



**SAN JUAN
CITIZENS
ALLIANCE**

Protecting 30% of Our Land and Water by 2030

**SJCA Leads the Way with
Conservation in the Southwest**

Plus:

**Colorado Wolf Reintroduction
Animas River Recreation**

Spring/Summer 2021

DEAR SUPPORTERS,

2021 is off to a fast start! In February, Colorado's Representatives and Senators immediately reintroduced conservation bills to protect over one million acres of western Colorado as new wilderness areas and other protective designations. The House of Representatives quickly brought up a slate of bills it previously passed last year, and on February 26th once again passed the Colorado Wilderness Act and the CORE Act. Now it's up to Colorado's Senators to similarly move the bills through the Senate.

Some of our cherished local landscapes gained an immediate reprieve from new oil and gas lease sales when the Biden Administration announced an interim moratorium on new leasing while it assesses the status of the federal oil and gas program. That means 2,500 acres within the HD Mountains and adjacent to Chimney Rock National Monument will be spared from impending lease sales. We're hopeful the Bureau of Land Management will finally deem those parcels more valuable for their wildlife, recreation, and cultural resources than for new energy exploration.

The Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission started its planning for the reintroduction of wolves by the end of 2023, in compliance with the wishes expressed by Colorado's voters in November with passage of Proposition 114. We are participating in this process and encouraging the Commission to honor voters' intent and get on with planning in a prompt fashion without pointlessly re-arguing the pros and cons of wolf recovery.

The energy landscape in New Mexico continues to quickly evolve. We are encouraging the Bureau of Land Management to move swiftly with its required environmental analyses for approval of hundreds of megawatts of new solar plants adjacent to soon-to-retire San Juan Generating Station.

At the same time, we are keeping a close eye on the planned merger of Public Service Company of New Mexico (PNM) with Avangrid. PNM is looking to get rid of its 13% ownership interest in the Four Corners Power Plant by dumping it on the Navajo Transitional Energy Company, potentially further burdening Navajo communities with the legacy of a precipitously declining industry.

Meanwhile, we're participating in rapid-fire energy and climate bills at both the New Mexico and Colorado legislatures. We worked with our coalition partners to defend the Energy Transition Act in New Mexico, which was central to PNM's abandonment of San Juan Generating Station and \$20 million in community transition funds. We're also focused on legislation and rulemaking processes in both states to cut methane emissions.

The need for advocacy and watchfulness never rests. With your support, we can continue to enhance the quality of our communities and environment.



Mark Pearson

Mark Pearson

Executive Director,
San Juan Citizens Alliance

Quick Hits

Updates on a few of our ongoing campaigns



Colorado Wilderness Bills Pass the US House

The CORE Act and the Colorado Wilderness Act, rolled into the larger Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act, passed the House on February 26th.

The vote was 227-200, with eight Republicans supporting and one Democrat opposed. The next step for these bills is action in the Senate.

The CORE Act protects 400,000 acres statewide, including 30,000 acres of wilderness in the San Juan Mountains (such as Mount Sneffels, Lizard Head and McKenna Peak), plus another 30,000 acres of other protected areas, like the Sheep Mountain Special Management Area surrounding Ice Lake basin.

The Colorado Wilderness Act protects 36 areas over 660,000 acres as wilderness areas managed by the Bureau of Land Management. About 150,000 acres in the bill are located in Southwest Colorado and include areas like Canyons of Ancients, the Dolores River basin, and both Handies and Redcloud Peaks.



Domestic Sheep Grazing Halted at Collier State Wildlife Area

SJCA, along with our partners at Backcountry Hunters and Anglers and the Rocky Mountain Bighorn Society, scored a victory to keep bighorn sheep safe and improve the management of Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) State Wildlife Areas (SWAs).

During late summer, domestic sheep were grazed on the Collier SWA near South Fork as they were moved from a U.S. Forest Service high country allotment near Creede down to the floor of the San Luis Valley.

We had two main concerns: the potential transmission of disease from domestic sheep to bighorns and the use of the SWA for domestic grazing with no written agreement and no monitoring of grazing impacts. We brought these issues to CPW, and the agency decided to stop the practice.

