



Get A GRIP

The Newsletter of Gila Resources Information Project

PROMOTING
HEALTHY
COMMUNITIES
BY PROTECTING
OUR ENVIRONMENT
SINCE 1998

DECEMBER 2020



A WIN FOR GRANT COUNTY: WATER TREATMENT NOW MANDATORY AT CHINO MINE CLOSURE

Requirement will save 9,000 acre-feet of water annually

Allyson Siwik, Executive Director

After years of perseverance, Chino Mine is now required to treat mine effluent at closure rather than diluting it to meet water quality standards, saving thousands of acre-feet of precious groundwater. This victory was a long-time in coming and the result of years of pressure by GRIP and community members on state agencies and Freeport-McMoRan to develop a viable water treatment methodology to remove toxic contaminants from mine-

impacted water when operations close. GRIP appealed the Chino supplemental discharge permit for closure back in 2003, arguing that using 9,000 acre-feet of clean groundwater every year-- more than three times the amount of water Silver City uses annually -- to dilute contaminated mine effluent to meet water quality standards was wasteful and not a beneficial use of the state's water resources. Groundwater belongs to the people of New Mexico. Although

its water rights allow Freeport to put the water to beneficial use, the rights do not permit them to unnecessarily waste our water when reasonable treatment alternatives are available.

Freeport finally came to the table and agreed to develop a water treatment proposal modelled after a similar methodology approved at the Tyrone Mine. After demonstration by the company that its water [\(continued on page 2\)](#)

PERSISTENT OPPOSITION DEFEATS THE GILA DIVERSION

Allyson Siwik, Executive Director

The Gila River diversion is finally defeated after more than a decade and with lots of energy and persistence. The Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) voted 7-2 in June to stop work on the Environmental Impact Statement for the Gila River diversion project, effectively ending the 15-year battle over the future of the Gila River.

Your steadfast support over the past several years made the difference in the campaign to end this ill-conceived project and protect the wild Gila for future generations. Thank you!

Back in 2014, you joined with us to strongly oppose the "billion-dollar boondoggle" that would have put massive diversion and storage

infrastructure in the Cliff-Gila Valley, severely impacting ecologically important riparian habitat and popular recreational areas, including an inventoried roadless area.

Citizens and conservation groups across New Mexico and Arizona joined with GRIP and its partners in the Gila Conservation Coalition in commenting on the diversion proposal during the environmental compliance scoping process in 2018 and on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement earlier this year. More than 500 substantive comments had been catalogued and categorized before the DEIS process ended.

This campaign demonstrated that by joining

together diverse voices representing conservation, sportsmen, businesses, communities, and elected officials throughout the state, we could build a unified and powerful force for protection of New Mexico's last wild river.

In addition to the support of advocates, community leaders, and citizens, several amazing champions deserve our thanks for defeating the Gila diversion project.

In her 2018 water plan, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham pledged to end work on the diversion and to direct the Interstate Stream Commission to work with local governments and stakeholders on implementing water projects to benefit all of southwest New Mexico. Lieutenant Governor Howie Morales has been a strong leader since his time in the State Senate when he sponsored legislation to direct Arizona Water Settlements Act (AWSA) funding to priority community water projects rather than the harmful and unaffordable Gila diversion. [\(continue on page 2\)](#)

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A WIN FOR GRANT COUNTY: WATER TREATMENT NOW MANDATORY AT CHINO MINE CLOSURE

treatment proposal would achieve standards without dilution, GRIP settled its appeal with the Water Quality Control Commission in 2008 in return for the company's commitment to implementing water treatment when the mine eventually plays out and is closed.

But it took another 12 years before water treatment became mandatory as part of an enforceable permit for the Chino Mine. Renewal of reclamation plans and permits at all three of Freeport's mines dragged on for years, well beyond the five-year renewal period specified by state law. Although Chino's permits should have been renewed in 2008, Freeport's legal and legislative efforts to roll back water quality safeguards, such as the Tyrone appeal and the Copper Rule, held up the permit renewals for more than a decade.

GRIP's advocacy with regulatory agencies and the company came to a head in 2018 with the reopening of the Cobre mine. In April 2018,

we signed a Memorandum of Agreement with Freeport to resolve permitting issues related to restarting Cobre and the unacceptable delays in permit renewals. GRIP and Freeport agreed to meet quarterly to address issues with permit applications early on before a permit is drafted. We also agreed to confer on closure-closeout plans and reclamation cost estimates in order to more efficiently renew the outdated plans, permits, and financial assurance.

It's been a long battle, but the Chino permits were finalized a few months ago and now require that Freeport implement water treatment at closure, and as a result, extending the life of valuable groundwater supplies for Grant County residents. Community participation was a critical factor in achieving this outcome. Our combined voices, along with legal muscle and technical support, created the power to force state agencies and Freeport to do the right thing and conserve our precious water resources. Thanks everyone!

