

The Mountain Chickadee

Newsletter of the Sangre de Cristo Audubon Society
Volume 46 Number 4, December, 2017



Photograph by Tom Taylor

Upcoming Activities Mark your Calendar

Illustrated Evening Programs

Wednesday, February 14
TBA

Wednesday, March 14
**Postfire Watershed
Restoration**
Steve Vrooman

Wednesday, April 11
**Los Alamos
Breeding Bird Atlas**
Mouser Williams

**Note the location at the Randall Davey
Audubon Center and time: 6:30 PM.**

Field Trips

Friday, December 29th
Santa Fe Christmas Count

Sunday, December 31
Española Christmas Count

Sunday, January 28
Rosy Finches at Sandia Crest

Saturday, February 3
**Bosque Del Apache & Ladd
Gordon Areas**

**Details inside. Remember to check the
Sangre [Website](#) for information.**

Rapidly Warming Southwest Faces Water Challenges, Choices

"I'm openly skeptical we'll ever be able to fill Elephant Butte Reservoir again," Dr. David Gutzler told attendees of a recent climate change conference. That's given the trend toward diminished flows in the Rio Grande resulting from the continued global rise in temperature.

The University of New Mexico Earth and Planetary Studies Department professor delivered the grim news on a crisp, yellow and blue fall morning along the bosque in Albuquerque.

Since the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation completed the reservoir in 1916 to supply farmers in southern New Mexico and Texas with water, the reservoir's levels have fluctuated—from highs in the 1940s to lows in the 1950s, '60s, and 70s. Many New Mexicans are familiar with the wet period that lasted from 1984 through 1993; between 1980 and 2006, the state's population increased by 50 percent. But then the region was hit with drier conditions—and increasing temperatures. Areas of the Southwest have suffered from drought since 1999 and, unlike earlier droughts, it's driven not just by a lack of precipitation, but a rise in temperature.

Even with good snowpack in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico the past few years, there simply isn't enough water to boost the reservoir's levels again, said Gutzler, who is also one of the lead authors of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 2013 Assessment Report. The reservoir is currently at just 15 percent capacity.

"It is a lot warmer here now than it was a generation ago," said Gutzler—about three degrees Fahrenheit warmer. And by the end of the century, New Mexico could be four to six degrees warmer.

Warming in the American Southwest is occurring at about double the global rate—and that local warming will have a profound impact on water resources in the Interior West. Those changes in water supply will occur regardless of changes in precipitation, he said.

Gutzler added, "There is nothing the slightest bit hypothetical about this warming."

In November, the U.S. government released its Climate Change Special Report and the fourth volume of the National Climate Assessment, an update of the last report released in 2014. It's the culmination of work by 13 federal agencies mandated by Congress to assess climate science and climate change impacts every four years.

The assessment's authors point out that human activities—such as the burning of fossil fuels—are the dominant cause of this warming. "For the warming over the last century," the assessment's authors write, "there is no convincing alternative explanation supported by the extent of the observational evidence."

[Read More.](#)

Laura Paskus, NM Political Report

Audubon Activities

Illustrated Evening Programs

Wednesday, February 14
TBA

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Postfire Watershed
Restoration
Steve Vrooman

Wednesday, April 11
Los Alamos Breeding Bird Atlas
Mouser Williams

Meetings with illustrated talks on bird conservation and other topics concerning the natural world are held on the second Wednesday of February, March, and April at 6:30 PM in the Education building at the Randall Davey Audubon Center and Sanctuary at the end of Upper Canyon Rd. in Santa Fe. Abundant parking is available. Everyone is welcome. There is no charge and the building is wheelchair accessible. A short update of environmental issues and chapter activities precedes the program.

