

SAN JUAN CITIZENS ALLIANCE

FALL 2022 NEWSLETTER

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+ saving bighorns



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: SJGS
EcoFlight

DEAR SUPPORTERS,

A generational change occurred in September with the permanent closure of the San Juan Generating Station. The massive coal-fired powerplant loomed over the landscape, and fouled skies across the Four Corners, for 50 years. Now, the smokestacks emit nothing.

The closure is an enormous victory for clean air and climate change, cutting carbon dioxide emissions by over **10 million tons** from what was emitted just 5 years ago. But it **poses an economic dilemma for Farmington with the loss of several hundred related jobs,** and puts front and center the question of Farmington's future vision. Will that be embracing solar energy, outdoor recreation, agriculture and cultural tourism, among others? Our indefatigable staffer in Farmington, Mike Eisenfeld, is deep in the mix on these questions.

Elsewhere in this newsletter, progress continues apace. **Gary Skiba reports on the forthcoming release of Colorado's plan for reintroduction and management of wolves,** another generational change to our region. **Emelie Frojen tackles the thorny issue of defunct oil and gas wells,** and how to get a better handle on prompt clean up.

This past summer has been marked by comings and goings. Jimbo Buickerood retired after 15 years tracking developments across our public lands. We are pleased to welcome **John Rader to assume responsibility for watchdogging our public lands.** One of John's immediate priorities is **addressing winter recreation management on our region's mountain passes.**

Marcel Gaztambide moved up to run the environmental center at Fort Lewis College. **Sara Burch is our new Animas Riverkeeper,** and is excited to invite your participation in monitoring the health of our beloved river.

Susan Etter took a break from financial management and administration at the Alliance in the Spring after a 7-year stint. **Drew Rozean came on board in June as our new Membership Manager,** and is undertaking a variety of membership building campaigns.

Successful advocacy for clean air, pure water, and healthy land and wildlife across the San Juan Basin is a group endeavor. ***It cannot be done without a vigorous community of supporters like you!***



Mark Pearson

Mark Pearson

Executive Director,
San Juan Citizens Alliance

MEET *the* TEAM

Find out what SJCA's small but mighty crew likes to do outside of work hours!

MARK PEARSON • Executive Director



I love to hike and explore the wild and remote corners of the San Juan and Dolores Basins, from peaks to canyons.

MIKE EISENFELD • Climate & Energy Program



I like to mountain bike, trail run, ski, raft in the Four Corners Region. Always fun. I can find petroglyphs.

GARY SKIBA • Wildlife Program Manager



Whitewater kayaking! Anywhere.

EMELIE FROJEN • Climate & Energy Program Associate



You can find me in my kayak on the Animas, canyoneering around the Four Corners, or making cabochons and jewelry at the Four Corners Gem and Mineral Club.

JOHN RADER • Public Lands Program Manager



My favorite fun things to do outside of work are climbing, skiing, and playing music.

SARA BURCH • Animas Riverkeeper



My favorite activity is to enjoy the natural beauty we are surrounded by, from hiking in alpine environments to biking in high desert landscapes and floating along the river that connects us all!

DREW ROZEAN • Membership Manager



Bliss is being on a paddle board in cool, clear waters.

RANE DICKERSON • Communications & Events



There's nothing better than hiking with my dog in the summer and skiing in the winter!

THE END *of an* ERA

SAN JUAN GENERATING STATION CLOSES

A generational event occurred at the end of September with the closure of the 50-year-old San Juan Generating Station (SJGS) coal-fired plant in Waterflow, New Mexico between Farmington and Shiprock.

Beginning in 1973, the 1,800-MW power plant and associated San Juan Mine were part of a massive complex of energy exports to California, Arizona, Utah and central New Mexico that included significant pollution and public health impacts. The power plant was also one of the largest contributors to carbon dioxide pollution in the Southwest, spewing 12 million tons annually at its peak.

The plant's closure was set when the primary owner of SJGS, Public Service Company of New Mexico (PNM), announced in July 2017 its intention to close SJGS by 2022. The Alliance quickly tackled the difficult work to develop a plan and seek opportunities for transition and economic diversification in the Four Corners region.