(Continued from page 1)

PERSISTENT OPPOSITION DEFEATS THE GILA DIVERSION

Senators Martin Heinrich and Tom Udall have worked tirelessly for Gila River protection and fiscally responsible use of AWSA funds to meet southwest New Mexico's water supply needs.

Our state legislative champions in the Senate (Peter Wirth, Mimi Stewart, Joseph Cervantes, Jeff Steinborn, Bill Soules, Benny Shendo, Liz Stefanics, and Antoinette Sedillo Lopez) and the House (Rudy Martinez, Matthew McQueen, Nathan Small, Melanie Stansbury, Abbas Akhil, Angelica Rubio, Joanne J. Ferrary, Andrea Romero, Debbie Sariñana, and Derrick Lente) also deserve our thanks for their support for spending AWSA funding on cost-effective, community water projects instead of an unaffordable and harmful diversion.

Now that the diversion has been defunded, it's up to us to make sure that the ISC follows through with a responsible process for spending the remaining \$80 million in AWSA funds on local water projects that secure a resilient future water supply for everyone in southwest New Mexico.

See related article on page 7.



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Eduardo Arguello
CarolBeth Elliot

STAFF

Allyson Siwik, Executive Director
Doyle Wrealli, Program Associate
Leigh Jenkins, Silver City
Watershed keepers Coordinator

CONTACT

575.538.8078 office/fax
grip@gilaresources.info

ADDRESS

305A North Cooper St.
Silver City, NM 88061



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GOODBYE 2020, HELLO 2021!



By Allyson Siwik,
Executive Director

It's been a rough year, but 2020 has taught me some valuable lessons. What are your lessons learned? Here are some of mine:

We're all interconnected. The devastating impacts from the coronavirus pandemic; wildfires, heatwaves and destructive storms due to climate change; and the tragic incidents of racial injustice in our country, all made it crystal clear just how interconnected we are with one another and with the natural world. We have no time to waste to address

the climate and extinction crises and justice, equity, diversity and inclusion in our work and throughout society.

When the landscape changes, adapt. The pandemic forced us to rethink how we do our work and put on events. GRIP successfully pivoted to working from home and hosting online and COVID-safe events, such as Gila Earth Day, the Gila River Festival and Silver City Watershed Keepers activities.

Build community resilience to create a healthy and safe community for everyone. The COVID emergency made us realize very quickly that we must strengthen our individual, family and community resilience through projects such as the Grant County Coronavirus Update project in order to meet the ongoing challenge of COVID-19, future pandemics, and climate change.

Live in gratitude. Gratitude has helped me

get through this difficult time. I am grateful for my family, friends and colleagues and the refuge provided by our beautiful Gila. I am so appreciative of our generous supporters who have made sure GRIP can continue its important work. Thank you to the McCune Charitable Foundation, Just Woke Up Fund and Lineberry Foundation for their ongoing assistance, essential to our efforts.

As a new president takes office in January 2021, I am hopeful that we'll get through the pandemic and get back to work to solve the critical challenges of our time.

My very best wishes to you and yours for a safe and healthy holiday season!

Allyson Siwik

Allyson Siwik

RESPONSIBLE MINING PROGRAM UPDATE

Despite the pandemic, copper reached a 7-year high of \$3.47/pound in early December with news of a vaccine and reduced copper stockpiles in China. It's been a busy year for mining projects in our area. Freeport-McMoRan will resume Chino operations by January 15, mining 120,000 tons per day or half of its pre-COVID capacity. One shovel will be running at Hanover Mountain, and haul trucks will resume transport of ore from Cobre to the Lambright leach stockpile at Chino. Freeport announced a 10-year expansion plan at the Tyrone mine, the Bureau of Land Management has greenlighted the American Magnesium dolomite mine outside of Deming, and renewals of permitting and financial assurance for Grant County mines are nearly complete.

RECLAMATION PLANS AND FINANCIAL ASSURANCE FINALIZED FOR CHINO AND COBRE MINES

As a result of GRIP's pressure campaign, the updated permitting and financial assurance for the Chino and Cobre mines is finally complete. The Mining Act permit and associated financial assurance for the Chino mine were finalized in September. Approved financial assurance totals \$237,278,796, with \$89,582,363 covered by a Third Party Guarantee and the rest by a combination of a cash trust and surety bond. The Mining Act permit and financial assurance for the Cobre Mine were finalized in April. The approved reclamation cost estimate of \$21,444,901 for financial assurance is covered by \$1,143,389 in a Third Party Guarantee and the rest by cash trust, collateral and surety bond. Because it is equivalent to self-bonding, GRIP continues to oppose the approval of Freeport-McMoRan Inc as the Third Party Guarantor. Although the state Mining Act allows a Third Party Guarantee of up to 75% of the total reclamation cost estimate, the federal Bureau of Land Management and US Forest Service don't allow them.

