



Photo: Tom Snyas

**SAN JUAN
CITIZENS
ALLIANCE**

SJCA Kicks off Wildlife Program

Wolves & Bighorns a priority

Plus:

Defending the HD Mountains

Four Corners Solar Projects

Fall/Winter 2020

DEAR SUPPORTERS,

Many of us probably can't wait to wave adios to 2020. We've experienced unprecedented turmoil from a virulent pandemic, economic upheaval, political wrangling, and a relentless assault on the bedrock American values of clean air, clean water and public lands. 2021 has a low bar to clear for vast improvements over this year!

The election results mean a reversal of course at the federal level on climate policies, federal land management, and a host of pollution and environmental regulations. Election results in New Mexico and Colorado maintained the status quo, and we anticipate continued progress towards renewable energy, greenhouse gas reductions, and wildlife habitat conservation.

We look forward to working with the incoming Biden Administration to get back on track addressing the root causes of climate change. In the absence of federal leadership the past four years, we've turned to state legislators, governors, and agencies in Colorado and New Mexico to undertake new rules to reduce methane pollution from oil and gas facilities, and to embark upon ambitious climate change goals.

Nowhere has seen more rapid change than New Mexico. In just the past year, Public Service Company of New Mexico gained approval to retire the 847-MW coal-fired San Juan Generating Station near Farmington and replace that power with almost 1,000-MW of new large-scale solar and battery storage, all located in northwest New Mexico. Our region could also soon assume the mantle of the Four Corners Solar Center. Most tellingly, the new solar plants will make good use of existing infrastructure and occupy previously disturbed lands, setting the example for transition from a coal energy economy to a solar energy economy.

As the year ends, we anxiously await progress on long-standing efforts to achieve permanent wilderness protection for 200,000 acres across Southwest Colorado. The Colorado Wilderness Act and the CORE Act are both pending action in Congress in last minute appropriation bills. If enacted, we'll celebrate the first desert wilderness areas in the San Juan and Dolores basins in Colorado after 40 years of effort, as well as well-deserved expansions to high alpine ranges in the western San Juan Mountains. If the bills fall short of the finish line, we anticipate renewed momentum in 2021 towards swift passage.

With voter approval of Colorado's wolf restoration ballot initiative, state wildlife managers are commencing planning for wolf reintroduction. This process will restore wolves to the last remaining gap continent-wide in the Rocky Mountains. We'll be deeply engaged in public outreach as the San Juan Mountains are likely the focal point for forthcoming reintroduction.

We couldn't do this work without supporters like you who are willing to take actions and make contributions. Let's toast to the new year, and we hope to rub shoulders in person again sooner rather than later!



Mark Pearson

Mark Pearson

Executive Director,
San Juan Citizens Alliance

Quick Hits

Updates on a few of our ongoing campaigns



Valle Seco Land Exchange

SJCA submitted comments critical of the proposed Valle Seco land exchange in October. Our focus is the San Juan National Forest's intention to trade away 175 acres of the South San Juan Adjacent roadless area, a proposal clearly at odds with the plain language of the Colorado Roadless Rule.

We certainly support public acquisition of the 880-acre Valle Seco big game winter range parcel, but crucial roadless lands should not be sold as payment for that parcel. The land exchange's proponent is Kelcy Warren, owner of the Bootjack Ranch and a Texas pipeline billionaire most famous for ramrodding the controversial Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota.



Bighorn Sheep Allotment Buyout

SJCA is working with the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) and other bighorn advocates to reduce the danger to bighorn sheep from diseases carried by domestic sheep by retiring public lands grazing allotments.

Early this year, the Endlich Mesa allotment in the Weminuche Wilderness was voluntarily retired through a one-time payment that NWF negotiated. Advocates hope to use this technique more in the future, paving the way for the expansion of bighorn populations throughout the West.



Navajo Nation Transition Funds

The majority owner of the Four Corners Power Plant, Arizona Public Service Company (APS), announced \$128 million in just transition funding to the Navajo Nation for economic impacts from forthcoming closure of the coal-fired plant.

APS will also buy power from Navajo clean energy projects and provide financial assistance for economic redevelopment, cost-free electrification for homes on the Navajo Nation that currently lack electricity, and assistance in securing water rights tied to APS's coal-fired power plants. SJCA worked closely with our Navajo grassroots partners at Diné CARE and Tó Nizhóní Ání to support this historic outcome.

MEET JIMBO!

