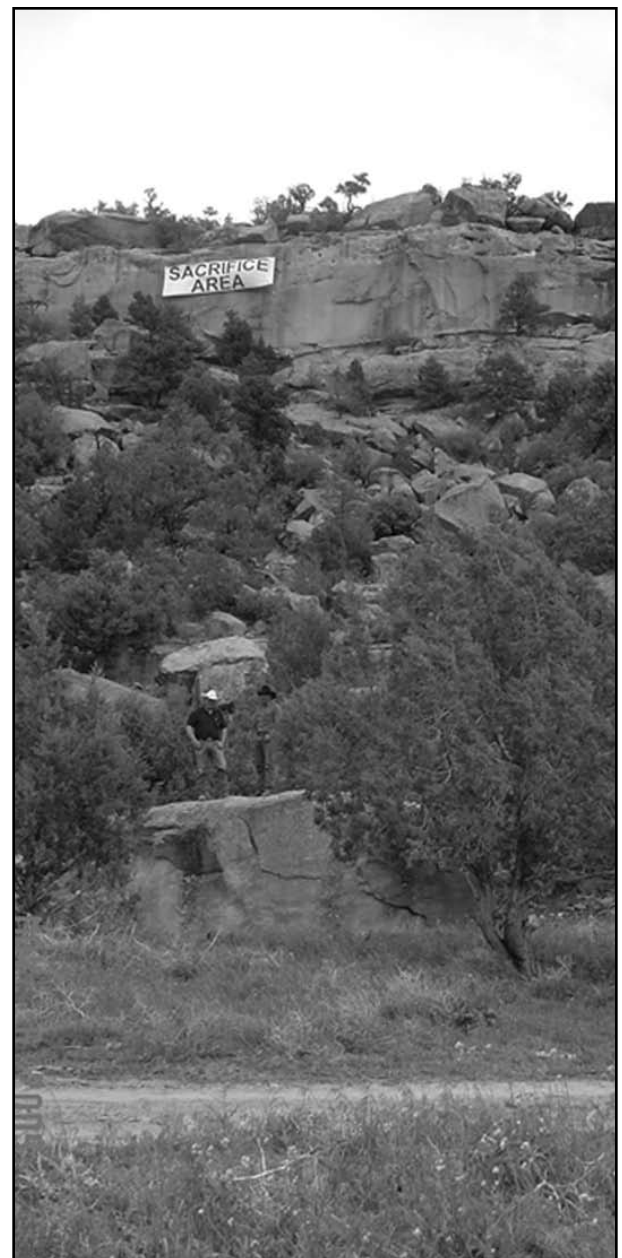
For more information, contact Art Jaquez (326-5229, artjaquez@yahoo.com), or the new Chair Nick Cullander (334-0935, ncullander@hotmail.com).

—Tweeti Blancett

Right: Linn Blancett and neighbor Chris Velasquez beneath a banner they hung in protest at the Blancett’s ranch headquarters. (photo by Tweeti Blancett)

Outings

Saturday, April 29 • Chaco Canyon tour – With Larry Baker from the Salmon Ruins. And on Sunday morning, April 30, at the Chaco Group Campsite there will be a mini training for prospective outing chairs from the Farmington area. For more information, see outings on page 8.



The Endangered Species Act, Teetering on the Edge

John Muir, the great naturalist, writer, conservationist, and founder of the Sierra Club, once said, "When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world." Muir realized the impact human disturbance could have on an ecosystem, and had the foresight to help protect some of our most important and treasured public lands. In his time he saw the beginning of the decline of some of our nation's most magnificent creatures, including the gray wolf and bald eagle. Decades later, pressure from habitat destruction, over-hunting, and pesticide use would drive these species to the brink of extinction. It would take this looming crisis and a growing social environmental ethic for Congress to come to Muir's realization that we need to protect our web of life, and in 1973 to pass the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

For more than 30 years, the Endangered Species Act has been successful at protecting and recovering species like the green sea turtle, Karner blue butterfly, gray wolf, peregrine falcon, countless plants, and our nation's symbol of freedom, the bald eagle. Of the more than 1,800 species listed under the Act, only nine have been declared extinct. A primary function of the Act is to maintain healthy ecosystems, which benefit humans by providing clean air and water, soil protection, recreation opportunities, and medicinal

plants. The Act also helps to protect the conservation legacy we leave to future generations.

