

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2024

TOP-10 ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES TO WATCH IN NM

# GREEN FIRE TIMES

*News & Views from the Sustainable Southwest*



## DEFENDING THE SACRED

LOVE & RESISTANCE IN THE AGE OF ANTHROPOCENE

EL AGUA NO SE VENDE, SE AMA Y SE DEFIENDE: ACEQUIAS RISE  
EMPOWERING TOMORROW: A YOUTH-LED MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE

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Green Fire Times is a platform for regional, community-based voices—useful information for residents, businesspeople, students and visitors—anyone interested in the history and spirit of New Mexico and the Southwest. GFT’s small, dedicated staff and multitude of contributors generate articles documenting the interrelationship of community, culture, the environment and the regional economy. The sustainability of our region affects all of us, and requires people from all backgrounds working together to create solutions. One of the unique aspects of GFT is that it provides multicultural perspectives that link green, cutting-edge innovations with time-honored traditions.

Storytelling is at the heart of community health. We have an opportunity to change the story going forward, which can lead to positive transformational change. GFT shares inspiring stories of hope and community action. By helping our communities discover who they once were and what they can become, a more positive future can be created.

Of course, it is an extremely challenging time to continue to produce a free, quality, independent publication. Production costs have greatly increased. Many local and regional publications have folded or have been bought up by corporate entities. Fortunately, a growing number of publications are receiving boosts from nonprofits that are devoted to protecting journalism. GFT is owned by Southwest Learning Centers, Inc. (est. 1973), a nonprofit educational organization. SWLC provides a mentorship program for some of GFT’s writers, aspiring journalists and documentarians.

Green Fire Times is struggling to survive. We also need funding to upgrade our online archive and make 15 years of articles more accessible to community members, students and researchers. Don’t assume that someone else will help. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation through our website, or send a check made out to Southwest Learning Centers (with a notation ‘for GFT’) to P.O. Box 8627, Santa Fe, N.M. 87504-8627. Also, please advertise! The print edition—currently published every other month, while our website is updated more frequently—is widely distributed from Albuquerque to Taos and beyond. For a rate sheet, visit [GREENFIRETIMES.COM](http://GREENFIRETIMES.COM).

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DEFENDING THE SACRED  
IN THE AGE OF ANTHROPOCENE

FROM THE EARTH CARE EDITORIAL TEAM

Here we are again—our sixth annual collaborative edition of the *Green Fire Times*.



Artwork by David Valencia, a member of YUCCA

Earth Care and YUCCA are dedicating this edition to those fighting to defend the sacred in the face of climate chaos, state violence, political uncertainty and colonial genocide. In a historical context when violation and force is the modus operandi, everything we cherish is threatened. Whether by destruction, co-optation or commercialization, our land, air, water, foods, rituals, home places, languages, spiritual practices, creativity and open-heartedness are all under siege.

But in every corner of the world there is resistance to these trespasses of spirit. Our communities refuse to be uprooted, refuse to have our lifeways upended, refuse to have our relationships severed.

From the sacred mountains and cornfields of New Mexico to the olive groves of the Middle East—we honor those whose connection to

our home places, to our communities and to the majesty of the world ignites the fires within us, stirs our hearts and propels us to fight for justice and liberation, even against incredible odds.

In this edition, we invited leadership from our movement to share about their work to defend the sacred. Our hearts are hurting as we continue to experience the wounds that colonization and extraction create. Violence in these forms is about severance. It’s about ripping us and the earth apart. In a time when everything is at stake, but our consumerist culture lulls us asleep – we are grappling with some heavy questions as the last sand from the hourglass falls.

What will it take to build a movement actually capable of defending the sacred?

What do we have to know? How do we need to relate? What is the practice? What are the pitfalls we’ll need to avoid? The false solutions and temptations we’ll need to navigate as the power structures work against change by inciting fear, co-opting our stories, greenwashing solutions, and dividing and conquering?

How do we call each other in—to rise to the challenge? To choose the risks and heartbreak and loss that come with loving each other and the world in the midst of devastation? How do we move beyond the false security and abusive relationships on which our society is built and find the courage to choose real change?

Carry these questions with you as you read on. Let us know what you think and join us in the struggle. [YUCCA@EARTHCAREN.M.ORG](mailto:YUCCA@EARTHCAREN.M.ORG)



## CLIMATE JUSTICE: UPROOTING THE COLONIAL EXTRACTIVE ECONOMY

### *Reclaiming Our Future as Sacred*

Before there were fossil fuels to burn or communities to pollute, there were conquistadors and settlers who pillaged lands. There was colonization. There was occupation. This story is told time and time again all over the world.

Occupation and colonialism are not a distant history for the United States, but rather, they are the foundation. In New Mexico, there were the Spanish. Tewa-speaking peoples who stewarded this land for generations, and continue to do so, were occupied in every sense of the word—the land itself was taken, along with the water and people. Violent occupation is baked into the history of our state and country. Occupation and colonialism are at the forefront of the climate crisis. They continue to be defining forces in our world.

If you tell it like a story, it reads like this: Ancestral ways of living are outlawed and punished. Indigenous peoples were moved from place to place, separated from their communities, homelands and traditions. The Spanish entered the Americas with the objective to grow their imperial wealth through the extraction of gold and silver, but this was only accomplished by actively committing genocide and setting the foundations of an extractive economy. The environment and natural world were destroyed. In the present, we have become an oil and gas state, and people have been suffering through the climate crisis.

The term climate *justice* implies that there is some form of climate *injustice* that we must fight. What is that injustice? Colonialism and extraction are the disease; the climate crisis with its storms and droughts are the symptoms. Relationships to the land have not been the same since the Spanish forced their religion and political power upon the Indigenous lands of the “Americas.” Colonial systems of oppression have continued.

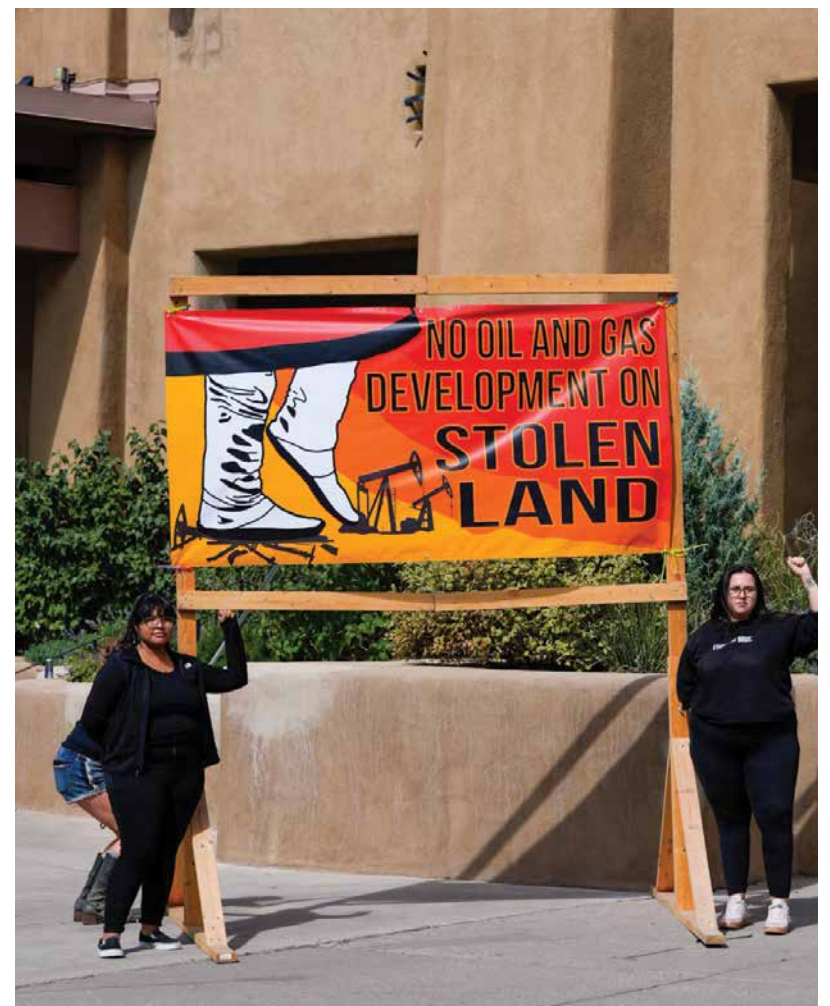
Commodifying the sacred and putting a price on “resources” like land, air and water are what began spinning the wheels of the extractive economy we all know and rely on. New Mexico’s extreme poverty (third highest in the U.S. in 2021) displays an active and present colonial force, despite the consistent rhetoric that oil and gas revenue will set us free. New Mexico is the

stronghold of a colonial extractive economy wherein the sacred land, water and people of this place are discarded while our resources are taken to grow others’ wealth. Youth United for Climate Crisis Action (YUCCA) proactively demands an equitable and just transition by seeking an immediate phaseout of fossil fuels. For centuries, communities, including Indigenous nations throughout New Mexico, have been treated as sacrifice zones in the interest of profit from oil and gas and militarization.

Our guiding Principles of Environmental Justice affirm “...the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.”<sup>1</sup> Ecological destruction undermines Indigenous Peoples’ right to self-determination by sacrificing our communities’ health, land, air and water.



### *YUCCA is launching our Campaign to Take Back Our Future.*



Youth climate activists Ennedith López and Sofia Jenkins-Nieto deployed a banner at El Dorado Hotel in Santa Fe during a protest of the annual meeting of the N.M. Oil and Gas Association.

### *YUCCA is expanding our campaign to Take Back Our Future*

In order to achieve climate justice in New Mexico, we must acknowledge the gruesome roots of colonialism and occupation while actively uplifting and supporting our shared struggles for liberation with people across the globe. Our fates are intertwined. Not only because the oil extracted or consumed here exacerbates climate impacts for peoples across the world, but because we must all struggle together against the colonial forces that dehumanize Indigenous peoples, violently and forcibly remove Indigenous peoples from our home places, and then rape and pillage the earth to benefit those from somewhere else.

Climate justice actively challenges our need to depend on the extractive economy and the perpetuation of an abusive and violent extractive and colonial arrangement among industry, politicians and our communities. We cannot allow profit-driven interests to continue to harm our communities. Decades of pollution and environmental racism must end. We can no longer accept an economic model which sees New Mexicans as workers to exploit and discard, and fails to center our fundamental human rights to clean air, water, land, food, education and shelter. It's time to acknowledge the colonial foundation of our energy system and the New Mexican economy and to make a collective commitment that as we transition we will also heal. In order for justice to be at the center, truth and accountability must be at the center.

<sup>1</sup> <https://climatejusticealliance.org/ej-principles/>



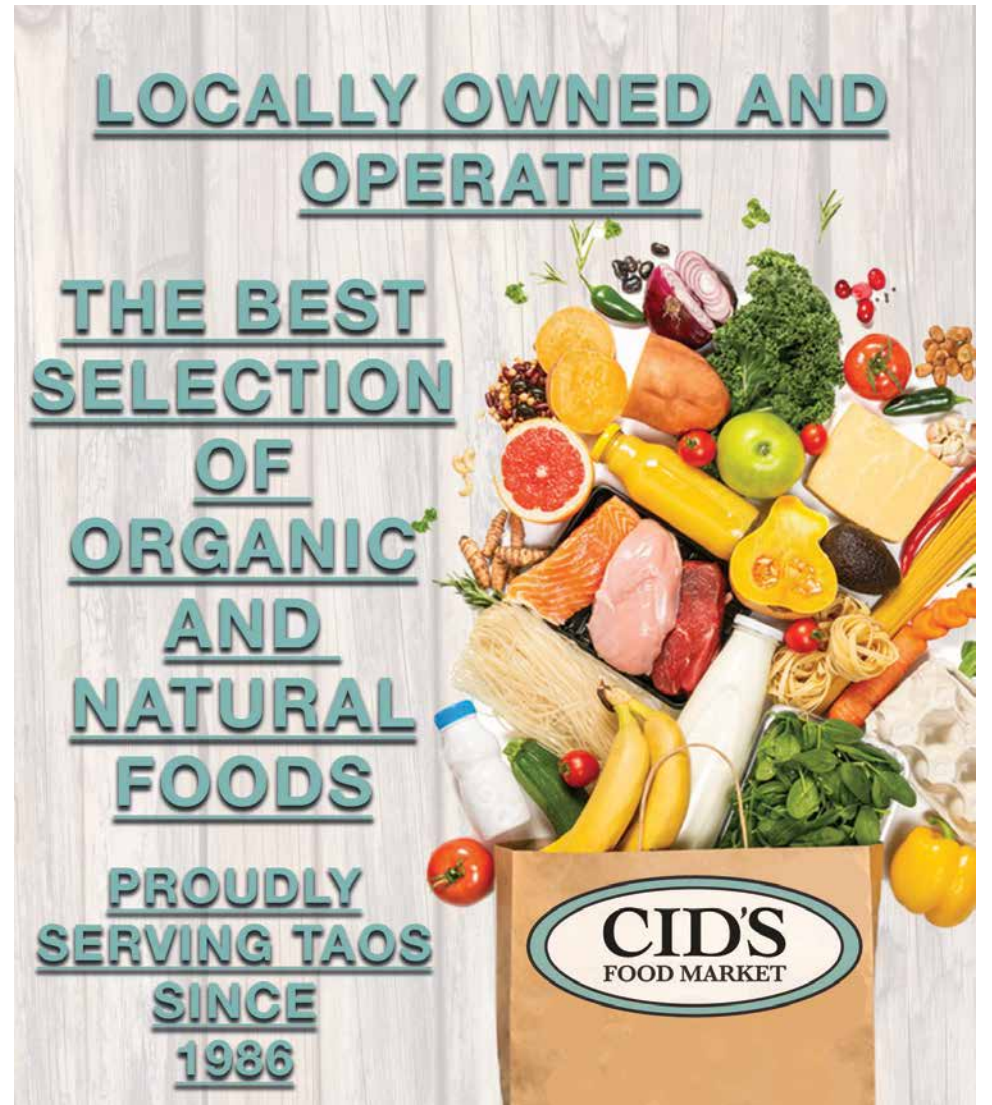


*Communities throughout New Mexico have been treated as sacrifice zones in the interest of profit from oil and gas and militarization.*

of our movement: That climate justice is fundamentally about defending the sacred—about refusing to accept any further forced displacement of Indigenous peoples and local communities from our home places. Any further theft of Indigenous land. Any more missing and murdered Indigenous sisters. Any further violations of our Earth Mother. All over the world, people are rising up and calling for an end to colonization and occupation and demanding liberation. For New Mexico, with our hostages economy—climate justice and decolonization are inextricably linked. We need your help to break these cycles and heal. We hope you'll join us. ■

*Ennedith Lopez is the policy campaign manager for YUCCA (Youth United for Climate Crisis Action).  
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*Sofia Jenkins-Nieto, environmental justice coordinator for Earth Care NM, has a B.S. in Environmental Science and a minor in Sustainability Studies from UNM.*



Top: More than 50 Indigenous and frontline advocates from New Mexico joined 75,000 people from around the world marching in Manhattan to demand that the U.S. end its extraction and use of fossil fuels. Center: No False Solutions Coalition members Julia Bernal, Zephyr Jaramillo and Jonathon Juárez-Alonzo stage a sit-in at Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's office. Bottom: Pueblo Action Alliance Youth Fellow Alicia Gallegos speaks against oil and gas development in New Mexico during a protest at Blackstone headquarters in New York City.



# WHERE THE WATER FLOWS

*Photos by Macee Hunt*



*I have taken these photos of Hogback, the highest point in Waterflow, a place where I find comfort and solace. They take me back to the version of Waterflow that I knew as a child. These photos are a view of my Waterflow.*

Home is beauty wrapped in toxic waste. We come from wasted land. We come from poison. We come from pollution.

I'm from Waterflow, New Mexico, a place that's experienced heavy water stress and drought. Ironic for a place called Waterflow, I know.

As a child, I thought Waterflow was the best place in the world. I would grow and harvest crops with my dad; he was a farmer and a butcher. We used to grow corn and hay, fruits and veggies.

It felt like untouched land, but as I entered adolescence, I saw the damage of heavy industry nefariously destroying the land. I saw the effects of environmental racism.

My dad grew up living close to the San Juan Generating Station. His family would get water from a nearby well. He and his siblings would play in contaminated water in nearby arroyos.

They started seeing many of their animals—animals they depended on to survive—die more quickly than they should have.

In recent years, I have seen my family getting sick and starting to die from illnesses.

Home is a complex place; in many ways, I love it, but in other ways I hate it because it brings me pain, hurt and sorrow. Although the generating station has finally closed, its remnants, the lasting impacts of pollution, remain. ■

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*Macee Hunt (Diné/Navajo) is an artist from Waterflow, N.M. Her skills include hoop dancing, photography and videography.*





## WHAT IS SACRED? REFLECTIONS ON REMATRIATION

My recent observations on the state of the world have me pondering notions of sacredness. It appears the dominant culture has no reverence for the sacred. No reverence for the miracle that is life. Gun violence is at epidemic rates in our nation. Our land-bases are only measured by their ability to produce something commodifiable. We seem to have lost the battle with COVID, as it continues to wreak havoc on the most vulnerable communities.

*We, as women, know that we are the  
backbones of our communities.*

As Indigenous people, we feel the lasting legacy of colonialism. It never seems to end for us. To live in *O'ga Pogeh*, Santa Fe (unceded Tewa land), is a constant reminder of the division between race, class and access. Yet, we as Pueblo people manage to live out our Original Instructions every day, honor our ceremonial calendar, dance, sing, pray, celebrate birth, death and all the milestones therein.



We still have the ability to laugh during the hardest times, cry, and most importantly, come together to help our family and community when in need.

As I write this, I am mourning the passing of one of the amazing matriarchs in my community of Jemez Pueblo, Juanita Fragua. Aunt Juanita was a master potter whose work is well known, and she passed her artistic gifts on to her own children. She lived across the road from my family house, and much like her sprawling adobe home, she was a staple, a constant. When I was a city transplant years ago, she was one of the matriarchs who, in an unspoken way, showed me that I had a place in my village. When I danced on feast days, she would help me get dressed, cinch my belt tight for me and lend me jewelry or dresses. She was always positive and kind. Everyone loved her dearly.

*As Indigenous women,  
we don't need feminism,  
feminism needs us!*

Even though most of our pueblos have patriarchal leadership, we, as women, know that we are the backbones of our communities. We know without us nothing could exist, and for that we are steadfast, deeply aware that we carry the responsibility of continuing our culture, literally and figuratively. This calls to mind the term ReMatriation, which is gaining traction in Indigenous scholarship and advocacy for the land and our lives as Indigenous people. ReMatriation to me is synonymous with the sacred. It is the counter-narrative to Western feminism, in that it is immensely more expansive and inclusive, taking into account our connection to all human and non-human relations, including our most sacred Mother Earth. It is a return to our Traditional Ecological Knowledge and sacred contracts to hold life-givers and the land in the highest reverence. It also encompasses our relationship with the elements and spiritual realms, including our veneration of our ancestors and genetic memory. Unlike Western feminism, it's not about capitalism and economic parity with men, or a desire to be "equal" with men. It is about honoring the balance between the divine feminine and divine masculine. We have words in our languages for this. I always say, as Indigenous women, we don't need feminism, feminism needs us!





## What do you hold sacred?

If we can collectively return to these Original Instructions and reclaim our power as women and matriarchs, we can begin to find the balance we so desperately need, *now*. So, I ask everyone to consider: What do we hold sacred? If we say we hold women, children and elders sacred, how are we protecting them from harm? New Mexico continues to have the highest rate of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR), our lands are constantly being scouted and desecrated by extractive industry profiteers, and our elected leaders' pockets are lined with gas and oil money. Los Alamos National Labs, up on the hill, continues to manufacture weapons of mass destruction, which have been used on innocent people.

Meanwhile, our quickly destabilizing nation markets death like a fashion trend. Yet in spite of all this, Indigenous people continue to live and thrive, not because of our resiliency, but rather our sheer excellence and adaptability. Let's start calling it what it is and stop pandering to the deficit paradigm that continues to invalidate our existence in our own homelands.

As we move into a new year and say goodbye to a 2023 filled with unprecedented death and violence, I want to remind you that our existence on this Earth is a gift.



*Jemez Pueblo/Chicana) was born in Southern California from a family that participated in the federal Indian Relocation Program. In 2017, she co-founded Three Sisters Collective, an Indigenous women-centered grassroots organization. Castro resides in O'ga P'ogeh, Santa Fe, N.M. She is a mother, farmer, scholar, educator, community organizer, artist and public speaker.*

*Dr. Christina M. Castro (Taos Pueblo/*

I know I have my work cut out for me in trying to maintain a positive outlook in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, but this is where my faith comes in. Faith is the foundation of our culture, and it propels us forward during the most difficult times. I wish you an abundance of faith in 2024 and the strength to keep living up to our highest ideals. ■

We as Pueblo people have managed to endure all of this because of our faith in our Original Instructions, but within that lies our responsibility to care for those most vulnerable. So, I ask, what do you hold sacred? How will you honor that in your daily life, with not only words but actions as you move into a new year?



*The mural is titled "Shards of Our Stories." The lead artist was Pola López, with co-lead, Autumn Gómez, in collaboration with the Three Sisters Collective. It is located at the intersection of Baca and Agua Fria streets in Santa Fe.*

*Left: Christina Castro*

*Photos © Seth Roffman*



# Top 10 Environmental Issues to Watch in NM in 2024

BY NEW MEXICO ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CENTER STAFF

The New Mexico Environmental Law Center is honored once again to be invited by *Green Fire Times* to share our list of what we consider to be the Top 10 Environmental Justice Issues for the coming year. This annual issue is again guest-edited by Earth Care/Youth United for Climate Crisis Action (YUCCA), and we feel the theme they chose—Defending the Sacred—appropriately centers the mindset and framework this pivotal turning point requires. Our planet is facing environmental threats on a massive scale that calls for a radical shift from extractive, profit-driven and resource-intensive policies toward true sustainability with proper respect for Mother Earth. That is our greatest hope for current and future generations. We have much responsibility at this moment—the stakes could not be higher. Here are our Top 10 issues for your consideration.



*Black Fire in the Gila National Forest, May 30, 2022.  
Photo: Yoder Volunteer Fire Department*

temperatures, rising sea levels, melting glaciers and the loss of sea ice. August 2023 was the hottest on record, 2.59 degrees F above average.

In New Mexico, we are getting hotter and drier, with less precipitation, more rain than snow and more severe and frequent wildfires. We are in a mega-drought, with low reservoirs and a Río Grande that for months was anything but *grande*.

At the latest UN Global Climate Conference, COP28 (the 28th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change), held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from Nov. 30 to Dec. 13, 2023, delegations from 199 countries finally agreed to “transition away from” (rather than phase out) burning fossil fuels like oil and coal that are driving climate change. But Indigenous organizations like Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN) criticized COP28 as a huge missed opportunity for real solutions, instead seeing more than 2,400 fossil fuel lobbyists pushing false solutions. Tom BK Goldtooth (Diné/Dakota), IEN executive director, said, “More false solutions will accelerate climate change and deforestation with a push for carbon capture and storage, hydrogen and nuclear power in the Global Stocktake and carbon markets, offsets and private sector finance.”