While CPW has not committed to permanently eliminating domestic grazing in the future, they have agreed that they will only allow such use if wildlife benefits can be demonstrated.

MEET MIKE!

Energy and Climate Program Manager

Mike joined SJCA in 2006 following ten years as an environmental consultant in the Four Corners region. Mike works on energy issues including coal, oil/gas, air quality and public lands. He specializes in the National Environmental Policy Act, Federal Land Policy & Management Act, and Endangered Species Act compliance. Mike has a B.A. from Bates College and a M.A. in Environmental Policy and Management from the University of Denver.



The Wolves Are Coming

Planning for Colorado's Reintroduction



The coming year will be critically important for Colorado's wolf restoration program. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and its Commission are charged with reintroducing wolves to the state, with paws on the ground by the end of 2023.

Opponents of wolf restoration claim that advocates want to "accelerate" this process, creating a plan that lacks adequate public input. Wolf advocates, on the other hand, are concerned that CPW is dragging its feet and won't make the legally required 2023 deadline. These advocates are urging CPW to move quickly, but only with a process that provides robust public input.

Wolf restoration is a socially difficult issue and CPW needs to ensure that the planning process is transparent and provides opportunity for all interested parties to adequately express their views. But at the same time, the law created by the passage of Proposition 114 is clear and requires the reintroduction of wolves. The bottom line is that CPW needs to move efficiently to implement the will of the voters.

Colorado can easily create a cutting-edge, comprehensive wolf management plan before the end of 2022 that addresses the concerns and desires of the many individuals and

organizations who have an interest in wolf management in Colorado.

The key question is how CPW will implement this plan. In order to establish a self-sustaining wolf population, it is crucial that the state ensures that everyone who is affected has their concerns heard and addressed.

In his January 13 remarks to the CPW Commission, Governor Polis noted it would be wise to complete the wolf reintroduction planning process well ahead of the December 31, 2023 deadline. In fact, Polis actually advocated for having some wolves reintroduced by late 2022 or early 2023.

1945

Year the last wild wolf
in Colorado was killed.

This is the best course of action for several reasons. Wolves are most easily moved in groups of related individuals, and that's best done in the late fall through the early spring, from November through March. Planning to complete the first reintroductions by March of 2023 would ensure that

CPW meets the legal requirement of Proposition 114 and would also wisely allow for any problems that might prevent reintroduction before the fall of 2023. That's just good planning.

Another important consideration is who will be involved in creating the reintroduction plan. CPW will create a Technical Working Group that includes personnel from various state and federal agencies, but there is no specific requirement for inclusion of scientists with experience in wolf biology and management. There are numerous biologists with wolf management experience who could help ensure that the best available science is used to develop Colorado's plan, and they should be engaged in the process as soon as possible.

To further complicate the matter, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) removed the gray wolf from protection under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) on January 4, 2021. CPW has much more latitude in releasing gray wolves in Colorado if the species is not ESA listed, with no need to meet any federal requirements. But several groups filed suit immediately to reverse the USFWS decision, and the outcome of those challenges is unknown both in terms of the specific decision itself and when it will be made.

The result may be that the gray wolf

in Colorado is again protected under the ESA. Given the uncertainties, it is prudent for CPW to consult with the USFWS to ensure that, in the event of federal re-listing of the gray wolf, CPW can meet the legal mandate of reintroduction by the end of 2023.

With all this in mind, SJCA has recommended several actions to the Governor, the Director of the Department of Natural Resources, the CPW Commission and CPW Staff, including:

- Finalize the reintroduction plan by fall of 2022
- Ensure comprehensive public involvement

- Use existing knowledge and information to inform decisions
- Include wolf biologists in the Technical Working Group
- Coordinate closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

We'll remain closely engaged with the planning process as CPW moves forward to ensure that wolves can come back home to Colorado.

By Gary Skiba

BioBlitz in the HD Mountains

The land bordering the Piedra River as it leaves the San Juan Mountains and emerges into lowlands has long been of interest to peoples who lived in and travelled through this territory.