For details, check the [SdCAS Website](#)

Field Trips

December 14 – January 5
Christmas Bird Counts

The National Audubon Society began the Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) in 1901. These counts provide important information about wintering bird populations. There are close to 30 counts held in the state of New Mexico and the Sangre de Cristo Chapter participates in 10 counts in its area. The CBCs will be held between mid-December and mid-January. Novices are welcome and will be paired with more experienced birders. For information, check the web sites:

[Sangre de Cristo Audubon](#),
[The New Mexico Audubon Council](#),
[Audubon New Mexico](#),
[New Mexico Ornithological Society](#)

Contact the leaders of each count you want to participate in to make count arrangements

For Details go to the
[SdCAS Website](#)

Every Saturday
Randall Davey Audubon
Center

Every Saturday (except in January), a naturalist will lead a walk around the RDAC grounds, an Audubon Important Bird Area, at 8:30 AM. Binoculars can be provided. Dress appropriately. All welcome. For information, call: 983-4609.

Note that the Davey Center is closed in January; birdwalks will restart on Feb 3.

Friday, December 29th
Santa Fe Christmas Count

Lonnie Howard, (505) 995-9799
LonnieH@cybermesa.com

Contact the leader for meeting place and information.

Sunday, December 31
Española Christmas Count

Bernie Foy, 505-820-1658
taigamerlin@comcast.net

We will meet at 7:30 am in the parking lot of Lowe's in Espanola and split into groups at that time. Contact the leader for more information.

Sunday, January 28
Rosy Finches at Sandia
Crest

Leader: Tom Jervis, 505-988-1708,
Jervidae@cybermesa.com

A fun trip to Sandia Crest to see Rosy Finches and other winter montane species and watch the banding operation. We'll spend the morning inside the Crest House and if the weather is cooperative, take a walk through the snowy woods to see what may be around. We will meet on the far west side of the Santa Fe Place Mall at 8:30 AM and carpool to the Crest. We will be back no later than mid afternoon.

Saturday, February 3
Bosque Del Apache &
Ladd Gordon Areas

Leaders: Mary Ristow 505-690-7336,
mristow@newmexico.com
Linda Mowbray 505-989-8295,
birdinglinda@yahoo.com

On this long one-day trip we should see large numbers of Snow Geese and Sandhill Cranes, plus raptors and other waterfowl. Appropriate for all levels of birders. Spotting scopes are useful. Contact leaders for meeting time and place.

Sangre de Cristo Audubon Society Field Trips are designed to promote understanding and appreciation of wildlife and their habitats. Our aim is to cultivate awareness of outdoor ethics in an atmosphere of friendly companionship. Field trips are free and open to the public. Some area entry fees are required and driving costs are shared. Participants are expected to carpool whenever possible. On all field trips, wear walking shoes and clothing appropriate for the weather. Bring water, lunch, and binoculars. No pets, please. Always call the trip leader before the trip. Trips may be cancelled for a variety of reasons.

Audubon New Mexico Randall Davey Audubon Center and Sanctuary

The grounds at the Randall Davey Audubon Center are open Monday to Saturday, 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM, closed Sundays (and in January). Stroll the gardens as birds visit the birdfeeders, or walk the trails and enjoy the natural beauty and serenity of the 135-acre wildlife sanctuary. Additionally, the Davey Center is an environmental education center and offers a variety of educational events. Please check the [website](#) for details. The Center is located at the end of Upper Canyon Road on the far east side of Santa Fe.

Historic House Tours

Step back in time as you stroll through the old Santa Fe style home (originally a lumber mill built in 1847 by the U.S. Army) of the artist Randall Davey (1887-1964). This docent-led tour will give you an opportunity to view some of Davey's most spectacular works of art, as well as a beautiful collection of Spanish Colonial and European antiques. Tours are held each Friday at 2:00 P.M. Reservations are recommended. Cost is \$5 per person. For information call 505-983-4609.



Note that the Davey Center will be closed in January!

Randall Davey Center Activities Call 983-4609 for more information on these Events

Every Saturday, **Bird Walks** at the Davey Center. 8:30 AM

GBBC

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a free, fun, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online at [birdcount.org](#). Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from beginning bird watchers to experts, and you can participate from your backyard, or anywhere in the world. There will be a special program at REI in Santa Fe followed by a GBBC event at the Davey Center in conjunction with the GBBC.

The 2018 GBBC will be held Friday, February 16, through Monday, February 19, 2018. Please visit the official website at [birdcount.org](#) or the Randall Davey [website](#) for more information.

Audubon New Mexico Aims to Save Birds on America's Working Lands!