Lands and Forest Protection Manager

Jimbo Buickerood joined SJCA in 2007 with extensive experience managing experiential education programs throughout the West, including 20 years with Colorado Outward Bound as an Instructor, Course Director and Program Director. Jimbo brings vast first-hand knowledge of the landscapes of southwest Colorado as well as a diversity of involvement with regional communities. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Outdoor Education and a Master's Degree in Education, both from Prescott College, and has traveled extensively throughout the planet.



Four Corners Solar Projects Move Forward

SJCA has long advocated for a just and equitable transition from reliance on coal-fired power plants to renewable resources in the Four Corners Region. Many of the coal complexes in the Four Corners region are closed or closing, due primarily to economic factors; coal-derived electricity costs are now far more expensive than those of renewables.

Among these closures were the Navajo Generating Station and Kayenta Mine (2019), and Escalante Generating Station (2020). We are also preparing for the pending closure of the San Juan Generating Station in 2022 and Four Corners Power Plant before 2031. We have long advocated for replacement of these coal plants with 100% renewable resources and are now seeing those efforts come to fruition.

Now, the Four Corners region is seeing the possibility of a remarkable shift to investment in renewable energy. One major investment, the Four Corners Solar Center, comprises several projects amounting to approximately 1,400 MW of solar photovoltaic and battery storage facility proposed by Photosol.

There are three distinct projects that are part of the Four Corners Solar Center, each hundreds of megawatts in size:

- Three projects called San Juan Solar located adjacent to San Juan Generating Station to the east.
- Shiprock Solar, located contiguous with San Juan

Generating Station on the west.

- Four Corners project on approximately 3,500 acres of previously disturbed Navajo Coal Mine land adjacent to the Four Corners Power Plant.



San Juan Generating Station, and the site of the planned Shiprock Solar Project.

One key aspect of these projects is their replacement of lost property taxes from closure of the coal plant. The solar projects total about a \$600 million investment in the Central Consolidated School District and will replace San Juan County property taxes of \$3.5 million paid by San Juan Generating Station. The projects also will utilize existing transmission lines and substations. Total current solar

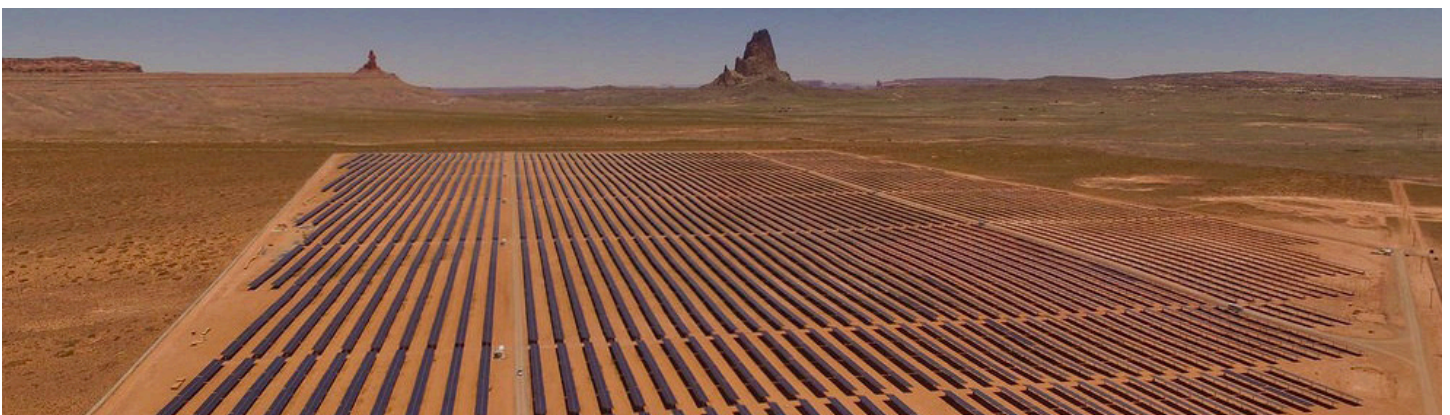
project proposals for the northwestern New Mexico region are at least 1,788 MW, far exceeding the 847 MW that will be lost when San Juan Generating Station closes in 2022.

These projects ensure that northwestern New Mexico will help meet the state's goal for utilities to produce energy from 100% carbon-free sources by 2045. In addition to these new energy projects, the recently passed Energy Transition Act assists impacted communities with \$20 million for sustainable economic projects like tourism, health care, education, agriculture, and renewable energy innovation.

