

# SAN JUAN CITIZENS ALLIANCE

FALL 2021 NEWSLETTER

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### We advocate for:



Pure  
Water



Healthy  
Lands



Clean  
Air



Thriving  
Wildlife

The foundations  
of resilient  
communities,  
ecosystems, and  
economies in the  
San Juan Basin.

Cover: Sneffels Range,  
Jack Brauer

## DEAR SUPPORTERS,

One of the new frames for landscape conservation is the 30x30 initiative, the idea of gaining lasting protection for 30 percent of land base by 2030. Thus far it's consumed a lot of conceptual brainstorming which perhaps obscures the plain opportunities right in front of us.

Namely, we are on the brink of permanent protections through legislation for more than 1 million acres of Colorado's most dramatic wildlands. The Colorado Wilderness Act brings wilderness designation to 660,000 acres of mostly desert mesas and canyons managed by the Bureau of Land Management, and the CORE Act almost matches that with protections for 400,000 acres of largely forested and mountain landscapes. Both bills have already passed the House of Representatives; we just need Senate approval. We need to double down and get tangible protections implemented now. Otherwise, 2030 will be upon us in no time.

The ponderous pace of conservation action at the federal level is fortunately offset in the realm of climate and energy by aggressive leadership by state governments in Colorado and New Mexico. Colorado is speeding ahead with ambitious greenhouse gas emissions reductions leading to closure of coal-fired powerplants, plugging ubiquitous methane leaks in oil and gas production, and planning a less carbon-intensive transportation future.

And in New Mexico, the state has set the bar for rapid and equitable transition from burning coal in Farmington to replacement by expansive new solar energy industry.

Not to say we won't have hiccups along the way. A foolish scheme to pursue carbon capture at the aging San Juan Generating Station reeks more of an ambitious pursuit of billions in taxpayer subsidies. And the oil and gas industry retains its robust reputation for aggressive and effective lobbying to avoid facing the climate crisis head-on.

We live in interesting times. We might never have imagined the progress accomplished in the past few years. Let's hope for similar success in the coming year.



*Mark Pearson*

**Mark Pearson**

Executive Director,  
San Juan Citizens Alliance



# *The* COLORADO WILDERNESS ACT



Dolores River, John Fielder



Handie's Peak, Bob Wick



Unaweep, Brett Henderson

A longtime goal of SJCA: **pass the Colorado Wilderness Act.**

This act protects the wide array of Colorado's pristine wilderness, from breathtaking desert landscapes to striking mountain areas.

# THE FIGHT *of our* LIFETIMES



PURSUING A JUST & EQUITABLE ENERGY  
TRANSITION IN THE FOUR CORNERS

San Juan Generating Station

**S**peaking from twenty-four years of dealing with energy policy and fifteen years of working for the Alliance, I know that transitioning from fossil fuels to renewables in a just and equitable way is the challenge of our lifetimes. I have lived this fight and watched the energy industry change over time, from my beginnings with SJCA opposing Desert Rock to my current work exposing the fruitless ideas of big companies implementing carbon capture on old coal plants.

I was first hired to fight the third coal-fired power plant proposed for the Four Corners region, called Desert Rock, as well as reform the Department of the Interior's prioritization of resource extraction on public lands. The eventual defeat of Desert Rock led to a more critical analysis of the existing Four Corners Power Plant and Navajo Mine as well as San Juan Generating Station and San Juan Mine complexes. **These complexes were once infamously known as the largest single-point source of pollution**

**in the United States** (measured remotely by Los Alamos National Laboratory in 2014). Four Corners Power Plant was built in 1962 and San Juan Generating Station in 1972 at a time when the Four Corners region was considered as the cheap electricity source for Southern California, Phoenix, and Las Vegas.

**What the alleged cheap electricity failed to account for was the wide range of negative environmental effects these locations would cause in the Four Corners.** This region still struggles with pollution, adverse public health impacts, and disproportionate distribution of resources failing to provide many community members with water and electricity.