But now the Act itself is endangered. In September 2005, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a dangerous bill that could unravel the past three decades of success. The legislation, HR3824, was sponsored by Richard Pombo (R-CA), who pushed the bill through the House in less than two weeks, leaving little time for discussion or public input. Pombo's bill, deceptively titled "The Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Act," would undercut our ability to conserve habitat for species recovery. It would set a dangerous precedent by requiring taxpayers to pay developers not to harm endangered species. It would exempt all pesticide decisions from compliance with the ESA, and deter the use of best available science for listing and management decisions. And the list goes on. Of New Mexico's three representatives, Tom Udall was the only one to vote against Pombo's destructive legislation. Now we must turn to the Senate to stop it from becoming law.

If John Muir were alive today, he would call on each and every one of us to do what we can to stop it. It's up to us now. Please call and write our senators and demand that they stand up for our wildlife legacy. Ask them to do it for us, for New Mexico, and for our future.

For more information, contact Lisa Hummon, New Mexico Outreach Representative, Defenders of Wildlife, in Albuquerque (248-0118 ext. 5; LHummon@defenders.org).

—Lisa Hummon



(photo by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

To Contribute to the Rio Grande Sierran

The *Rio Grande Sierran* is published six times a year – early January, March, May, July, September, and November – 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.) Product 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 masthead 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. Send checks to Thomas Robey, 145 W Zia Road, Santa Fe, NM 87505 Please allow eight weeks for processing.

Extra copies are often available. Please contact the editor (see masthead page 2) or the Group Chair in your area (see Group pages).

Rio Grande Chapter Quarterly Meetings

The Rio Grande Chapter will next meet on 11-12 March 2006 at the Sevilleta Wildlife Refuge south of Socorro. The Conservation Committee will meet on Saturday; the Executive Committee will meet on Sunday morning. All members are invited. To attend the Conservation meeting, contact Conservation Chair Ken Hughes; for Chapter Ex Com, contact Susan Martin or Norma McCallan. To arrange carpools, please contact Group chairs (see masthead page 2). The Chapter's summer meeting is scheduled for 10-11 June 2006 in Santa Fe.

John Muir in Global Perspective

The John Muir Center at the University of Pacific in Stockton, CA will be sponsoring a John Muir Conference (a once-in-five-years event) from 31 March to 1 April 2006, entitled "John Muir in Global Perspective."

The preliminary program and registration form are available from the university's website (www.pacific.edu/college/muir).

Join us!

Sign up online
www.sierraclub.org/membership
or return this form:

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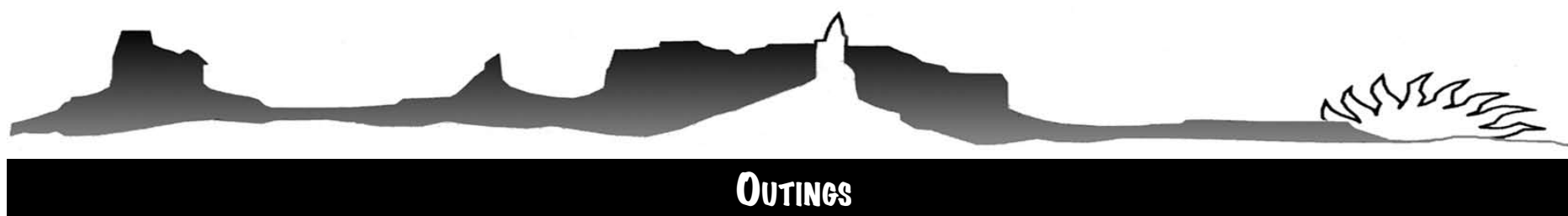
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	INDIVIDUAL	JOINT
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REGULAR	<input type="checkbox"/> \$39	<input type="checkbox"/> \$47
SUPPORTING	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100
CONTRIBUTING	<input type="checkbox"/> \$150	<input type="checkbox"/> \$175
LIFE	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1,250
SENIOR	<input type="checkbox"/> \$24	<input type="checkbox"/> \$32
STUDENT	<input type="checkbox"/> \$24	<input type="checkbox"/> \$32
LIMITED INCOME	<input type="checkbox"/> \$24	<input type="checkbox"/> \$39

Contributions, gifts, and dues to the Sierra Club are not tax-deductible; they support our effective, citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts. Your dues include \$7.50 for a subscription to *Sierra* magazine and \$1 for your Chapter newsletter.