*Right:*  
*Front row center: Inter-American Commission on Human Rights staff member Santiago Martínez, commissioners Roberta Clark, Esmeralda Arosemena de Troitiño, and staff member Laura Morelo visited Churchrock and Crownpoint, July 2023*

*There is broad consensus from all stakeholders that there are overburdened communities in Bernalillo County.*

We must heed the calls of Indigenous, People of Color, frontline and youth-led leadership and knowledge holders who are demanding a rapid transition to phase out fossil fuels and curb global warming.

## 2. Threats Old and New from the Nuclear Industry

The nuclear industry, including uranium mining and milling and nuclear weapons manufacturing and testing, has left a trail of environmental, health and cultural impacts across New Mexico, especially in Indigenous communities. On the Pueblo of Laguna, for example, the Jackpile Mine, which operated from 1952 to 1982, was at one time the largest open-pit uranium mine in the world. In 2013 the U.S. EPA designated the Jackpile Mine a Superfund site, and restoration efforts continue today. Churchrock, on Navajo Nation, is the site of the 1979 United Nuclear Corporation uranium tailings dam break that resulted in the largest release of radioactive material in U.S. history. Recent Geiger counter readings taken by local Indigenous community members continue to be substantially above background. Downwinders from the 1945 Trinity Test, the world’s first atomic bomb detonation near Alamogordo, continue to seek recognition and financial compensation for the cancers and other diseases generations have experienced.

In spite of this deadly legacy, there is a major threat of new uranium mining in Indian Country. Laramide Resources, a Canadian company, conducted “confirmatory” drilling near Churchrock last year, likely incentivized by the Biden administration’s increased subsidies for domestic supplies of uranium since Russia invaded Ukraine. Laramide also received a \$1.7 million grant to work with Los Alamos National Lab to demonstrate that it will be able to restore groundwater it will contaminate if it is allowed to begin operations in Churchrock and Crownpoint. No in situ leach (ISL) mine has ever restored an aquifer to a state that is usable for domestic or agricultural purposes.

Downwinders came close in 2023 to extending and expanding who





## *There is a major threat of new uranium mining in Indian Country.*

is covered by the Radioactive Exposure Compensation Act (RECA), getting it passed by the Senate, but the latest version of the NDAA no longer contains the RECA amendment. Organizers will try again to get RECA added to another bill before it sunsets in 2024.

Eastern Navajo Diné Against Uranium Mining (ENDAUM) invited the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to visit Churchrock and Crownpoint to see firsthand the impacts from uranium mining on their communities, and two commissioners and two staff members conducted a promotional visit in July 2023. ENDAUM's case against the United States for licensing uranium mining in violation of their human rights as Indigenous people is still pending with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). Red Water Pond Road Community, along with members of the Ute Mountain Ute and Oglala Sioux tribes, have again requested a thematic hearing in front of the IACHR regarding human rights violations from uranium mining on Indigenous communities.

### **3. Cumulative Impacts Regulations**

Cumulative Impacts regulations are considered to be the holy grail of

*Cumulative impacts legislation at the state level is needed regarding air quality, water and land protection.*



*NMELC staff and clients at the Health, Environment & Equity Impacts Regulation public hearing, Dec. 4, 2023*

environmental justice. Many states have introduced bills that would require regulatory agencies to take cumulative impacts into account when making permitting decisions. We saw the Mountain View Coalition (MVC), represented by NMELC, file a historic, precedent-setting cumulative impacts regulation called the Health, Environment & Equity Impacts (HEEI) regulation to the Joint Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Air Quality Control Board. Their petition was filed in November 2022, and a six-day public hearing was held in Albuquerque in December 2023.

The Air Board did not pass the rule filed by the MVC; however, the board did vote to pass its own version and issued its new rule on Dec. 20. NMELC and MVC are still evaluating how protective the new rule will be. The chair of the Air

Board referred to it as “limited” during her presentation to the Bernalillo County Commission.

Meanwhile, the Albuquerque City Council passed an ordinance and a resolution purging city-appointed members of the Air Board and pausing the board's ability to take action on quality-of-life issues through February. The mayor's vetoes of both bills were subsequently overridden, and the Air Board and the MVC filed requests for temporary restraining orders and permanent injunctions against the bills, which are still pending.

As the dust settles on both the litigation and the impact of the new rule, and while we remain in legal limbo, one thing from the HEEI hearing is very clear: There is broad consensus from all stakeholders, including industry, that there are overburdened communities in Bernalillo County. The need to address decades of concentrating toxic and polluting industries in low-income communities of color and the health and environmental impacts from those racist policies were recognized. This is no small feat. Frontline and fenceline community members were also energized and grateful for the outpouring of support in the form of over 100 public comments at the Albuquerque Convention Center and over Zoom, as well as countless emails and letters sent to the Air Board.

Cumulative impacts legislation is also needed at the state level, not just regarding air quality but also permitting decisions connected to water and land protection. We support passing a strong cumulative impacts bill at the New Mexico Legislature.

### **4. Water Scarcity**

New Mexico has less water due to a warming climate, drying rivers and dwindling aquifers. Persistent drought from rising average temperatures has devastated watersheds, leading to catastrophic wildfires. As more intense monsoons occur, the need for stronger stormwater control increases.

Despite the dire state of water quantity, policymakers far too often continue to make land-use development decisions severed from water availability reality. We saw that when the Bernalillo County Commission approved the Santolina Development Master Plan, even though developers have no agreement with the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority demonstrating water availability. Niagara Bottling also keeps trying to increase its water grab from 93 million gallons per year to 254 million gallons per year from the aquifer underneath Los Lunas, which stretches from Socorro to Santa Fe. Corporations and water speculators continue to try to grab water rights for mining at the Copper Flat Mine near Hillsboro and for water speculation by Augustin Plains Ranch in central New Mexico.

The need for comprehensive water planning is paramount. Progress has been made slowly at the New Mexico Legislature, and the 2024 legislative session will see more requests for funding for water programs and governance. Bernalillo County approved \$200,000 to initiate regional water resilience planning, and last year the Legislature passed the landmark regional Water Security Planning Act, but it didn't approve enough money or staff to promptly implement the law.

Water is life; we need our policymakers to make decisions that reflect that



*Valencia Water Watchers rally against the Niagara Bottling request for additional water rights in Los Lunas*



## *The stakes could not be higher.*

fundamental reality rather than placing profits over protecting this finite resource.

### **5. The Importance of Local Elections**

During the recent Health, Environment & Equity Impacts (HEEI) hearing in Albuquerque, we saw a dramatic display of how important local elections can be. On the evening of the second day of the week-long hearing, a city councilor interrupted the hearing, walked up to the podium where public comments were being made and claimed that the hearing was prohibited by law and should be suspended. The



*Richard Moore, co-coordinator of Los Jardines Institute, speaking to the Albuquerque City Council on Dec. 4, 2023*

Albuquerque City Council had recently passed two bills purging the current Joint Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Air Quality Control Board of its city-appointed members and putting a moratorium on the board's actions for several months in a blatant attempt to prevent the HEEI Cumulative Impacts Rule from becoming law. The council's bills are in legal limbo at the moment, as two requests for temporary restraining orders and permanent injunctions against both bills are pending a judicial decision. The Bernalillo County Commission has indicated it is willing to pursue litigation to protect its interests on the joint board in the protection of air quality as well. But the incident and the legislation clearly demonstrated inappropriate and unilateral interference by a local government to a state-mandated joint city-county board of volunteers whose job it is to prevent or abate air pollution in Bernalillo County. City council elections are often won or lost by only a few ballots. In November 2023, we saw an Albuquerque city councilor retain a seat by a mere 158 votes. Important legislation is in the balance, including key environmental justice issues. Bottom line—voting matters.

### **6. Political, Environmental & Health Impacts from Oil & Gas Production**

It's well-known that New Mexico is highly dependent on oil and gas revenue. It's less well known that the state is the second-largest producer of oil and gas in the United States. Revenue to New Mexico in 2024 is projected to be \$13 billion, about half of which is estimated to come from taxes and royalties from the oil and gas sector. Such dependence on fossil fuels produces two major problems: environmental and health impacts from drilling, fracking, spills and flaring; plus corruption of the political process, when fossil fuel lobbyists influence and weaken legislation. It is extremely disappointing when legislators pay more heed



*About 1,500 barrels of crude oil were released from a ruptured pipeline northwest of Shiprock, N.M., Dec. 11, 2023.*

to their oil-funded campaign contributors than to their working-class constituents who are the ones impacted by decisions made on their behalf.

It will be critical that local groups continue to introduce and demand legislation that does not fall short of what this critical moment in the climate crisis requires. We must ensure that environmental regulations and protections are strengthened, not weakened, and that loopholes are omitted, not allowed.

## *New Mexico is now the second-largest producer of oil and gas in the United States.*

We support YUCCA's call for three ways to provide stronger protection to freshwater resources at the 2024 legislative session: adding a definition of freshwater to the Oil and Gas Act; prohibiting the use of freshwater in oil and gas operations when recycled and using treated produced water instead; and requiring operators to report their liquid use and for the Oil Conservation Division (OCD) to review the reports.

### **7. Hydrogen As a False Solution to the Climate Crisis**

Julia Bernal, executive director of Pueblo Action Alliance, explained the dangers of New Mexico investing in hydrogen hubs at the COP28 in Dubai. She was part of the 28-person delegation led by Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN). She said, "Hydrogen is incredibly dangerous. It is the smallest molecule in the world, has a high risk of leakage, and is prone to react to metals that cause failures to hydrogen pipelines and steel storage vessels. The combustion of hydrogen produces more harmful nitrogen oxide than burning methane alone, exacerbating health risks to frontline communities. And with such easy leakage comes a wide flammable range in the air, wide explosion range and embrittlement effects that could be disastrous. If hydrogen were to leak, it would eventually combust and cause explosion reactions that can pose danger to workers and those that live near hydrogen hubs."

## *Policymakers often continue to make land-use development decisions severed from water availability reality.*





*Press conference at UN COP28 Climate Change Conference 2023, UAE, Dubai with (l-r): Tom Goldtooth, executive director of Indigenous Environmental Network; Brenna Two Bears, IEN's Keep it in the Ground coordinator; Julia Bernal, executive director of the Pueblo Action Alliance; and Eriel Deranger, executive director of Indigenous Climate Action*

Despite state legislators voting against hydrogen-hub funding legislation in previous sessions, the governor applied for federal funding for New Mexico to be part of a regional hydrogen hub but this did not make the cut. Claims continue to be made that a hydrogen economy is key to shifting New Mexico from fossil fuels. 350NM, however, shared a study that blue hydrogen, made from natural gas, has a 20 percent greater carbon footprint than burning natural gas or coal for heat. New Mexico should invest in renewable technologies and phase out fossil fuels—and not continue to promote false solutions like blue hydrogen.

## 8. Racial Discrimination in Public Permitting Process

The ability to meaningfully access and participate in the public-permitting process of facilities, projects and other activities that will impact communities' health, wellbeing and their environments ensures that impacted communities, typically already overburdened by polluting industries, have the opportunity to gain and share knowledge and concerns with the respective permitting agency and thereby influence permitting decisions. However, the State of New Mexico and its agencies have a long history of engaging in practices that limit communities of color, especially those with limited English proficiency, from accessing and meaningfully engaging in the public permitting and decision-making process.

These discriminatory practices often take the shape of providing public notices and important documents pertaining to a permit application solely in English, with limited or no translation in languages spoken by those most impacted. Translation and interpretation services are often not provided at public permitting hearings. Polluting-facility permits are approved in low-income



*Associated Asphalt & Materials plant in Santa Fe, N.M.*

communities of color, while permits are denied in predominantly white, affluent neighborhoods.

By engaging in these activities, agencies continue to restrict access and discourage participation by non-English speaking members of the public (not just Spanish speakers) in the public permitting process—raising federal civil rights concerns under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

## 9. Accountability to Polluters Through Private Right of Action Litigation

There have been multiple attempts to get a Private Right of Action bill through the New Mexico Legislature. A private right of action would allow an affected individual or organization—in addition to the state, local or tribal government—to sue companies that have broken environmental laws. In 2021, HB 50 sought to amend five environmental protection laws—the Air Quality Control Act, Water Quality Act, Hazardous Waste Act, Solid Waste Act and Oil and Gas Act—to allow a private individual who had been harmed by a company's violation of one of these laws to bring a lawsuit in state court to enforce the requirements of these existing



*The Albuquerque Plastics Fire erupted on August 6, 2023 at the Atkore United Poly Systems facility in Mesa del Sol. Photo by Chaney Bush, courtesy NMELC*





*Asphalt plant in Mountain View. Photo by Gabriela Campos*

environmental laws, regulations or permits. The court could order the polluter to stop polluting and impose civil penalties, but the court could not order monetary damages for the person bringing the suit. A private right of action bill is needed so that New Mexicans have another tool in the regulatory toolbox to better enforce environmental protections in our state.

### 10. Inequitable Distribution of Harm from Climate Change & Environmental Injustices

The impacts from climate change and environmental harm are not evenly distributed across the globe or in our society. The climate and environmental burden is not shared equitably. Numerous studies have clearly demonstrated that air pollution, hotter temperatures and the siting of toxic and polluting industries affects low-income communities of color more than white, affluent communities.

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The American Lung Association State of the Air Report for 2023 gave Bernalillo County a grade of F for ozone and a D for fine particle pollution. Albuquerque was named one of the top 25 worst cities in the nation for unhealthy levels of ozone pollution. Their report shared sobering national statistics that, “out of the nearly 120 million people who live in areas with unhealthy air quality, a disproportionate number—more than 64 million (54 percent)—are people of color. In fact, people of color were 64 percent more likely than white people to live in a county with a failing grade for at least one measure, and 3.7 times as likely to live in a county with a failing grade for all three measures.” The MVC’s HEEI regulation was intended to address the disproportionate siting of industrial facilities in overburdened communities in Albuquerque and Bernalillo County.

Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities are disproportionately exposed to climate risks, often living and working in areas at higher risk of flooding, sea-level rise, fires, heat stressors, and poor air quality, stemming from a history of racial redlining. BIPOC and frontline communities are also disproportionately vulnerable to climate risks due to other societal issues including food insecurity, less access to quality healthcare and barriers to employment.

We know that unjust social, political and economic structures have created these inequities. The inequity of who bears the burden from climate change must be addressed and disrupted at the structural level globally, nationally and locally. The harsh injustice of who suffers the harms and feels the impacts of environmental degradation and global warming is a social and environmental justice issue that deserves greater attention and action. Policies that work toward a just transition and

### NEW MEXICO ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CENTER

#### *Contributing to More Just and Healthy Communities*

Established in 1987, the New Mexico Environmental Law Center is the oldest, and only public nonprofit law center in the state focused on environmental justice.

NMELC serves and represents frontline, low-income communities and communities of color to protect air, land and water, through legal services, policy development, advocacy and public education. NMELC provides free and low-cost legal services to clients who would otherwise not have access and for those that are the most harmed by environmental degradation. NMELC also provides expertise to ensure clients are able to participate in decision-making processes that aim to dismantle discriminatory and racist policies.

NMELC’s priorities and approaches follow the guidance of impacted communities, working collaboratively to effect systemic change. The NMELC helps clients navigate the legal process, equipping them with tools to lead as grassroots changemakers in holding polluting industries and government accountable.

You can follow the NMELC’s work on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter (X). To stay connected and up to date, sign up for twice-a-month eblasts ([HTTPS://NMELC.ORG/SIGN-UP/](https://nmelc.org/sign-up/)). As a nonprofit, the NMELC relies on donations, which can be made online at [NMELC.ORG/DONATIONS](https://nmelc.org/donations).





## ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM IS ALIVE AND WELL IN ALBUQUERQUE

*But Its Moral Arc is Being Bent Towards Justice*

The Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Air Quality Control Board's Health, Equity and Environmental Impacts (HEEI) rulemaking will go down in history. The HEEI hearing will change the course of history many times over. The Air Board's December 2022 decision to hear HEEI regulation means they have done what many Air Boards of the past have been unable to do: stay the course of preventing air pollution in the face of attacks from environmentally racist government bodies and corporations.

The City-County Air Board was enshrined by state law in 1994 in both city and county code. The board serves a quasi-judicial and quasi-legislative role. It may adopt, amend, or repeal air-quality rules and standards consistent with the New Mexico Air Quality Control Act, the federal Clean Air Act and National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) to prevent or abate air pollution in Albuquerque and Bernalillo County.

The Air Board's power was upgraded by the state Legislature in January 2021 via Senate Bill 8. SB8 provides the board the authority to adopt and amend air-quality rules and standards more stringent than federal or state law. This power would be fully exercised in the consideration and recent passing of the HEEI regulation.

Though the HEEI regulation was petitioned in November 2022, the history that led to this historic petition and rulemaking dates deep into our past. It is a history that exposes the City of Albuquerque's particularly racist and discriminatory track record of allowing the violation of constitutional rights of low-income, working-class and communities of color. The regulation was not the first effort by communities to address the overburdening of their neighborhoods with permitted industrial pollution. And it wasn't the first time communities have advocated for the cumulative impacts of pollution to be addressed.

Cumulative impacts science has been under development since the 1970s. Ultimately, it's the study of how the total burden of chemical and non-chemical pollutants and their interactions affect the health, wellbeing and quality of life of a person or population at a point in time or over a period of time.

The HEEI is particularly concerned with the cumulative effects of air pollution and the impacts on the health and wealth of communities like Mountain View and San José. It's been proven that there are areas across the city, state and country that are disproportionately overburdened by air pollution, and it's a breach of their constitutional rights.

These issues have been raised since before the first Earth Day in Albuquerque in 1970, which is when the predominantly Chicano, Mexicano and Hispano communities of Baretas, Martínez Town, South Broadway and San José organized a march along the acequia by the sewage plant on Second Street. Their focus drew on the interconnections of systemic racism and poverty to the issues of air pollution, water pollution and hunger in Albuquerque and across Turtle Island.

*The loss of groundwater and surface water access led to major losses of natural and cultural resources.*

Later, in 1984, "methemoglobinemia" was causing babies in Mountain View and parts of San José to turn blue—later known as "Blue Baby Syndrome." This became a major controversy, and there is proof that the city and state knew the water was contaminated since the 1960s—but their response was

to tell locals to "dig deeper wells." The local community expressed concern over Kirtland Air Force Base's weapons development and testing and the expansion of industrial polluting activity in the South Valley. That included the General Electric jet engine plant that would later become the number one priority for cleanup in New Mexico.

This loss of groundwater and surface water access led to major natural and cultural resource loss. In fact, the loss became so great and the water quality so poor that in 1992, the governor of the Pueblo of Isleta forced the hand of the city by adopting more stringent water-quality standards.

This saga of environmental racism went on, when, in 1999, the Kirtland jet fuel spill was discovered. It would later be declared the largest jet fuel spill in American history—an estimated 24 million gallons. For local residents, this confirmed the contamination of natural resources by corporate and military actors that threaten traditional, Indigenous and agricultural lifeways.



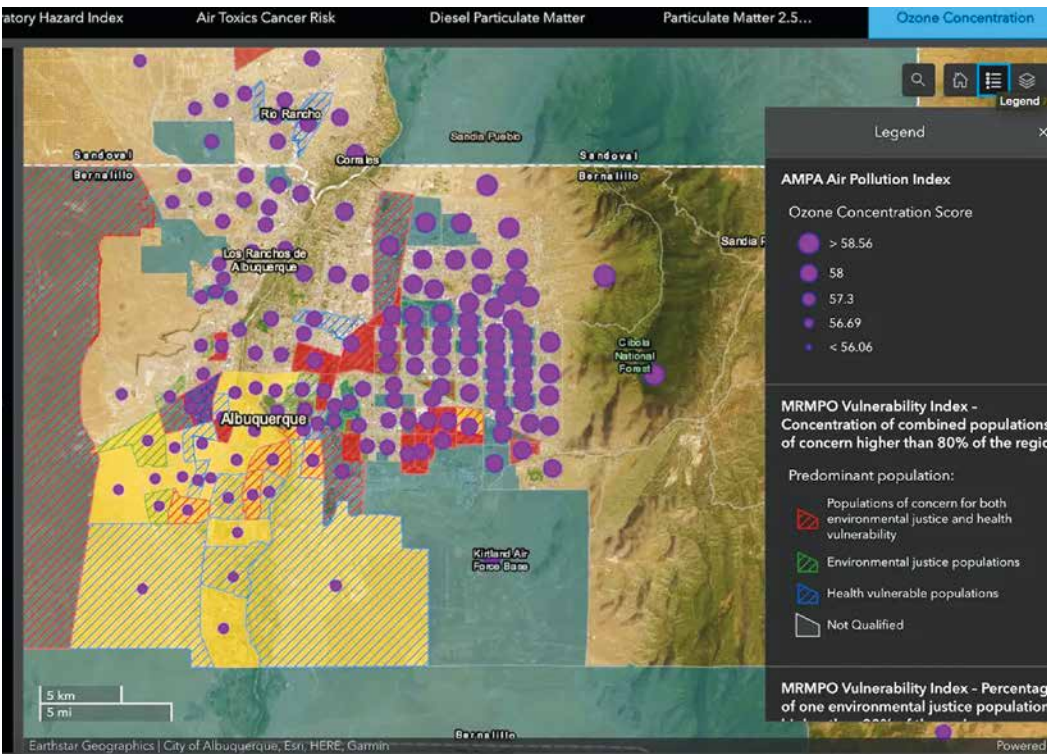
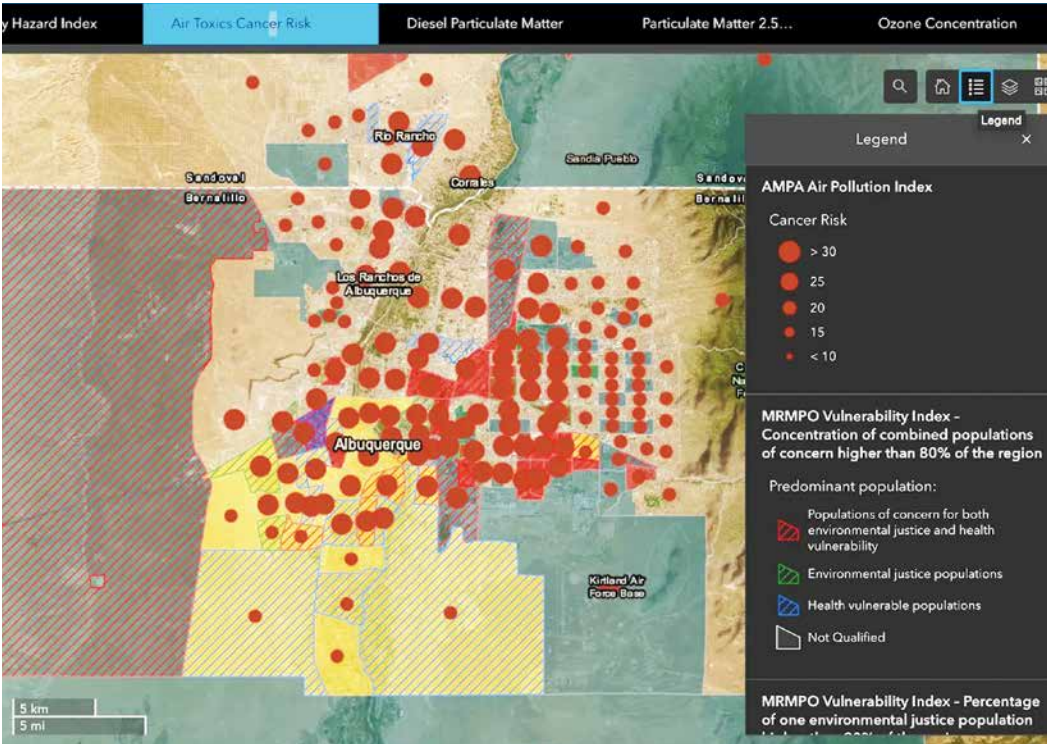
*Mountain View Coalition members and New Mexico Environmental Law Center staff after filing the historic Health, Environment and Equity Impacts (HEEI) regulations with the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Air Quality Control Board*

*The history that led to this historic petition and rulemaking dates deep into our past.*

In 2014, 44 years after the Earth Day march, community members in San José filed a Civil Rights complaint against the City of Albuquerque. The complaint outlined the historical and knowing disregard by the city to address the overburdening of communities and the cumulative impacts of that burden. As of 2023, the civil rights complaint is still outstanding, and these violations are likely to be resurrected in 2024 as the HEEI is adopted into law and its related lawsuits are carried out.