We'll be working for final approval of solar projects in the Four Corners region over the coming year. The focus on renewable solar energy and battery storage as replacement for the region represents the potential for the Four Corners region to become a preeminent battery storage hub. Additionally, the investment in renewable energy associated with the abandonment of San Juan Generating Station and early retirement scenarios for Four Corners Power Plant make Enchant's speculative carbon capture and carbon sequestration project even more dubious and doubtful.

This is a transformative time for our region, representing a monumental benefit for impacted communities with a path to economic diversification and renewable energy investment.

By Mike Eisenfeld





Reducing Our Reliance On Coal-Fired Power

Attaining utility-scale renewable power for communities in the Four Corners region has been one of SJCA's goals for years. Renewable energy is better for both our environment and our wallets; over the past few years the cost of renewables has plummeted while the cost of coal continues to skyrocket. In Colorado, we've been engaging with our local electric cooperative, La Plata Electric Association (LPEA), as they navigate their power supply options. Unfortunately, LPEA is stuck in a coal-intensive, long-term energy contract with their power provider, Tri-State, that limits local generation and forces us to pay high rates for dirty, expensive coal-fired power.

Luckily, there are a few avenues to hold Tri-State accountable and pursue cheaper, cleaner power. One such option is the state of Colorado's roadmap for emissions reduction, which they will be discussing this winter. In 2019, the state legislature passed bold new greenhouse gas reduction goals of 26% from 2005 levels in 2025; 50% by 2030; and 90% by 2050. And the best and fastest way for Colorado to slash emissions is to accelerate the shift away from coal-fired electricity. The electric sector will need an 80% reduction in emissions for Colorado to reach its goals, which means that Tri-State will need to drastically lower their dependence on coal.

Indeed, Tri-State is finally beginning their belated transition towards renewable energy, and recently announced that they plan to cut emissions from Colorado electricity sales 80% by 2030, a goal that puts them on track with

Colorado's emissions reductions goals. For a company that has long resisted the transition to renewable energy, this announcement was huge news.

But even though Tri-State's new commitments are a step in the right direction, they still have a long way to go. For one thing, Tri-State has not put forward a plan that details how they will reduce their reliance on fossil fuels, and they even have plans for a large expansion into natural gas. Tri-State is committed to coal through 2030, and they plan on still using coal for generation until 2050. Tri-State's rate forecast also shows a 55% increase by 2050, even though most utilities show flat or even decreasing rates in the years ahead.

As this process unfolds, SJCA will continue to advocate for cleaner, cheaper power by engaging both with our local cooperatives here in Southwest Colorado and in larger statewide processes. We will continue to inform and recruit member-owners to attend and advocate for cleaner, cheaper power at monthly Board meetings. We'll also keep supporting forward-thinking candidates for our cooperative Boards, mobilizing public comments on clean energy rulemaking processes, and informing the public on what's going on at their local electric co-op. There's a long road ahead, but we have an opportunity to secure a brighter, cleaner energy future right here in Southwest Colorado.

By Katie Pellicore

55%

Amount Tri-State's rates are forecasted to increase by 2050

SJCA Kicks Off Wildlife Program



Welcome, Gary!

Gary Skiba is the new Wildlife Program Manager for San Juan Citizens Alliance! Here, he reflects on his background & what he'll focus on in his role at SJCA.



I'm really excited about my role as the Wildlife Program Manager. I started on April 1st (no fooling) and have been involved in a lot of interesting work since then.

The Wildlife Program was created this spring after years of recognition by the staff and board that the Alliance needed to focus more on wildlife issues. Jimbo, SJCA's Lands & Forest Protection Program Manager, was doing all he could to keep up with public lands management issues, which often have lots of associated wildlife issues, but we needed extra staff capacity to work on wildlife as its own campaign.

One main area that I've focused on is the ballot initiative, Proposition 114, to restore wolves to Colorado. I led one of the 12 working groups (Opposition Research) under the Rocky Mountain Wolf Project that were working for passage of 114, made presentations promoting wolf restoration to a dozen groups, wrote op-eds and letters to the editor, and put together the blog series on the SJCA webpage on wolves.

All that hard work paid off, as 114 passed in November and the wolves will be coming home!

Though it had a very narrow margin, Proposition 114 did indeed pass, and now our state wildlife agency, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), has committed to developing a comprehensive plan with public input, as required by the proposition. CPW must release wolves and have paws on the ground by the end of 2023.