As described in the last edition of The Mountain Chickadee, Audubon has developed the Conservation Ranching program to combat the negative effects of grassland degradation---and to keep grass on the landscape. The Audubon certification seal is expected to bring a broad market appeal that should enhance demand by consumers that want options for beef that is sustainably raised and benefits wildlife habitat. [Read More.](#)

To support Audubon's conservation efforts to restore grasslands for the benefit of birds, you can purchase Ranney Ranch beef certified under the Audubon Conservation Ranching program, contact [Skarsgard Farms](#) at 505-681-4060.

An informational Webinar on Conservation Ranching in NM will be held December 11 at 4pm MT. Please RSVP by contacting Desiree Loggins at dloggins@audubon.org.

9/11 Tribute in Light Reveals How City Lights Affect Migration

A new study provides the most compelling evidence yet that artificial lights cause radical changes in the behavior of birds migrating at night. Using radar data and observations during the Tribute In Light in New York City, researchers from the University of Oxford, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and New York City Audubon found densities of birds were up to 150 times higher over lower Manhattan when the tribute was illuminated. The birds dissipated when the lights were turned off. [Read More.](#)

Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology

Take the Pledge; Keep Your Cats Indoors

Ever since the invention of kitty litter, cat owners have realized the many benefits of keeping their furry companions safely indoors. This transition has enabled cats to live longer, healthier lives, resulting in fewer trips to the veterinarian, and extending the years of mutual companionship. Keeping cats indoors also protects birds and other wildlife from a cat's instinctive predatory drive.

To stand up and be counted among the many cat owners doing their part to protect cats and birds, please Take the Pledge to Keep Cats Indoors. By signing this pledge, you agree or reaffirm your commitment to keep cats safely indoors or on a leash.

As a responsible cat owner and wildlife supporter, I pledge to keep my cat(s) and any future cats that I own safely and responsibly indoors.

By taking this action, I recognize that by maintaining my pet indoors or on a leash, my cat will live a longer, healthier life, and that I am helping to reduce the mortality of native birds and other wildlife.

Visit: [Here](#) for more information and to take the pledge.

Environment News

Natural Selection in Feeder Birds

Many studies have found evidence of rapid evolution in response to environmental change. In most cases, there has been some suggestion of which traits might be most responsive ahead of time. Researchers have now turned this approach on its head by using genomic regions with a signature of selection to identify traits that are changing. In Great Tits (*Parus major*) in the United Kingdom, genomic regions showing selection invariably contained genes associated with bill growth. Indeed, U.K. birds not only have longer bills, but these longer bills are associated with increased fitness. These changes likely reflect an increase in domestic garden bird feeders over the past several decades.

Science 20 October, 2017

Coffee Plants Benefit from Ant Dung

Ants and the plants on which they live have evolved to benefit from their close relationship. Plants provide nesting space and food for the ants, which in turn defend the plant against herbivory. In coffee plants, researchers have demonstrated a previously undescribed aboveground uptake of nutrients provided by weaver ants. Nitrogen in the ants' food was traced using isotopic labeling, allowing the authors to observe that nitrogen in the ants' excretion was absorbed through leaves and translocated throughout the plant. Leaves from plants that hosted ants contained more nitrogen than those that did not. It is not yet known how widespread this phenomenon is, but it may be that canopy fertilization, as well as protection from herbivory, earns ants their keep in relationships with plants.

J. Ecol. 10.1111/1365-2745.12841 (2017).

Science 13 October, 2017

Sensitive Species Reporting in eBird

Bird populations are at risk all around the world. The precise locations of eBird data are often used to inform conservation or research efforts for threatened and endangered species. At the same time, species can be overwhelmed by excessive visitation or targeted by those with less than honorable intentions. eBird's new Sensitive Species initiative helps ensure that these valuable data can continue to be collected in a way that helps the birds while protecting them from targeted exploitation by humans. [Learn more.](#)

Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology

Endangered Birds Killed by Feral Cats on Wildlife Refuge In Hawaii

Trail cameras installed by American Bird Conservancy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recorded the predation of multiple endangered Hawaiian Common Gallinules by feral cats at a wildlife refuge on Kauai. The loss of these nesting adults resulted in the failure of nine eggs to hatch and the death of two hatchlings. [Read more here.](#)