These facilities were once projected to be in operation beyond 2040. As several units have closed in recent years and the economic demise of coal has become apparent, new goals for retirement were set. San Juan Generating Station is slated to retire in 2022 and Four Corners Power Plant in 2031.

**This boom and bust cycle is not new for the Four Corners Region.** There are over 40,000 oil and gas wells in the San Juan Basin, including many

forms of hydraulic fracturing. The proliferation of these facilities contributed greatly to the methane hotspot (high concentrations of methane) identified in 2014. Furthermore, there is the critical issue of clean-up, reclamation, mitigation, and revegetation. These companies need to be held responsible for the health and well-being of the land and the people.

**Our vision is for the Four Corners region to become an innovative energy generation hub for solar with the use of stranded assets (transmission and substations associated with coal plant retirement) and redevelopment of abandoned industrial sites.** This is our opportunity to transition to renewable energy, securing a different future, and responding to our societal obligation to address climate change. Four Corners regional and U.S. Southwest climate change impacts are scientific

fact, and the need for reductions in pollutants from fossil fuels is indisputable. Cultural, heritage and place-based values of this region are equally critical elements to consider as we move toward more responsible energy development and production. We will no longer accept the prioritization of irresponsible fossil fuel production and development.

***This is our opportunity to transition to renewable energy, securing a different future, and responding to our societal obligation to address climate change.***

**I remain optimistic that we can realize renewable energy transition in this region.**

However, there are numerous obstacles to this energy transition that we must bear in mind, including industry power brokers promoting coal-fired power plant carbon capture and sequestration, the concept of hydrogen derived from natural gas extraction gaining momentum, the fallacy of certified natural gas, government subsidies for the perpetuation of fossil fuels, the intent to reinvigorate nuclear power, and the climate science denialism that persists in many public forums in our communities, to name a few. SJCA will remain a platform that advocates for a front-line community energy transition from fossil fuel reliance. Our fight for this is far from over.

- Mike Eisenfeld / [mike@sanjuancitizens.org](mailto:mike@sanjuancitizens.org)





Power Lines, Matthew Henry

This fall, Tri-State Generation and Transmission *submitted its energy resource plan* to the Colorado Public Utilities Commission for review.

*This is our chance as community members to advocate for cleaner energy in our community.*

### ***Who is Tri-State?***

For the past few years, a primary focus of ours has been changing our electric generation sources from coal to renewables. Unfortunately, because La Plata Electric Association (LPEA) and other rural electric cooperatives are locked into an increasingly expensive contract that forces us to buy 95% of our power from Tri-State through 2050, efforts to more quickly make the energy transition have been stymied. LPEA is currently weighing options of whether to stay, exit, or partially exit this contract. In the meantime, we can work to make Tri-State a better energy provider with cleaner power through participating in processes such as the energy resource plan.

### ***What is an Energy Resource Plan?***

An Energy Resource Plan helps regulators and utilities decide where to invest resources for electricity and decide where that electricity comes from. The plan aims for low-cost, reliable, and environmentally responsible electricity. Historically, Tri-State was not required to file traditional Energy Resource Plans. This changed last year, and Tri-State's plan must be held to the same high standards as other utilities. In its plan, Tri-State must account for carbon dioxide emission reductions of 80% by 2030, with specific scenarios for how costs and benefits relate to the retirement of its existing resource and plans for new resources. Additionally, for the first time, Tri-State has to include calculation of the social cost of carbon.

### ***How can you make a difference?***

Tri-State's plan for its future electric supply fundamentally affects LPEA and member-owners like you. Tri-State has high rates, a looming debt problem, and has consistently failed to invest in clean energy. If we want affordable, sustainable energy, we need the Public Utility Commission to require that Tri-State's plan evaluates the cost of existing resources to ensure that Tri-State is appropriately calculating the risks of its expensive coal fleet, accounting for the health and environmental impacts of carbon emissions from its plants, and includes a workforce transition plan when proposing to retire an electric generating facility. **Coloradans can comment on the draft plan through written comments at the Public Utility Commission's website and give live testimony.** We will be holding an event this fall to provide detailed instruction on how best to engage with this process. Stay tuned and stay engaged as we work to make the best out of our contract with Tri-State for as long as it remains in place.