I will help represent SJCA and Southwestern Colorado in that planning process. CPW has a difficult task ahead in figuring out just how to manage the planning, including how they will gather public input, if they will have a core advisory group of stakeholders, how many public meetings to have, and so on. Then, they will have to make decisions about the actual restoration effort, such as where they will obtain the wolves for reintroduction, where to release them in Colorado, and how many to release.

CPW will also need to develop a compensation program for livestock lost to wolf predation. While there's a lot of precedent with compensation programs in other states that CPW can draw on, those programs are rarely considered adequate by ranchers. This will likely be one of the most difficult parts of the planning process.

I'm also involved with several bighorn sheep management issues. Bighorns were possibly our most common ungulate (hooved animal) before the arrival of Europeans and their livestock. When you look around Southwest Colorado, you can see vast areas of suitable bighorn habitat, from high elevation zones like the La Plata Mountains, to lower elevation canyons like the lower Animas. Unfortunately, these areas are no longer occupied by bighorns due to overhunting and diseases transmitted from domestic livestock.

Disease, specifically the transmission of disease from domestic sheep and goats to bighorns, is currently the most important problem for bighorn sheep. The main concern is the bacterium *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae*, shortened to *M. ovi*. It can cause respiratory disease in domestic animals and can lead to death in bighorns. In addition, bighorn herds that have been infected with *M. ovi* typically have low lamb survival, meaning the herd can't grow and expand its range.

Because bighorns will occasionally go on "forays", long distance movements from their core home ranges, they can come in contact with domestic sheep or goats, get infected, and return to their home herd. The results can be devastating for the bighorns. The only way we know of to prevent *M. ovi* infections in bighorns is to keep them separated from domestic sheep.

And, the best way to do that is to remove domestic sheep grazing from public lands that are near bighorn herds. That happened early this year, when local sheep rancher J. Paul Brown agreed to take a payment from the National Wildlife Federation and surrendered his rights to the Endlich Mesa allotment in the Weminuche wilderness.

This is an expensive option that has been effective in other areas in the West, and there are more opportunities in the Weminuche and other important public lands in Southwest Colorado. A group of Colorado bighorn advocates will continue to help move this process along, and we hope to see the eventual increase of bighorn herds and an increase of bighorn use in habitat that they're currently not using.

I'm also working on trying to get CPW to address their management of the Collier State Wildlife Area near South Fork. They currently allow domestic sheep grazing on the area for a short period, but there's no formal agreement with the sheep producer. In cases like this, there is potential for disease transmission to bighorns nearby.

My other work includes helping Jimbo out on oil and gas development issues in the HD Mountains east of Bayfield. We have a great volunteer from Pagosa Springs, Beverly Compton, who is helping us plan for a "BioBlitz", an intensive wildlife and plant inventory which we hope to get done next spring and summer so there's better information on the possible impacts of well pads and pipelines in the area.

If any members would like to talk to me about wildlife issues, please feel free to call or email me (gary@sanjuancitizens.org)!

By Gary Skiba

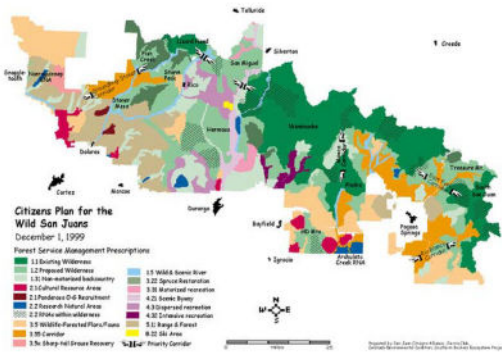


6,900

Bighorn population in Colorado, a number which researchers estimate is 5% of their original population.



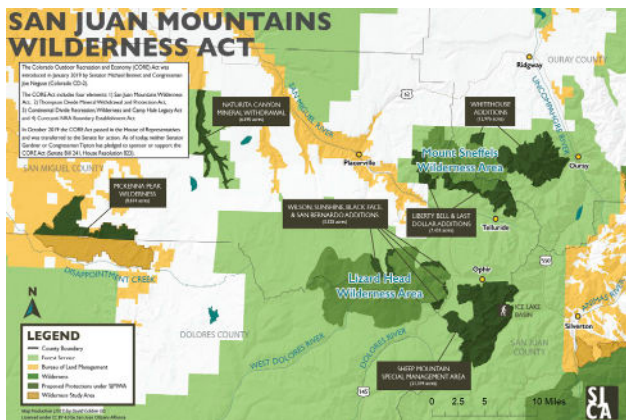
Wildlands Protection Takes Shape



SJCA's 1999 vision for wildlands protection for the San Juan Mountains and Dolores River Watershed.