TYRONE FINANCIAL ASSURANCE STILL IN PROCESS

After a public meeting in August, the Mining and Minerals Division is still reviewing the reclamation cost estimate and financial assurance proposal for the Tyrone mine updated reclamation plan. GRIP remains concerned with the urgent need to respond to climate change with respect to reclamation design standards, allowing for a reduction in long-term reclamation costs without any technical justification, and acceptance of a Third Party Guarantee and collateral as financial assurance. The draft water quality discharge permit has yet to be released for public review and comment.

FREEPORT TO EXPAND TYRONE AND LITTLE ROCK MINES

Earlier this year, Freeport-McMoRan Tyrone presented a 10-year expansion plan to community members that includes expansion of the Little Rock Mine, a new open pit called the Emma project, and other in-pit expansions. The company submitted an application for the Little Rock expansion, and requests for a public hearing by GRIP and area residents have been approved by the Mining and Minerals Division. GRIP's technical consultant is reviewing the reclamation plan for submission to state regulatory agencies.

The company is continuing exploration at the site of the Emma project, a proposed 400 to 500-foot deep open pit just south of the Burro Mountain Homestead Road along Highway 90. The estimated timeframe to begin mining has been moved up to June 2022. Freeport will submit permit applications to the Mining and Minerals Division and NM Environment Department in January. The new pit is expected to be actively mined for five years or less. GRIP is concerned with the potential for groundwater contamination if any of the waste rock is determined to be acid generating. Additionally, it's unclear if the open pit will intersect shallow or regional aquifers. Freeport is currently conducting more drilling to better determine the location of groundwater. If groundwater is intersected, the pit will need to be dewatered and localized impacts to wells in the area could occur. The next community meeting on the Emma project is likely to take place in early 2nd quarter once groundwater study results are available.

CONSERVATION GROUPS FILE SUIT TO REVERSE APPROVAL OF AMERICAN MAGNESIUM DOLOMITE MINE

A coalition of conservation groups including GRIP are suing the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to reverse the agency's approval of an extensive mining exploration and development project in the Florida Mountains by American Magnesium, LLC. The lawsuit focuses on violations of the Administrative Procedures Act, Federal Land Management Policy Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act, and asks for full public disclosure of the impacts of the entire mine project. "Approval of the American Magnesium dolomite mining operation without a valid plan for processing the ore is like greenlighting construction of a bridge to nowhere. We are concerned that the BLM has not adequately evaluated and made public the potential for significant environmental and community impact from the full mine proposal," said Allyson Siwik, Executive Director of GRIP. Please consider signing the petition developed by our coalition partner, Friends of the Floridas, against the American Magnesium mine [here](#).

COPPER FLAT MINE

Canadian-owned NM Copper Corporation is attempting to reopen the Copper Flat Mine outside of Hillsboro. After rescinding its technical completion determination over the mine's lack of sufficient water rights, the NM Mining and Minerals Division reached a settlement with the company that it will not move forward on the company's application until it demonstrates that it has secured the approximately 6,095 acre feet per year of water from the production wells and the open pit necessary to operate and reclaim the mine. Represented by the NM Environmental Law Center, GRIP, Turner Ranch Properties and Hillsboro Pitchfork Ranch have appealed to the New Mexico Court of Appeals the Water Quality Control Commission's approval of the water quality discharge permit for the mine.

GRIP JOINS INITIATIVE FOR RESPONSIBLE MINING ASSURANCE



Allyson Siwik, Executive Director

Along with companies, communities and other civil society groups, GRIP has joined the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA) to demonstrate support for socially and environmentally responsible mining and to encourage mining operations in New Mexico to conduct IRMA mine assessments.

With increased customer awareness, companies in the auto, jewelry, building and electronics industries are demanding an impartial, credible and verifiable certification process for responsibly-sourced minerals. Communities and civil society organizations, such as unions and nonprofit organizations, want a process that leads to transparency and accountability about a mine's efforts to reduce adverse impacts to the environment and community and worker health and safety.