# PRIORITIZING *PUBLIC LANDS*

San Juan National Forest, EcoFlight

Our work protecting the lands and forest across the San Juan Basin is ever-changing. Here is a quick summary of what we're working on right now:

## ***Bootjack Ranch/Valle Seco Land Exchange***

The Decision Notice for this sordid and coordinated effort by the project proponent Kelcy Warren and San Juan National Forest to trade away Colorado Roadless Areas lands to private ownership was just released. Thanks to the scores of you who submitted comments on the Draft Environmental Assessment. As the Forest Service continues to be deaf to public input and refuses to release the hundreds of pages of property appraisals that are foundational to any land exchange, we will be filing a formal objection. We ask, why isn't there complete transparency when the loss of our public lands is at stake?

## ***Silverton Travel Management Plan***

In a joint effort with San Juan County to halt the further motorization of alpine terrain, we filed an appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals earlier this year to halt the designation of the upper Minnie Gulch trail as a motorcycle route through alpine tundra above 12,000 feet. Minnie Gulch has been identified by the Ute Tribes as an area of important cultural heritage. The BLM failed their legal and ethical responsibilities to provide appropriate and adequate protections to this cultural landscape. Currently, we are awaiting the decision to our appeal.

## ***Timber harvesting***

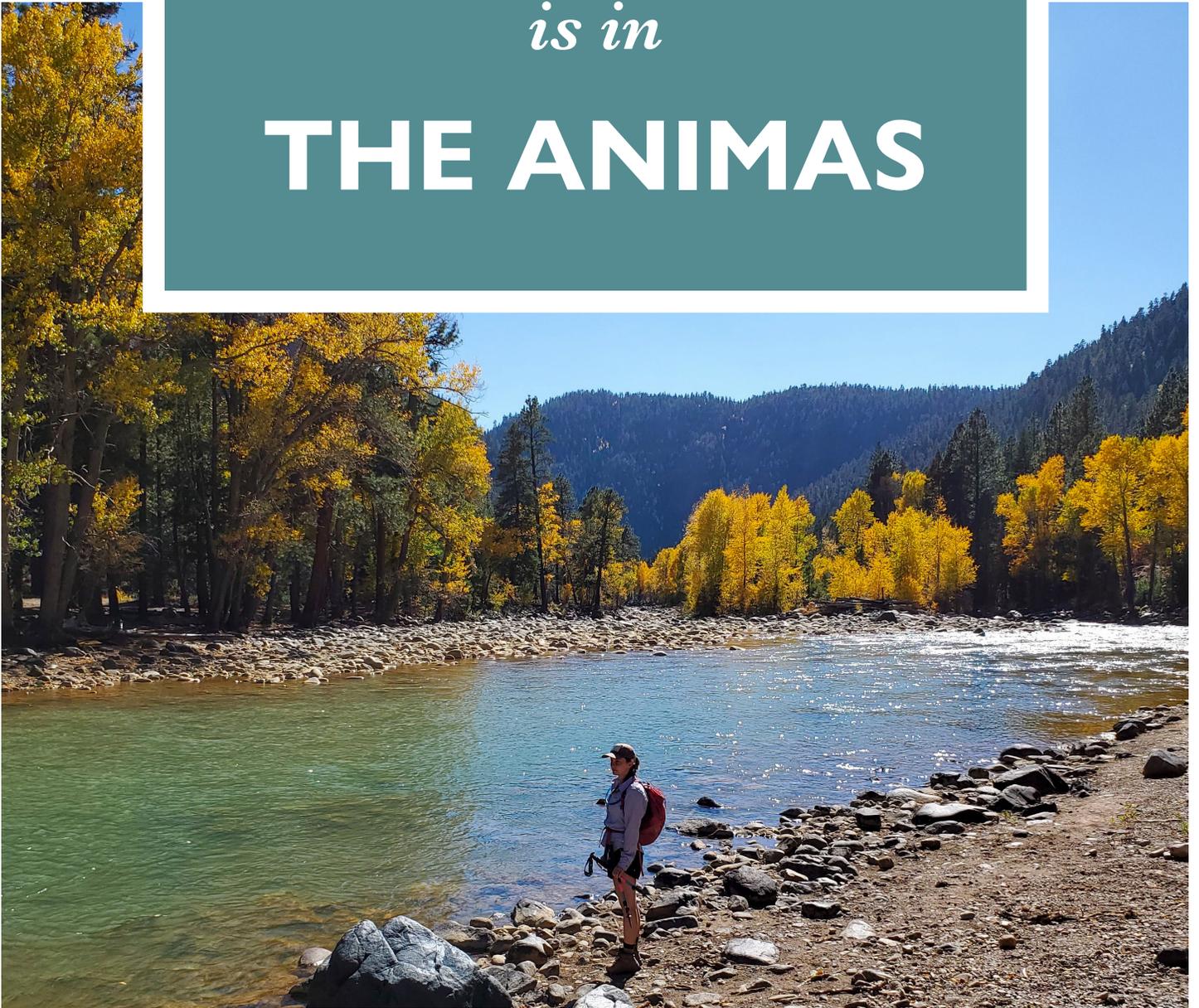
Logging can be beneficial to the multiple use acreage of our public lands. However, we need to ensure that the detrimental effects of logging, such as the loss of carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat, and watershed integrity, are minimized. We are currently tracking about 10 forestry projects across the San Juan National Forest and recently filed an official Objection to the Salter Vegetation Management Project in the Dolores District due primarily to the lack of project design criteria supporting forest restoration rather than just the removal of sawlogs. Other objectors included the Town of Dolores and southwest Colorado mountain advocates owing to potential impact on the Bogy Draw trail system.