McKenna Peak, in the Disappointment Valley, would earn wilderness protection under the Colorado Wilderness Act.



The San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act eventually became a central feature of the CORE Act.



The CORE Act would make Sheep Mountain and San Miguel Peak, near Telluride, a Special Management Area.

Over 20 years ago, SJCA members and staff crafted a long-range vision for protecting the wildlands of the San Juan Mountains and the Dolores River watershed. Our Citizens Plan for the Wild San Juans highlighted key unprotected roadless areas and prioritized the biggest gaps within our region's network of existing wilderness areas.

Out of that vision grew the campaign to protect the Hermosa Creek watershed, at the time the largest unprotected roadless area in Colorado. Hermosa Creek gained legislative designation in 2014, several years after the San Juan National Forest formally recommended its protection and after a lengthy community stakeholder process.

About the same time, the San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act took form, which proposed making Ice Lake Basin and the headwaters of Mineral Creek's South Fork off-limits to future development, mining, and roads. The basin and surrounding peaks is a missing link between the Weminuche Wilderness and the Lizard Head Wilderness. Our citizens vision aimed to secure permanence for the wild character of this larger landscape, and we hoped that would enhance the survival of species like lynx that range across large distances. Ice Lake Basin and the Sheep Mountain Special Management Area became centerpieces of the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act, the focus of a concerted grassroots campaign over the past decade.

The desert canyons and mesas of the Colorado Plateau west of the San Juan Mountains were similarly a focus of conservation advocacy. Back in 1980, the Bureau of Land Management first identified areas like Cross Canyon (now in Canyons of the Ancients National Monument), McKenna Peak in the Disappointment Valley, and the Dolores River Canyon as outstanding wilderness candidates. Later, in 1994, conservation groups put forth a larger vision for desert wildlands, and that gained traction as the Colorado Wilderness Act introduced in 1999. For 20 years, desert wilderness supporters have worked with Rep. Diana DeGette to gain traction for this bill, which now incorporates 36 areas across 660,000 acres that span the state of Colorado.

The past year saw tremendous legislative progress, with both the CORE Act and the Colorado Wilderness Act passing the House of Representatives. As of this writing, both wilderness bills could gain final passage through Congress via an appropriations bill for the defense department. In any case, conservation advocates anticipate momentum carrying over into 2021 with either prompt action on these remaining legislative priorities, or the opportunity to pursue new prospects.

See www.coloradowildernessact.org and www.sanjuanwilderness.org for more details about the areas within the two wilderness bills.

By Mark Pearson



The Outstanding Animas

A river is the sum of its many parts. The health and quality of a river's tributaries determines the overall health and resilience of the river itself.

The Animas River is no exception. Water that flows in the Animas first begins in the tributaries, wetlands, and washes of the San Juan Mountains, the surrounding forests, and the lower shrublands that make up the Animas Watershed. The high-quality water contained in these tributaries contributes to the overall health of the Animas and, by extension, the health of our communities, ecosystems, and economies.

We're working alongside our conservation partners in the State of Colorado seeking new protections for some of the highest quality tributaries to the Animas.

Outstanding Waters

Through a process known as Outstanding Waters designation, the Clean Water Act gives individual states the authority to designate special protections on pristine waterways to ensure water quality is not degraded. In Colorado, the decision to designate "Outstanding Waters" is made by the Colorado Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC) and depends on specific criteria like water quality standards, outstanding natural resource values (like aquatic

habitat or recreational use), and community support for enhanced protection.

The WQCC ultimately makes their decision during a rulemaking hearing that culminates in a triennial review of water classifications and standards for each basin in the State of Colorado. For our San Juan Basin, which contains the Animas, this hearing is scheduled for the summer of 2022.

Earlier in 2020, we began the important work with our partners to identify Outstanding Water candidate streams, collect critical water quality data, document natural resource values, and gather community support for protecting high-quality water.

Our initial list of potential candidate streams includes Animas River tributaries like Boulder Creek, Bear Creek, Cascade Creek, Lime Creek, and Grasshopper Creek.

All of these waterways are valuable to our river communities, providing essentials like:

- Critical aquatic habitat for native trout species, macroinvertebrates (bugs), birds, and other wildlife.
- Significant contributions to downstream resilience of the Animas and ecosystem services like higher quality drinking and irrigation water.

- Exceptional recreational value including existing uses for fishing, swimming, and paddling.