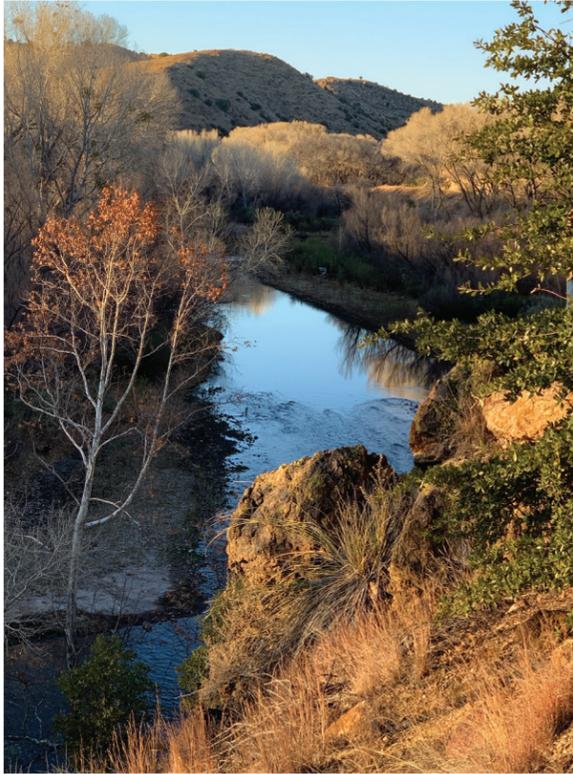
Similar to fair trade or organic certified labeling, IRMA facilitates responsible mining by independently certifying social and environmental performance at mine sites using an internationally recognized standard. IRMA was developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and is the most comprehensive mine-site standard in the world. The standard encompasses 26 chapters, from community and stakeholder engagement to planning and financing reclamation and closure, worker health and safety, and environmental responsibility.

IRMA is needed now more than ever as the Trump administration has streamlined mine permitting processes for "critical and strategic minerals" and rolled back environmental protections. Although we recognize the need for a rapid clean energy transition, minerals mining should not come at the expense of community health and the environment.

GRIP has used IRMA as a benchmark in its evaluation of mine permitting decisions and will continue to use the standard to encourage socially and environmentally responsible practices at New Mexico mines.

To learn more about IRMA, visit responsiblemining.net. Hear more from IRMA's Executive Director Aimee Boulanger on the Earth Matters podcast at <https://tinyurl.com/y67hlvx6>

NM GROUPS APPEAL DIRTY WATER RULE



GRIP, Amigos Bravos, and the New Mexico Acequia Association, joined together to appeal the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Army Corps of Engineers so-called Navigable Waters Protection Rule. This “Dirty Water Rule, which went into effect in June, drastically shrinks the number of New Mexico waters that are protected under the Clean Water Act. Represented by the NM Environmental Law Center, the groups filed their appeal with the US District Court for the District of New Mexico.

New Mexico is disproportionately affected by the Dirty Water Rule because of the large number of small streams in the state that flow only during wet times of the year. These smaller ephemeral streams have historically been protected by the Clean Water Act but under the new rule they are left unprotected.

The New Mexico Environment Department has estimated that as much as 96% of the surface waters in the state could lose protection under the new rule.

Unlike federal rollbacks in other areas of environmental protection, New Mexico’s waters do not have state protections to fall back on. New Mexico is one of just three states that does not have delegated authority from the EPA to regulate discharges of pollution into rivers, streams, and lakes. There is now no entity with regulatory authority to manage existing discharges from the wastewater treatment plants, mines, federal facilities, and other polluters that currently discharge into these smaller New Mexico streams.

Even some of our larger iconic rivers such as the Gila River in the south and the Rio Costilla in the north are threatened by this rule. The rule removes automatic protections for interstate waters – both the Gila and Rio Costilla are interstate waters – and because both of these rivers run dry before meeting up with larger downstream rivers, it is uncertain if under this new rule they will remain protected.

SILVER CITY WATERSHED KEEPERS CELEBRATES 10 YEARS OF WATERSHED STEWARDSHIP



Leigh Jenkins, Silver City Watershed Keepers Coordinator

While the COVID-19 pandemic shut down most community events in 2020, Silver City Watershed Keepers (SCWK) marked its 10th year by moving forward with programs to promote watershed education and stewardship, water quality monitoring, water conservation, trash removal and climate resilience, all while following COVID-safe practices.

Before the pandemic hit, SCWK assisted students from Guadalupe Montessori School with their Earth Force project about the impact of trash, in particular plastics, in our waterways. The group of nine fourth and fifth grade students walked to downtown Silver City to interview professionals as part of their research. After talking with GRIP’s Allyson Siwik for an overview of the trash problem in the Silver City watershed, they met with county commissioner Alicia Edwards about county ordinances concerning trash in the local waterways and visited Mayor Ken Ladner to learn about the Toss No Mas program. The students ended their day with water quality monitoring in San Vicente Creek. Students helped to collect data at Site 1 as part of SCWK’s first quarter monitoring of 2020.

In late February, SCWK partnered with Snell Middle School in a 2-day water education event that took place in the classroom and in the field. Professional conservation advocates spoke to students about water harvesting, geology and geo-morphological and hydrological events that led to the formation of the Big Ditch, the definition of a watershed, and how environmental

water quality monitoring is conducted at the local mines. The following day, 80 middle school students traveled to Silver City for a direct experience in the watershed that included water quality monitoring, native plant identification, a museum display explaining the formation of the Big Ditch, and a presentation about Cut Your Waste Grant County, a program designed to change our consumption habits. There was an emphasis placed on the consumption of plastics and their negative impact on our waterways and ecosystem in general. Students participated in a short meditation designed to emphasize how we are connected to Earth and our environment.