The endemic forests, grasslands and streamside vegetation spread across a variety of aspects and elevations, further enriching their biodiversity. It is evident from the archaeological record that the Ancestral Puebloans made diverse use of these plant and animal species during their residency in the area. The Nuuchiu (Ute) people, who frequented these lands for centuries and still inhabit the lands further south, have similarly benefitted from the region's biodiversity.

The wide range of life zones across the region also captured the attention of incoming European residents and visiting travelers. One such eminent visitor was the budding botanist Hazel Schmoll, whose field work in the Chimney Rock

area in the early 1930s supported her PhD in Ecological Botany and led to her appointment as Colorado's first State Botanist. Ms. Schmoll's pioneering botanical taxonomic work includes more than 300 plant species, verifying the region's biological richness.

Much more recently, the region has attracted fossil fuel extraction interests who rapidly mobilized natural gas field development though mineral leasing, wellsite development and the construction of pipelines, roads and other infrastructure.

This surge in natural gas development in the Chimney Rock/HD area threatens biodiversity and instigated the development of the 2007 Northern San Juan Basin Environmental Impact Statement by the San Juan National Forest, which reviewed specific, cumulative and long-term impacts of the natural gas development projects.

With the aim of taking a fresh look at the area's species and natural systems, SJCA is organizing a BioBlitz

this spring. The BioBlitz is a biological survey of the area to inventory plant and animal species across an array of forest and vegetation types. This effort will bring together numerous partners including the Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP), Fort Lewis College, and regional native plant and birding groups.

The BioBlitz's inventory teams, composed of organizational staff, regional scientists, citizen volunteers, college students, retired scientists and CNHP interns, will gather data that will become integrated into the CNHP database both for easy access and long-term curatorial needs. To gain an accurate biological inventory, the BioBlitz survey teams will visit the region periodically over a period of several months.

Stay tuned for the results: a culminating informational event to share findings of the BioBlitz will be scheduled for early fall, 2021.

By Jimbo Buickerood



The BioBlitz will encompass a variety of lower-elevation life zones in the HD Mountains.

New Rulemakings To Cut Methane Emissions in Colorado and New Mexico

The San Juan Basin of northwest New Mexico and Southwest Colorado is home to the highest concentration of methane pollution in the United States, giving the Four Corners the unfortunate distinction of being the country's "methane hotspot." While some of the emitted methane in our region is natural, a 2016 report from NASA and the University of Michigan found that the natural gas extraction industry is responsible for the majority of the pollution.

Methane is the primary component of natural gas and is leaked into the atmosphere during every stage of extraction, from preproduction to distribution. Many wells, especially legacy wells, are not properly cased to prevent leaks and so methane "bleeds" into the air twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Methane is also frequently wasted. When excess gas is captured from oil drilling it is often simply vented or flared into the atmosphere. These common, wasteful practices cause millions of dollars in lost tax and royalty revenue every year.

Methane leakage isn't just wasteful; it's also a major contributor to climate change. In the first twenty years after it is emitted, methane is 84 times more potent than carbon dioxide. For a region like the Four Corners, which is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, cutting methane emissions is a vital component to reducing warming and improving air quality. Recognizing this, both Colorado and New Mexico currently have efforts underway to reduce methane emissions from the oil and gas industry.

For years, New Mexico had the worst methane regulations in the country. But in January of 2019, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham signed an executive order to clean up the state's energy, reduce pollution, and protect against the impacts of climate change. A key facet of this executive order was to develop new regulations to reduce methane emissions and waste from the oil and gas sector.

Over the two years since that executive order, New Mexico state agencies have been holding public hearings and rulemakings for a robust new set of methane regulations. The proposed methane protections would require 98% of natural gas emissions to be captured and would add in new reporting requirements for operators. Routine venting and flaring would also be prohibited. New Mexico's Oil Conservation Commission will vote on the final adoption for these rules in late spring of this year.

Colorado has also been revamping their methane regulations. In 2019, the Colorado legislature passed sweeping climate reform bills, which in turn triggered a set of rulemakings to cut methane emissions from the oil and gas industry.