Embracing a Sustainable Transition

The Alliance participated in key decisions at the New Mexico legislature and the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission to ensure that our vision of a just and equitable transition was implemented. In particular, we wanted to ensure PNM and the other plant owners contributed fairly to new economic development opportunities and worker retraining. New Mexico's Energy Transition Act, that we strongly supported, included requirements that PNM provide \$40 million for workers and for community economic development, and to ensure complete reclamation of the power plant. **One critical aspect supported by the Alliance was to ensure that property tax lost to the Central Consolidated School District with an overwhelming Native American student body, be compensated.** Closure of SJGS means loss of several million in property taxes, and by insisting that renewable energy replacement projects be located within the school district boundaries, we can ensure that lost tax revenue is replaced. We are presently focused on ensuring the timely approval and

construction of solar projects like the 600-MW San Juan Solar project located immediately adjacent to the east side of SJGS, and utilizing the existing transmission lines and substations.

We are also encouraging allocation of \$20 million in economic development funds to appropriate projects that enhance diversification, and in particular support indigenous communities. Farmington is the gateway to the Grand Circle of National Parks, amidst the iconic American Southwest defined by culture, heritage and natural beauty. Tourism and recreation in this region represent huge upward job and revenue implications particularly when pollution sources such as SJGS are shut down. Cleaner air in the region can only help in attracting economic growth, and our rivers are a vital part of the Four Corners. Resource reallocation provides some great opportunities, for example taking the water once used to cool SJGS (approximately 20,000 acre-feet) and using it for domestic water for communities that traditionally don't have access to water.

Countering Enchant's Speculative Project

One potential obstacle to an orderly transition still looms. An outfit called **Enchant Energy has proposed speculative and expensive carbon capture and sequestration technology** to keep the power plant alive for another decade. Enchant Energy's proposed project is a far-fetched quest for a subsidized, tax credit-based carbon dioxide manufacturing facility blind to the costs of coal generated electricity, environmental

liabilities, and historic legacies of the site. As of September 2022, Enchant has made no progress whatsoever, with no proven investors, no significant grants for the \$1.6 billion project, no permits, no water, no electricity customers and of utmost important, no rights to transfer of the now closed power plant.

Together, Our Partnerships Make a Difference

SJCA has persevered to see through the retirement of SJGS and San Juan Mine, and has worked through many coalitions at local, regional and national levels. We could not have accomplished this without our partners Diné Citizens Against Ruining our Environment and Western Environmental Law Center.

We are indebted to our partners, campaign supporters and SJCA members for believing in our mission to transition this region away from the legacy of polluting coal facilities.

- Mike Eisenfeld, *Climate & Energy Program Manager*
mike@sanjuancitizens.org



Wolf Creek Pass RECREATION

Wolf Creek Pass, straddling the Continental Divide between Pagosa and Del Norte along the Rio Grande and San Juan National Forest boundary, is a haven for wildlife – including critical habitat for the endangered Canada lynx and an important migration corridor for elk.

Recreation at Wolf Creek

Wolf Creek Pass also provides exceptional winter recreation, hosting Wolf Creek Ski area and providing access to world class backcountry skiing and riding.

But as recreational use has increased, so have conflicts between user groups, with consequences for our public lands and wildlife. **Ever-improving snowmobile and timber sled technology pushes motorized use deeper into the backcountry**, impacting human-powered recreation, encroaching on the ski area boundary, and fragmenting wildlife habitat.

The Forest Service has a duty to manage winter travel proactively, setting aside areas that are appropriate for different uses along a “Recreation Opportunity Spectrum” and mapping those areas to inform users. According to federal regulations, areas that aren’t explicitly

open to motorized travel are presumed closed. But the **Rio Grande and San Juan forests have yet to establish a winter travel plan**, abdicating their responsibility to manage winter recreation on the pass. Even well meaning and respectful users don’t have clear rules to follow. We need a plan, and we need the public to be involved.

The San Juan Citizens Alliance and our partners are working hard to ensure the Forest Service does its job – intentionally managing winter travel so that all users can enjoy the pass, while ensuring intact wildlife habitat and corridors to protect the species that call it home. We’ve partnered with Winter Wildlands Alliance and Wolf Creek Ski Area to push the Forest Service into action, and are helping to organize backcountry recreationists in the San Juan Basin to protect our treasured places.

Interested in helping?