We present this historical grounding to appreciate the significance of the HEEI rulemaking hearing. It brings the victims and perpetrators from over a century-long struggle into the same room and on the same record to address long-standing environmental and economic issues of injustice.



*Neighborhoods have been overburdened with permitted industrial pollution.*

As of Dec. 19, 2023, after much open deliberation, the Air Board published its *Statement of Reasons for Adoption of the HEEI Regulation*. The rule would take effect on July 1, 2025. Environmental Justice (EJ) communities are concerned that the HEEI rule adopted by the Air Board was watered down during deliberation due to unprecedented pressure from industry on the rulemaking process, Air Board members themselves, and the actual science of cumulative impacts embedded in the rule. But ultimately, the public record the HEEI provides and the fact it has brought so much attention to these decades of issues will prove to benefit the realization of environmental and economic justice in Albuquerque.

In short, the new HEEI rule will demand that the Albuquerque Environmental Health Department identify overburdened areas, with input from the public, and identify any census block group that has more than two air pollution stressors from a list specified by the board above 80 percent of county average. Furthermore, the department has until January 2025 to map “overburdened communities.” The department shall require every new or modified source in or within a mile of an overburdened area to apply best available control technology, including to manage hazardous air pollutants. And the department shall, in consultation with the public, update overburdened maps within two years of new census data.

We can be assured the HEEI regulation and the issues it’s brought up will be front-and-center in 2024. The HEEI rulemaking transcript and Zoom recording is available online for the public to view. It includes sworn testimony from EJ communities, government agencies (local to federal) and some of the largest polluters in the county, city and state. There are multiple litigations between the Air Board and the city after the city council attempted an unconstitutional coup to abolish the Air Board, during the rulemaking proceeding. Please investigate this series of events for yourself. We also want to acknowledge the county for standing with the Air Board and understanding the significance and the benefits of protecting air quality for all—which greatly outweigh the private interests of polluting businesses. ■

*Los Jardines Institute (LJI) is a legacy grassroots organization whose purpose is to build and support healthy, sustainable and self-determined communities. Its work today is a continuation of multigenerational, community-based models of learning, sharing and community-building rooted by intersecting social, economic and environmental movements for justice. Readers are invited to visit the website [www.losjardinesinstitute.org](http://www.losjardinesinstitute.org) and to visit the urban farm campus in the South Valley of Albuquerque, N.M.*

*Photos:*  
**Los Jardines Institute Co-coordinators**  
*Sophia Martínez, Ph.D., Dr. Martínez is a writer, documentarian and activist. She co-founded Voces Feministas, a women-of-color radio collective.*

*Richard Moore serves as co-chair of the inaugural White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council, and is national co-coordinator of the Environmental Justice & Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform.*

**Air Toxics Cancer Risk Map**  
*The leading data from the EPA shows that air toxics cancer risk is not just high in low-income communities, but across the city of Albuquerque.*

**Ozone Concentration Map**  
*Ozone is known to cause disease, premature death and great environmental harm. The leading data shows that, unlike particulate matter, ozone pollution actually impacts the East Mountains and areas considered “less threatened” by air pollution.*



# EL AGUA NO SE VENDE, SE AMA Y SE DEFIENDE ACEQUIAS RISE TO PROTECT WATER

BY **PAULA GARCÍA** PHOTOS BY **SETH ROFFMAN**

On a sunny November day in Taos, acequia leaders from across the state gathered for the annual *Congreso de las Acequias*. The theme was “*El Agua No Se Vende: Se Ama y Se Defiende*,” (The water is not for sale; we must defend it). Acequias honored decades of grassroots organizing to protect local acequia waters from being sold and transferred separately from land and community.

As is customary, the Congreso was centered around the *Bendición de las Aguas*, a water blessing, to honor the sacredness of water, with everyone invited to share water from their respective places, culminating in a blessing by local keepers of tradition. The two days are steeped in a cultural worldview with ceremony, music, art and theater to remind us of our role as caretakers of the water. The gathering was also a commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the passage of legislation in 2003 amending the New Mexico Water Code in response to the threat of the commodification of water.



*Teatro Acequero performed “Ponte Trucha o te Vuelven Boquinete.” River animals have a “junta” to discuss who will represent them to address their wildfire, water rights and drought challenges. Top (l-r): David Manzanares, Yolanda Jaramillo, Virgil Trujillo, Maximino Manzanares, Dabi Garcia, Joaquín Romero*

One of the highlights was a performance by *Teatro Acequero* in which animals, including fish, a turtle, a beaver and an owl gather to strategize on dwindling water supplies and the problem of water transfers. As they analyze the situation, one fish says, “I’m a fish, but I think it is time to sell my water right.” As they debate, they reach a tentative consensus that they will not sell their water but they will delegate

*Two days steeped in a cultural worldview with ceremony, music, art and theater to remind us of our role as caretakers of the water.*

one of them to fight for them at the State Capitol, where water laws are made. Their debate is interrupted by a pig dangling dollar bills in front of them with a fishing rod.

They choose the turtle because of her powers to live in water and walk on the land, and they load up their issues, represented by placards, on her back: water transfers, climate change, wildfires, drought, etc. Time passes and the other animals get impatient with her slowness in fixing their problems. An

## *Analysis and debate over the unprecedented challenges facing acequias*

argument ensues over what to do. In the end, they resolve to work together to protect the water collectively. The Congreso was a human version in real time of the analysis and debate over the unprecedented challenges facing acequias. Panels of acequia leaders and experts weighed in on several key topics. Day one was focused on panel presentations, including an overview by attorneys on the power and authority of acequias over water transfer applications, a proposal for acequia engagement in regional water planning and a retrospective on the 2022 wildfire/flooding disasters.

Day two started with the *Bendición de las Aguas*, followed by an engaging panel with author Sylvia Rodríguez and attorney David Benavides on the historical context of the 2003 water laws. Rodríguez shared her firsthand account of the grassroots organizing and movement building in the Taos Valley in response to gentrification starting in the 1980s and 1990s that was part of the underpinning of the 2003 legislative strategy. Benavides provided more context of the struggles of acequias statewide in filing numerous protests to water transfers in an effort to protect the future viability of acequias, and he elaborated on the significance of the 2003 acequia laws, which were a change to the Water Code that authorized acequias to make decisions on water transfers. Any proposed application for a water transfer from an acequia must first get the approval of the acequia through consideration of whether it is “detrimental to the acequia or its members.”

As stated by New Mexico Acequia Association (NMAA) in the 20 years since, this power has given acequias a measure of self-determination. By having more decision-making power over water rights, acequias have a key role in determining the future of their respective communities, since all decisions about growth and development will be based on water rights.

In addition to informative presentations, NMAA also recognized accomplishments of the Río de Chama Acequia Association and the other regional associations that reached a settlement with Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo in 2023. NMAA also honored Taos Valley Acequia Association for its work in

## *Rollbacks similar to the recent Supreme Court decision could leave most waterways in New Mexico unprotected.*

protecting the watersheds, acequias and the valley from the impacts of gentrification and tourism. A highlight was also a segment devoted to recognizing youth who participated in NMAA’s youth programs and farmer training programs: Sembrado Semillas, Acequia Youth Leadership Institute and Los Sembradores Farmer Training Project.



Each year, the Congreso, which is also the name of the governing body of the NMAA, is charged with developing policy positions that guide the strategic direction of the NMAA in the coming year. The Congreso passed several resolutions addressing some key policy issues:

- **Water Rights:** A resolution strongly urging the state engineer to follow requirements in state law with regard to water-lease applications. Despite a court ruling and an attorney general opinion that legal requirements of notice, protests and hearings are required, the state engineer has continued to grant expedited leases. The Congreso urged the OSE to abide by the court ruling and AG opinion and to honor due-process requirements in state law.
- **Clean Water:** A resolution supporting protections for clean water in New Mexico including the creation of state-based surface water regulations. This has become more urgent because of the recent U.S. Supreme Court *Sackett* decision, which removed federal protections for wetlands. Similar rollbacks are possible for ephemeral and intermittent streams, which could leave most waterways in New Mexico unprotected if there is not a state system in place.

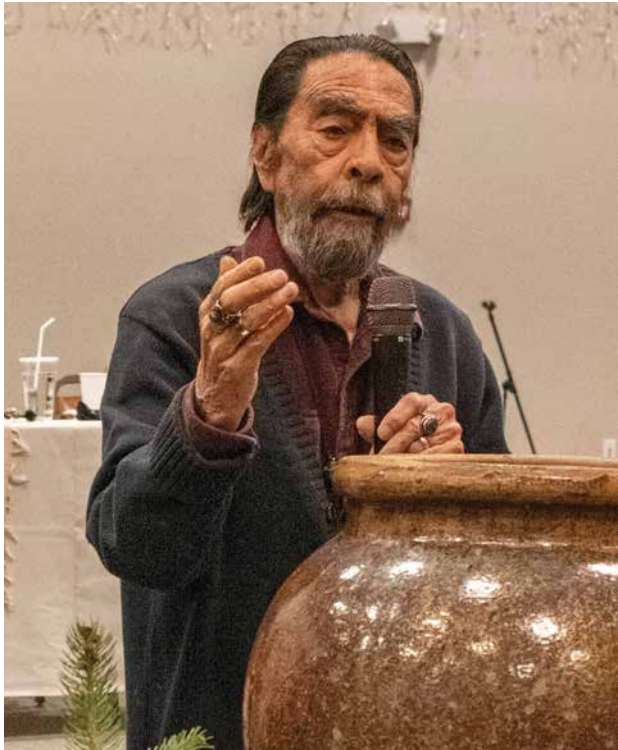
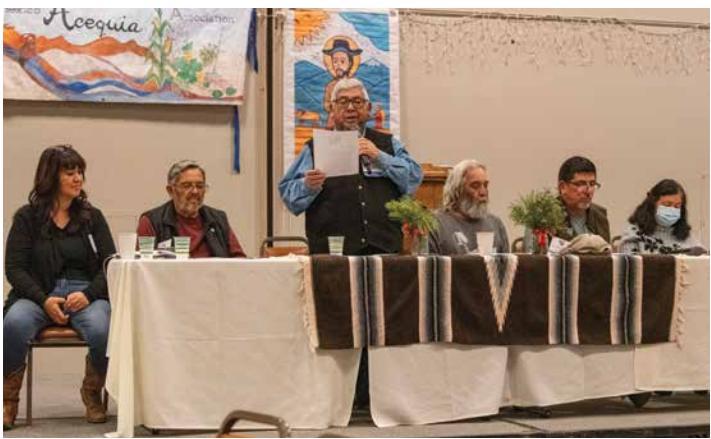
Other resolutions addressed infrastructure funding, real estate transaction problems and support for the Ohkay Owingeh Water Rights Settlement on the Río Chama, which benefits not only the pueblo but also approximately 80 acequias.

*Acequias have a key role in determining the future of their respective communities.*

next steps in the movement to defend the precious waters of our watersheds, aquifers, rivers and communities. ■

Paula García is the executive director of the New Mexico Acequia Association. She is an aspiring gardener and long-time water activist who lives in Mora, where she is devoted to healing communities and watersheds from recent fire and flood disasters. [HTTPS://LASACEQUIAS.ORG](https://lasacequias.org)

Overall, the 2023 Congreso was festive, hopeful, prayerful, contemplative and deliberative. It served as a call to unity while also setting forth some



*Acequia leaders and elected officials, including U.S. Senator Ben Ray Lujan, top left, joined in a water blessing and presentations on acequia governance, disasters and water rights. Delegates also voted on resolutions that guide the policy positions of the New Mexico Acequia Association. Photos © Seth Roffman*



## WATER RIGHTS SETTLEMENT IN THE RIO CHAMA STREAM SYSTEM

The Río Chama stretches from its origins in the mountains of Colorado to its confluence with the Río Grande near the Pueblo of Ohkay Owingeh, north of Española New Mexico. On Aug. 30, 2023, New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and Ohkay Owingeh Gov. Larry Phillips, Jr. signed the Indian Water Rights Settlement for the Río Chama stream system. “Resolving outstanding water rights claims of the Pueblos, Tribes and Nations in New Mexico is critical to moving our state toward greater equity and water security,” Gov. Lujan Grisham said in a press release.

The settlement recognizes the unique historic, social and cultural characteristics of both Pueblo and non-Pueblo water users. It includes regional acequia associations (Asociación de Acéquias Norteñas de Río Arriba; Río de Chama Acéquias Association; La Asociación de las Acéquias del Río Vallecitos, Tusas y Ojo Caliente; El Rito Ditch Association) that represent 79 independent acequias. The City of Española is also included in the agreement.

The ancient tradition of acequia water-sharing, *repartimiento*, rather than priority administration, was established as the primary approach to managing shortages. “The settlement embraces long-standing practices of water-sharing for historic and traditional irrigation and provides financial resources to deal with declining supply,” said Antonio Manzaneres, president of Asociación de Acéquias Norteñas de Río Arriba.

*Acequia water-sharing, repartimiento, rather than priority administration, was established as the primary approach to managing shortages.*

Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo is the largest water rights holder on the Río Chama and holds the most senior rights. After decades of litigation, the settlement resolves the pueblo’s claims. “This is a historic settlement,” Phillips said. “It provides many benefits to water users throughout the Río Chama Basin. It provides the water we need to continue on our path to self-sufficiency... We will exercise our sovereignty to manage our water to ensure this sacred resource is available for future generations... It will give us the means to restore the bosque, or riparian corridors, along with our rivers, which are important to our culture.” Ohkay Owingeh hopes to use some of the funding for ecosystem restoration below Abiquiú Dam. Under the agreement, the pueblo will receive \$818.3 million for restoration and maintenance of riparian areas and for developing water and wastewater infrastructure, acquiring water rights and managing and administering existing pueblo water rights.

An Interim Implementation Agreement is in effect. Full implementation requires legislative action at both federal and state levels to provide funds for key provisions such as infrastructure enhancements, basin-wide drought management, water acquisition and shared water storage. Acequias could receive \$98.5 million in state funds for water supplies and infrastructure. Some acequias are trying to acquire water from the San Juan River that would be transported to the Río Chama that they can hold in available storage pools.

State Engineer Mike Hamman said, “I commend all parties for their commitment to collaboration and mutual benefit.” Ohkay Owingeh and the state engineer have brought the settlement to the state’s congressional delegation to advocate for federal approval and funding. If passed by Congress, it will also fund local water systems improvements. The parties will also seek state legislation to provide funding for the non-pueblo parties and changes in state law necessary to implement the agreement.

## FEDERAL COURT RULES JEMEZ, SANTA ANA AND ZIA PUEBLOS HAVE ABORIGINAL WATER RIGHTS TO JEMEZ RIVER

In one of the most fascinating Native American water cases involving the long-running Jemez River adjudication to allocate water among its users, the U.S. District Court of New Mexico (*United States v. Abousleman* (9/28/23)) found in favor of the pueblos’ sovereignty over water. The court found that Jemez, Santa Ana, and Zia all have aboriginal water rights to the Jemez River—water rights based on the inherent sovereignty of the Native people.

And, the court found that these rights were not undermined in any way by the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Mining Acts of 1866, 1870 and 1877, and the Indian Claims Commission Acts of 1924 and 1933. This means when the water rights for the Jemez River are ultimately prioritized and qualified, the pueblos will have the senior (oldest) water rights in the system. Under Western water law (appropriative doctrine), that is important, because in dry years when there is not enough water for everyone, the pueblos’ water rights would be fully respected and the last to be curtailed.

The ruling is a win for sovereign Indian water rights and law, and will likely be used for other Indian Tribes and Nations. However, “first in time, first in right” is a target of water law reformers who say that during a drought, the idea that priority rights holders won’t be required to share with others some of what they claim to own, is unrealistic.

## AGRIVOLTAICS

### NEW PARADIGM BRINGS TOGETHER TWO MAJOR SECTORS OF THE ECONOMY

The emerging field of *agrivoltaics*—the co-location of solar-energy installations and agriculture beneath or between rows of photovoltaic panels—has the potential to help farmers adapt to climate change. The practice is set to become an increasingly valuable method of growing more food for more people on our planet’s increasingly limited land.

The space between rows of solar panels can be divided between crop beds, each with a different microclimate. Adjacent rows can get morning sun and afternoon shade. Plants that prefer cooler temperatures and more shade in hot climates grow well in this environment. The panels alter soil moisture by redirecting summer rain and morning dew. Research in the drylands of Arizona found that the panels’ shade slows evaporation from the soil, meaning that less irrigation is needed and soil loss can be reduced or prevented.

Agrivoltaics may be intertwined with regenerative farming, a trend that has centuries-old roots within Indigenous cultures. It can also improve crop yield and may help some crops continue to thrive as global temperatures rise. With an average of 300 days of sunshine



and high elevations, crops in New Mexico can suffer from sun scorching. Agrivoltaics can reduce scorching and protect plants from wind. The panels can also provide shade for animals on hot days. “Solar grazing” is emerging as a preferred practice for livestock farms.

## PASSIVE COOLING THROUGH VEGETATION

Another benefit is that solar panels have been shown to handle heat better when combined with crops. As described in a February 2023 report published in the journal *Applied Energy*, crops under solar panels can reduce the panels’ surface temperatures, making them more efficient and increasing their longevity. This is in part due to crops’ ability to reflect much more light than bare ground, cooling the ground surface and reducing the panels’ exposure to heat. Evapotranspiration of vegetation can also provide cooling as water droplets form at the base of the panels.

*Land use can be maximized by pairing solar panels with cropland.*

million in research on how agrivoltaics could work for farmers, the solar industry and communities. Adding farming to existing solar sites is being explored as an approach to increase access to land for historically disadvantaged groups. A pilot project in Spain is demonstrating the microclimate benefits of solar panels in vineyards. Arrays can be raised



Colorado Agrivoltaic Learning Center at Jack’s Solar Garden in Longmont, Colorado, hopes to inspire future sustainability leaders by teaching about clean energy, local food and responsible land-use management. Sandia National Labs in New Mexico is also researching agrivoltaics.

Questions remain, including which crops are suitable for a shaded environment. Studies are happening around the world as more people see agrivoltaics’ potential. The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is funding \$15

higher off the ground and far enough apart so species that support pollinator populations can be interplanted. Vertical panels and alternative designs are being investigated.

A 2021 report from the Rocky Mountain Institute, a nonpartisan nonprofit, says that rural communities have a significant opportunity to strengthen and diversify their local economies by actively engaging in the ongoing renewable energy transition. Solar energy generated by the panels can be distributed to microgrids for rural uses.

Much land deemed suitable for solar development is farmland. Pairing solar panels with agricultural land can minimize competition between energy production and food. The

## HUGE REFORESTATION GREENHOUSE TO BE BUILT IN MORA

Over the past 20 years, wildfires have burned about 5.5 million acres across New Mexico, and because many were high-intensity, the trees aren’t growing back. Scientists predict that wildfires will grow more intense and frequent because of accelerating climate change.



A massive reforestation center will be built in Mora, next to the New Mexico State University’s Forestry Research Center. A 160,000-square-foot greenhouse will take up most of the center, which will also house offices, a seed bank, processing areas and a 30,000-square-foot lab. The greenhouse will cultivate 3 million to 5 million seedlings in a year that will have to withstand hotter and drier summers.



© Seth Roffman

Officials hope to begin growing trees within three years. Reforestation teams will collect data on the effort. About 90,000 acres—about 24 million trees—must be replanted within the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon burn area alone. According to a press

release from the New Mexico Energy, Mineral and Natural Resources Department, the state needs to replant between 1 million and 2.6 million acres, requiring as many as 390 million seedlings. This will likely take decades.

The reforestation center will be a collaboration among the state Forestry Division, NMSU, New Mexico Highlands University and the University of New Mexico. Officials are requesting \$47.5 million from the state Legislature for the first phase of construction, in addition to the \$8.5 million that has already been allocated. The project’s partners requested \$80 million from the federal government in 2022 to jumpstart the project.



# PROTECTING THE SACRED WITH LA MILPA COMUNITARIA

BY MARA FLORES



*I want my children to know how to produce and harvest their food.*

Irail and María prepare mulch to place in planter pots on a beautiful, brisk October day. The two moms are getting ready to give a presentation on the importance of producing their own food. As they finish their preparations, their peers, other parents, and Santa Fe Southside community members start walking in to attend their presentation.

The *La Milpa Comunitaria* project started with the support of Growing Up New Mexico through its Santa Fe Family Leadership Council program, which aims to promote leadership in parents and childcare providers to help them carry out projects that benefit their communities. In October 2023, Irail Anarely Torres and María Elizabeth Hernández led *La Milpa Comunitaria*'s launch at Earth Care, a nonprofit focused on community development.

Irail is an immigrant originally from Cosío, Aguascalientes, México, who works cleaning houses in downtown Santa Fe. That experience allowed her to observe how high-income families could grow vegetables at home and harvest directly to prepare their food. That reminded her of her childhood growing up in the countryside. It also made her think that when people live in mobile homes, it gets harder to have space to grow food. Sometimes, landowners do not permit them to build planters on the little space allotted.

*We want to generate conversations about the sacredness of food production.*

She also recalled what her diet was like as a child. “I remember that we had *nopales*, chile, beans and corn. I didn’t know it was called organic food. Milk, meat, chicken eggs, everything was produced in our house,” said Irail. “However, here on the south side of the city of Santa Fe, there is none of that. I want to eat like I used to. I have young children, and I want them to know how to produce and harvest their food.”

On the other hand, María Hernández, an immigrant from San Antonio Aguas Calientes, Guatemala, observed that the parks in the south side of Santa Fe have poor infrastructure, including adequate restrooms and open places to eat and spend time with the family, so she wanted to run a project that included a splash pad. As classmates, María heard Irail talk about the *La Milpa Comunitaria* project idea. This brought back memories of a childhood close to rural farm life; her grandparents grew corn, beans, carrots, beets and radishes.

*The main idea is to focus on uniting families.*

In New Mexico, children’s food insecurity is higher compared to other states. According to the state’s Human Services Department, 17 percent of Santa Fe’s children under 18 have experienced food insecurity. This is related to many factors such as the low availability of nutritious food in the market, families with low income and inadequate financial resources to meet basic living requirements, which includes access to healthy food, housing, utilities, health care and transportation (The Food Depot, 2022).

