

# SAN JUAN CITIZENS ALLIANCE

SPRING 2022 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: Shiprock, NM  
Jimmy Conover / Unsplash

## DEAR SUPPORTERS,

*We've got big dreams for 2022 for the future of our landscapes, climate, and communities across the San Juan Basin.*

There is exciting news for our local energy future! In February, **La Plata Electric Association struck a deal with Tri-State to obtain 50% of its electricity from other sources, leveraging the ability to rapidly transition half its energy supply to carbon-free sources and saving \$7 million annually in the process.** This partial contract buyout is a dramatic step towards local, renewable and cheaper electricity.

A half-million acres of public lands could see greater protections this year. In northwest New Mexico, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland is spearheading a **proposal to create a 10-mile buffer surrounding Chaco Cultural National Historical Park that precludes future oil and gas leasing across 350,000 acres.**

Congress could finally approve the **Colorado Outdoor Economy and Recreation (CORE) Act, giving permanent protection to 60,000 acres of beloved San Juan Mountains high country**, including Ice Lake and the rest of the Sneffels Range. And the **Colorado Wilderness Act brings wilderness designation to 120,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management wildlands**, covering parts of the Dolores River Canyon and alpine summits like Handies Peak and Redcloud Peak.

The **coal-fired San Juan Generating Station should be forever retired this year**, ending a 50-year span of reliance on dirty fossil fuels. Solar energy companies are breaking ground on utility scale photovoltaic projects amounting to hundreds of megawatts as replacement power.

We'll still need to keep a close eye on the never-ending saga around the destructive proposal for the **Village at Wolf Creek**, and the nonsensical scheme to keep burning coal promoted by **Enchant Energy**. But whether it is lands, wildlife, rivers, or climate, big things are afoot this year.

*We can't wait to achieve long-standing goals with your help!*



*Mark Pearson*

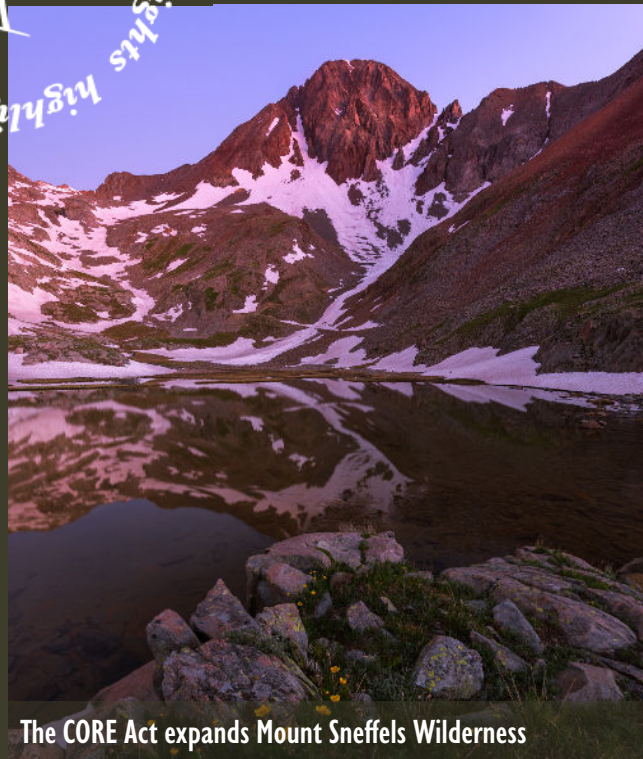
**Mark Pearson**

Executive Director,  
San Juan Citizens Alliance





350,000 acres off-limits to leasing around Chaco



The CORE Act expands Mount Sneffels Wilderness



San Juan Generating Station on track to close in 2022

SJGS, EcoFlight



LPEA moves to 50% local energy

Solar, Jeremy Bezanger / Unsplash





# *Legislature Defeats* **HYDROGEN BILLS**

## **NEW MEXICO'S LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

Every year New Mexico's state senators and representatives gather in Santa Fe for a state legislative session, which alternates between a 30 day and 60 day session. This winter was a 30 day session which opened on January 18th and closed February 17th. During that time, legislators, lobbyists, and other stakeholders (like us) diligently worked to pass laws that help our communities and stop laws that hurt them. At SJCA, we advocated for equitable energy transition in the Four Corners Region, and worked hard to successfully stop an onslaught of carbon intensive energy bills.

## **FIGHTING CARBON CAPTURE AND SEQUESTRATION ("CCS")**

One bill that thankfully did not make it out of committee and did not pass was the Geologic Carbon Dioxide Sequestration Act. This bill would have transferred liability that currently lies with the federal government to New Mexico, which would increase carbon sequestration activity and tax pay liability in the state. This is a no-go for SJCA. First off, it does not capture all of the carbon emissions.

Typically, CCS only captures about 55% of emissions. Additionally, CCS is extremely expensive and long term storage is uncertain and unproven. It also creates additional hazards for communities around carbon pipelines and injection sites. Rather than investing in new CCS infrastructure, we are advocating for investment in renewable energy.