From December 2019 to early 2021, Colorado held a series of four groundbreaking rulemakings through two regulatory departments, enacting a comprehensive set of new methane protections.

A few of the major outcomes from these rulemakings include:

- Enhanced statewide leak detection and repair requirements
- Prohibition of venting in all cases, and prohibition of flaring in nonemergency cases
- Comprehensive and frequent monitoring of preproduction sites
- Requiring zero-bleed pneumatics and valves for all new oil and gas facilities while phasing out existing high-bleed sites
- New annual reporting requirements for oil and gas producers from all facilities and activities

Colorado is the first state in the country to pass strong methane protections like these, making the state a model for cutting methane emissions and prioritizing public health and the environment.

This December, there will be two more major hearings in Colorado tied to climate action. These hearings will target the transportation and oil and gas sectors, and while they will focus primarily on carbon emissions there will still be an opportunity to advocate for methane emissions reductions.

SJCA will remain closely engaged with methane rulemakings in both states. We'll be sending out public engagement opportunities for upcoming hearings, so stay engaged and make sure your voice is heard!

By Katie Pellicore



Flaring is a common, yet wasteful, method to get rid of excess methane from oil and gas operations.



Leakage from natural gas processing facilities is a significant contributor to the methane problem.



Both states have new reporting requirements for oil and gas operations to monitor emissions.

Now is the Time to Close the Southwest's Coal Plants



Photo: Carlan Tapp

The start of 2021 has been a whirlwind for SJCA as we navigate New Mexico legislative bills, impending coal plant retirements, and the transition to renewables.

It is readily apparent that communities in the Four Corners region need to prepare now for a just and equitable transition. The economics of coal as an electricity source for utilities are faltering and have been usurped by the opportunity for our communities to replace coal with renewables. This is a welcome respite for the Four Corners region, where disproportionate public health impacts, natural resource degradation (for air, water, and land), and lack of transition planning have limited sustainable economic development opportunities.

For decades, utilities have benefited from low-cost electricity from coal plants in the Four Corners. Now, that power has become very expensive, particularly when accounting for externalities, economic costs, pollution controls and deferred maintenance. As utilities begin to look towards cheaper sources of power and shut down these expensive coal plants, we are working to protect the communities most impacted by the closures.

In recent years, SJCA has intervened in several regulatory cases in New Mexico and Arizona concerning utility abandonment and rate-cases. The abandonment case of San Juan Generating Station in New Mexico resulted in nearly \$1 billion in investment in solar as the identified replacement resources by the primary owner, Public Service Company of New Mexico (PNM).

PNM has also just announced a merger with Avangrid with a plan to exit from coal. The downside, however, is that PNM and Avangrid are trying to give their 13% share in Four Corners Power Plant (FCPP) to the Navajo Transitional Energy Company, along with a \$75 million gift for taking it off the PNM/Avangrid books by 2024.

This would prolong the life of FCPP by a decade, which would not only burden Navajo communities with an increasingly costly plant but also add to the toxic legacy of burning coal. SJCA has intervened and is looking to force PNM and Avangrid to work towards retiring FCPP.

In Arizona, the majority owner at FCPP, Arizona Public Service, is contemplating a Just and Equitable Transition package for the Navajo Nation for approximately \$144 million, acknowledging its responsibility in assisting communities historically associated with coal. SJCA provided supporting testimony in this case before the Arizona Corporation Commission. However, the plant's owners are contemplating operating the plant through 2031, and waiting ten more years to close FCPP will further increase costs and needlessly delay the region's transition away from coal.

While all of this has been going on, the climate denier bloc has been busy at work trying to influence the New Mexico legislature that emissions reductions from fossil fuel industries are unnecessary and unwanted. The climate deniers, emboldened by their ties and contributions from the oil and gas industry, assert it doesn't matter what we do in New Mexico to reduce fossil fuel emissions because global emissions will increase in other parts of the world.

It's clear, though, that what we do in our region does matter, both on a global climate scale and for our local communities. Many in New Mexico take responsibility for being stewards of our world and are committed to challenging this do-nothing nonsense. SJCA remains focused on closing coal plants, holding oil and gas industries responsible for emissions, addressing climate change, and turning the corner on economic development with renewables.