Selected Sierra Club Outings for March, April, and May 2006

Saturday-Sunday, March 4-5 • Otero Mesa rock art carcamp, Cornudas Mountains east of El Paso – 200' gain. Up to 2 miles. Easy. An hour's ride on dirt road from Border Patrol checkpoint on Carlsbad Highway to Otero Mesa by Alamo Mountain. See ruins of old Butterfield Stage station, then camp. View rock art in grand arroyo leading down the mountain on Sunday. Laurence Gibson (917/594-7342, lgibson@utep.edu – El Paso).

Saturday-Sunday, March 11-12 • Tejas Trail backpack in Guadalupe Mountains National Park – 2100' gain. 8 miles. Moderate/strenuous. Carcamp at Dog Canyon; hike scenic loop up the Bush Mountain Trail to the Tejas campsite. Bring at least a gallon of water; be prepared for wind. Small user fees both nights. Harry Newman (588-7192, swtraveller@aol.com – El Paso).

Sunday, March 19 • Upper Sunset/Lower Sunset loop day hike in Franklin Mountains State Park – 1000' gain. 9 miles. Moderate. The 3-mile upper trail leads to a bluff with good views over the Franklins and El Paso's Upper Valley. The 6-mile lower trail descends sharply from end of access road and circles back through barren canyons and flat desert. Bring sturdy hiking boots, sun protection, plenty of water, lunch, and snacks. Terry Sunday (915/584-9301, sundayt@zianet.com – El Paso).

Saturday-Sunday, March 25-26 • Chiricahua carcamp, Coronado National Forest, Arizona – Two hours west of Sunland Park on Columbus Hwy. Easy. World-class bird sanctuary where the tropical Mexican habitat pushes across from Mexico. We might encounter the elegant trogon or a troop of coatimundi. Laurence Gibson (917/594-7342, lgibson@utep.edu – El Paso).

Saturday-Sunday, March 25-26 • Turkey Creek carcamp in Gila National Forest near the wilderness boundary – Meet at the end of F.R. 155 before 9:00 am. Visit Turkey Spring Hot Springs, a beautiful riparian area, a trout stream, interesting geology. A short hike Sunday morning. Rick Anderson (612/518-5632 – Southern Group).

Saturday, April 1 • Jemez Mountains exploratory hike – 6 miles. Moderate. All off-trail, some boulder hopping. Page Press (946-0169 – Northern Group).

Saturday, April 1 • San Mateo Mountains hike, Tool Box Spring to the head of West Red Canyon – 5 miles. Easy/moderate. Spectacular views of East Red Canyon, back via Indian Creek. Hike in mixed ponderosa and Douglas-fir forest; some narrow leaf cottonwoods in the canyon bottoms. Bring lunch; meet in parking lot at Black Range District Forest office in TorC at 8:00 am. Mary Katherine Ray and Margot Wilson (744-5860 – Southern Group).

Saturday, April 8 • Frijoles Canyon/Upper Crossing loop hike in Bandelier National Monument – 1000' gain. 13 miles. Strenuous. Tobin Oruch (820-2844 – Northern Group).

Saturday-Sunday, April 8-9 • Animas Creek backpack, from the North Percha – 10 miles. Moderate. Beautiful riparian area, famous trout stream, Massacre Canyon graves and monument. Meet at the General Store in Hillsboro at 8:00 am. Rick Anderson (612/518-5632 – Southern Group).

Thursday, April 20 • Valles Caldera spring highway cleanup – Meet at Ponderosa Campground (State Road 4 and West Jemez/501) at 4:30 pm, and carpool to our stretch of road at the Valles Caldera. Bring work gloves (we have a large supply of bags). If we're lucky, we'll watch elk. After a two-hour cleanup, dinner in Los Alamos. David Gemeinhart (662-6267 – Pajarito Group).

Saturday, April 22 • Apache Springs/Upper Frijoles Canyon loop hike in Bandelier National Monument – 11 miles. 1200' gain. Strenuous. Call before Thursday, 9:00 pm. Michael Di Rosa (663-0648 home, 667-0095 work – Northern Group).

Sunday, April 23 • Red Dot Trail hike – Moderate. Rough trail. Dogs okay. Leave at 9:00 am. Eliza Schmid (474-5846 – Northern Group).

Sunday, April 23 • Doña Ana Mountain hike to petroglyphs – Identify dominant desert flora. Bring camera, lunch. Meet at the Rincon exit on I-25 (Exit 35). Margot Wilson and Dan Lorimer (744-5860 – Southern Group).

Saturday to Monday, April 22-24 • Bandelier backpack – Basecamp in Capulin Canyon; moderate day hike from there on middle day. Bob McKee (471-0005 – Northern Group).