World Water Day was celebrated early in March at the Bayard Public Library where attendees learned about water quality monitoring, the importance of water conservation, and of keeping trash out of the waterways to protect ecosystem health and the safety of our drinking water. The program stressed climate resilience through conserving water to reduce the amount of fossil fuels needed to pump groundwater and lowering greenhouse gas emissions.

Unfortunately, the World Water Day event at Big Ditch Park had to be cancelled due to COVID-19, but several small groups of volunteers collected trash in Big Ditch Park and south of the Highway 90 overpass in honor of the annual celebration. Water conservation and education were also a part of the virtual Gila Earth Day event organized by GRIP. In early November, a small group of volunteers in partnership with the Gila National

Forest Service gathered to collect glass and shooting debris off Bear Mountain Road.

With the pivot to on-line learning due to COVID, SCWK designed environmental education materials to promote watershed stewardship in the community. Weather journals were created and distributed along with rain gauges to local schools to encourage students to collect precipitation data while at home to learn about weather and climate change. Other environmental education activities have been promoted through social media and on the SCWK website.

SCWK has continued to collect quarterly water quality monitoring data throughout the year in small groups of volunteers. The data will become part of a larger database to track surface water quality and groundwater in the state. In addition to the educational outreach in the community, SCWK is working to release its second State of the Watershed Report featuring much of the work being done by community groups to protect and enhance the quality of our local watershed.

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS!

Become a Silver City Watershed Keepers citizen scientist

Contact Leigh Jenkins at
silvercitywatershedkeepers@gmail.com

GRANT COUNTY CORONAVIRUS UPDATE PROJECT KEEPS COMMUNITY INFORMED DURING PANDEMIC

Allyson Siwik, Executive Director

The early days of the coronavirus pandemic were scary. There was so much fear and uncertainty about protecting ourselves and our families from this unseen, and at that point, unknown virus, and weathering the personal and community economic fallout from the emergency public health orders.

Recognizing the need to disseminate accurate and trustworthy real-time information to our local community, GRIP and other local nonprofits -- Gila/Mimbres Community Radio, Healthy Kids-Healthy Communities Grant County, National Center for Frontier Communities, and United Way of Southwest New Mexico -- came together to initiate the Grant County Coronavirus Update Project.

Since 30% of Grant County households do not have access to the internet, we immediately recognized that we needed multiple ways to get up-to-date information out to everyone in our community. The project started off by producing daily radio shows on Gila/Mimbres Community Radio that provided people with the latest health and economic relief resources from local, state and federal agencies and providers and interviews with local public health experts and social service nonprofits. United Way of Southwest New Mexico has been distributing the weekly update via email to its list of local nonprofits, community leaders and other interested people.

We then augmented the radio programming with a website - grantcountycoronavirusupdate.org - to provide a clearinghouse of current COVID health and economic response information. With financial support from the United Way of Southwest New Mexico and a partnership with Grant County and the Town of Silver City, the site has been accessed by more than 3000 people since it went live in May. A Facebook page helps us reach folks who get their information via social media. Additional funding from the National Center for Frontier Communities will help sustain the effort into early 2021.

Get Help/Give Help, a mutual aid component of the project, has distributed hundreds of cloth face masks made by Maryann Marlar's group of volunteer sewers and the Grant County Covid Supplies Support Group. Thanks to an anonymous donation, financial resources were provided to the two groups to purchase the fabric and notions used to produce the cloth face coverings.

Early on, the project also initiated an ad hoc group of nonprofits, service providers and local government staff that met weekly to identify the many needs our community had -- from increased demand at local food pantries to PPE and cleaning supplies -- and find ways to fulfill them. Local public health experts, Dr. Renee Depres, Dr. Ken Sexton and Dr. Anne Barraza along with Grant County and the

Town of Silver City, have since established an Emerging Infectious Diseases Task Force under the umbrella of the Grant County Community Health Council to coordinate a comprehensive local COVID response across all sectors. The Grant County Coronavirus Update Project is an integral part of the new organization to ensure that accurate COVID response information is distributed to the public.

A shout out to the many people who keep the project going during these difficult times. Andrea Warner has done an amazing job producing the weekly updates, maintaining the website every day and managing the social media effort. As host and co-producer, Marcus Hanson has kept the daily Grant County Coronavirus Update radio show going weekdays at noon on KURU 89.1 FM and streaming at gmc.org. KURU station manager Ken Keppler has kept us on the air for the past 8 months, while Marcus Hanson, Jamie Newton, Andrea Warner, Alicia Edwards, and Allyson Siwik have produced the program's interviews. Amanda Morales at United Way of Southwest New Mexico has been distributing the weekly updates via email. Stacey Cox of National Center for Frontier Communities has provided much needed support. Thanks to Chris Uribe who created a beautiful, user-friendly website for us.