By Mike Eisenfeld



Renewable power will replace soon -
to-retain San Juan Generating Station



Photo: Alex Pullen

What's Next to Protect?

Guiding Conservation with the 30 x 30 Initiative

President Biden's new administration brings forth the opportunity to pivot management of public lands and waters from enhancing extraction to instead promoting protection. Biden's newly confirmed Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland, promises a refreshing perspective both as our nation's first Indigenous Interior Secretary and a champion of conservation.

The need to bump up the pace and scale of protecting our lands and waters has been framed by the international "30 x 30" initiative, which aims to protect 30% of our planetary lands and 30% of our oceans by the year 2030. It's a goal that has received the early endorsement of President Biden's Administration.

Across the San Juan Basin, we have a key role to play in achieving this goal. In fact, major initiatives are already underway, including the Colorado Wilderness Act and the CORE Act. Combined, the two acts offer protections for 1 million acres across Colorado, though that amounts to just a bit more than 1.5% of the state's land base.

Though most of us in the American West know that our public lands are foundational to our everyday lives, we may

not be aware of just how important they are. A consideration of the diversity of their benefits can serve as a catalyst to highlight the need to increase the tempo of our land protection advocacy.

Our forested watersheds cleanse and store a phenomenal amount of water, shelter and feed wildlife, provide migration corridors, furnish critical habitat for pollinators, sequester massive amounts of carbon, cycle nutrients, nurture biodiversity with their intricate web of ecosystems, provide flood and sediment control, serve as a repository for native species, and bring beauty to our lives. And yes, they do also provide recreational destinations, lumber, grazing forage, firewood and more. However, if these lands are not ecologically functional then those latter elements might not be forthcoming either.

The desired outcome of 30 x 30 is to protect lands and waters to enable their healthy ecological function. That entails not only legislated protections, such as new wilderness designations and wild rivers, but also bolstering our foundational environmental laws, such as the Clean Water Act and National Environmental Policy Act.

440

Million more acres of land that would need to be protected in the US to reach the 30 x 30 goal.



Just a few of the places SJCA is working to protect that would contribute to the 30 x 30 goal. From top: Chimney Rock National Monument, the Animas River near Silverton, the Dolores River Canyon, the Piedra River.

SJCA's long-term vision for wildlands protections across the San Juan Basin was initially spelled out in the 1990s, with our Citizens Plan for the Wild San Juans. That effort pre-dates the current 30 x 30 conversation, but we can build on it to identify key opportunities to advance large-scale conservation.

The CORE Act and the Colorado Wilderness Act incorporate protections for places like the Mineral Creek headwaters around Ice Lake and arid canyons and ridges nearby Mancos and Cortez. Collectively they bring permanent legislated protection to over 200,000 acres across Southwest Colorado. Other possibilities abound throughout our region.

The HD Mountains Roadless Area east of Bayfield has long been a focus of SJCA's conservation campaigns, and precluding new oil and gas leasing and development would significantly contribute to 30 x 30 goals. Similarly, the environs surrounding Chimney Rock National Monument need enhanced protection from encroaching oil and gas leasing.

The half-million acres of national forest roadless areas across the San Juan National Forest offer compelling opportunities, such as completing protections for the headwaters of the San Juan River, with additions to surrounding South San Juan and Weminuche wilderness areas, and bolstering protections for the forested landscapes surrounding the Piedra.

Securing the future of the Dolores River canyon via a National Conservation Area designation and safeguarding Chaco Culture National Historical Park from encroaching energy development similarly

fit the bill. And stitching together the protected landscapes via wildlife movement linkages and riparian corridors is central to achieving these goals.

Designations on their own are inadequate without corresponding rules to keep land and water ecologically intact. As an example, consider the Animas River. The Animas faces a variety of ecological challenges: it is fishless between Silverton and Bakers Bridge, it suffers from high levels of E. coli in its lowest reaches into New Mexico, and in its ever more common low flow state the river is sometimes congested with algae blooms due to high temperature and nutrient content.