“I asked 10 children, ‘Do you know where tomatoes come from?’ And seven of them said they come from Walmart.” – Irail Torres

“By the time of the corn harvest, we would go to sleep in the fields in a hut made of sticks. We would eat just beans but we were happy. Around the whisk in the pot of beans, it was about having time together as a family. But now, at family gatherings, the children are on their cell phones while their moms cook. It is necessary to rescue the values of living together as a family.” – María Hernández

The food we consume today contains fewer nutrients due to higher amounts of synthetic inputs, used in the production process or to increase shelf life.

When María came to live in New Mexico, she missed the trees and flowers that were part of the landscapes of her hometown in Guatemala, so she began experimenting with planting. She successfully grew strawberries and pumpkins but had poor outcomes with other crops, such as watermelons and radishes. She had many questions about the best time to plant each crop. She also wanted to have an orchard at her house so her family could harvest fresh fruit. “I think it’s important to take care of nature and for children to know where vegetables come from,” she said.

According to Santa Fe MPO (2021), nearly 20 percent of households on the south side are single mothers. The median income per family in the area is \$49,442, with an estimated five percent of households having an income less than \$10,000. That is why *La Milpa Comunitaria* aims to motivate people to learn how to grow food at home. Most people in the south side live in mobile homes or apartments and don’t have



*Above Left: Youth, parents and program leaders attended Earth Care’s annual holiday party. This group presented program updates to the organization’s membership network.*



*‘I asked 10 children, ‘Do you know where tomatoes come from?’ Seven of them said Walmart.’ – Irail Torres*

space to set up a farm, but they may be able to grow in pots.

“If they don’t have the space to plant at home, they can come to Earth Care to plant,” said María Hernández. “We need healthy food and healthy children who are fed with the nutrients of Mother Earth,” said Irail Torres.

There are other educational projects in the region that have large tracts of land, but this project does not intend to achieve that because the main idea is to focus on uniting families. We want to generate conversations about the sacredness of food production, which, from our worldview, includes:

- The connection with caring for Mother Earth
- Learning to be thankful for the harvest and the importance of understanding the cycles of nature
- Learning and transmitting knowledge about this territory’s native species
- Recognizing historical interactions with Native peoples
- Incubating other projects with families to give back what has been received
- Connecting the project with schools and other educational centers to share experiences and knowledge
- Fostering cultural exchange and highlighting the identities of the communities that inhabit the south side of Santa Fe
- Showing that more than being vulnerable, our people work hard and can achieve many things for the good of the community and society. ■

*Mara Flores is an ecologist and an environmental educator. Born in México, she developed a career working with people in rural areas to protect their forests and other natural resources. She has a passion for medicinal plant ecology, cooking traditional recipes and using stories to help people connect with their ancestral power.*

# PROTEGIENDO LO SAGRADO CON LA MILPA COMUNITARIA

POR MARA FLORES

Irail y María preparan tierra para ponerla en macetas en un agradable día de Octubre. Las dos mamás se están preparando para dar una presentación sobre la importancia de la producción de alimentos. Mientras terminan sus preparativos, sus compañeros, otros padres y miembros de la comunidad del sur de Santa Fe, comienzan a llegar para asistir a su presentación.

El proyecto *La Milpa Comunitaria* se originó por el impulso de Growing Up New Mexico a través de su programa Santa Fe Family Leadership Council, el cual tiene por objetivo fomentar el liderazgo en padres, madres y proveedores de cuidado infantil, para llevar a cabo proyectos en beneficio de su comunidad. El sábado 14 de Octubre de 2023, Irail Anarely Torres y María Elizabeth Hernández lideraron el lanzamiento de La Milpa Comunitaria en Earth Care, una organización sin fines de lucro dedicada al desarrollo comunitario.

Irail es una inmigrante originaria de Cosío, Aguascalientes, México, trabaja limpiando casas en el centro de Santa Fe; esa experiencia le permitió observar cómo otras personas con mayor capacidad adquisitiva tenían la oportunidad de cultivar algunos vegetales en sus casas y de ahí cosechaban directamente para preparar su comida.

Eso le recordaba a su infancia criándose en el campo en Cosío. También le hacía pensar que viviendo en una trilla a veces es difícil tener espacio para cultivar alimentos, debido a que a veces los renteros no dan permiso para construir jardineras sobre el poco espacio asignado. También recordó cómo era su alimentación cuando era niña.

“Me acuerdo que arrimábamos que los nopales, el chile, el frijol, el maíz... yo no sabía que se le llamaba comida orgánica... la leche, carne, huevos de gallina, todo era producido en nuestra casa. Sin embargo, acá en el lado sur de la ciudad de Santa Fe no hay nada de eso, hay algunos proyectos, pero no es lo mismo. Yo quiero comer como comía antes. Tengo mis niños pequeños y quiero que ellos sepan cómo producir y cosechar sus alimentos.” (Irail Torres)

Por otro lado María Hernández, inmigrante originaria de San Antonio Aguas Calientes, Guatemala, observó que los parques en el sur de Santa Fe no cuentan con suficiente infraestructura en baños o lugares para comer y convivir con sus niños; así que tenía la idea de gestionar un pequeño parque acuático. María escuchó que Irail hablaba de una idea de proyecto sobre producir alimentos y recordó que ella también tuvo una niñez cercana al campo; sus abuelos cultivaban maíz, frijol, zanahoria, remolacha y rabanitos.

Cuando María Hernández llegó a vivir a Nuevo México, extrañaba los árboles y las flores de su comunidad en Guatemala, así que comenzó a experimentar sembrando fresas, sandías y calabacitas; tuvo éxito sembrando fresas y calabazas pero le ha ido mal con otros cultivos como sandías y rábanos. Tiene muchas preguntas sobre cuándo es el tiempo para sembrar cada cultivo, también quiere tener árboles frutales en su casa para poder cosechar frutas frescas.

“Creo que es importante cuidar de la naturaleza y que los niños sepan de dónde vienen los vegetales.” (María Hernández)



*Earth Care staff, program leaders and members at the annual holiday party*



En el estado de Nuevo México, la inseguridad alimentaria en niños es mayor comparada con otros estados en los Estados Unidos. De acuerdo con el New Mexico Human Services Department, alrededor del 17% de los niños menores de 18 años han experimentado inseguridad alimentaria. Lo anterior está relacionado a diferentes factores como baja disponibilidad de alimentos nutritivos en los mercados, familias con bajos ingresos y poco acceso a recursos financieros que les permitan acceder a servicios básicos, lo cual a su vez repercute en el acceso a comida saludable, vivienda, pago de gastos del día a día, salud y transporte. (The Food Depot, 2022).

“A diez niños les pregunté ¿tú sabes de dónde viene el jitomate? Y siete de ellos contestaron que venía de Walmart.” – Irail Torres

“Para el tiempo de la cosecha de maíz, nos íbamos a dormir al campo en una choza hecha con palitos, comíamos frijoles pero éramos felices alrededor del batidor en la olla de frijoles, era la convivencia con la familia. Ahora en las reuniones familiares los niños están con su celular mientras la mamá cocina. Es necesario rescatar el convivir en familia.” – María Hernández

Los alimentos que estamos consumiendo hoy en día son menos nutritivos debido a la alta cantidad de insumos sintéticos que son usados tanto en su producción como para incrementar su tiempo en el anaquel.

De acuerdo con Santa Fe MPO (2021), cerca del 20% de los jefes de familia que habitan el sur de la ciudad de Santa Fe son madres solteras, mientras que el ingreso promedio por familia en la misma zona es de \$49,442 dólares, con un estimado de 5% de jefes de familia viviendo con menos de \$10,000 dólares.

Es por ello que el proyecto de La Milpa Comunitaria pretende motivar a las personas a aprender a cultivar sus propios alimentos en casa. La mayoría de las personas en el sur de Santa Fe viven en trailas o departamentos y no cuentan con suficiente espacio para establecer una granja pero les sería posible conectar con la producción de alimentos mediante el cultivo en macetas.

“Si no tienen el espacio para plantar en su casa, pueden ir a Earth Care a plantar” – María Hernández “Necesitamos alimentos limpios y niños saludables que se alimenten con los nutrientes de la Tierra.” – Irail Torres

Cultivar nuestros alimentos en casa tiene la ventaja de que ya no es necesario gastar en alimentos caros sobre todo si se vive con un salario mínimo o se es madre soltera. Existen otros proyectos educativos en la región, que cuentan con grandes extensiones de terreno pero este proyecto no tiene ese objetivo, sino el de enfocarse en unir a las familias. Queremos generar conversaciones sobre la sacralidad en la producción de alimentos lo cual, desde nuestra perspectiva, incluye:

- La conexión con el cuidado de la madre tierra.
- Agradecer por la cosecha y la importancia de entender los ciclos de la naturaleza
- Aprender y transmitir el conocimiento sobre las especies nativas de este territorio, incluyendo el reconocimiento de las interacciones históricas con los pueblos nativos
- Incubar otros proyectos con las familias para regresar lo que se ha recibido
- Conectar el proyecto con escuelas y otros centros educativos para compartir las experiencias y el conocimiento
- Fomentar el intercambio cultural y resaltar las identidades de las comunidades que habitamos en el sur de Santa Fe

- Demostrar que más que ser vulnerables, nuestra gente trabaja duro y puede lograr muchas cosas para el bien de la comunidad y de la sociedad ■



*Mara Flores es ecóloga y educadora ambiental. Ella nació y creció en México donde tuvo la oportunidad de trabajar en comunidades rurales promoviendo la conservación de los bosques y otros recursos naturales. Su pasión por estudiar la ecología de plantas y sus usos le ha abierto las puertas para conectar con diversas comunidades en México y los Estados Unidos. A Mara le apasiona explorar recetas tradicionales, aprender sobre la historia detrás de las plantas y los ingredientes que se usan, así como contar historias para ayudar a las personas a conectar con ellas mismas y con su poder ancestral.*



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# Empowering Tomorrow RISE, A Youth-Led Movement for Change

BY NISA GALLEGOS, SKYE JOHNSON, DESTINY RAY, FATIMA TORRES,  
DAVID VALENCIA, MEMBERS OF THE RISE YOUTH COLLECTIVE AT  
EARTH CARE NM, FOUNDED IN THE FALL OF 2023

## RISE: A YOUTH-LED MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE

In the closing days of Earth Care-New Mexico's 2023 El Puente Leadership Program, interns filled with vibrant yet melancholic energy decided their activism spirit would not fade away. A young group of leaders from the program founded the RISE Youth Collective, through a dynamic collaboration with mentors/facilitators Miguel Acosta, Bianca Rivera and Mary Ann Maestas.



*A determination to be the architects of  
our collective future*

*Resilient, Inclusive, Sustainable and Empowered (RISE) Youth Collective is on a mission to rewrite the script of our future and rebuild our community's fabric. Rooted in the enchanting city of Santa Fe, our focus extends beyond picturesque landscapes; we advocate for civic engagement and sustainability, unified under the banner of empowerment. As youth, we see a big divide between the south and east sides and want to unify the city with equity and justice.*

*We must evaluate our current realities  
to ensure they foster success for all of us.*

Our movement is a testament to the belief that age is no barrier to effecting change. Our rallying cry is simple yet profound: to create a community where the echoes of every voice resound and the prosperity of each resident is a shared priority. Our journey begins with a passion for progress and a determination to be the architects of our collective future.

We've already left our mark on Santa Fe's landscape, leading initiatives such as the high-end excise tax for affordable housing and advocating against the LNG plant proposal in Río Rancho. We follow the achievements of Earth Care's Youth at the Center campaign, which worked for years to put Southside youth at the forefront of the city's investments such as the new Southside teen center, which was designed and is led by youth, not city administrations.

One of the very first things we talked about as RISE, before creating our mission statement and before we even defined who we were as a group, were the disparities around our city. You can see them in the infrastructure in areas like the Southside. We need and deserve crosswalks, sidewalks and better roads to make our communities safer, especially given that the Southside houses most of our city's children. We need healthy and affordable food options on the Southside, such as access to locally grown



*We advocate for  
civic engagement  
and sustainability,  
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empowerment.*

*Earth Care youth leaders celebrate with members of the Santa Fe City Council, city staff and Mayor Alan Webber at the ribbon-cutting of the new teen center after more than a decade of organizing led by youth and community.*

*Participants in Earth Care's summer leadership training academy and internship El Puente pose at Wise Fool after a full day of training.*



and non-GMO foods to make our communities healthier. We need better nutrition options at school and safer classrooms. Moving toward clean energy options is also very important to secure a sustainable future. Adequate school funding that's not held hostage by the oil and gas industry is necessary. Just as the decision in the Martínez/Yazzie lawsuit aims to improve the curriculum for our populations, we must address the structural racism and economic injustice that leads to housing insecurity, displacement, poverty, intergenerational trauma - the social determinants of health that shape our lives. We need to transform these realities to ensure success for all of us. These issues, among others, significantly impact people's lives across generations in our city.

As we introduce RISE to the world, we invite you to join us on our transformative journey. This is not merely a youth movement but a declaration—a call to action that can resonate with many people. Together, we RISE, poised to carve a path toward a more sustainable, just and empowered tomorrow.

**DEFENDING THE SACRED**

When we defend the sacred, we must not overlook the sanctity of childhood and youth, often compromised by the challenges afflicting our communities. Childhood is meant for reveling in innocence, wonder and imagination—a sacred time where dreams can flourish without the weight of adult complexities. It is a time when curiosity knows no bounds and hearts are open to the magic of discovery. The fleeting years of youth contain a unique sanctity, where bonds are forged, dreams take root, and the groundwork for a life is laid. To preserve and protect the sanctity of youth is to honor the potential, vulnerability and inherent goodness that define the early stages of life.

Regrettably, children and young people are often thrown into the harsh realities of the world prematurely, confronting issues ranging from school shootings to poverty and homelessness. However, these harsh realities need not define our collective experience. Acknowledging the profound impact of these challenges on all generations within our community is imperative. In response to these issues, we founded the RISE (Resilient, Inclusive, Sustainable, Empowered) Youth Collective to catalyze community change and place youth voices at the forefront.

While addressing the issues, we must also cherish and defend the spaces where youth can thrive. RISE is committed to tackling problems such as affordable housing, civic engagement, renewable energy, gun violence prevention, education reform and child and family welfare. Our mission is to forge a sustainable and equitable community where every voice is heard and the wellbeing of all is prioritized. Through these endeavors, we strive to create a space where youth's sanctity is acknowledged and actively safeguarded for the betterment of all generations.

*The conventional narrative that meeting energy and infrastructure needs requires extractive, harmful and desecrating practices should be dismantled.*

Testimony from Fatima Torres, a 17-year-old RISE member and co-founder, sheds light on the pervasive violence within the Santa Fe school system. Instances of student conflicts, ranging from fights in schools to altercations with teachers, underscore the urgent need for intervention. Consequences such as In-School Suspension (ISS), suspensions and expulsions are currently employed, but Fatima advocates for a more proactive approach. She proposes increased presence and proper staff training in conflict resolution and restorative justice to help mitigate violence.

Furthermore, RISE emphasizes addressing students' needs rather than resorting to punitive measures like ISS or expulsion. The belief is that meeting students' needs can improve the learning environment, allowing students to focus on their education without disruptions.

This call for change aligns with a broader examination of the root causes of violence within the school system. The multifaceted challenges faced by students, including poverty, lack of affordable housing, limited healthcare access and insufficient mental, emotional and spiritual support contribute to the overall unrest. Despite schools being conceived as safe spaces for learning, the necessity of drills for active shooters or bomb threats underscores the stark reality that educational institutions are not immune to prevalent societal issues.

The contrast between the lack of active shooter drills in public spaces like malls and the heightened fear of violence within educational institutions is noted. This



*Earth Care leaders rally in support of equal rights at the 2023 PRIDE parade.  
Photo by Bianca Sopoci-Belknap*



paradox emphasizes the urgent need for comprehensive solutions that address the immediate concerns within schools and the systemic issues affecting homes and communities. The impact of poverty, disparities in affordable housing, environmental challenges tied to racism, and the absence of robust support structures further highlight the complex web of factors contributing to the precarious atmosphere in schools.

Nisa Gallegos, 19, and Skye Johnson, 19, from RISE, have delved into the pressing issue of housing, recognizing it as a central concern for their community. The glaring housing disparity they observe underscores a critical truth: Without secure housing or the ability to make ends meet, pursuing other life necessities becomes an overwhelming challenge.

In the picturesque city of Santa Fe, a severe housing crisis has taken root. Locals who have long considered their homes sanctuaries are compelled to relinquish these havens due to gentrification and rising housing prices. The repercussions of this crisis are felt across generations, as individuals who have invested in building their lives in Santa Fe now face the stark reality of being unable to afford even the most basic necessities for their families.

For those fortunate enough to secure affordable housing, the options for improving their long-term housing status could be more varied. The looming threat of the “benefits cliff” adds a layer of anxiety. Individuals reliant on government assistance to survive are caught in a precarious situation. A slight increase in income can lead to disqualification for assistance, leaving them in a financial gap where they struggle to sustain themselves and their households, often resulting in eviction. This fear is not limited to parents alone; it extends to children who must learn to surrender their safe spaces at a tender age.

The daily struggles faced by families dealing with housing insecurity are palpable. Prioritizing essentials like bills, rent and emergencies often means sacrificing access to other basic needs, such as sufficient food and personal items. The adverse impact of the housing crisis permeates every aspect of life, creating a domino effect that reaches the community’s immediate and long-term wellbeing.

*Even the implementation of seemingly eco-friendly solutions can carry environmental and racial implications.*

In addressing the housing crisis, RISE leaders Nisa, Skye talk about the group’s work to highlight the challenges and advocate for sustainable solutions that ensure secure housing for all. Beyond creating funding streams for affordable housing development like the successful Excise Tax campaign, the group is working with movement partners to pursue housing for all policies—so that individuals and families can thrive without the constant threat of losing their homes, creating a foundation for a more equitable and resilient future.

David Valencia, another RISE member, astutely pointed out the significant reliance on non-renewable energy sources, particularly oil and gas, to meet our schools’ energy needs and funding sources. This prevailing trend, observed across most educational institutions, highlights a lack of sustainable and environmentally just practices in managing school infrastructure and electricity requirements.

The conventional approach to energy production for school facilities often neglects the inherent potential for sustainability. A pervasive dependence on fossil fuels exists, perpetuating a pattern of environmental harm even within the educational setting. David underscores that even the implementation of seemingly eco-friendly solutions, such as solar and green energy, can carry environmental and racial implications if not approached with care.

*We strive to create a space where youth’s sanctity is acknowledged and actively safeguarded.*

David advocates for a transformative shift in how schools are built and powered, arguing that the places of learning for children, teens and young adults should not be sustained by environmentally extractive, racist and harmful energy practices. The assertion is clear: schools should be constructed and operated based on just and sustainable energy production methods, aligning with the values that ensure a livable future.

The message extends beyond just the environmental impact. David emphasizes the importance of teaching learners that their education spaces can embody values of safety, justice and respect for the Earth. The conventional narrative that meeting energy and infrastructure needs requires extractive, harmful and desecrating practices should be dismantled. Instead, learners should grow up in environments that exemplify the principles of a safe and just society—one that prioritizes the planet’s health and, consequently, the wellbeing of all those within it.

Overall, we call for a huge change in our society. We must protect our youth from the forms of violence we endure and be proactive to build and invest in healthy spaces for youth, investments in our health, a shift in the way we power and structure our educational spaces, advocating for sustainability, environmental justice and a commitment to values that foster a healthier and more equitable future for all.

For more information, follow RISE on TikTok, Instagram, or Facebook at [@RISEYOUTHCOLLECTIVENM](#)

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# DINÉ BIKÉYAH

## PHOTOS BY JOSHUA MIKE-BIDTAH

Joshua Mike-Bidtah grew up in *Diné Bikéyah*, the Navajo lands in New Mexico. “I value my homelands as a vital source to *k’é*, my family. The landscapes are a place of healing, as home helps you find yourself. Our people, culture and way of life rely heavily on the land. Our wellbeing is reflected through the land.

“Unfortunately, many energy companies exploit our people and natural resources. Uranium, oil and water from *Diné Bikéyah* energize parts of the United States, while many on our reservation are still hauling water, burning coal for heat and using kerosene lamps. This has shaped my awareness of the need for environmental justice. Advocating for the empowerment of self-determination is vital to the sacredness of self. It’s a collective responsibility as Indigenous peoples for our future generations. I use my photography, filmmaking, music production and education to engage in the conversation.”



*Left top: The Shiprock, N.M. pinnacle, Tsé Bit’a’i, Rock with Wings, is a sacred place where our ancestors lived. To capture this photo, I walked through heavy fog and waited hours in deep meditation and reflection on shicheii, my grandfather.*

*Left bottom: Angels Peak, N.M. (Ma’ii Dab Siké, Pair of Sitting Coyotes) is a holy place and original home to the protagonist in our Diné Windway ceremony. It is now in a natural gas field near a big oil community, desecrated by several pumping stations.*

*“Shitsi hasht’ish doot’izhi ligai igii dahyoo tl’oh” My niece is holding gleesh’, her white clay. It is considered a primitive medicine. She loves to let it dissolve in her mouth.*

*Through our Navajo clanship, this is my great-grandson.*

*Joshua Mike-Bidtah on a production set for a documentary*



OP-ED: GAIL EVANS AND MARIO ATENCIO

## NEW MEXICO'S OIL AND GAS POLLUTION CRISIS

Drive through the Greater Chaco landscape of northwestern New Mexico and you may first notice its immensity. Big blue sky over a high desert vista, piñon pines and puffs of sagebrush extending to the horizon and beyond. This is ancient land. Sacred land.

*The site operator never compensated or even contacted nearby residents for contaminating their land and main water source.*

Once your eyes adjust to the breathtaking beauty, though, you may spot something in the distance that looks like it doesn't belong. Giant metal barrels, pipes and tanks, camouflaged in hues of green and brown. It's the first



indication that this is also sacrificed land: fracking sites where water, sand and toxic chemicals are blasted deep underground to smash apart rocks and send oil or gas bubbling upward.

And after you've recognized one fracking site, you'll start to see them everywhere. This region is one of the epicenters of New Mexico's booming oil and gas industry.

*Many spills spew millions of gallons into the land and aquifers.*

In the past decade, oil production here has increased nearly tenfold, making New Mexico the country's second-largest producer of oil and seventh-largest producer of gas. With this surge in production



Mario Atencio

has come a surge in pollution, which most directly hurts the people, animals and ecosystems closest to fracking sites in rural northwestern New Mexico and the Permian Basin.

Each stage of oil and gas extraction emits dangerous air pollution that warms the climate and can cause cancer, respiratory and neurological damage, headaches, nausea and other health harms. It also generates thousands of gallons of toxic liquid waste—health and environmental catastrophes in waiting.

In February 2019, off a bumpy dirt road about 10 miles from Chaco Canyon, equipment failure at a fracking site caused 59,000 gallons of toxic liquid to gush into a nearby arroyo, flowing over a mile downhill and eventually seeping into the earth and the aquifer below. While this land is remote, it's not uninhabited. The spill occurred about half a mile from a home, on land where cattle graze. The site operator, Enduring Resources, which owns about 1,000 oil and gas wells in New Mexico, never compensated nearby residents for contaminating their land and main water source. It never even contacted them about the disastrous spill.