GILA EARTH DAY GOES VIRTUAL

Plans for 2021 in the works



Doyne Wrealli, GRIP Program Associate

The restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic in March caused the Gila Earth Day planning committee to change horses midstream to a virtual event. While we were very sorry to not be able to gather together in Gough Park to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, we thought the occasion was too important to skip. One of only a handful of New Mexican Earth Day celebrations that occurred despite the pandemic, local organizations and businesses stepped out of their comfort zone and contributed content filmed on everything from phones to drones, and created a fabulous two-hour online event that made us proud! If you missed it, you can still view the production on the GRIP Vimeo channel at <https://vimeo.com/411566900>.

We're already planning our next Gila Earth Day,

which we hope will be back in the park. If so, it will take place on Saturday, April 24, and the national theme this year is "Restore Our Earth." Please consider joining the planning committee; we'd love to have your input! We meet once a month, starting in January, and meetings last no more than one hour. In March, the meeting frequency may increase to every two weeks. No organizational affiliation or experience is required.

The first planning meeting is scheduled for Friday, January 22, 1 - 2 pm via Zoom.

If interested, please contact GRIP Program Associate and Gila Earth Day Coordinator Doyne Wrealli at earthendoyne@gmail.com.

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and
Our Environment

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FINAL EIS ON HOLLOMAN F-16 PROPOSAL EXPECTED SOON



Allyson Siwik, Executive Director

The Holloman Air Force Base Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is expected to be available for public comment by the end of the year 2020/early 2021.

Holloman wants to expand its F-16 pilot training airspace across southwestern New Mexico. Although the Air Force acknowledged in its Draft EIS that current airspace is adequate, it proposes an annual addition of 10,000 flights, discharge of 15,000 flares and 15,000 bundles of chaff.

We shouldn't sacrifice the Gila, America's first wilderness, and other special places in

southwest New Mexico when there are better places for this training. These are areas that are quiet and distinguished by a wealth of unique natural assets. People living in these areas will not receive economic benefits from intense F-16 training, but will experience extreme noise, pollution, the threat of catastrophic fire and severe impacts to outdoor-based economies.

Additionally, there are existing Military Training Routes through our region. Many people have reported to us recently that low-level military overflights are occurring in the Gila Wilderness, the Cliff-Gila Valley and the Burros. Please

help us keep track of current military training operations by reporting the incidents on the Peaceful Gila Skies website reporting form at peacefulgilaskies.com

GRIP and its partners in the Peaceful Gila Skies coalition will continue to defend the Gila region from military training.

We're tracking the release of the Holloman Final EIS, and we'll help facilitate public participation when the document is available. Sign up for GRIP's email list to stay informed at www.gilaresources.info

WHAT'S IN STORE FOR THE UPCOMING COVID-SAFE LEGISLATIVE SESSION?

Allyson Siwik, Executive Director

Given that we are still in the throes of the coronavirus pandemic, the 2021 legislative session is likely to be held online. The upcoming session will run for 60-days from January 19 - March 20, 2021 and will cover all issues. Short 30-day budget sessions and long 60-day sessions alternate from year to year.

According to House Speaker Brian Egolf in a recent Retake Our Democracy Zoom briefing, "it is very likely the Capitol Building will be closed to the public." Scientists from Los Alamos National Laboratories are developing an airflow model so that "we can make the best science-driven decision" about how to keep everyone safe while also completing the critical work of the Legislature. House and Senate leadership is "also in conversation with the City of Santa Fe to see if there is an option to use the convention center for committee meetings. But if that isn't an option and the Roundhouse can't be open to the public, committee meetings will be open

to the public by Zoom." The Speaker explained that Zoom has been working well in interim committees for people to make public comment using the platform.

The leadership is looking at regularly scheduled Zoom office hours, since catching legislators in the hallways or on the floor of the House or Senate won't be possible this year.

Also under consideration are ways to run the process more efficiently online. "We're looking at reducing the number of bills, like Colorado has done, to ease up the flow," said Egolf. They may modify the process and "introduce all of the legislation in extended floor sessions and then have no floor sessions for two to three weeks while committees meet to discuss and pass bills" from one committee to the next. Another one week of floor sessions would be held to vote on bills and send them from one chamber to the other.

Working with the Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter, we hope to have this all figured out in time for virtual lobby trainings in January. Instead of having geographically-specific trainings as in past years, online sessions will be held by topic, such as water and clean energy. Stay tuned for more information and the training schedule.

Some of the legislation that we'll be supporting this year includes responsible allocation of the NM Unit Fund to build water supply resilience in southwest New Mexico; holding the line on state environment and natural resource agency budgets needed to ensure a clean environment and protection of natural resources; modernizing our water planning and management policies and frameworks to address the impacts of climate change; funding opportunities to provide equitable access to nature through the Outdoor Equity Fund; and renewable energy legislation to facilitate the clean energy transition.