Calling all backcountry recreationists in the San Juan Basin: let’s play hard and preserve Wolf Creek while we’re doing it. If you’re interested in lending your voice and joining our action group, please reach out to our new Public Lands Program Manager, John Rader.

John Rader, Public Lands Manager
(970) 259-3583 // john@sanjuancitizens.org



Wildlife UPDATE

SJCA's wildlife program is going strong, focusing on wolf restoration and bighorn sheep management.

Wolves: Planning Process on Track

Colorado Parks and Wildlife is well on its way to **creating a comprehensive management plan for the restoration of wolves** to the state. Wildlife staff will be presenting a draft plan to the Colorado Wildlife Commission in December, and public comment will be invited early in 2023.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife appointed a Stakeholder Advisory Group, focused on social and economic issues, of which SJCA's Wildlife Program Manager, Gary Skiba, is a member. The advisory group offered recommendations towards the overall management plan.

Wolf advocates have continuing concerns about the plan. One of the biggest concerns is that the plan will authorize the establishment of a recreational (public) hunting season for wolves. Most wolf biologists agree that recreational

hunting of wolves is unnecessary as wolves tend to manage their own population levels, and any problems with livestock depredation or unacceptable impacts on big game populations are better dealt with by targeted agency removal.

A related concern is the establishment of a maximum population size. There is no way to predict what impacts might occur from wolves in Colorado until they're on the ground in substantial numbers, and thus no way to determine a maximum number. Stay tuned for more on the wolf planning process, which will include your opportunity to weigh in on the plan early next year. The state is still on track to meet its statutory deadline to reintroduce wolves by the end of 2023. ***We should soon have a better idea of the initial reintroduction location as well.***

Bighorns: The Battle Continues

Domestic sheep carry diseases that can be devastating to bighorn populations. As our state animal, and an iconic species of Colorado's mountains, we should be doing all we can to protect and expand bighorns. Both the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service manage domestic sheep allotments that can be problematic for bighorns. Domestic sheep too close to bighorns increases the possibility of disease transmission. There is some evidence that herds in the

Weminuche Wilderness have declined recently, and while the degree of decline and the possible causes are unknown, disease is suspected.

SJCA will continue to work with its partners to **create management plans that protect our bighorns** and will also continue to lobby Colorado Parks and Wildlife to be more aggressive in their recommendations to the federal agencies.

Gary Skiba, gary@sanjuancitizens.org





MEET YOUR NEW ANIMAS RIVERKEEPER

Sara Burch started with the San Juan Citizens Alliance in September 2022.

Her love for the San Juan Basin began while attending Fort Lewis College where she studied geosciences and pursued hydrogeologic research throughout the San Juan Mountains. Sara is returning to the area from the canyons and ponderosa pine forests that surround Northern Arizona University, where she spent the last two years studying groundwater-dependent ecosystems in the Grand Canyon during her MS program. Along the way, Sara always made time to recreate on rivers throughout the Colorado Plateau.

Why Does She Love the Animas River?

From its headwaters near Silverton, CO to its confluence with the San Juan River near Farmington, NM, the roughly 126-mile reach of the Animas River connects diverse communities throughout different geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic regions.

The Animas River, along with its tributaries, are critical waterways for multiple reasons - they support unique ecosystems, transport

nutrients, and supply our communities with water that is used for drinking, irrigation, and recreation purposes. However, the Animas Watershed is not without their threats, ranging from water quality issues to climate change impacts, and impeded recreational access.

A Celebration of Wins!

In recent years, efforts along the Animas River and its tributaries have proven successful in efforts of restoration and conservation. Dedicated work from the San Juan Citizens Alliance, partner organizations, stakeholders, and community members throughout the watershed have proven successful on multiple campaigns. Headwater tributaries were designated as **Outstanding Waters, onpoint source pollution along**

tributaries has been reduced, the community organized to guide **remediation efforts at the Bonita Peak Superfund Site,** and communities rallied to celebrate **recreation opportunities.** These are just a few key projects throughout the past years. Our communities' passion for the Animas River should not be overlooked, and we have a lot to celebrate. However, there is more to do.

Continuing the Call to Action

Water quality issues still exist in the Animas Watershed that require continued monitoring and action. These issues may be exacerbated by **climate change,** as variable weather patterns threaten to alter the historical cycle of snowfall, runoff, and base flow regimes along the Animas River.