Enduring also faced no penalty from the state of New Mexico. Tragically, that enduring spill was not an isolated event—far from it. Every day in New Mexico there are an average of four spills of liquid toxic waste at fracking sites, many of which spew millions of gallons of contaminated water into the land and aquifers. In fact, there have been thousands of spills of toxic liquid waste by oil and gas

operators in the past few years, and not a single operator has been penalized.

*Our state has failed to put in place a statutory, regulatory and enforcement system to protect our people and environment.*

Adding insult to injury, Enduring has received approval from New Mexico's Oil Conservation Division to convert a water well in the same area into a toxic liquid waste injection well, where up to 20,000 barrels per day of its toxic waste will be injected 7,000 feet below ground at high pressure, raising community concerns about groundwater contamination



*There have been thousands of spills of toxic liquid waste in the past few years, and not a single operator has been penalized.*

place a statutory, regulatory and enforcement system to protect our people and environment. Instead, New Mexico has given the oil and gas industry a free pass to make billions at the people's expense—and the expense of our wildlife, water and air.

So, on May 10, 2023, frontline community members, Indigenous people, youth and environmental organizations filed a landmark lawsuit against New Mexico for violating Article X, Section 21 of its state Constitution. This pollution control clause declares that the “protection of the state’s beautiful and healthful environment is...of fundamental importance to the public interest, health, safety and the general welfare. The legislature shall provide for control of pollution and control of despoilment of the air, water and other natural resources of this state, consistent with the use and development of these resources for the maximum benefit of the people.”

Despite this constitutional duty, the state continues to authorize and promote unchecked oil and gas extraction.

While New Mexico does have environmental laws and regulations, it has exempted the mega-polluting oil and gas industry from most of those laws. And it fails to enforce the few oil and gas pollution control measures that are in place, citing a lack of resources and leaving our air, lands and waters poisoned.

and earthquakes. Again, the community and landowners in the area received no notice and had no opportunity to voice their concerns before the state approved this massive, dangerous project.

These are just two examples of how our state has failed to put in

This addiction to the extraction of fossil fuels leads to premature death, food insecurity, and widespread damage to property, the climate, ecosystems and Indigenous resources and holy sites like Greater Chaco.

Our lawsuit will be the first time the Constitution’s pollution control clause is tested in court. We’re asking the state to stop permitting new oil and gas wells until it complies with its constitutional duty to control pollution at the more than 69,000 active wells. We’re also seeking a strong statutory, regulatory and enforcement structure that guarantees oil and gas companies meet standards to keep New Mexicans and our environment safe.

For starters, the state should put a health buffer zone of at least a mile between dangerous oil and gas drilling and places frequented by people—where we live, work, play, get healthcare and go to school. Instead of abandoning wells when they stop producing, companies should have to clean them up and ensure they no longer emit methane or other pollutants that make us sick. Instead of using our precious and scarce fresh water, oil companies should be required to reuse their toxic wastewater. And instead of continuing to sell out our state to the climate-killing fossil fuel industry, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham should be leading us toward a just, renewable-energy transition.

We believe that our state’s beautiful landscapes and precious resources belong to New Mexicans, not oil and gas companies. It’s time to start protecting them and putting public health before private profits, both for us and for those who come after. ■



*Gail Evans is an Albuquerque-based attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity. She holds a law degree from the University of New Mexico and an LLM from Georgetown University.*

*Mario Atencio is Diné from Na’neelzhiin, Eastern Navajo Nation. He is Mud Clan; Born for the Bitterwater Clan; His maternal grandfather was of the Tangle People and his paternal grandfather was of the “Red eye band painted” people. As an organizer, he is focused on community in environmental justice work.*



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## OIL AND GAS POLLUTION LAWSUIT PLAINTIFFS OUTLINE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

BY HANNAH GROVER, NM POLITICAL REPORT

The plaintiffs in a lawsuit alleging that New Mexico has not done enough to protect communities from oil and gas pollution have laid out their priorities for the 2024 legislative session. The groups and individuals who call themselves NMLAWS—New Mexico Land, Air, Water and the Sacred—said during a webinar in December that they have three pieces of legislation they hope to see passed and are working with Rep. Debra Sariñana, D-Albuquerque, on that effort.

The first one is what they call children’s health protection zones. This would require new oil and gas wells to be built at least a mile away from schools. That is already the practice on state trust land. Additionally, the protection zones would require that existing wells within a mile of a school be closed and remediated by 2028. This would impact thousands

### *Increasing accountability for oil and gas companies*

of wells in New Mexico. One school—Mettie Jordan Elementary School in Eunice—has more than 200 active wells within a mile of it, according to a map that Silas Grant with the Center for Biological Diversity displayed during the webinar.

However, that could run into legal challenges as the oil and gas operators have entered into lease agreements that give them the right





Members of NM LAWS rally outside of the courthouse on the day the plaintiffs filed the historic lawsuit

YUCCA youth pose with banner depicting the purpose of the lawsuit and campaign to protect New Mexico from oil and gas pollution and desecration

*The legislation would prohibit the use of freshwater in areas where produced water or recycled water can be used.*

to develop leases and extract fossil fuels for a certain period of time. For example, oil and gas leases through the U.S. Bureau of Land Management are generally 10-year leases. Gail Evans, an attorney representing the plaintiffs, said that if the legislation becomes law there would need to be an administrative procedure in place for the Oil Conservation Division to properly apply that law.

The second piece of legislation that the plaintiffs hope to see passed this session they described as increasing accountability for oil and gas companies. That means when a spill happens there would be mandatory penalties and communities that might be impacted by the spill would have to be notified. Mario Atencio, a plaintiff in the lawsuit, spoke about a produced water spill on his family's land in the Eastern Agency of the Navajo Nation near Counselor.

*Children's health protection zones would require that existing wells within a mile of a school be closed and remediated by 2028.*

Finally, a third piece of legislation would prohibit the use of freshwater in oil and gas extraction in areas where produced water or recycled water can be used. Jozee Zuniga, a Permian Basin resident and a member of Youth United for Climate Crisis Action (YUCCA), said oil and gas operations are putting community members' health at risk. "I can personally speak to the air quality issues by saying, I'm sick, my neighbors are sick, my friends, my family, we're all sick. And it started maybe two, three years ago where people started getting sicker and no one knew why," she said. Air pollution from oil and gas has been linked to increased rates of respiratory illness.

### Lawsuit Update

The state of New Mexico has filed a motion to dismiss the lawsuit. The plaintiffs have been waiting on a hearing about the state's motion. A hearing on a motion to intervene by the New Mexico Chamber of Commerce is scheduled for February.

Evans said the case has a lot in common with the *Yazzie v. Martinez* lawsuit, where plaintiffs argued that the state's public education department had failed to ensure students were receiving the educational programs and services they were entitled to under the state Constitution. Evans was also the lead counsel on that case. She said in both instances the state filed a motion to dismiss arguing that the case did not belong in courts. In the pollution case, she said the argument the state is making is that the Legislature and executive agencies should be left to determine how best to control pollution.

But Evans said the state Constitution includes a pollution control clause. "The court has a duty to interpret and enforce the Constitution," Evans said, adding that neither the executive nor the legislative branch is above the law and that "they're certainly not above the mandates of the Constitution." She said oil and gas has been exempted from pollution control by the state Legislature.

For their part, the governor and various state agencies have taken steps in recent years to address pollution from the oil and gas sector while also being cognizant of the huge role the industry plays in funding New Mexico's budget. The New Mexico Environment Department has implemented ozone precursor rules and the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department implemented methane regulations that served as a template for the new federal methane regulations. The state has also taken measures to reduce the use of freshwater in extraction and to prevent new oil and gas wells from being drilled on state lands within a mile of schools.



## CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE SOUTHWEST

A massive government report released in November, *The National Climate Assessment*, says that climate change is affecting people's health and livelihoods in every corner of the country in different ways, with minority and Native American communities often disproportionately at risk. It is "harming physical, spiritual and community health and wellbeing through the increasing frequency of extreme events, increasing infectious and vector-borne diseases, and declines in food and water quality and security." The report unequivocally blames the burning of coal, oil and gas.

At a talk in Santa Fe in October, climate change activist Bill McKibben said that since 1990, global greenhouse gas emissions have increased by 60 percent, and that over the last 30 years, the ocean has had to absorb more than 90 percent of the Earth's excess heat from fossil fuel use, which has led to the loss of 50 percent of the world's coral reefs. Sea surface temperatures have gone completely off the chart.

Many sources show that today's temperatures are the highest for at least the last 2,000 years. McKibben said that the past year was the hottest in 125,000 years, and that "our time to do something is very, very short." The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has confirmed that the warmest years on record are the past eight. A recent report from the WMO says that reduced levels of soil moisture, combined with more frequent heat waves, are causing reductions in crop yields and drops of groundwater levels.

The Southwest is experiencing more drought and extreme heat—including 31 consecutive days last summer when Phoenix's daily high temperatures reached or exceeded 110 degrees—reducing water supplies and increasing wildfire risk. As of December, more than 96 percent of New Mexico was in varying degrees of drought. Drier areas included pockets in the northwestern and southern portions of the state. New Mexico's shrinking snowpacks, which often don't peak until February or March, are vital sources of water for rivers, people, crops and ecosystems.

## NEW MEXICO HEALTH PROFESSIONALS FOR CLIMATE ACTION

A growing group has formed the New Mexico Health Professionals for Climate Action to mobilize New Mexico health professionals in advocating for healthy and equitable climate solutions.

A NMHPCA statement released in August signed by Dr. Paul Charlton, Nathaniel Matthews-Trigg and Shelley Mann-Lev, said, "We call upon our peers in the medical, public health, social work and other health communities to join us in advocating for a New Mexico that supports those most vulnerable to climate change, provides communities with the infrastructure they need to stay safe, and invests in our health systems so they are prepared for a hotter future. Our communities need your expertise, the strength of your influence, and the depth of your commitment to improving the health of all New Mexicans. In the face of a changing climate, silence is a luxury we cannot afford, and inaction is a choice too costly to make. The time to act is now. The heat is on."

To invite NMHPCA to lead a presentation or workshop, email [NMHPCA@GMAIL.COM](mailto:NMHPCA@GMAIL.COM). For more information, visit [WWW.NMHPCA.ORG](http://WWW.NMHPCA.ORG).

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BOOK PROFILE

SOLVING THE CLIMATE CRISIS  
FRONTLINE REPORTS FROM  
THE RACE TO SAVE THE EARTH

BY JOHN J. BERGER  
SEVEN STORIES PRESS, 2023

This book is a hopeful and critical resource that makes a convincing and detailed case that there *is* a path forward to save our environment. Illustrating the power of committed individuals and the necessity for collaborative government and private-sector climate action, the book focuses on three essential areas for action:

- **The technological dimension:** Move to 100 percent clean renewable energy as fast as we possibly can through innovations like clean-steel, “green” cement and carbon-reuse companies;
- **The ecological dimension:** Enhance and protect natural ecosystems, forests and agricultural lands to safely store greenhouse gases and restore soils, transforming how we grow, process and consume food;
- **The social dimension:** Update and create new laws, policies and economic measures to recenter human values and reduce environmental and social injustice.

Based on more than six years of research, Berger traveled the nation and abroad to interview governors, mayors, ranchers, scientists, engineers, business leaders, energy experts and financiers, as well as carbon farmers, solar and wind innovators, forest protectors, nonprofit leaders and activists.

With real-world examples, an explanation of cutting-edge technologies in solar and wind, and political organizing tactics, *Solving the Climate Crisis* provides a practical road map for how we can effectively combat climate change.



Replacing the fossil-fuel system with a newly invigorated, modernized, clean-energy economy will produce tens of millions of new jobs and save trillions of dollars. Protecting the climate is thus potentially the greatest economic opportunity of our time.

OP-ED: JOZEE ZUNIGA

PROTECT SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO  
FROM THE CARBON BOMB

In the haze, through the traffic, I can see the Guadalupe Mountains from my backyard. It’s quiet now but in less than an hour there will be men tearing up my grandmother’s backyard to add natural gas pipelines next to five already in the ground. Traffic starts roaring at 4 a.m. In the evenings I hear sirens from accidents caused by oil field traffic.

*When people talk about the Permian, they talk about production and money, but don’t mention the people who are living with production in their backyards.*

With the way industry has sunk its claws in, I worry about the future of southern New Mexico. Oil and gas extraction in New Mexico’s portion of the Permian Basin (which includes Artesia, Carlsbad, Hobbs and Jal) creates one gigaton of greenhouse gas emissions every few years. The Permian is the world’s biggest carbon bomb, with potential emissions of nearly 28 gigatons contributing to catastrophic climate harms. When people talk about the Permian they talk about production and money, but don’t mention the people who are living with production in their backyards. They don’t talk about the undocumented workers whose deaths go unreported. They don’t talk about the young people diagnosed with cancer or the kids playing in playgrounds with flares burning close by. I want to talk about it because the people in these sacrifice zones don’t deserve to be left behind.

Air pollution in the Permian has become extreme. It was discovered that it violates health-based ozone limits set by EPA. At the worst times, the air has unsafe levels of



ozone multiple days per week, multiple weeks in a row. The Permian region has proved to be a danger to public health but has yet to be declared a nonattainment zone (an area that does not meet the national primary or secondary air quality standards).

This is becoming a long-term exposure problem. These chemicals are seeping into our homes day and night. The risks have

become too high in frontline communities all over New Mexico. It’s not just us in the Permian who suffer; those who live in the San Juan Basin are also suffering. These chemicals are endocrine disruptors, meaning they throw our bodies’ natural hormones off and render us vulnerable.

Our water is being polluted, too. A 2023 report by Physicians for Social Responsibility revealed that New Mexicans are being exposed to harmful ‘forever chemicals’, or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) used in oil and gas drilling. PFAS are dangerous cancer-causing chemicals commonly used in fracking, and some operations only feet



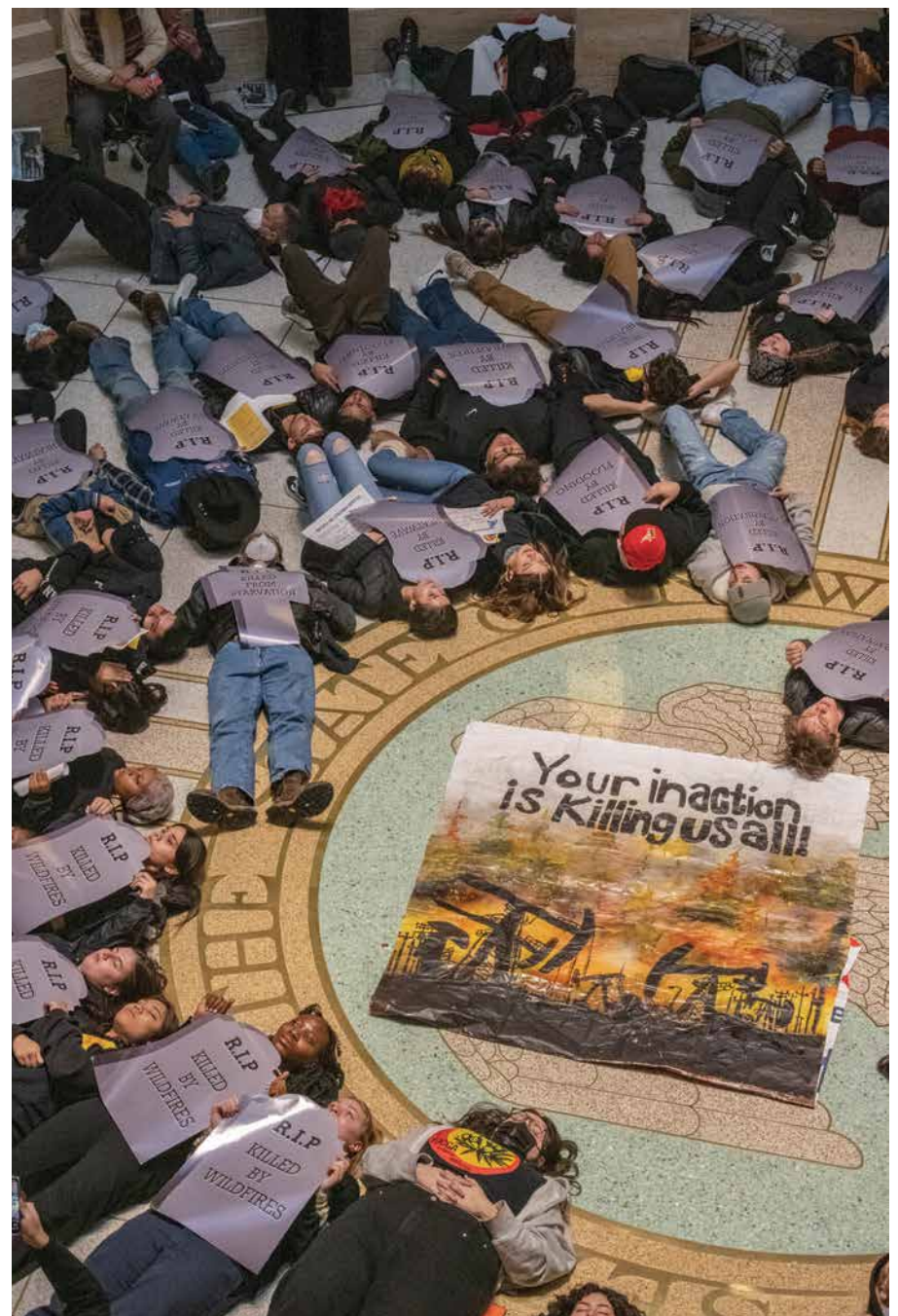
*“I don’t feel like it’s responsible for me to have kids, knowing the risks pollution can expose you to.”*

from our front doors. I can’t stop thinking about these chemicals getting into my home. My family bathes in that water, my neighbors and our animals drink it. I’m 21 years old and I don’t feel like it’s responsible for me to have kids, knowing the risks pollution can expose you to.

It’s common to encounter people in the Permian who genuinely believe climate change is a hoax. But they aren’t the only ones who live here. Elders who live near extraction sites have raised concerns for themselves and their grandchildren. Why do their calls continue to go unanswered? When will New Mexico defuse its carbon bomb and join the rest of the climate-conscious world to create a clean, safe and healthy future?

I encourage you to understand the effects of the lifelong pollution that is contaminating our bodies and natural resources, and to include citizens of southern New Mexico in efforts for climate justice. Our youth deserve long, healthy lives, and our elders deserve a world where we can uplift our land-based cultural practices of farming and caring for livestock, and protect our water for future generations. ■

*Jozee Zuniga is a leader of Youth United for Climate Crisis Action (YUCCA).*



*More than 100 members of YUCCA staged a die-in at the start of the 2023 N.M. Legislative session and brought their demands and personal messages to lawmakers and the governor for climate action, a just transition and real climate solutions.*

*Photos © Seth Roffman*



## REAL SOLUTIONS IN THE FACE OF FOSSIL FUEL CHALLENGES



Richard Moore of Los Jardines Institute rallies protesters in front of the “Hydrogen Hydra,” a 30-foot banner outside the NM Roundhouse during the 2023 legislative session, depicting the constellation of dangerous false solutions that perpetuate dirty extractive energy.

Indigenous Lifeways, an organization rooted in Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and land-based practices, places a strong emphasis on safeguarding sacred sites—which are integral to maintaining cultural identity—and supporting frontline communities. The organization sees its role in understanding the delicate balance between human activity and preserving the environment. Our work is grounded in matriarchal values that emphasize community wellbeing over profit-driven agendas.

McKinley County has been entangled in a 140-year history of fossil fuel extraction, yet the community has not reaped economic benefits. This has resulted in a cycle of economic disparity and low childhood wellbeing.

A push toward producing green hydrogen poses new threats. Touted as a clean-energy alternative, this technology has been closely scrutinized by the No False Solutions Coalition and knowledgeable researchers. The coalition includes Indigenous Lifeways, YUCCA, the Pueblo Action Alliance, Los Jardines Institute, Earth Care, New Energy Economy and the Center

for Biological Diversity. We believe the hydrogen industry is rooted in the manipulation of land and people and poses severe risks to public health, land and air quality.

In recent years, there have been proposals to convert the Escalante Power Plant, a decommissioned coal power plant near Prewitt, New Mexico, into a green/gray hydrogen plant. Our coalition thinks that, due to the plant’s structure and other factors, this poses many risks.

Hydrogen, one of the smallest molecules, can potentially seep through metals. It is colorless and odorless. One must use UV scanning to detect a hydrogen flame, which is more combustible than gas. The process of extracting hydrogen requires using clean or “produced” water and splitting water molecules from hydrogen and oxygen (electrolysis).

The Western Interstate Hydrogen Hub (WISHH) was part of an \$8 billion bipartisan investment by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), aimed at establishing regional hydrogen hubs across the United States. Promoted as a climate-friendly solution, states such as New Mexico, Colorado and Wyoming have sought to extract, produce and transport hydrogen. So far, technical challenges have led the DOE to withhold funding for the projects in this region. Undeterred, major private investors seek to impose this on our frontline communities. Despite serious concerns voiced by surrounding communities, investors such as Blackstone, with the support of New Mexico Gov. Lujan Grisham, continue to fundraise for what we consider a greenwashed venture.

The New Mexico No False Solutions Coalition advocates for a comprehensive phase-out of fossil fuels within New Mexico. We emphasize the need for an Indigenous just transition to



Krystal Curley



Left: Youth activists at the 2023 Climate Strike organized by YUCCA call out false solutions proposed at the “Advanced Energy Technology Summit” hosted by industry and some NM lawmakers

Above: YUCCA leaders Ennedith López and Sofia Jenkins-Nieto raise awareness about the danger of hydrogen energy (98 percent of which is made from fossil fuels) at the NYC climate march.

### *A delicate balance between human activity and preserving the environment.*

address the energy crisis. The coalition proposes policies that prioritize the protection and preservation of sacred sites. We call for a rejection of false solutions such as green hydrogen, carbon-capture storage, nuclear energy and biomass. Along with other coalitions, we urge the recognition and codification of the UN Human Rights Declaration of Human Rights policies, which ensure that Indigenous people have a voice and prior consent in energy development.

The coalition believes that real solutions can be found based on the knowledge and experience of grassroots people. We call for inclusive policies that empower communities and serve as a framework for climate solutions for the entire nation. The rejection of false solutions and the promotion of an Indigenous just transition away from fossil fuels is the foundation for the coalition’s commitment to a livable and equitable future for New Mexico. We are urging policymakers at both state and national levels to heed the voices of Indigenous communities and embrace a paradigm shift towards genuine environmental stewardship and social justice. ■

Krystal Curley (Diné/Navajo) was born in Chichitah, N.M. She is the executive director of Indigenous Lifeways. She has been actively involved in improving her community, which inspired her to earn a B.F.A in Film Production with Honors from Santa Fe University of Art and Design.

*We call for inclusive policies that empower communities and serve as a framework for climate solutions for the entire nation.*



## DO BETTER IN HONORING CHACO

The Greater Chaco region is a living and ancient cultural landscape. A thousand years ago, Chaco Canyon in northern New Mexico was the ceremonial and economic center of the Chaco Cultural Landscape, an area encompassing more than 75,000 square miles of the Southwest in New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Utah and sacred to Indigenous Peoples. Today, Chaco Canyon is a National Park and UNESCO World Heritage Site, considered one of the most important archaeological sites in the Americas, yet the vast majority of the Greater Chaco Landscape is leased to oil and gas activities. Indigenous People, primarily Pueblo and Navajo (Diné) peoples, sacred cultural sites, precious water resources, and the area's biodiversity are all under a grave and growing threat from fracking.