South San Juan Roadless Area



# THE PROOF *is in* THE ANIMAS



PROTECTING OUR WATERS IN  
THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

**R**ivers and streams in the West are facing a lot of challenges these days, especially in the face of an undeniably warming world.

**As climate change progresses, our waterways are increasingly stressed by worsening droughts, wildfire, and diminished flows.**

The evidence is visible in our own backyards. In the Animas basin, we've had years with less snowfall and rain, shorter snowfall seasons, and earlier runoff to streams. We've seen wildfires choke the river with ash and debris, killing fish and threatening water supplies. And when precipitation does fall, it's increasingly finding thirsty, dry soils that soak up much of the water before it can make it to our favorite trout stream or swimming hole. The proof is in the Animas, which saw record low flows earlier this summer.

This compounds on water quality issues the Animas already faces. From legacy mining pollution at the headwaters of the river, to issues with nutrients, sediment, and bacteria across the watershed, our scientists and watershed groups are straining to keep up.

***So, what do we do?***

**First and foremost, we support policies that address the climate crisis and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.** The reality, however, is that the impacts of climate change are already here, making it critical that we also work to restore and maintain resilience in our river systems and the communities that depend on them.

At the headwaters of the Animas, this looks like engaging the Environmental Protection Agency in **cleaning up over 150 years of mining pollution** that sully the river with toxic metals. We helped form the Community Advisory Group to help with the federal Superfund clean-up that's been in progress for

the last five years. This group gives local citizens a voice in the process as we push for projects to improve water quality as quickly as possible.

Further downstream, we work with the San Juan Watershed Group to **study and mitigate sources of nutrients, sediment and bacteria that are impacting the river.** We're applying a hands-on approach by also working with landowners and state agencies to implement solutions, such as kick-starting regenerative agricultural practices and helping homeowners to better manage raw sewage that otherwise would make its way into the river.

Through a process called Outstanding Waters designation, we are also **working with partners to create water policy that will protect Animas tributaries** that have never been degraded by human-caused pollution. This designation will place special protections on forest streams with exceptionally high water quality. This in turn supports fish and wildlife, provides recreational opportunities, and helps build the downstream resilience we need in a warming world. Working to secure these special protections is already underway and will culminate in a hearing before the Colorado Water Quality Control Commission in the summer of 2022.