## STOPPING FOSSIL FUEL HYDROGEN BILLS

Fossil Fuel Hydrogen was a hot topic this legislative session, and was disguised as a false solution for our climate crisis. New Mexico legislators and government officials attempted to pass several bills that would incentivize fossil fuel hydrogen production in our state in the quest to secure subsidized Federal funding for Hydrogen Hubs. Fossil fuel hydrogen energy distracts from the bigger picture, perpetuating fossil fuel extraction while distracting time and money from an equitable energy transition. Hydrogen production already taking place is responsible for 3-4 percent of the world's carbon emissions — equivalent to the carbon emissions from the UK and Indonesia combined. Pouring billions of taxpayer dollars

into proposed fossil-fueled hydrogen projects would create new reliance on fracked gas that could lock in devastating climate consequences and health damages for frontline communities. Fossil fuel hydrogen bills were tied to speculative responsibility sourced natural gas (which doesn't exist) and carbon sequestration as a byproduct of hydrogen production. Prospects for a hydrogen hub in New Mexico focused on the Gallup area and the subsidized retrofit of the Escalante Generating Station from coal to hydrogen. Rather than investing in unfounded hydrogen hopes, we continued to advocate for New Mexico to invest in reliable, affordable, renewable infrastructure.

***No hydrogen bills passed.***

## CONTROVERSIAL CLIMATE BILL

A mixed-bag climate bill ran through several committees but ultimately did not pass this legislative session. The Clean Future Act would have created a no-offsets-allowed mandate to reduce direct statewide climate emissions 50% below 2005 levels by 2030. However, critics of the bill were frustrated that it did not require zero emissions, but rather net-zero

emissions, meaning emission reductions can be achieved through unproven methods of carbon sequestration. As mentioned earlier, carbon sequestration is dangerous for the environment and our communities and is not a fix for carbon emissions. We are going to continue this conversation with hopes to put forth a better, zero carbon bill next legislative session.

## LOOKING AHEAD

We are going to continue to fight against fossil fuel hydrogen and unproven carbon capture and sequestration in the Four Corners. We will be keeping our eyes out for a possible special legislative session, and preparing for New Mexico's next 60 day session in 2023. Pollution never stops at state borders and we are going to continue to work for clean air and resilient communities across the Four Corners Region.

- Emelie Frojen and Mike Eisenfeld, *Climate and Energy Program Team*  
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# *Help Protect Our* **BIGHORNS**

SJCA's partner in bighorn sheep conservation, the Mountain Studies Institute, is continuing its citizen science program to monitor bighorn and domestic sheep in Colorado. You can help by participating in reporting locations of domestic and bighorn sheep during the upcoming hiking season.

## *Why do they need our help?*

**The single biggest threat facing Colorado's bighorn sheep is disease transmitted from domestic sheep.**

Disease outbreaks can devastate bighorn populations as it did on the National Bison Range in Montana in 2019. That outbreak killed 85% of the bighorns. In addition, the disease can linger and cause decreased lamb survival long after the initial die-off.

Domestic sheep grazing allotments on lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management are sometimes close enough to bighorn sheep populations to cause a real concern about disease, and bighorn behavior can increase the risk.

One way that bighorns and domestic sheep come into contact is through the behavior known as a "foray". Bighorns, most commonly young rams, but also young ewes, will leave their home area and travel, sometimes for tens of miles, in an apparent search for other bighorns. This behavior promotes

the exchange of genes between bighorn populations and can lead to the establishment of new populations.

Unfortunately, it can also bring bighorns into contact with domestic animals that carry disease. Foraging bighorns often take a jaunt away from their home herd and then return a short time later. If they encounter infectious domestic animals along the way, they can bring disease back to their home herd.

While Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) has mapped the location of bighorn sheep herds, foraging individuals can show up far from their mapped habitat. Domestic sheep sometimes wander outside of the areas they are permitted to graze, ending up closer to bighorn sheep than land managers intend. Knowing where bighorns and domestic sheep may be coming into contact helps the land management agencies and CPW to better manage permitted grazing and better protect bighorns.

## *We need your voice!*

The Mountain Studies program uses the iNaturalist smart phone app to easily capture the location and photos of bighorns and domestic sheep. When you're out hiking near bighorns or domestic sheep, you can contribute important information that helps protect bighorns.

**VISIT [SANJUANCITIZENS.ORG/BIGHORN](https://www.sanjuancitizens.org/bighorn)**

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



# *Preserving the* **FORESTS**

**SJCA has found itself in the unfortunate situation in recent months needing to vigorously challenge a range of projects underway on the San Juan National Forest. For many years, we've had a much more productive relationship with our local forest managers, but recent land exchanges, timber projects, and ski resort expansions have stressed that relationship.**

## ***Purgatory Ice Creek Lift Pod***

SJCA staff reviewed the final environmental assessment and decision for a new lift Purgatory is proposing in Ice Creek, a generally flat area facing west. The new lift is within Purgatory's existing permit area, but in a portion of forest frequented by lynx and along the high quality headwaters of Hermosa Creek's East Fork. We filed an objection focused on water quality impacts to Hermosa Creek from projects past and present, along with the Forest Service's lack of concern in ensuring that prior mitigation and reclamation requirements were implemented. The environmental analysis documents degradation of the East Fork of Hermosa Creek over the past 15 years. A final decision is slated for later this Spring.