For over a century, the federal government has quite literally treated the Greater Chaco Landscape like a national energy sacrifice zone. Victim to large-scale resource exploitation, including a history of Navajo displacement and land theft, the Greater Chaco region has been carved into a complex checkerboard of federal, state, private, and Navajo allotment land. A maze of federal and state agencies control the area, allowing for oil, gas, and mining companies to exploit communities, as well as layers of law, regulations, and oversight agencies. New Mexico is now the second biggest oil producer in the United States, hosting the world's largest oilfield in southeast New Mexico and west Texas, with more than 91 percent of available lands in the Greater Chaco area leased for fracking.

After a decade of dedicated advocacy, the Greater Chaco Coalition is continuing our work supporting frontline Greater Chaco communities' demands to protect the health of people and life on the land. The coalition includes impacted Diné Nation community members/landowners, Pueblo water protectors and allies across the Southwest.



In November 2021, Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland initiated a 20-year administrative withdrawal (from new oil and gas drilling) of unleased federal lands within 10 miles of Chaco Culture National Historical Park. The next step is to initiate a collaborative process among the BLM, BIA, Tribal nations, Indigenous and frontline communities to manage the land.

No one knows what the future holds for communities that the Honoring Chaco Initiative (HCI) addresses. This is due to continuing uncertainty about the next steps the Navajo Nation, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will take because they have revealed few details.

Since 2013, I've attended Chapter meetings and met with local elder allottees who have educated and kept me up-to-date on the Checkerboard land challenges. We live in a region heavily impacted by hydraulic fracturing. When I started sitting with fellow impacted community members, I learned that more than 90 percent of the land managed by the BLM in the San Juan Basin (the Greater Chaco landscape) had been sacrificed to the oil and gas industry since the 1920s. In recent years, the BLM Farmington and Río Puerco Field offices illegally leased land by authorizing oil and gas permits under outdated Resource Management Plans (RMP) and Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) without translating the processes into the Navajo language or any other contemporary Indigenous languages that connect the site's cultural stakeholders.

*Oil and gas activities are taking  
and taking our fresh water during  
a climate-induced drought.*

In 2016, I witnessed the Farmington BLM office and BIA host scoping meetings within the Greater Chaco landscape, from Crownpoint to Shiprock, for community members to comment on an upcoming RMP/EIS. Then in 2020, during the pandemic, the BLM held hearings over Zoom to announce it would move forward with the draft RMPA/EIA process. The draft was written to approve over 3,000 new wells in the Greater Chaco region, but there was nothing that focused on climate-change impacts. During each listening session, there was a strong, united Diné voice from impacted communities, demanding that the BLM and BIA implement safer protections and respect sacred sites





## *The BLM should do better because they should know better.*

beyond a 10-mile buffer. There are also people who live there and lease their lands who demand protections outside of the 10-mile buffer.

A concerted effort must be made to conserve our precious water resources. We are seeing the development of a collaborative effort to co-manage a sacred landscape, which includes its biodiversity. I encourage people from New Mexico to stand in solidarity with us by organizing or learning to organize. New Mexico is filled with meaningful sacred sites, and we're all learning to co-protect land and resources. There should be no reason for community members to live without running water or electricity, while next door, oil and gas activities are taking and taking our fresh water during a climate-change-induced drought.

Based on what we're seeing on the ground after years of neglect and dishonesty from the BIA and BLM, here are our demands:

- Implement the recommendations from the community Health Impact Assessment.
- There must be meaningful consultation with impacted communities and Chapter houses, and tribal co-management of lands and resources.
- Phase out fossil fuel exploitation.
- Protect land, air and water.
- Support economic security and stability.
- Reinvest in impacted communities with resources like hospitals, shelters, etc., and provide emergency response plans.

The Greater Chaco Coalition also encourages people to get involved by hosting an *Our Story* film gathering, virtually or in-person. Or protest outside of a BLM office to tell them to do better—because they should know better. ■

*Cheyenne Antonio is Haltsooi—Meadow Clan from the Eastern Checkerboard region of Dinétab in Pueblo Pintado and Torreon, N.M. She is a community organizer and the energy organizer for Diné C.A.R.E.*



OP-ED: ALEXANDRÍA LYONS

## NEW MEXICO DECLARATION FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

### *Demands for a Just Transition*

In September 2023, a group of frontline, Indigenous and youth leaders from New Mexico climate-justice organizations participated in the New York Climate Week of Action, an annual event held near the United Nations. Given the continuing rise of global temperatures and, in states such as New Mexico, a huge increase of oil and gas permitting and fracking, this was particularly important. Members of New Mexico No False Solutions, Greater Chaco Coalition and the Permian Basin Coalition for Climate Justice went to New York to deliver their *New Mexico Declaration for Climate Justice* to the UN and the Biden administration.

The Declaration, which proposes a way forward for New Mexicans of all backgrounds, calls for a phase-out of fossil fuels in the state, including existing infrastructure and stopping all new projects, while providing financial support for workers and communities impacted by the transition. Youth and Indigenous activists have also continued their call for the governor to declare a climate emergency.

While in New York, coalition members spoke about the chokehold that the fossil-fuel industry has on New Mexico, as political support for oil and gas development soars to unprecedented levels under Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and this Democratic-controlled Legislature, even while the climate

crisis devastates our state. Due to fossil-fuel-centric economic development, revenue from the industry now comprises nearly half of New Mexico's budget.

*Hydrogen, in all its  
colors, is a distraction  
from moving toward  
renewable energy.*

Unfortunately, the only new investment idea coming from the current administration seems to be the expansion of our extractive energy sector through the development of hydrogen—despite the fact that 98 percent of hydrogen comes from dirty fossil fuels. Green hydrogen technology is unproven and

extremely energy- and water-intensive. Investing in hydrogen will only perpetuate New Mexico's reliance on the oil and gas industry at a time when the state urgently needs to phase out fossil fuels. No matter the fuel source, all forms of hydrogen use vast quantities of water, which our drought-stricken state simply cannot afford. Moreover, hydrogen transportation poses unique safety risks because hydrogen burns hotter than gas and is more combustible and corrosive to pipelines.

Combustion of hydrogen produces more harmful nitrogen oxide than burning methane alone, exacerbating health risks in frontline communities. Nitrogen



*COP 28, in December 2023, formally recognized the inextricable links between climate and health, climate and nature, and climate and food, among other links, creating the opportunity for integrated solutions to these crises. Further, the COP agenda for the first time formally included cities and states, a critical move for effective climate action.*

*Youth and Indigenous activists continue their call for  
the governor to declare a climate emergency.*

oxide contributes to dangerous ozone and fine particulate-matter pollution. Between 20 and 40 percent of the renewable energy used to generate green hydrogen is lost in the process, meaning that green hydrogen will always be more expensive and less efficient than renewable electricity. Instead of wasting the state's renewable resources on the production of green hydrogen, New Mexico should expand community-supported wind and solar and use this energy directly.



COP28 IN DUBAI

Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham was the only U.S. governor to travel to COP28 in Dubai with the U.S. Climate Alliance. Representatives from the Pueblo Action Alliance, the Center for Biological Diversity and the New Mexico No False Solutions Coalition were also there as part of the Indigenous Environmental Network’s delegation. The governor promoted green hydrogen and announced a \$500 million proposal that would take place over the next two years to process produced water for reuse.

Julia Bernal, executive director of Pueblo Action Alliance, attended Gov. Lujan Grisham’s panel, hand-delivered the “New Mexico Grassroots Declaration for Climate Justice” and requested that the governor’s office meet with coalition members. “At COP28, the private-public sector promoted false solutions like Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS), Direct Air Capture (DAC), nuclear energy and green hydrogen as solutions for climate adaptation and mitigation,” said Bernal. “The governor has shown total disdain for the Indigenous-led grassroots movements during international climate negotiations.”

Members of the NM 2 End Fossil Fuels and New Mexico No False Solutions Coalition also delivered the Declaration to the Office of the Governor and reiterated their request for a meeting. So far, there has been no response. The coalition has held several demonstrations at the Capitol demanding the governor pivot toward a full investment in scientifically proven renewables, such as wind and solar.

For the past two years, the Legislature has rejected bills that seek to move public funds into the hands of private hydrogen developers. These bills were met with widespread opposition from Indigenous peoples, frontline communities, social justice organizations, environmental groups, health advocates and public interest organizations. Will this legislative session continue the misuse of public funds? It will all come down to the choices made by legislators and state leaders. Will they listen to the demands of everyday people? The delegation from New Mexico will remain vigilant. You can read the full declaration at: [nofalsesolutions.com](http://nofalsesolutions.com).

*When will the state address its historic injustices to communities that have suffered a legacy of pollution and extraction and have become energy sacrifice zones for the country?*



As New Mexico faces devastating climate hazards like wildfires and record-breaking heat waves, it is imperative to move toward renewable energy, which won’t repeat the pattern of externalizing costs to frontline communities. Hydrogen, in all its colors, is a distraction from this critical task. ■

*Alejandria Lyons, a Xicana organizer from Los Lunas, N.M., is coordinator of the New Mexico No False Solutions Coalition. She received her master’s degree in Community and Regional Planning from the University of New Mexico.*

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# The World We Depend On, Now More Than Ever, Depends On Us

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# NEW MEXICO GRASSROOTS DECLARATION FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

This declaration was crafted by members of grassroots-led coalitions in New Mexico who came together to demand an end to the era of fossil fuels and a just and equitable transition to clean energy.

**IN ORDER TO SECURE A JUST AND LIVABLE FUTURE NOT ONLY FOR NEW MEXICO BUT ALSO FOR MOTHER EARTH, THE BIDEN AND LUJAN-GRISHAM ADMINISTRATIONS MUST:**



**STOP ALL NEW FOSSIL FUEL PROJECTS**, including in the Permian Basin, the world's largest climate bomb, and across the Greater Chaco Landscape. Revoke permits for the Willow Project and the Mountain Valley Pipeline.



**IMMEDIATELY PHASE OUT ALL EXISTING FOSSIL FUEL EXTRACTION** in line with the 1.5C° temperature limit, ensuring a commitment from the U.S. to do its fair share, and protecting frontline communities during this rapid transition.



**REFUSE FALSE SOLUTIONS** like hydrogen, carbon capture and storage, nuclear energy, biomass and other greenwashed and geoengineered initiatives that distract from true transition efforts and maintain reliance on fossil fuels.



**PROTECT THE SACRED** by centering traditional ecological knowledge and rejecting the financialization of nature and commodification of what is sacred, the land, air, water, and our communities. Indigenous and community stakeholder participation is critical to achieving bold climate goals and climate mitigation and adaptation strategies. Embrace Indigenous stewardship principles to sustain balanced ecosystems and biodiversities.



**DECLARE A CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND PAVE THE WAY FOR A JUST TRANSITION** to a renewable clean energy future, creating millions of jobs while respecting workers' and community rights, local healthy job security, and equitable employment. Halt fossil fuel exports and foreign investments, expediting the establishment of fair, resilient, distributed energy systems. Reduce energy consumption to levels sustainable within local ecosystems.



For generations, New Mexico has been a **SACRIFICE ZONE** for the fossil fuel industry. Fossil fuels have inflicted irreparable damage upon our land, air, water, sacred places, health, and the climate. Indigenous Peoples, people of color, low-income communities, and youth in New Mexico bear a disproportionate burden due to the state's reliance on and promotion of fossil fuels. These communities are leading the fight for a **JUST TRANSITION**.





## INDIGENOUS LEADERS VOICE CONCERN OVER MINING TO POWER THE GREEN TRANSITION

Indigenous leaders at the COP28 climate conference in Dubai urged governments and corporations to protect Indigenous rights and lands as the demand for metals to power green technology soars. At least 30 energy transition minerals and metals (ETMs) form the material base for the renewable energy transition, with lithium, cobalt, nickel and copper underpinning green industries amid a shift toward sustainable solutions to tackle climate change. The minerals are needed to make electric car batteries and other energy equipment.

More than half of all energy transition materials have been found on, or close to, Indigenous peoples' lands, according to a University of Melbourne study. A legacy of exploitation has impacted many Indigenous communities whose land has been used for oil, gas and mining operations.

In an open letter, the nonprofit Cultural Survival said, "We urge governments and corporations to ensure equitable and responsible environmental and social practices on our lands. We have ancestral, cultural and spiritual ties to our lands that not only require our participation in climate advocacy but also call us to commit to deeply rooted stewardship practices of nature. Indigenous leaders are pursuing and championing clean energy and transportation solutions on their territories that align with self-determined needs and goals. These solutions should be recognized, promoted and funded by states and private entities."

Protocols under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples encourage open consultations and negotiations on mining activities, with the final say on operations given to local communities.

## NEW MEXICO LOOKS TO BRACKISH AND PRODUCED WATER AMID CLIMATE CHANGE

BY HANNAH GROVER, NM POLITICAL REPORT

It's no secret that wells in parts of New Mexico are running dry and communities that rely on surface water from rivers have watched those waterways dwindle to a mere trickle.

State leaders are now turning toward the vast reserves of brackish water and "produced" water—a byproduct of oil and gas production—in hopes that the arid state can continue to grow and thrive even as climate change ushers in an era of aridification. In December, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced the creation of a strategic water reserve that will be built by purchasing cleaned-up brackish or produced water. This water will not be used as a drinking water source but can be used in other sectors and may reduce demand for freshwater. That will allow more of the freshwater to be used to support communities, including as drinking water.

The governor's announcement came at the start of a panel discussion about partnerships with business during the COP28 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Dubai. "You might have heard that New Mexico is challenged by water," Lujan Grisham said. "Frankly, many countries and localities are equally challenged." She said that climate change is making it harder to recharge stressed aquifers, and New Mexico is anticipated to see a 25 percent reduction in available water. At the same time, Lujan Grisham said the state desires to grow responsibly.

Building this strategic water reserve provides opportunities for businesses. Lujan Grisham said the state will invest \$500 million to purchase this cleaned-up water and it will be "technology-neutral." During a press conference, the governor said this funding will come through severance tax bonds and that she will ask the Legislature to fund \$250 million for the project this 30-day session and the remaining \$250 million in the 60-day session in 2025.

"We want unequivocally to make sure that we're identifying some of the waste from the fossil fuel industry and some of the brackish water assets that we have and basically turn it into a commodity so that we are protecting freshwater for New Mexicans for generations to come," Lujan Grisham said. She pointed to areas like hydrogen and chip manufacturing as sectors that might be able to utilize the cleaned-up produced or brackish water.

In Dubai, Lujan Grisham said that in a state with little water to spare, continued economic growth will require a strategic water reserve. At the same time, she said government policies and regulations can "create or chill any kind of innovation."

The announcement follows years of efforts laying the groundwork for such an initiative. In 2019, Lujan Grisham signed the Produced Water Act that paved the way for using wastewater from oil and gas for a variety of purposes. Produced water is often injected into the ground, which can lead to earthquakes. The use of produced water outside of oilfields has been controversial, with many environmental groups saying that it could place fresh water supplies and communities at risk.

The New Mexico Environment Department is currently working on water reuse standards. Secretary James Kenney said the comment period on a draft rule closed at the end of November and NMED is now petitioning the Water Quality Control Commission to enact rules. Kenney said New Mexico will have "both a carrot and stick approach" to brackish and produced water that will allow the state to "continue to move the economic needle while preserving our freshwater reserves."

Companies that participate in the initiative will need to go through rigorous environmental permitting, Lujan Grisham said. She said that will ensure the water is clean enough to be used safely and that "we aren't creating any other problems by just saying 'look, here's money' to the private sector."

While the standards needed are not all in place today, Kenney said they will be in 2024. Furthermore, he highlighted that the state has worked with the New Mexico Produced Water Consortium, which is based out of New Mexico State University. NMED and NMSU entered into a memorandum of understanding in 2019 that created the consortium.

Lujan Grisham emphasized the importance of the partnership with NMSU. She said that using independent academic institutions allows the state to ensure that it is "exceeding to every degree possible whatever the standards ought to be." Additionally, she said including scientific research provides New Mexicans security in the decisions the government makes.



## NEW MEXICO SUES PFAS MANUFACTURERS

### *Santa Fe County Funding Groundwater Studies*

The New Mexico Attorney General and the state's Environment Department have an ongoing lawsuit against manufacturers of PFAS, "forever chemicals" linked to cancers and damage to immune systems. In July 2023, 22 attorneys general, including New Mexico's, urged a federal court to reject a proposed settlement over contamination of U.S. public drinking water systems. The officials are seeking monetary damages to defray costs of environmental monitoring and the installation of treatment systems.

PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) don't degrade in the environment and remain in the bloodstream. State regulators are concerned about the chemicals seeping into aquifers. Eighty percent of New Mexico residents rely on underground water in their homes. In March 2023, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed the first federal limits on forever chemicals in drinking water, limiting them to the lowest detectable level.

PFAS are all around us. They coat non-stick cookware, smartphone screens, waterproof clothing and stain-resistant textiles. They are also used in microchips, jet engines, cars, batteries, medical devices and refrigeration systems. PFAS in firefighting foam has contaminated military institutions and adjacent communities. New Mexico officials and the U.S. Department of Defense have been at odds over remediation responsibility at Cannon and Holloman Air Force bases. Three thousand cows at the Highland Dairy in Clovis (near Cannon) were euthanized in 2022 after contamination of a herd and the milk it produced.

Twenty-one companies are named in New Mexico's lawsuit, including 3M and Dupont. "These companies had knowledge that these chemicals cause harm and still chose profit over people," state Environment Secretary James Kenny said in a statement. More than 100 companies and brands, including Apple, have pledged to phase out PFAS. In December 2022, 3M announced that it will try to get them out of products within two years.

In June 2023, 3M agreed to pay over \$12.5 billion to settle lawsuits brought by 531 U.S. cities. Three other companies also agreed to pay more than \$1 billion to settle the first wave of claims. The 3M payout, which will be spread out over 13 years, will occur in two phases. The first will benefit 4,488 systems that are already grappling with known PFAS contamination. The second phase's scale will be determined by the number of utilities participating and will cover the expenses of compliance and testing. It will also establish a special action fund to support systems that discover PFAS contamination.

A 2023 law in Colorado bans PFAS in household products as well as in oil and gas extraction. In June 2023, WildEarth Guardians filed a petition with New Mexico's Oil Conservation Commission that seeks a ban on PFAS in fracking. The petition was in response to a Physicians for Social Responsibility report, which found that oil companies used about 9,000 pounds of PFAS for 260 wells in New Mexico. WEG also wants a rule rescinded that allows operators to conceal many of the chemicals they use. A spokesman for the New Mexico Oil and Gas Association has denied that PFAS are currently used in drilling and fracking. Sigma Advanced Technologies, a New Mexico tech company using ozone, working with Sandia National Laboratories, is one of several research groups working on systems to remove and destroy PFAS in "produced" water, which comes out of oil or gas wells during extraction.

## PFAS FOUND SOUTH OF SANTA FE

In response to a February 2023 report published by the U.S. Army National Guard disclosing that PFAS were found in groundwater samples collected at the National Guard Santa Fe Readiness Center, Santa Fe County has sought to identify whether the substance is present in the La Ciénega and La Cieneguilla areas. The main production well for La Ciénega's Mutual Domestic Water Consumers Association did not test positive. However, PFAS were found in five of six private wells tested in November. Three were above current EPA health advisory levels. A press release from the County says that the test results do not mean that PFAS are present in water drawn from a specific private domestic well, and recommends that well owners conduct regular testing. The county has awarded \$459,000 from the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) for further investigation in those areas. The press release also says that the test results do not apply to the City of Santa Fe or County water utility systems.

Despite publishing the report, the National Guard did not notify area residents, some of whom expressed alarm after learning about it in November. According to a National Guard spokesman quoted in the *New Mexican*, a remedial investigation—to determine the extent of the contamination and evaluate risks to human health and the environment, and then evaluate options for cleanup—is underway but may take "several years."

Approximately 60 percent of water systems with known PFAS contamination are small systems. The average remediation cost for smaller systems is estimated to reach nearly \$6,600 per connection—significantly higher than the estimated \$450 per connection for larger systems. The federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) has allocated \$10 billion for PFAS remediation. The PFAS challenge may be pushing us toward an inevitable reliance on home filtration for drinking water safety. However, that is a solution that could fail many underrepresented communities.



New Mexico  
Environmental Law Center

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## THE ENERGY JUSTICE PROJECT

Please do an exercise with me. Think of energy in the literal sense, as in power and electricity. What comes to mind? Your home, our schools, buildings, cars? I imagine you, like most people, think of it as something we pay for and consume, as a commodity. Yet, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our daily lives depend on energy. It is a need.

In the age of fossil fuels, our use of energy is killing our planet and threatening all that is sacred to us. Fossil-fuel energy use has supercharged the extraction, production and consumption that sustain our capitalist economy. It has also created catastrophic ecological and social crises that demand systemic transformation. Environmental racism and colonialism have ensured that the impacts of the climate catastrophe are not equally borne. An extractive economy relies on an unequal distribution of power, wealth extraction of natural resources, an exploited labor force and the marginalization of diverse communities.

We need to reduce our use of energy *immensely*. But for the moment, the need for energy is a real one—so we cannot expect people to just stop using it. We need to change where our household energy is coming from.

But what do we do when the fossil fuel energy we must transition away from is fueling the economy of the state where we live? What if short-sighted politicians kept investing year after year in the fantasy of the fossil-fuel economic panacea? What if they made choices to prioritize fossil fuels over public health and clean enterprises—and so all our state's eggs are in the fossil-fuel basket?

The contradictions and challenges are *real*.

In the United States, and especially New Mexico, which is the second-top oil-producing state in the United States, our economy strongly relies on the extraction of fossil fuels. Yet, in order to avoid a climate catastrophe and ensure global temperatures remain below 1.5 degrees Celsius, we must immediately phase out our use of fossil fuels and transition our economy.

The answers:

1. We need alternative energy sources that significantly reduce the harm of our energy use.
2. We need to invest in alternative economic endeavors.
3. The structures, communities and societies that we begin to build, piece by piece, need to be way more efficient and way less indulgent—so that they don't demand the same volume of energy.

But we also need to change the structure of how energy is provided to our communities in order to achieve energy justice.

In New Mexico, the investor-owned utilities (IOU) structure has been monopolized by the Public Service Company of New Mexico (PNM), Xcel Energy and El Paso Electric. These three IOUs control the access to energy and prices charged to the consumer. They invest in big, expensive energy projects because they want to collect a guaranteed return on investment. And they've kept our energy system hostage—proposing to invest in more fossil fuels and nuclear, unless they are forced by advocates and good regulators to invest in renewables. As electricity prices rise year over year, low-income households are disproportionately impacted.

If we are to transform our energy system to meet our needs without killing the planet, we must get energy providers out of our governance system! The huge number of lobbyists, the IOUs and oil and gas companies greatly influence decisions made by our state Legislature.