Friday-Sunday, April 28-30 • Chaco Canyon tour – Full-day tour Saturday with guest archaeologist Larry Baker, director of the Salmon Ruins Museum. Visit numerous sites including Una Vida, Hungo Pavi, Chetro Ketl, Pueblo Bonito, and Casa Rinconada. Meet at the visitor center at 9:30 am. Group campsite reserved for Friday and Saturday; vehicle parking limited; \$2/person/night, plus \$8 entrance fee and a donation to the Salmon Ruins. Dogs okay on leash in campground (only). Sunday-morning outing leader training at the campsite for prospective Farmington (or other) outings leaders. Reservations required if staying overnight. Norma McCallan (471-0005 – Northern Group).

Saturday, April 29 • Cerro Grande hike – 1300' gain. 2 miles. Walk past elk enclosures, which help biologists determine the impact of elk. Walk through aspen, spruce, and Douglas-fir to 10,199' peak in Bandelier National Monument. Steep. Bring sunscreen, appropriate clothing, lunch, water. For time and meeting place, call David Gemeinhart (662-6267 – Pajarito Group).

Saturday, April 29 • Sierra Negra hike, near Abiquiu – 1000' gain. 9 miles. Moderate/strenuous. All off-trail; some rough, steep sections. Dan Rusthoy (690-8967 – Northern Group).

Saturday, May 6 • Grass Mountain hike, near Pecos – 1500' gain. 12 miles. Strenuous. Call before Thursday, 9:00 pm. Michael Di Rosa (663-0648 home, 667-0095 work – Northern Group).

Sunday, May 7 • Robinson Cave hike, near the Percha – Easy hike along interesting drainage. Meet at 8:00 am for breakfast at the General Store in Hillsboro. Bring lunch, camera. Margot Wilson (744-5860 – Southern Group).

Friday-Sunday, May 12-14 • Valle Vidal carcamp – Take a llama to lunch on Saturday, with eco-guide Stuart Wilde, whose gentle llamas carry a gourmet lunch while he shares his knowledge of the flora and fauna, history, geology, and folklore of this threatened and very special place. Further exploring on our own on Sunday before driving back. Cost: \$35. Reservations Norma McCallan (471-0005 – Northern Group).

Saturday, May 13 • Nambe Lake hike – 7 miles, 2100' gain. Strenuous. Lester Drapela (438-3306 – Northern Group).

Saturday, May 20 • Tunnel Springs Trail hike in the Sandias – 3240' gain. 14 miles. Strenuous. Great views, gorgeous spring flowers (we hope). Dan Rusthoy (690-8967 – Northern Group).

Saturday-Monday, May 27-29 • Valle Vidal issues outing – Join us for a Memorial Day campout. Explore this area threatened by possible coalbed methane development. Arrive Saturday and enjoy easy-to-moderate hikes on Sunday and Monday. Co-sponsored by the Pajarito Environmental Education Center. Reservations Ilse Bleck (662-2368 – Pajarito Group).

Please check the five Groups' pages for more information on these trips, and for additional activities.

All area codes are 505, except as noted.

Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge Events Calendar

Sunday, April 15 • Earth Day Native Plant Field Trip – Join Judith Phillips, author of the best-selling *New Mexico Gardener's Guide*, on a visit to the east side of the refuge to discover the grasses, wildflowers, and plants. Free.

Saturday, May 20 • International Migratory Bird Day Pinyon Canyon Birding Field Trip – An excellent guided field trip for the avid birder. Join U.S. Forest Service ornithologist Hart Schwarz for a trek into Pinyon Canyon.

Sunday, September 10 • Socorro Fest Fat Tire Fiesta Bike Tour – Enjoy a rare opportunity for an early morning bike tour on the eastside of the refuge that is generally closed to the public. This ride is moderately difficult on good-quality roads. Contact Kimberly King-Wrenn (864-4021) or visit the Socorro Striders & Riders website (www.socorro.com/fattire).

Sunday, October 14 • Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge Open House – Take the opportunity to enjoy one of our tours with a variety of subjects and visit an area of the refuge that is generally closed to the public. The refuge will also have exhibitors with live animals, a lecture on the Mexican gray wolf, and a virtual refuge tour. Fees for tours \$7/person by reservation only.

To make reservations for any of these activities, contact Kimberly King-Wrenn at the refuge (864-4021) or visit the website (<http://southwest.fws.gov/refuges/newmex/sevilleta>). Sevilleta Wildlife Refuge is located approximately one hour south of Albuquerque or a half-hour north of Socorro. Take I-25 Exit 169.