IT'S TIME FOR A NEW GROUP TO HELP ALLOCATE THE NEW MEXICO UNIT FUND

Allyson Siwik, Donna Stevens, Todd Schulke - Gila Conservation Coalition

Although the Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) voted to stop work on the Gila River diversion project under the Arizona Water Settlements Act (AWSA), the NM CAP Entity wants control over millions in remaining AWSA monies in the NM Unit Fund in order to continue its pursuit of a diversion.

The ISC voted in June to defund the diversion environmental compliance process because the project was not economically viable -- costs exceeded benefits and project water was unaffordable. The ISC directed staff to determine how to spend the NM Unit Fund on non-diversion water projects instead.

Deciding how to allocate the fund is a technically complex and high-stakes process that will require an efficient, effective, and representative effort to bring our region together to decide how best to achieve water supply resilience. There is \$80 million in the New Mexico Unit Fund that can be spent on any water utilization project in southwest New Mexico. The NM CAP Entity is attempting to maintain its relevance now that the Gila diversion is off the table and have influence over how the funding is allocated.

The Gila Conservation Coalition believes the

Entity is not up to this critically important challenge. Our region needs a new advisory group to lead the process.

For more than 15 years, the Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) and members of the NM CAP Entity, most recently with the CAP Entity in the lead, have piloted the Gila diversion planning process under the AWSA. They squandered \$15 million of the NM Unit Fund and another \$2 million in state taxpayer dollars on diversion planning with nothing to show for it.

The NM CAP Entity has continued its feckless course despite the ISC's June decision. The group's discussions about amending its Joint Powers Agreement show it is still trying to build the Gila diversion. The group wants to control the money, keeping most of it for the diversion. The Entity's latest attempt to keep the diversion alive includes requesting another \$25,500 from the NM Unit for an engineering report "to obtain future funding for continuation of the project and implementation of any recommended improvements." This ignores the ISC's decision to end all engineering work on the diversion. And in a bizarre twist, following their recent failures, the NM CAP Entity now wants to become a regional water authority

"to get access to a huge amount of money to develop water."

The stakes are high for southwest New Mexico's water future. We face long-term drought and climate change, deteriorating water infrastructure, and the need to conserve precious water supplies. Given the region has \$137 million in water needs (from FY22-26 Infrastructure Capital Improvement Plan lists), we can't afford to squander the \$80 million in the NM Unit Fund on more failed Gila diversion planning. The NM CAP Entity's lack of technical expertise, lack of representation, clear bias toward agricultural interests, climate change denial, and divisive rhetoric, show the NM CAP Entity is clearly not the right group to move things forward.

Enough is enough. It's time to create a new advisory group that can legitimately and effectively assist the ISC with allocating the NM Unit Fund by facilitating a process that brings all stakeholders together to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number of people with the available AWSA funds.

A version of this article was published as a guest column in the Silver City Daily Press.

GRIP EXPANDS PLANNED GIVING PROGRAM TO INCLUDE A LEGACY SOCIETY

A special message from the GRIP board

Sometime before these current crises began, Allyson and the Board started talking about our desire to expand our planned giving program in ways that would ensure that GRIP's essential work is sustained into the future.

For more than twenty years, we've depended mostly on current individual donations, grants, fundraising and community support. Wouldn't it be nice to give people a way to create a legacy that supports GRIP in the future, and now especially, without affecting their current finances?

We are excited to tell you that the GRIP For The Future society has been established, and you are invited to become a member!

A bequest from a will requires using the GRIP Federal Employer Identification Number (85- 0452944) along with the full organization name and address and your intent for the use of the money. Any bequest of actual money must be in a will. However, you can leave assets such as jewelry, valuable books, art and other real property to be distributed after you are gone by simply making these instructions in a letter and attaching it to your will, so long as nothing in the will is contradicted.

Your financial advisor can assist you with determining which planned gift may be best for you.

If anyone reading this has already put GRIP in their will and would like to share that, welcome to the legacy society!

The GRIP For The Future society expands options for supporting our organization, such as donations from Donor Advised Funds or contributions of stocks or securities.

More information on GRIP's planned giving program will be available at www.gilaresources.info.

I pray and hope that you and yours are doing well in these tough times.