Looking ahead

As we move into a future of climate uncertainty, and as streams with exceptional water quality become increasingly rare, it will become ever more important that we protect the high-quality water that still exists in our mountains and forests. By engaging with the Outstanding Waters process, we plan to continue investigating high-quality streams over the next few years with the goal of proposing our strongest candidates for protection in 2022.

We've embarked on this multi-year effort alongside our friends and partners at American Rivers, American Whitewater, Colorado Trout Unlimited, Conservation Colorado, Mountain Studies Institute, High Country Conservation Advocates, The Pew Charitable Trusts, and Western Resource Advocates. Beyond Animas streams, our group is also exploring protections on tributaries to the Dolores, San Juan, San Miguel, and Gunnison rivers.

For more information, or if you'd like to get involved, feel free to contact your Animas Riverkeeper: marcel@sanjuancitizens.org.

By Marcel Gaztambide

107,000

Miles of rivers in the headwaters state of Colorado

Defending the HD Mountains

It's really no surprise that Colorado's highest peaks attract the greatest attention from human visitors, smart phone cameras, Wilderness designations, and more – they are awe-inspiring and photogenic. However, most of us have come to know that the “lower and slower” landscapes have much to offer both their endemic species and human visitors, sometimes even more so than our peaks on high.

And so it is with the HD Mountains, just east of Bayfield and south of Highway 160, with their rolling ridges of old-growth Ponderosa rising up between cottonwood-lined streams and grassy meadows ringed with tree-sized Gambel oaks. Abundant bear populations forage and frolic in the summer, and during the winter months the large herd of mule deer browses on the shrubs and forbs after a summer season high in the San Juan Mountains.

Ardent followers of the Alliance will remember that protecting and defending the HD Mountains has been a primary interest of ours for decades. You know how it goes: the less-flashy and lesser-known gems of nature often need extra doses of energy to keep them protected and whole. This is especially true when fluid fossil fuels lie below the forest floor as they do in the HDs.

The HDs are already studded with a few dozen natural gas wellsites. The visual impact, acreage directly impacted, and the “52/24/7” noise generated from the wellsites are not the only impacts to the HDs. Remember, each wellsite requires a road (wide and straight enough for a drill rig), a corridor for pipelines, and

sometimes electrical power lines, too. Of course, there's multi-thousand horsepower compressors, water extractors, pump stations and on and on. Don't let anyone tell you that this is anything other than industrialization.

But in addition to the natural gas sites that are already established, right now there are gas extraction schemes both envisioned and already in the planning phase that not only surround the HDs but also plunge straight into their heart. Some of you must be wondering, “Is someone really wanting to invest in natural gas extraction when we have a glut of it?”



Natural gas development in the HD mountains.

With the nation figuratively swimming in natural gas with its low price, huge “stockpile” and projected low prices for years ahead, one would think that investing in commodities in high demand (solar panels and toilet paper?) might be a smarter investment that would also, of course, leave more of our

public lands intact. But nonetheless, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) that “manages” natural gas leasing continues to greenlight more and more leasing and development on our public lands. Certainly, legislative and administrative actions are sorely needed at the federal level to alter the BLM's misguided trajectory.

Some of you are surely thinking that strong protections are guaranteed in the HDs because half the range is designated as a Colorado Roadless Area. Unfortunately, while there are stipulations attached to the development of natural gas leases on the San Juan National Forest, they are not ironclad; many of them can be “excepted, modified or waived.” Therefore, what we would hope to be strong protections for the forty square miles of HD Roadless Area are not necessarily stringent or reliable.

So, what lies ahead of us? With about 25 miles of dual pipelines, a dozen wellheads, and additional well access roads either recently approved or in the planning pipeline, we will need to muster our efforts, resources and capacity to hold back the push for unnecessary natural gas development as much as possible.

Your SJCA membership, your monetary donations, your comment writing, and your overall awareness and support of the need to maintain the HD Mountains as a quiet, wildlife-rich and road-free landscape are the bulwark we must maintain against the incessant industrial onslaught of our public lands.

By Jimbo Buickerood

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.



5 CARES Act Contributions

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act allows for up to \$300 per taxpayer in an above-the-line deduction for charitable gifts made in 2020 and claimed on taxes in 2021. You can lower your income tax bill by giving to SJCA today, even if you take the standard deduction on your taxes. Contact your accountant to learn more.

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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Gary Skiba, *Wildlife Program Manager*

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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Photo: John Fielder

Last Look



The Little Bookcliffs, an area that would be protected as wilderness under the Colorado Wilderness Act.