**This community shows up for its rivers, and for this we are lucky.** Together we can work to secure a hopeful and healthy future for our beloved Animas. So, while we strive to restore and protect what we still have, we must also take time to enjoy the Animas and the amazing opportunities it provides. Fish the streams, paddle around, and walk the river trails.

On that note, if you're feeling an urge to help keep our river healthy, get in touch with your local Animas Riverkeeper. See you on the water!

- Marcel Gaztambide, *Animas Riverkeeper*  
[marcel@sanjuancitizens.org](mailto:marcel@sanjuancitizens.org)



# RESTORING *BIGHORNS & WOLVES*



Imagine Colorado 150 years ago, when hearing a faraway wolf howl or seeing a bighorn was not rare. While many things have changed in those 150 years, our **Wildlife Program aims to restore this wildlife and ensure that it happens in a way that is harmonious for all parties involved.**

As you may know, Proposition 114 passed in November 2020, requiring Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) to **restore wolves to Colorado by the end of 2023.** For the planning process, CPW created two groups: the Technical Working Group and the Stakeholder Advisory Group. The technical group advises on science and legal issues, while the stakeholder group members, including myself as SJCA's Wildlife Manager, provide a wide range of viewpoints to advise CPW on social and economic issues that should be addressed. The goal is to finish the plan by summer of 2023 and reintroduce the wolves by the end of that year. Wish to learn more about or get involved with the planning process? Visit [wolfengagementco.org](http://wolfengagementco.org)

**Meanwhile, SJCA is working to restore the existing population of bighorn sheep in Colorado.** The bighorn sheep is Colorado's state animal, and they now occupy only a small portion of the land they once did. The combination of unregulated

hunting, which supplied meat to cities and mining camps, combined with diseases transmitted from domestic sheep, caused catastrophic declines in the number and distribution of bighorns. By 1900, about 7,000 bighorns remained in Colorado. While the original population is unknown, we do know that bighorns were not limited to high elevation areas like you see today. They could be found all across the state, and some biologists believe that they were more common than any other large mammal, including deer and elk.

So where does that leave the bighorns today? Unfortunately, their population continues to be limited by a disease carried primarily by domestic sheep. Recent research shows that even if bighorns have immunity to some pathogens, domestic sheep can still infect them and cause major die-off, as well as a continued long-term impact on the survival of lambs. Ultimately, the disease is leaving bighorn populations stagnant or shrinking. The only known strategy to reduce exposure to this disease is by separating domestic and bighorn sheep, which means we must reconfigure or close grazing allotments on public lands. We are currently working with our conservation partners to enact this very strategy.

- Gary Skiba  
[gary@sanjuancitizens.org](mailto:gary@sanjuancitizens.org)



# WAYS TO *Give*

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

SJCA is a member-based organization, supported by donations from over a thousand of your friends and neighbors. Please consider joining us!

[sanjuancitizens.org/donate](http://sanjuancitizens.org/donate)

## 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 **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.

## 4 **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.

*We would not exist without you, so thank you!*

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San Juan Citizens Alliance  
 1309 East Third Ave, Suite 5  
 PO Box 2461  
 Durango, CO 81302  
 970.259.3583  
[info@sanjuancitizens.org](mailto:info@sanjuancitizens.org)  
[sanjuancitizens.org](http://sanjuancitizens.org)



San Juan Citizens Alliance  
1309 East Third Avenue  
PO Box 2461  
Durango, CO 81302

## HELP *with* BIGHORN MONITORING

Anyone can help monitor bighorn sheep in Colorado thanks to Mountain Studies Institute's monitoring program. This program allows Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the Forest Service to document the presence of bighorns near domestic sheep grazing allotments as well as stray domestic sheep that may be near bighorns.



-Bighorns, Rohan Makhecha

Go to [sanjuancitizens.org/bighorn](https://sanjuancitizens.org/bighorn) to learn more!