## ***Salter Timber Sale Project***

The San Juan National Forest issued a formal reply to SJCA's objection to a large timber management project across 35,000 acres in the vicinity of Salter Y and Boggy Draw to the north of Dolores. As we feared, the Forest Service brushed aside our concerns about an ecologically-based forest restoration approach favoring the retention of large and old trees within a sufficiently diverse, and therefore resilient, forest structure management. The project also drew objections from mountain bikers worried about impacts to the popular Boggy Draw trail system, and the town of Dolores over their concerns of unregulated logging truck traffic.

## ***Valle Seco Land Exchange***

SJCA filed a formal objection to the San Juan National Forest's proposed Valle Seco Land Exchange project. We are primarily focused on the Forest Service's intention to eliminate 175 acres of the South San Juan Adjacent Colorado Roadless Area. The overall land exchange involves the Forest Service trading about 400 acres of public land in roadless areas, along river corridors, and with ancient ponderosa pines for an 880-acre private parcel comprised of arid rangeland and pinyon-juniper valued as big game winter range. The land exchange proponent is a Texas billionaire – one of Trump's largest donors, and owner of the notorious Dakota Access Pipeline where he hired ex-military mercenaries to attack and harass Native American protesters. We objected to the failure to protect Colorado Roadless Areas by exchanging lands out of public ownership and failure to comply with the Forest Plan. A final decision is anticipated in Spring 2022.







# WHO POOPED *in the* RIVER?





## WHAT'S FLOWING INTO THE RIVER?

The Animas River, as it runs from the high country of Silverton, Colorado to the San Juan River in Farmington, New Mexico, faces significant water quality problems. From metals, to nutrient pollution, to sediment, to bacteria - there's no shortage of challenges in need of attention and action.

### A GROUP WITH A MISSION: PROTECT NEW MEXICO RIVERS

In the lower sections of the river through New Mexico, our Animas Riverkeeper program works to confront those challenges by collaborating with the San Juan Watershed Group (SJWG) – a group of local citizens and agencies committed to studying sources of pollution, implementing projects to reduce or eliminate that pollution, and building community around resilient river systems.

First convened in 2001 at the direction of the New Mexico Environmental Department (NMED), the group has completed dozens of projects that range from erosion control, to riparian restoration (removing invasive species and planting native trees and bushes), to improving irrigation infrastructure, and more.

### ALL POLLUTION SIGNS POINT TO... POOP

We first got involved with the SJWG back in 2017, after an earlier study showed that bacterial pollution in the Animas and San Juan rivers was coming from both animal and human sources – a big problem – especially as the lower Animas and San Juan rivers become increasingly popular for recreation.

Springing into action, and led by a paid coordinator, the group formed a special committee to brainstorm potential solutions. Lovingly called the “poop group”,

our committee has since developed a public outreach campaign focused on the proper management of septic systems and RV waste, and we've distributed thousands of flyers and mailers. Our group has also worked with local governments and NMED to place better signage at legal sewage dumping stations and popular recreation areas, and in 2021, we facilitated a training session for local waste management professionals.

### JOIN US!

The group holds regular, monthly meetings (usually on the 3rd Monday of each month), which are open to anyone with an interest in improving water quality, or is just curious to learn more about their backyard rivers and the work being done to protect them. There's lots of work to do this year and beyond, so don't hesitate to contact your Riverkeeper or attend a meeting.

Good people doing good work!

*Read more: [www.sanjuanswcd.com/watershed](http://www.sanjuanswcd.com/watershed)*

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





bird's eye view  
bird's eye view  
bird's eye view



Four Corners Power Plant



Navajo Mine - provides coal to Four Corners Power Plant



The San Juan Mountains



Prime bighorn habitat in the San Juan Mountains

It's been an honor to partner with EcoFlight and gain a bird's eye view perspective of our landscape. Over the years, we've been able to see a lot of the issues we work on from the air. Sharing that space with fellow conservationists, decision-makers, and media folks has provided a platform and perspective we are extremely grateful for.



# 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](https://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!*

#### **BOARD**

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**Diana Vernazza**, *Vice President*  
**Steve Ellison**, *Treasurer*  
**Robin Richard**, *Secretary*  
**Maya Kane**  
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## **A WIN** *for the* **GUNNISON SAGE GROUSE**

Senior U.S. District Court Judge John Kane overturned the Bureau of Land Management's 2017 and 2018 decisions to lease over 10,000 acres of public land in Southwest Colorado for oil and gas development, thereby safeguarding the threatened Gunnison sage-grouse and their habitat.



U.S. Fish & Wildlife

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