This extends to the highest levels of governance. At COP28, Julia Bernal, executive director of Pueblo Action Alliance, joined a delegation of Indigenous and frontline community representatives and reminded leaders that, "This region in particular [the Southwest] has felt the exacerbated impacts of climate change and this falls under a historic legacy of 'energy sacrifice zones' of fossil fuels, of coal, uranium and other hardrock mining, which is typically in or near our ancestral lands." New Mexican and Indigenous communities across the state have been treated like sacrifice zones. For decades, in the interest of profit, our communities

*A regenerative economy is rooted in true energy democracy.*

have lived in proximity to polluting industries and military bases, exposing them to health risks and environmental threats.

A just and equitable transition toward a regenerative economy transforms not only our power system but also the power dynamic. Energy democracy sees energy access as a basic necessity and human right that must be governed and designed by the people because people can bring our economic systems and daily habits into alignment with our values. Corporations cannot. The Energy Democracy Project is a collaborative project across diverse, local, frontline organizations throughout the country centering policies, projects and organizing to solve the dilemma of energy's central role in our lives and economies. It is directly spearheading the initiatives through the following principles:

### Energy Democracy Principles

1. We seek a balanced relationship with the natural world and honor energy as essential for human life.
2. We value energy primarily as a shared natural resource for enabling and empowering human rights, rather than as a commodity for enriching corporate shareholders and financial institutions.
3. We believe everyone should be able to access safe and pollution-free renewable energy to meet their human needs, the needs of their community and the needs of their ecosystem.
4. We work together for our collective liberation over systems that divide and exploit (intentionally and unintentionally) people and the Earth.
5. We promote an equitable and just transition from an extractive economic system to a regenerative system.
6. We acknowledge our inextricable interdependence on the Earth and all other living creatures and therefore commit to protecting and defending our human rights, water, land, air and ecosystems.
7. We aim to advance health and safety for the wellbeing of all communities.
8. We commit to decolonize, reverse and repair historic harm, and advance environmental, economic and social justice for all communities—even when it's difficult.
9. We center and defend frontline, oppressed, targeted and systematically excluded communities.
10. We practice and prioritize community self-determination regarding the development, governance and control of energy resources.
11. We recognize that the current notion of "ownership" within the energy sector perpetuates a marketized, commodity model of profiting off energy, and we aim, instead, to make energy a public good that meets the rational energy needs of all communities.
12. We amplify community expertise and shared knowledge, recognizing that building local capacity, leadership and empowerment must be the basis of national and global change.



*Our use of energy is killing our planet and threatening all that is sacred to us.*



*Steering committee members of the No False Solutions Coalition pose at the Valle del Oro Reserve after their annual convening.*

*Xavier Barraza of Los Jardines Institute leading the launch rally for No False Solutions Coalition – advocating for real, renewable, community-driven climate solutions.*

These principles are evolving based on the critique, needs and social climate of the time. Solutions to the climate crisis are not sole techno-fixes but will require a fully rounded systemic transformation away from an inequitable extractive economy.

Locally based organizations such as New Energy Economy, Youth United for Climate Crisis Action (YUCCA), and others are actively working in support of enacting this visionary framework for New Mexico. For example, community owned solar projects establish a shared ownership model where solar energy can be produced off-site, on roofs, or in a community location and distributed to consumers at an affordable rate. This actively challenges the need to depend on our energy monopolies.

Energy Democracy offers an alternative dynamic that factors in an equitable distribution of power and systems. At this time of desperately needed transition, energy presents an opportunity to serve and become an economic resource for marginalized communities without sacrificing our health or environment.

I challenge the reader to look at energy beyond a commodity we consume and think of it as an opportunity to center our human rights, protect our communities, protect our environment and those sacred to us. ■

*Ennedith López is the policy campaign manager for YUCCA (Youth United for Climate Crisis Action). [ENNEDITH@EARTHCARENM.ORG](mailto:ENNEDITH@EARTHCARENM.ORG)*

## EPA PROVIDING \$2 MILLION FOR NM ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE PROJECTS

*Earth Care to Receive \$500,000 for Southside Santa Fe Health Assessment*

Environmental justice (EJ) is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. The EJ movement was started by individuals, primarily people of color, who sought to address the inequity of environmental protection in their communities.

Under the Inflation Reduction Act, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has launched and expanded innovative programs. In November, the EPA announced \$2,039,453 to fund three projects in New Mexico that align with the Biden administration's Justice40 initiative to deliver 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain federal investments to communities marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution. The projects were selected through the Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem Solving Agreement (EJCPS) and the Environmental Justice Government-to-Government (EJG2G) program to ensure disadvantaged communities have access to clean air and water, and climate resilience solutions.

In November, the EPA announced \$2,039,453 to fund three projects in New Mexico that align with the administration's Justice40 initiative to deliver 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain federal investments to communities marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution.

The EJCPS provides financial assistance to organizations working to address environmental or public health issues in their communities. The program builds on two of the president's executive orders that create a designation of funds exclusively for small nonprofit organizations that historically struggle to receive federal funding. "These grants are going directly to communities that are ready to implement solutions to environmental issues," said Regional Administrator Dr. Earthea Nance. "These recipients are deeply knowledgeable about the issues facing their communities, and are ready to invest these grants in projects that will bring meaningful results." "The EPA chose projects that will make us better ancestors," said Rep Teresa Leger Fernandez (NM-3). "These grants will serve our communities and pueblos through public education, cleanup initiatives, research and health assessments."

The EPA's EJCPS grant in New Mexico is being awarded to:

- **Earth Care International** in Santa Fe is receiving \$500,000 to conduct a community-led health assessment for the Southside of Santa Fe using collaborative problem-solving to develop concrete urban planning, local policy, and community-driven development solutions to the environmental justice and public health challenges the area faces.

The EPA's EJG2G program provides funding at state, local, territorial and Tribal levels to support government activities in partnership with community-based organizations that lead to measurable environmental or public health impacts.

The EJG2G grants in New Mexico include:

- **Santo Domingo Pueblo** is receiving \$539,453 to permanently decrease the number of individuals contributing to open dumps as well as eliminating open dumps in the pueblo.

- **The New Mexico Environment Department** is receiving \$1 million to help federal, state, county and tribal governments and community-based organizations carry out a Health Impact Assessment to engage community members and inform actions of NMED to help reduce help impacts in San Juan County due to harmful emissions from recycling facilities.



# Igniting Our Solar Future: The Urgency of Investing in Our Communities Today

BY REP. REENA SZCZEPANSKI AND SEN. HAROLD POPE

In New Mexico, we are working to embrace a clean energy future. We are proud of the strides we have made and excited about the unprecedented moment America stands in to accelerate this transition. However, like every state, our journey has not been seamless. We too are watching federal funding deadlines slip by and solar development unfold unevenly. Urban population centers like Albuquerque are amongst America's leading cities for solarization, while some of our rural communities have yet to embark on their first solar project.

These missed opportunities don't stem from a lack of enthusiasm or effort. Communities of all sizes and in every region of our state are ready to build public solar projects and create a more resilient energy grid. But there is a lack of access to capital and to planning and grant-writing expertise—especially for smaller communities.

We are introducing legislation in the 2024 legislative session that will establish the *New Mexico Local Solar Access Fund*. This groundbreaking initiative is poised to close the gaps and empower our communities in crafting a sustainable and equitable future for all New Mexicans. The mission of the fund is clear: deliver accessible grant funding for the planning and construction of solar and storage projects, powering buildings owned by a range of public entities. These entities include municipal governments, county governments, tribal governments, school districts, conservation districts, rural water associations and higher educational institutions. We know that shovel-ready projects don't exist today in every community. Critically, the fund will also issue planning grants, including contracting grant writers and federal funding experts to leverage unprecedented federal funding opportunities, as well as technical experts to conduct feasibility studies and plan projects. The aim is to empower communities to shape their energy future

and invest in their resilience, safety and security.

With an initial appropriation of \$110 million, the fund will be capable of receiving additional federal and private funding. This elasticity ensures that the fund evolves with the growing needs of our communities and advancements in renewable energy technologies.

We are inspired by a groundswell of enthusiasm coursing through New Mexico to get things done, to take advantage of available federal infrastructure funding, and to build projects



today that will benefit us for generations. We have heard from communities around our state and know that they want to build local solar and disaster-resiliency projects but still lack the capital and capacity.

This fund is going to change that. The Local Solar Access Fund is a commitment to equity in energy transition that will reduce carbon emissions and support community health. By structuring it to prioritize rural and under-resourced communities, we are ensuring that those who have historically faced barriers to funding and financing such projects can not only access renewable energy development but lead in creating a solar future for our state.

Through extensive engagement and outreach, we've learned that the need is urgent. This fund will be an accelerator, propelling community-owned and led development of renewable-energy projects. This will be a catalyst that enables New Mexico to leverage time-sensitive federal funding and secure accessible state funding to bring to life projects that lower energy costs.

The economic advantages are compelling. Solar, being more cost-effective than conventional energy, offers fixed rates over 25-30 years, shielding our communities from price gouging and market volatility. The potential savings are monumental, with millions projected to be saved over the lifetime of solar investments. The trend of decreasing solar costs, dropping more than 90 percent between 2009 and 2019, is expected to persist with increased manufacturing and investment.

Beyond the environmental and fiscal impacts, the fund will enhance community safety, security and resilience by facilitating the creation of emergency cooling centers that maintain power during blackouts, brownouts, severe weather events, heatwaves and wildfires.

The Local Solar Access Fund is complementary to existing and emerging





sources of funding like the New Mexico Climate Investment Center and time-sensitive federal funding from the Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. It will help jumpstart New Mexico’s renewable energy economy, which we need to strengthen and diversify our economy while meeting the challenges of climate change.

With our abundance of sunshine, we are uniquely positioned to harness the power of solar energy. The time to act is now. Let’s pass the Local Solar Access Fund in 2024. This is not just legislation; it will be a legacy. We are committed to support our communities’ dreams of solar and the security, prosperity and abundance it brings. The Local Solar Access Fund is our pledge to create a brighter, cleaner, and more prosperous tomorrow for all of us. ■



*Reena Szczepanski represents New Mexico’s 47<sup>th</sup> District, located in Santa Fe County. She serves as the majority whip in the House, the first Asian American elected to leadership in the New Mexico Legislature. She has spent her career “working for justice, equality, healthy communities and a healthy planet.”*



*Harold Pope represents Senate District 23. In 2022, he was elected majority caucus chair. Pope has served as vice chair of the Senate Education Committee, a member of the Conservation Committee, and co-chair of the Interim Military & Veterans Affairs Committee. He has passed numerous bills pertaining to veterans, military families, civil rights, police reform, education and environmental issues.*

## \$250M REQUESTED FOR SOLAR PROJECTS FOR LOW-INCOME HOMES

The New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) has requested \$250 million from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for low-income households. The requested funding is the maximum allowed from the EPA’s Solar for All competition, which will distribute \$7 billion to states, territories, municipal and tribal governments and nonprofit organizations. The grant awards are expected to be announced in March.

EMNRD officials say that 34,850 households would benefit from the program. According to a news release, their plan will add 123 megawatts of solar energy capacity to the state’s power grid and 13.5 MW to use when there is not enough sunlight to generate solar power. EMNRD estimates that the program will save New Mexico residents nearly \$500 million in energy costs over a 20-year period and avoid releasing 194,000 tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

According to the state’s proposal, New Mexico produced 256.6 MW of solar energy in 2013. That increased to 1,483 MW in 2022. To achieve its objectives, including a statewide goal of 100 percent carbon-free electricity by 2045, the state wants to focus on supporting shared solar access projects (community solar) in rural and tribal communities. That would allow multiple renters and people living in multi-family units to access solar power.

## ACCELERATING THE TRANSITION TO CLEAN TRANSPORTATION IN NEW MEXICO

Electric vehicles (EVs) are a pivotal solution to curbing toxic air and climate-changing pollution.

In November 2023, the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Board and the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Air Quality Board voted to approve Advanced Clean Car and Truck standards. In addition to encouraging manufacturers to supply the state with more zero-emission vehicles, the new standards are expected to reduce ground-level ozone, nitrogen oxides, particulate matter and greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by 2050, preventing health complications, hospital visits and premature deaths.

Although the number of eligible EVs will be limited under the Biden administration’s rules, federal tax credits make zero-emission vehicles more affordable than they have ever been. Incentives are available for institutions, businesses and individuals, regardless of tax liability. Auto dealers can offer the tax credit as an up-front discount. PNM has also proposed an upfront discount for limited-income people in the company’s service territory. Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham has said that in the upcoming legislative session, she will propose a new state tax credit for clean vehicles. The governor has directed state agencies to transform their fleets by 2035.

More information on the new standards can be found at:  
[HTTPS://WWW.ENV.NM.GOV/TRANSPORTATION/](https://www.env.nm.gov/transportation/) .

## NEW MEXICO IS ONE OF 39 STATES WITH IRA-FUNDED CLEAN ENERGY PROJECTS

The Inflation Reduction Act is the largest climate investment in U.S. history. Utilizing private capital to initiate climate goals, the IRA is intended to incentivize businesses to invest in clean- energy technologies. By providing bonuses to some businesses, it also encourages companies to locate in underserved communities where job creation will have the largest impact on the communities’ wellbeing.

Since the IRA became law on Aug. 16, 2022, private industries across the country have announced more than 210 major clean-energy projects, according to a report by E2 (Environmental Entrepreneurs), a national, nonpartisan group of business leaders, investors and professionals from every sector who advocate for “policies that are good for the economy and good for the environment.” E2 estimates that 403,000 jobs will be created by those projects, which include a dozen hydrogen projects. Hydrogen energy has been controversial because it often relies on fossil fuel-based methane.

Three of the projects are in New Mexico, including the Arcosa wind turbine manufacturing center in the Belen area, which President Biden visited last year. The Arcosa plant represents a \$55 million investment and will create 250 jobs. The largest solar cell and panel manufacturing center in the country is coming to the Mesa del Sol area of Albuquerque. It is owned by the Singapore-based company, Maxeon. It represents a \$1 billion investment and will create 1,800 jobs. The third project is a manufacturing center in Albuquerque that will produce cables that electric utilities use for grid resiliency. The \$40 million center, owned by ABB Ltd, will create 55 jobs.



# Speech by Newly Elected Santa Fe City Councilor, Alma Castro

*In a runoff, Alma Castro beat out a crowded field and was sworn in at an inauguration ceremony on Dec. 29, 2023.*



Thank you, Mayor and fellow councilors. Councilwomen Villareal and Bushee, thank you so much for supporting me and trusting me to continue the vital work you have pioneered in our community. To the dedicated members of my campaign... and everyone who joined the grassroots efforts—knocking on doors, making calls, holding signs and putting boots on the ground to mobilize voters—my deepest gratitude. Your unwavering commitment is the driving force behind this incredible opportunity I’ve been given to serve you.

As a multi-generational *Santa Fesina* and the proud daughter of a *Salvadoreño*, I deeply understand the intricate



tapestry that is our people. I am honored and excited to represent the richly diverse *gente* of District 1. Together, we will chart a course toward a future where prosperity is not just a privilege for a few but a right for all. I am committed to this cause, and I know you will hold me accountable, even if it means staying up until 2 a.m. on Wednesday nights, and faithfully watching our city council meetings on YouTube.

As I pondered what to say today, my thoughts kept returning to the Chicano rights leader, Rudolfo “Corky” González’s poem “*I Am Joaquín*.” His words have long inspired me on my journey of self-discovery. In honor of my mother and my mother’s mother and her mother before her, who instilled in me the strength and perspective *para navegar el mundo*, I share with you these *versos*:

I am not Juáquin. I am Alma Guadalupe Castro y González, *para servirle a Usted*. I stand before you, not lost in the labyrinth of *gringolandia*. I learned their rules and the manipulations of modern society. New Mexico won the struggle for cultural survival. *Tal vez* unwillingly dragged by “Progress,” *pero nunca nos quedamos atrás*. *Somos semillas*, yes, but even seeds need water and sun.

*Soy princesa Maya becha del maizal y la tierra volcánica; soy la espada de Oñate que tomo también venganza... entre pies, y vidas*. I am the granddaughter *del* dancer from Agua Fria. The steward over land with little surface water, so your roots better run deep. That’s how we survived this long. Our people toiled and tended this Earth and gave sweat and blood for the Spanish masters on land that belonged to no one. I am the descendant of both tyrants and slaves who were there when Hidalgo *dio su grito* and when Rudulfo was Blessed by Ultima. *Que en paz descanse...*

*No soy Joaquín, pero* I have within me the spirit of Juan Diego, *La virgencita de Guadalupe*, and Tonantzín, mother goddess. *Y como dijo Corky*, I *demande* the fear and respect afforded to *el mero mero* Joaquín Murrieta. *Ni santa ni... tan pura*, in the words of the late, great Gloria Anzaldúa: “The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds.”

I am Alma Guadalupe Castro y González, and against great odds, I am here and *y como Joaquín*, “We shall endure! We will endure!”

As your city councilor, I promise to serve you with integrity and passion, ever aware that you will be keeping tabs, keeping me true to my word and to our shared vision for a thriving Santa Fe.

*Muchas Gracias y Adelante.*

OP-ED: EARL JAMES

## THE BIOREGIONAL MOVEMENT TODAY (PART 2)

### COMING HOME

From the earliest days of the biological evolution that ended up as us, our predecessors in the chain lived more or less aligned with the seasons and the sustainable resources of our Earth’s systems—at least until the Industrial Revolution.

*Bioregional regeneration is not a quick fix but a multi-generational effort.*

A bio-geological era called the Holocene began some 12,000 years ago and provided all the necessary components for life on Earth to proliferate within a nurturing and stable climate. When the Industrial Revolution captured our imagination, we began to peel off from this coexistence and began exercising our new mechanistic powers to create a world we imagined we could control.

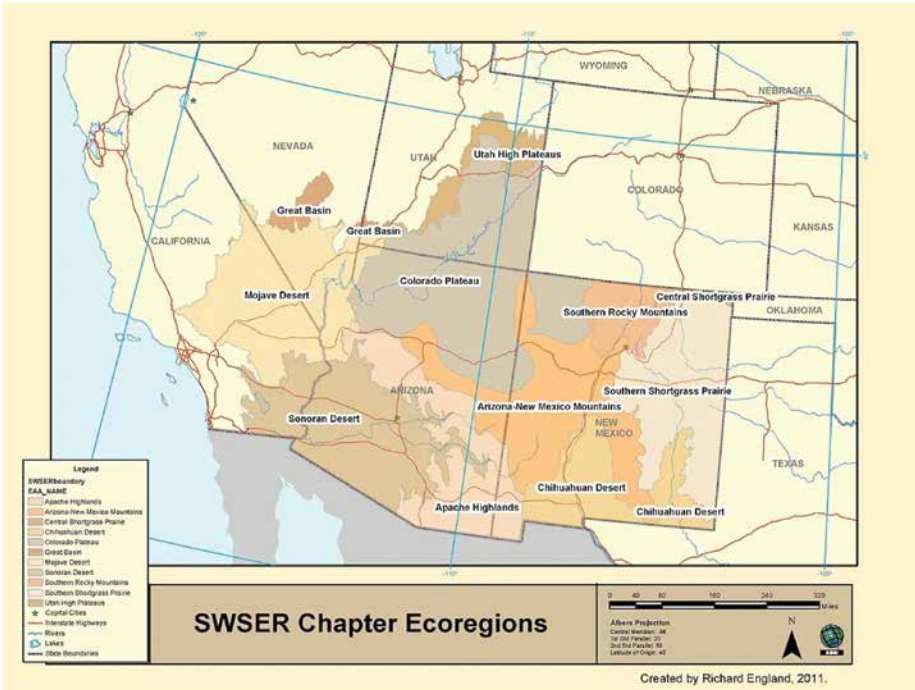
Now that we know better and find ourselves struggling to manage a retreat from our hubristic behaviors in order to survive, we need to return the Earth to Holocene-like conditions or as close to that as possible. In other words, we need to come home to that nurturing interdependency with all things on planet Earth that brought us here in the first place. In the Nov.-Dec. 2023 edition of the *Green Fire Times*, we looked at an overview of the bioregional regeneration movement today and recognized that it is an organizing strategy within vast areas of land called bioregions, and within those, smaller ecoregions. These bioregions are what sustains life.

Because we humans are now considered the major force of change on planet Earth, our era has been labeled the “Anthropocene.” To a great extent, we have used our dominant capabilities to impact the planet and its inhabitants destructively. We will have to turn that force toward fixing what we have broken to be proud of that label. Since Earth regeneration is usually thought of as patching up the places we have wounded—a watershed, a forest, a lakeshore, etc.—it’s important that regeneration projects have a goal of restoring in a manner that creates a new place that will be resilient to climate change for decades to come. In their early years, these new places will need much monitoring and nurturing with the best science possible, so, as Earth’s new creative force, we can return ourselves to that life-giving interdependence with nature.

Further, we have realized that we also have to cultivate proactive relationships with other humans and reverse the



destructive belief that we can live completely independent of each other by acquiring factory-produced goods that protect that illusion. To survive the extremely dangerous Anthropocene, major transformations must take place in everything we do. This means that a successful bioregional regeneration project is not only to pursue a deep interdependency with the Earth but also with each other, which is counter to how our materialist society has tried to socialize us. That's what this investigation of bioregional regeneration is about.



Map from the Society for Ecological Restoration  
— Southwest (<https://chapter.ser.org/southwest/>)

**Here We Are**

To emphasize the vastness of bioregions, here is a map of the Colorado Plateau and Mountain Forests bioregion, which contains about two-thirds of northern New Mexico and much of the Río Grande watershed so vital to life in New Mexico. As you can see from the map, this biologically defined entity also includes much of Colorado, Arizona and Utah. In fact, the estimated acreage of the bioregion is 72 million hectares, or 180 million acres.

Obviously, bioregional regeneration is not a quick fix, but rather, a multi-generational effort. It has been likened to cathedral-building in 14th-century Europe that took three or four generations. Conservationist Wendell Berry once described earthly regeneration this way: “Invest in the millennium. Plant a Sequoia.” The starting point for these efforts is to build a communication network between regeneration projects underway, perhaps just within your ecoregion, although that can also be a very large swath of land. This network allows people to share knowledge and solutions freely and builds interest in starting new regeneration projects. Some of these would remain as small, individualized projects within a given watershed, and others could be larger projects involving municipalities, farmers, ranchers, etc. To understand the dynamics of building this kind of community, let’s look at two that are actually underway.

This opens the door for us to begin understanding our place in restoring, regenerating and protecting vital pieces of the Earth system that is made up of the 185 bioregions.

**The Bioregional Living Solution**

**Cascadia** – In the previous edition of *Green Fire Times*, Cascadia was highlighted, as it was undergoing a self-assessment of sorts that culminated in a summit to hash out new pathways to guide its progress. Cascadia is the oldest bioregional community, in North America at least, but we should look at it as half-elder and half-startup. The “elder” Cascadia is detailed in the previous article. Its summit generated ambitious goals that were formed with support and guidance from the Design School for Regenerating Earth. The summit was

*Bioregions are what sustains life.*

preceded by a 30-day “activation tour” of these sites, led by Joe Brewer and Penny Heiple, the school’s co-founders.