Taking a whole watershed approach to implementing the 30 x 30 concept could entail several protective measures that would benefit the river. Legislating a Wild and Scenic River designation would be helpful insofar as protecting the Animas from dams, dewatering, channel modification, and other forms of degradation that could diminish flows and exacerbate water quality challenges as noted above.

However, we will only be successful in reaching our 30 x 30 goal if we also address the causes or sources of the ecological dysfunction itself. For the Animas, that means protecting headwaters from future mining-associated water pollution while also eliminating leaking septic systems and other impacts lower in the watershed.

The 30 x 30 concept offers a new format for implementing the long-range vision for wildlands and wild rivers protection SJCA has advocated over the past 30 years. It provides new urgency, and hopefully leads to new protections.

Increasing Opportunities for River Recreation



131,000

Jobs provided in Colorado by the state's \$18 billion water recreation industry.



Above: Kayakers, canoeists, and water pups on the lower Animas during SJCA's 2018 overnight group float.

Maintaining a healthy river, and a healthy river community, means more than simply keeping the water clean. Fishing, swimming, paddling, or simply walking along a river trail are important services that healthy rivers provide and they play an important role in maintaining the health, well-being, and quality of life for our communities.

That's why, alongside our efforts to mitigate pollution in the Animas, we also work for safe, reliable river access and expanded opportunities for recreating on the water.

In 2018, we hosted the first overnight group trip of the lower Animas, introducing dozens of people to stretches of the river that are rarely seen. Building on the success of that event, we organized the first lower Animas raft race between Aztec and Farmington, New Mexico in 2019.

Our race was held in collaboration with Farmington's Riverfest, an annual festival that draws tens of thousands of people to the Animas. Six teams representing local governments, businesses, and nonprofits paddled and rowed their hearts out to the cheers of Riverfest spectators. It was a big success, so we're making it an annual event that will include even more teams in the future.

Beyond hosting on-water events, we've also worked to improve river access by engaging

local governments and federal land management agencies.

After participating in our raft race, San Juan County in New Mexico announced they will be building a new public boat ramp in Cedar Hill in 2021, providing river access for a stretch of the river that desperately needs it.

We also worked with the Bureau of Land Management over the last four years to install new river signage along the lower Animas, alerting paddlers to sections of public land where it is safe and legal to step onshore, have a picnic, or camp overnight.

This year, we're keeping a close eye on river access above Durango, where the only available boat ramp at Trimble Lane was recently purchased by a private developer. We've already highlighted the importance of that ramp during the county development process, and it's looking like the new owner is committed to keeping it in place for the benefit of the local community.

We had to postpone all of our river events in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but with the distribution of vaccines, there's a light at the end of tunnel. Stay connected with us for the latest on river events, public river access, and more in 2021.

See you on the water!

By Marcel Gaztambide

You Power Our Work!



Ways to Give

Support SJCA in a way that works for *you*. Your contribution will help fight dirty energy projects, protect wild places, and preserve access to clean water here in Southwest Colorado and Northwest New Mexico.

1

Become a Member

As a regional member-based organization, we rely on individuals like you to support our work. Join or renew with a financial donation.

2

Monthly Giving

Spread out your contributions in monthly payments. It's easier for you and evens out SJCA's income across the year.

3

Include SJCA in your Estate Plans

You can provide an ongoing legacy of support through the creation of a bequest in your will. Contact us for assistance.

4

Qualified Charitable Distribution

Account holders who are 72 or older can donate to a qualified charity directly from a traditional IRA, effectively lowering your adjusted gross income and avoiding paying taxes. Contact your accountant for details.



Are you a member? Visit sanjuancitizens.org/JOIN

San Juan Citizens Alliance advocates for clean air, pure water, and healthy lands – the foundations of resilient communities, ecosystems and economies in the San Juan Basin.

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San Juan Citizens Alliance is a member-based organization, supported by donations from over a thousand of your friends and neighbors. Please consider joining them by supporting our efforts!

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Last Look



Safeguarding Chaco Culture National Historical Park from encroaching energy development is one opportunity to work towards the 30 x 30 goal of protecting 30% of our land and water by 2030.