New opportunities are emerging along the Animas River in which our voices can be heard. Right now, SJCA and our partners are reviewing the **2023 Colorado Water Plan Update** draft to

provide comments on protecting and conserving our watersheds. A recent settlement between the State of New Mexico and the Environmental Protection Agency allocated **30 million dollars to fund remediation projects for impacted communities in New Mexico** as a result of the 2015 Gold King Mine release. New Mexico's San Juan County Public Works Department is planning to complete construction of the **Cedar Hill river access** by spring 2023, increasing recreational access along the Animas River.

Together, We Can Continue to Improve our Watershed

Emerging opportunities are heavily monitored at SJCA, and will require collaboration and input from partners and community members to succeed. However, I have seen this community do just that in the past, and look forward to being a part of it in the future. As the new Animas Riverkeeper, I am excited to continue collaborating with our partners to identify

the unique needs of communities throughout the watershed. I am dedicated to protecting community voices within our watershed and continuing efforts of conservation, restoration, and access along the Animas River.

Stay tuned for upcoming projects and opportunities!

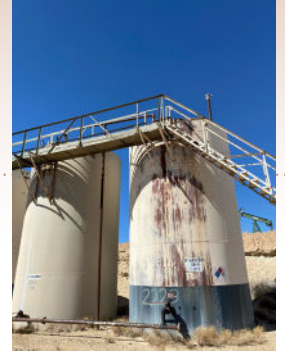
- Sara Burch, *Animas Riverkeeper*
sara@sanjuancitizens.org



Culture of ABANDONMENT

DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR'S RECKONING WITH ORPHANED AND ABANDONED WELLS

At the end of August, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, along with other federal officials, visited the Four Corners to announce the start of work to address orphaned and derelict wells across our region. The SJCA team has spent the past year working on this issue and was there to participate in this exciting announcement.



New Mexico's Orphaned Well Issue

For over a century, New Mexico has been an oil and gas producing state. This has left behind a legacy of unplugged wells scattered across the state. While government agencies may be just starting to understand the problem's extent, communities here in the Four Corners have felt the impacts for some time. On top of the pollution and litter on public lands, abandoned wells are a huge source of methane, a greenhouse gas 86 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

New Mexico regulators have identified 1,741 orphaned and abandoned wells in the state. On the federal side, the Bureau of Land Management has yet to accurately assess

the number of neglected wells on its land. The San Juan Basin is New Mexico's largest oil and gas region, with 40,000 wells. Despite this large number, astonishingly the BLM has not identified any orphaned wells in the basin.

We are diligently working to have BLM recognize the immense number of derelict wells in our community and invest the resources to clean them up. Environmental reclamation is a sustainable economic industry that can bring jobs to the Four Corners during this much needed time of transition while cleaning up the land, air, and water on which we rely.

The Federal Funding Coming to New Mexico

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, passed late last year, provided \$4.7 billion in funding to address orphaned wells across the nation, and \$1.15 billion of that was designated as funding directly to states to clean up and remediate orphaned wells.

Sec. Haaland announced the first disbursement of that funding during her August visit. Sec. Haaland saw first-hand the real impacts of decrepit oil and gas wells as she toured the neglected Chuza oil and gas field in the Hogback area. SJCA's staff visited this field earlier this spring to document the state of disarray many of the wells there. We saw non-operable decaying infrastructure, spilling bins of toxic waste,

rusty and abandoned equipment, and documented fugitive methane emissions.

Sec. Haaland's visit culminated in an announcement of \$25 million allocated to New Mexico starting October 1st to address 200 orphaned and abandoned well sites in the San Juan and Permian Basins, a fourfold increase in the existing rate of cleanup. SJCA will continue advocating for increased attention by state and federal agencies to aggressively tackle the legacy of waste on our public lands, as well as fight the culture of abandonment from extractive industries going forward.

Emelie Frojen, emelie@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

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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Celebrating **10 YEARS at CHIMNEY ROCK**

Ten years ago this past September, President Obama designated the Chimney Rock National Monument in 2012. Yet even more cultural resources remain at risk in the nearby HD Mountains from energy development, where we keep a watchful eye.



Chimney Rock National Monument Facebook

Go to sanjuancitizens.org to learn more!