CarolBeth Elliott
On behalf of the GRIP Board

16TH ANNUAL GILA RIVER FESTIVAL PRESENTATIONS AVAILABLE ONLINE

Visit GCC Vimeo Channel



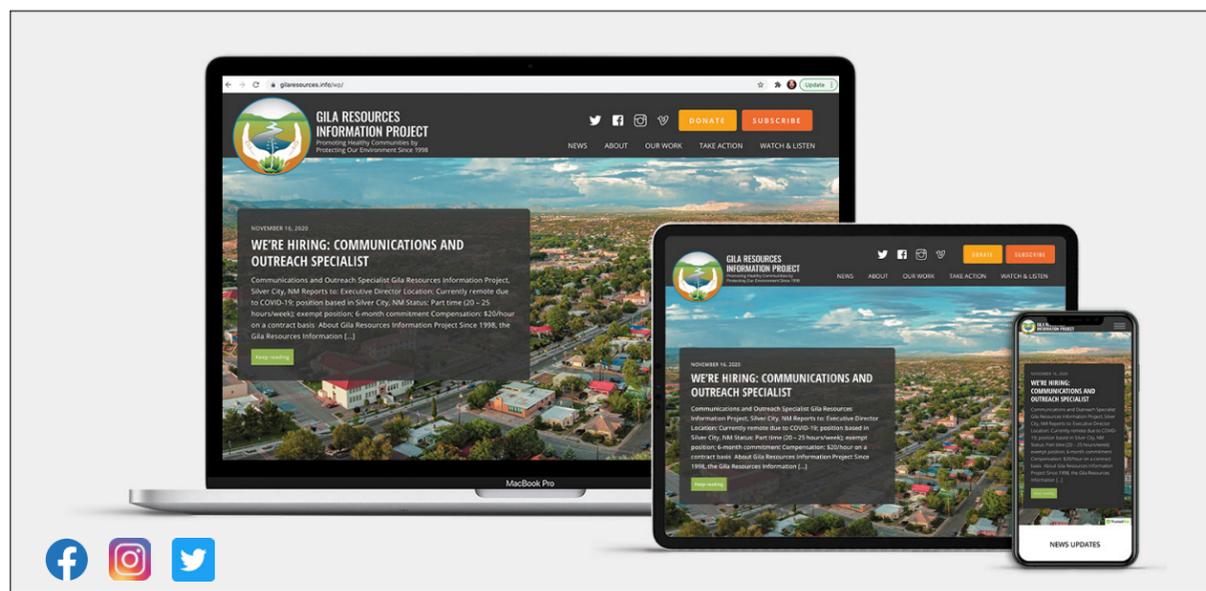
GRIP and its partners in the Gila Conservation Coalition thank you for making the first-ever virtual Gila River Festival such a big success! It was an enormous risk and technological challenge to pivot from an in-person to an online event, and we are grateful to all of our presenters and moderators, sponsors, technical support staff, planning committee, volunteers and attendees for your support and commitment to gathering online in celebration of New Mexico's last wild river.

This year 300 people joined us to explore how to cultivate resilience in our communities and ecological systems as we address the crises of climate change, the coronavirus pandemic, and systemic racism. Senator Tom Udall kicked off the festival with his 30 by 30 Resolution to Save Nature, an effort to protect 30% of our land and 30% of our water by 2030 in order to address both the climate and species extinction crises. Other presenters included Indigenous activist Casey Camp Horinek, poet Camille Dungy, and authors Gary Paul Nabhan, Sharman Apt Russell, and Phil Connors and many more.

For those of you who missed the festival, we have uploaded all of the presentations to our Gila Conservation Coalition vimeo channel. Thanks to the NM Humanities Council they are available for free at <https://vimeo.com/showcase/gilariverfestival>.

CHECK OUT GRIP'S NEW WEBSITE!

WWW.GILARESOURCES.INFO



GRIP has updated its website to better inform you of the environmental and conservation issues that matter to you. Access the responsive site on your phone, tablet, laptop or desktop. Take action on critical environmental and natural resource use decisions. Find out about volunteer opportunities. Connect to our digital media resources and Earth Matters podcasts and subscribe to our mailing list. You can also easily support our work through our online donation platform. Let us know what you think and how we can make the site most useful to you. Web design by Chris Uribe, SmartnPro.com

EARTH MATTERS

Begins its 9th year



Stay informed about the latest local, national and international environmental issues by tuning into Earth Matters. Now beginning its 9th year on the air, Earth Matters is a collaboration between GRIP, Upper Gila Watershed Alliance and the Southwest Environmental Center. The show broadcasts on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays at 10 am and Thursdays at 8pm on Gila/Mimbres Community Radio KURU 89.1 FM Silver City and streaming at gmcr.org. The show also broadcasts Tuesdays at 10 am and Thursdays at 9 am on Las Cruces Community Radio KTAL-LP 101.5 FM in Las Cruces and streaming at www.lccommunityradio.org/



Gila Resources Information Project
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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

2021

Virtual Grassroots Lobby Training

January 2021

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New Mexico 2021 Legislative session

January 19 - March 20, 2021

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World Water Day

Virtual celebration on Monday, March 22 and Community Action Day in San Vicente Creek on Saturday, March 20 will include COVID-safe activities such as water quality monitoring, trash clean up and stream restoration. More information at

silvercitywatershedkeepers.org

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Gila Earth Day

Saturday, April 24, 2021

Gough Park

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17th annual Gila River Festival

September 16 - 19, 2021

For more information or to volunteer, visit www.gilariverfestival.org