There are 14 active regeneration hubs in the bioregion at present where communities are conducting regeneration projects that are connected virtually and in real time. The majority of these are watershed regeneration projects. The tour activated or strengthened working relationships of people at and between the hubs, as they were visiting each other’s projects in person or online. Cascadia already had an organizational structure and a small staff, volunteer and compensated. Here they are self-described on their Regenerate Cascadia website as: “...a core team of more than 150 local organizers in 14 communities throughout the Salish Sea and Willamette Valley. Regenerate Cascadia is a long-term vision and process that works with on-the-ground communities to design and implement new governance, ecology, and economy frameworks for the regeneration and health of our bioregion.” (<https://cascadiabioregion.org/>) with this mission statement: *An independent bioregion that is regenerative, democratic and just, as part of a world of watershed movements around the world.*

*Interdependency with each other is counter to how our materialist society has tried to socialize us.*

Over the years, Cascadia has developed an identity, separate from that of Oregon, Washington and British Columbia, that has taken hold with local businesses, organizations, etc. and developed its graphic identity. A thorough reading of the website gives the impression that Cascadia is as much about political reform via building the Cascadia cross-border identity based upon the history and coherence of this bioregion, and its stated intent to establish a global network of bioregions.

The Cascadia Summit, however, focused upon strengthening and expanding their network of watershed councils—which, it seems, could form the backbone of every bioregional organization—establishing and managing a regeneration fund to support on-the-ground projects, and to demonstrate how bioregionalism sets new standards for measuring one’s alignment with Mother Earth and commitment to a livable future for all. Such a challenge requires a strongly collaborative organization as well as strong values.

To absorb this community’s makeup and strengths, go to [www.regenerathecascadia.org/summit-recordings/](http://www.regenerathecascadia.org/summit-recordings/), as the 23 short video titles outline their comprehensive approach. For a fascinating look at maps of the ecoregions of Cascadia’s vast lands, visit: <https://cascadiabioregion.org/nine-regions-of-cascadia>.

**Ashoka**

Now we will look at a bioregional regeneration project that is very different from the grassroots-up Cascadia style of initiating regeneration work, both in scale and approach. Ashoka is a social entrepreneur activist organization with decades of experience in organizing to empower grassroots people. In this case, Ashoka has decided to take a big leap into bioregional regeneration by initiating 10 experimental programs in Europe, with sufficient funding to provide all of the expertise needed by grassroots groups. They have assembled what they call a bioregional weaving lab collective (BWL), representing 25 organizations.

There are some excerpts on their website (<https://www.ashoka.org/en-us/Program/Bioregional-Weaving-Labs-Collective>): “The Bioregional Weaving Labs (BWL) Collective is a growing assembly of 25-plus international system-changing organizations, grounded in a community of practice...working



directly with farmers, nature conservationists, communities and stakeholders... taking collective action to ensure that high level climate and biodiversity plans become more actionable...to offer maximum support to change leaders, citizens' initiatives and their communities that wish to restore, protect and regenerate the landscapes and seascapes they live and work in. We consist of socio-environmental entrepreneurs that design and implement Nature-based Solutions and of facilitators who create the right enabling conditions for NBS to take hold and scale."

They first assemble cohorts of 40-60 key local stakeholders (farmers, fishermen, landowners, investors, corporate leaders, shareholders, policymakers, educators, community members, etc.) to reimagine a future for their bioregions. The BWL then develops a holistic landscape plan that can generate four returns in the bioregion:

- Natural
- Social
- Financial returns
- Return of inspiration

The BWL collective then sets out to recruit 100,000 changemakers per bioregion to begin implementing the plan. To date, there are BWLs: in Ireland, The Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, France, Austria, Romania and Spain. They align on a shared vision and mission and work together to transform the bioregions from bottom-up, bioregion per bioregion. Each project is a 10-year timeline, with frequent monitoring of impact. With 10 projects engaging 100,000 each, the BEL collective will ultimately involve 1 million changemakers, and will regenerate 1 million hectares of land. For a deep dive into this remarkable process, see the BWL2022 insight report at: [https://issuu.com/ashokachangemakers/docs/insights\\_report\\_bioregional\\_weaving\\_labs\\_march\\_2](https://issuu.com/ashokachangemakers/docs/insights_report_bioregional_weaving_labs_march_2).

To round out this short description of BWLs, here is information on two of the bioregions that the collective has launched.



**County Waterford** in Ireland is in a region where huge agricultural production levels and rapidly growing population centers are accompanied by degraded monocultural farmlands and challenging long-term socio-economic trends. A Waterford BWL can connect to the Irish Food Vision 2030 and other ambitious national and local policies, thereby providing an opportunity for this predominantly agricultural Southeast bioregion to act as a showcase for an alternative, regenerative food-system of the future.



**Altiplano Estepario**, a steppe plateau of 1 million hectares in the southeast of Spain, an

area with the lowest rainfall in Europe, is facing major problems of desertification associated with agricultural practices, resulting in erosion and loss of soil. A BWL can help align stakeholders and shift from development of almond monocultures and the proliferation of intensive agricultural and livestock farming practices to mainstreaming regenerative practices and developing the regional market for it.

These descriptions and others can be found at the following link:  
<https://www.ashoka.org/en-us/program/bioregional-weaving-labs-collective>.

# Can these projects bring us back to the soil and back to interdependent communities like New Mexico's acequia collaboratives?

There are more aspiring and inspiring bioregional regeneration sites around the globe, but this brief look at Cascadia and the European BWL sites provides a glimpse into the workings of two very different models.

## Design School for Regenerating Earth

As mentioned above, the Design School is a support organization for bioregional regeneration efforts. It is a startup that is very effective, and many of its features



are similar to those of the BWLs, offering a wide variety of educational information and connecting people that could partner with organizations like Cascadia to guide them to the most effective path and practices. For more information, see: <https://design-school-for-regenerating-earth.mn.co/>.

Can these multi-generational projects bring us back to the soil and back to interdependent communities like New Mexico's acequia collaboratives and out of the grip of industrial society?

To prioritize nature over the lure of some new shiny tech will take leadership and resources to join the bioregional regeneration movement in a meaningful



way. Deep consideration should be given not only to the opportunities that bioregional communities provide, but also to the reality that we must think big about food security and employment, among other critical aspects of sustainability in a much hotter and drier future.

Earl James has several decades of experience in environmental protection, historic preservation and global governance. In 1990, he organized a multi-county public-private coalition that launched the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area in southwest Pennsylvania. He currently serves on the board of Common Home of Humanity.



Photos: Elwha River on the Olympic Peninsula; Santiago Maestas with acequia in the South Valley of Albuquerque; pivot sprinkler used for conventional large-scale farming.



# WHAT'S GOING ON

## ALBUQUERQUE / Online

### JAN. 3, 9:30 AM

#### HEARING ON ENERGY CONSERVATION CODES

Regulation and Licensing Dept., 5500 San Antonio Dr. NE  
The Construction Industries Commission will decide if NM will adopt the 2021 Energy Conservation Codes. [HTTPS://WWW.SRCA.NM.GOV/NMAC/NMREGISTER/XXXIV/RLD-CIDNOTICE\\_XXXIV22.HTML](https://www.srca.nm.gov/nmac/nmregister/xxxiv/RLD-CIDNOTICE_XXXIV22.HTML)

### THROUGH JAN. 9, 7:30 AM–5:30 PM

#### WINTER BREAK PROGRAMS

Low-cost programs keep kids (ages 5-15) engaged while school is out. \$10 registration. [PLAY.CABQ.GOV](http://PLAY.CABQ.GOV)

### THROUGH JAN. 10

#### CONVERSING WITH THE LAND: NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN BASKETS

Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, UNM Campus, 500 University Blvd. NE  
Baskets from the museum's collection. Free. [WWW.MAXWELLMUSEUM.UNM.EDU](http://WWW.MAXWELLMUSEUM.UNM.EDU)

### JAN. 11, 8 AM–4:30 PM

#### NEW MEXICO WATER DIALOGUE

*Indian Pueblo Cultural Center*  
29<sup>th</sup> annual statewide meeting. How will NM adapt to water scarcity? Why the 2023 Water Security Planning Act will work. Presented by the NMWD and Water Advocates for NM and the Middle Río Grande. Registration: [HTTPS://NMWATERDIALOGUE.ORG/](https://nmwaterdialogue.org/)

### JAN. 16, 10–11 AM

#### EARLY CHILDHOOD BILINGUAL STORYTIME

*National Hispanic Cultural Center Library, 1701 4<sup>th</sup> St. SW*  
Free. [HTTPS://MY.NMCULTURE.ORG/20700/26591](https://my.nmculture.org/20700/26591)

### APRIL 17–21

#### 77<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

*Society of Architectural Historians*  
Albuquerque Convention Center  
Architectural and art historians, architects, museum professionals, preservationists and those in allied fields will share research. Paper sessions, keynote talks, social reception, tours. [WWW.SAH.ORG](http://WWW.SAH.ORG)

### MAY 4 OPENING, 3-5 PM

#### “NOTHING LEFT FOR ME”

*Maxwell Museum of Anthropology*  
Federal Policy and the Photography of Milton Snow in Diné Bikéyah. Exhibition examines the impact of Navajo Livestock Reduction Program on Diné communities and homelands in the 1930s. [JAC123@UNM.EDU](mailto:JAC123@UNM.EDU)

### THROUGH NOVEMBER

#### THE HEALING LAND: FINDING SACRED CONNECTION

#### THROUGH GARDENING

*Agri-Nature Center, Los Ranchos, N.M.*  
Hands-on course for your home garden. [WWW.SCHOOLOFTHEDESERTGARDEN.COM/THE-HEALING-LAND](http://WWW.SCHOOLOFTHEDESERTGARDEN.COM/THE-HEALING-LAND)

### TUESDAY–SUNDAY, 9 AM–4 PM

#### INDIAN PUEBLO CULTURAL CENTER

*2401 12<sup>th</sup> St. NW*  
“Gateway to the 19 Pueblos of N.M.” Museum galleries, exhibits and restaurant. Cultural dance program Sat., Sun. 11 am, 2 pm. Tickets \$10/\$8/\$7. 505-843-7270, [WWW.INDIANPUEBLO.ORG](http://WWW.INDIANPUEBLO.ORG)

#### NATIONAL HISPANIC CULTURAL CENTER VISUAL ARTS MUSEUM

*1701 4<sup>th</sup> St. SW (Barelas neighborhood)*  
Explore exhibitions like Hecho en Nuevo Mexico: Recent Acquisitions by NM Artists. (Through Jan. 21.) First Sunday of every month free to NM residents. 505-383-4471, <https://www.nhccnm.org/visit/>

#### NM MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

*1801 Mountain Rd. NW*  
505-841-2800. [WWW.NMNATURALHISTORY.ORG](http://WWW.NMNATURALHISTORY.ORG)

## SANTA FE / Online

### JAN. 11 FIRST COURSES BEGIN

#### COMMUNITY EDUCATION FOR PERSONAL GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION

Southwestern College & New Earth Institute  
New, non-credit courses. [HTTPS://NEWEARTH.REGFOX.COM/COMMUNITY-EDUCATION-FOR-PERSONAL-GROWTH-AND-TRANSFORMATION](https://newearth.regfox.com/community-education-for-personal-growth-and-transformation)

### JAN. 11, 4 PM

#### LANL TRANSMISSION LINE PUBLIC COMMENTS

*Santa Fe Community College*  
U.S. DOE public hearing on planned 14-mile 20,000-volt power line through SF National Forest and Caja del Río to Los Alamos National Laboratory. Public comment period ends Feb. 16.

### JAN. 23, 5:30 PM

#### CREATIVE CONNECTIONS—A CELEBRATION OF AUNTIES

*Institute of American Indian Arts, 83 Avan Nu Po Rd.*  
Native American arts, food, music and Indigenous performance with director Kendra Potter (Lummi) producer Andre Bouchard (Kootenai.Objibwe), performers Nora Naranjo Morse (Santa Clara Pueblo), Laura Tohe (Diné) and IAIA students. \$40. [PERFROMANCESANTAFE.ORG](http://PERFROMANCESANTAFE.ORG)

### JAN. 24, 7:30 PM

#### THE AUNTIES: WOMEN OF THE WHITE SHELL WATER PLACE

*Lensic Performing Arts Center, 211 W. San Francisco St.*  
Multimedia storytelling with Nora Naranjo Morse (Kha’p’o Owinge), Deborah Taffa (Quechan/Laguna Pueblo) and Laura Tohe (Diné). \$25–\$85. Presented by Performance Santa Fe. [PERFORMANCESANTAFE.ORG](http://PERFORMANCESANTAFE.ORG)

### JAN. 25, 9 AM–12 PM

#### NEW MEXICO FOOD & FARM DAY

*State Capitol Rotunda*  
Awards ceremony, information booths. [HTTPS://NMFOODPOLICY.ORG/FOOD-FARMS-DAY/](https://nmfoodpolicy.org/food-farms-day/)

### JAN. 27, 11 AM–2 PM

#### 2024 SOUPER BOWL

*SF Community Convention Center, 201 W. Marcy St.*  
Food Depot fundraiser with local chefs competing in best soup challenge. Adult VIP: \$150, child VIP (13 & up): \$30. General admission: \$75/\$15; 12 & under no charge. 505-471-1633, [THEFOODDEPOT.ORG](http://THEFOODDEPOT.ORG)

### JAN. 31–FEB. 2, 2024

#### NM MAINSTREET WINTER CONFERENCE

*La Fonda Hotel*  
Engage people, rebuild places, revitalize economies. NM Mainstreet is a program of the NM Economic Development Department. [WWW.NMMAINSTREET.ORG](http://WWW.NMMAINSTREET.ORG)

### FEB. 9

#### ENVIRONMENT DAY AT THE ROUNDHOUSE

*State Capitol*

### FEB. 10

#### 2024 SWEETHEART AUCTION

*Santa Fe Convention Center*  
Buffets, live and silent auctions, raffle, Healing with Heart Initiative. Benefits Cancer Foundation for New Mexico. \$150 per person. 505-955-7931, ext. 401. [SWEETHEARTAUCTION.COM](http://SWEETHEARTAUCTION.COM)

### SEPT. 13–15

#### EARTH USA 2024

*Scottish Rite Center*  
12<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Architecture & Construction with Earthen Materials. Podium presentations, poster sessions, speaker meet & greet, tours. Organized by Adobe in Action. [WWW.EARTHUSA.ORG/](http://WWW.EARTHUSA.ORG/)

### MON.–FRI.

#### POEH CULTURAL CENTER AND MUSEUM

*78 Cities of Gold Rd., Pueblo of Pojoaque*  
Di Wae Powa: They Came Back: Historical Pueblo pottery. The Why, group show of Native artists. Nah Poeh Meng: core installation highlighting Pueblo artists and history. 505-455-5041



**MON.–SAT., 8 AM–4 PM**

**RANDALL DAVEY AUDUBON CENTER & SANCTUARY**

*1800 Upper Canyon Rd.*

Free walks to see birds, Sat., 8:30 am. RSVP for Randall Davey House tours.

[RANDALLDAVEY.AUDUBON.ORG](http://RANDALLDAVEY.AUDUBON.ORG)

**TUES., SAT., 8 AM–1 PM**

**SANTA FE FARMERS' MARKET**

*Market Pavilion, 1607 Paseo de Peralta*

505-983-4098, [SANTAFEFARMERSMARKET.COM](http://SANTAFEFARMERSMARKET.COM)

**WEDS–FRI. THROUGH APRIL**

**MUSEUM OF SPANISH COLONIAL ART**

*710 Camino Lejo, Museum Hill*

Generations and Imagination: What Lies Behind the Vision of Chimayó Weavers, highlighting the shifting tradition through four generations of the Trujillo family’s work. \$10 admission.

**WEDS–SAT., 10 AM–6 PM; FRI.–SAT., 10 AM–6:30 PM**

**SANTA FE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM**

Interactive exhibits, play areas, weekly programs. Masks required for ages 2 and older.

\$10/\$8/\$7/\$3/one & under free. 505-989-8359, [SANTAFECCHILDRENSMUSEUM.ORG](http://SANTAFECCHILDRENSMUSEUM.ORG)

**WEDS–SUN.**

**EL RANCHO DE LAS GOLONDRINAS**

*334 Los Pinos Rd., La Ciénega*

Living History Museum dedicated to the heritage and culture of 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century New Mexico. 505-471-2261, [GOLONDRINAS.ORG](http://GOLONDRINAS.ORG)

**IAIA MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY NATIVE ARTS**

*108 Cathedral Place*

888-922-4242, [IAIA.EDU/MOCNA](http://IAIA.EDU/MOCNA). Closed Tuesdays.

**MUSEUM OF INTERNATIONAL FOLK ART**

*706 Cam. Lejo, Museum Hill*

“Protection: Adaptation and Resistance.” More than 45 artists explore themes of climate crisis, struggles for social justice, strengthening communities through ancestral knowledge and imagining a thriving future. Through April 7.

**SANTA FE HABITAT FOR HUMANITY**

Seeking land, donated or for sale, to build affordable housing. Low-income homeowners help build homes and make mortgage payments to the nonprofit HFH. Property owners can qualify for 50% Affordable Housing tax credit through the NM Mortgage Finance Authority. 505-986-5880, ext. 109

**STATE MUSEUMS**

Museum of International Folk Art (10 am–5 pm), Museum of Indian Arts and Culture (10 am–4 pm), N.M. History Museum (10 am–4:30 pm), N.M. Museum of Art (Tues.–Sun., 10 am–4 pm). [NEWMEXICOCULTURE.ORG/VISIT](http://NEWMEXICOCULTURE.ORG/VISIT)

**WHEELWRIGHT MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN**

*704 Cam. Lejo, Museum Hill*

505-982-4636, [WHEELWRIGHT.ORG](http://WHEELWRIGHT.ORG). Closed Sundays and Mondays.

**YOUTHBUILD / YOUTHWORKS!**

Paid training for Youth 16–24. Construction, Culinary, GED. 505-989-1855, [WWW.SANTAFEYOUTHWORKS.ORG/SANTA-FE-YOUTHBUILD/](http://WWW.SANTAFEYOUTHWORKS.ORG/SANTA-FE-YOUTHBUILD/)

**TAOS / Online**

**JAN. 19–21**

**EARTHSHIP SEMINAR**

3-day seminar with Mike Reynolds, lectures, tours, visit of construction sites. \$500. [OUTREACH@EARTHSHIP.COM](mailto:OUTREACH@EARTHSHIP.COM), Registration: <https://lnkd.in/gfhiwDn6>

**WEDS–SUN., 11 AM–5 PM THROUGH JAN. 2024**

**HARWOOD MUSEUM OF ART CENTENNIAL**

*238 Ledoux St.*

Journey through the museum’s (and the town’s) rich history. 575-758-9826, [HTTPS://HARWOODMUSEUM.ORG/CENTENNIAL/EXHIBITION-DETAILS/](https://HARWOODMUSEUM.ORG/CENTENNIAL/EXHIBITION-DETAILS/)

**FEB. 24–JULY 7**

**RAVEN CHACON: THREE SONGS**

*Harwood Museum of Art, 238 Ledoux St.*

Nationally known Pulitzer Prize and MacArthur Genius grant-winning Diné artist.

Exhibition features four live concerts/performances. [HTTPS://HARWOODMUSEUM.ORG/](https://HARWOODMUSEUM.ORG/)

**THROUGH MAY 30, 2024**

**ART OF TIMELESS BEAUTY: THE NAVAJO CHILD’S BLANKET**

*Taos Art Museum, Fecchin House, 227 Paseo del Pueblo Norte*

26 examples follow the evolution. \$6–\$10, 575-758-2690, [TAOSARTMUSEUM.ORG](http://TAOSARTMUSEUM.ORG)

**LA HACIENDA DE LOS MARTÍNEZ**

*708 Hacienda Way*

Northern NM-style Spanish colonial “great house” built in 1804 by Severino Martínez.

Open daily. [TAOSHISTORICMUSEUM.ORG](http://TAOSHISTORICMUSEUM.ORG)

**MILLICENT ROGERS MUSEUM**

*1504 Millicent Rogers Rd.*

Tuah-Tah/Taos Pueblo: Home, highlighting the pueblo’s culture and artistic

achievements. Pop Chalee! Yippee Ki Yay! paintings. Open daily. [MILLIF4N65OY45E.ORG](http://MILLIF4N65OY45E.ORG)

**HERE & THERE / Online**

**JANUARY 9, 5:30–7:30 PM**

**LOCAL SOLAR ACCESS FUND WEBINAR**

*Online*

Public Power NM webinar with Rep. Szczepanski and Sen. Pope. Researchers from Embold Research, a nonpartisan organization, will present results of a statewide survey of voters’ perceptions and preferences around solar energy policy.

Advance registration required: [HTTPS://US02WEB.ZOOM.US/WEBINAR/REGISTER/WN\\_IWDMT64HQYOXY9W1IKMCW#/REGISTRATIO](https://US02WEB.ZOOM.US/WEBINAR/REGISTER/WN_IWDMT64HQYOXY9W1IKMCW#/REGISTRATIO) n

**JAN. 12 APPLICATION DEADLINE**

**USDA FARM TO SCHOOL GRANTS**

Designed to increase the availability of local foods in schools and help connect students to the sources of their food through education, school gardens, field trips and local food sourcing for school meals.

[HTTPS://WWW.FNS.USDA.GOV/F2S/FARM-SCHOOL-GRANT-PROGRAM](https://WWW.FNS.USDA.GOV/F2S/FARM-SCHOOL-GRANT-PROGRAM)

**JAN. 18, 5:30–7:30 PM**

**CLIMATE JUSTICE & ENERGY DEMOCRACY CONVERGENCE**

Online (Zoom)

[WWW.YUCCANM.ORG/EDC](http://WWW.YUCCANM.ORG/EDC) to register

**JAN. 23–25**

**11<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL IRRIGATION LEADERS WORKSHOP**

Crowne Plaza Phoenix-Chandler Resort, Chandler, AZ.

[WWW.IRRIGATIONLEADERMAGAZINE.COM](http://WWW.IRRIGATIONLEADERMAGAZINE.COM)

**JAN. 24, 1-3 PM, 6-8 PM PUBLIC MEETINGS;**

**FEB. 12 COMMENT DEADLINE**

**CHROMIUM DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT COMMENTS**

Draft NEPA EA for Chromium Interim Measures and Final Remedy. Ask questions and submit comments & concerns for proposed treatment and removal of hexavalent chromium from source areas and groundwater below Sandia and Mortandad canyons at Los Alamos National Laboratory. Public meetings Jan. 24, 1-3 pm virtual and 6-8 pm at Cities of Gold Hotel Ballroom, Pojoaque, N.M. [HTTPS://ZOOM.US/JOIN](https://ZOOM.US/JOIN), enter meeting ID:849 7723 8202, Pass code: 062428 or call 1-699-444-9171. Email comments: [EMLA-NEPA@EM.DOC.GOV](mailto:EMLA-NEPA@EM.DOC.GOV). Subject line: Chromium Draft EA Comment

**FEB. 7, 10:30 AM–12:30 PM**

**DISCOVER THE FUTURE OF AGRIVOLTAICS IN NM**

*Las Cruces, NM / Online*

A webinar. A unique opportunity to enhance resource efficiency and land management. ClimateXchange State Climate Policy Network. Info: [ICALSOYA@NMSU.EDU](mailto:ICALSOYA@NMSU.EDU)

**FEB. 7–8**

**NATIONAL NATIVE SEED CONFERENCE 2024**

*Online*

Native seed production, seed-based restoration with an emphasis on Indigenous knowledge and climate change. Presented by the Institute for Applied Ecology.

[HTTPS://APPLIEDECO.ORG/NNSC24/](https://APPLIEDECO.ORG/NNSC24/)