American Bird Conservancy

Christmas Island Bat is Officially No More

It takes a lot to declare an animal extinct. That's because tracking down endangered species, such as the Christmas Island pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus murrayi*), can be difficult and costly. Now, 8 years after it was last sighted, the intensely studied bat is officially no more, according to the latest Red List of Threatened Species, put out in September by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. The pipistrelle was the sole echolocating species on Australia's Christmas Island, some 350 kilometers south of Java, making it easy for scientists to detect the bats using ultrasonic devices that record their calls. It's unknown what led to the decline, which accelerated in the 1990s, but researchers suspect invasive predators such as snakes and giant centipedes. After a survey in January 2009 indicated that just 20 bats were left, researchers planned a captive breeding program. But a monthlong search turned up only one, which evaded capture and vanished on 27 August that year. None has been seen or heard since.

Science, 22 September, 2017

New Species of Orangutan Described

Researchers have identified a new species of orangutan in an isolated forest on the Indonesian island of Sumatra. Fewer than 800 individuals remain, and the construction of a dam and road threaten the prime habitat of the ape. A combination of anatomical, ecological, and genetic data convinced researchers that *Pongo tapanuliensis*, named for the Tapanuli districts where it is found, is distinct from the two accepted species of orangutan. The authors also conclude this week in *Current Biology* that by 3.4 million years ago, orangutans in northern Sumatra had split from those in southern Sumatra and Borneo. Then, about 674,000 years ago, the southern Sumatra and Borneo populations also diverged. Conservationists hope the find—the first species of great ape new to science to be described since the Bonobo in 1929—will help raise awareness of the plight of orangutans. Most of the forest where *P. tapanuliensis* lives is off-limits to logging, but the best habitat is not protected. Conservation groups are working with local communities to reduce illegal tree-cutting and hunting. [Read More here.](#)

Science 3 November, 2017



Climate Corner

Consider Climate, Courts Say

The U.S. government must consider the impact major energy projects could have on climate change when deciding whether to approve them, two federal courts have ruled. The decisions could complicate the Trump administration's plans to de-emphasize climate concerns in regulatory proceedings. On 22 August, a three-judge panel of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission hadn't adequately considered future greenhouse gas emissions associated with three new natural gas pipelines approved for the southeastern United States. And on 15 August, a federal district court judge in Montana blocked expansion of the Bull Mountain coal mine, ruling that the Department of the Interior had failed to evaluate the environmental impact of burning the coal. If the rulings hold, the Administration will be forced to offer its take on how to assess the climate impacts of fossil fuels.

Science, 1 September, 2017



Measuring Earth's Carbon Cycle

One of the crowning achievements of modern environmental science is the Keeling curve, the detailed time series of the concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide begun in 1958 that has enabled deep insights into the mechanisms of global climate change. These measurements were difficult to make for most of their 60-year history, involving the physical collection of air samples in flasks at a small number of sites scattered strategically around the globe and the subsequent analysis of their carbon dioxide inventories in a handful of laboratories throughout the world. The Orbiting Carbon Observatory-2 (OCO-2) mission was designed to circumvent those limitations by providing a platform with which atmospheric carbon dioxide can be measured spectrally from space over large geographic areas, thereby offering an unprecedented capability to study, in great detail, the processes that affect the concentration of the gas over a variety of spatial and temporal scales. The satellite can also measure solar-induced fluorescence, a proxy for photosynthesis, which provides valuable information about the biological processes that affect atmospheric carbon dioxide.

In this issue, a collection of Research Articles presents the initial results from OCO-2, covering the detection of carbon dioxide emissions from specific point sources; measurements of carbon dioxide variations associated with El Niño, on land and at sea; and solar-induced fluorescence measurements of photosynthesis for determining gross primary production by plants. With its impressive collection of observational capabilities, OCO-2 will enable measurements of atmospheric carbon dioxide to be made with sufficient precision, resolution, and coverage to faithfully characterize its sources and sinks globally over the seasonal cycle, a long-standing goal in atmospheric and climate science.

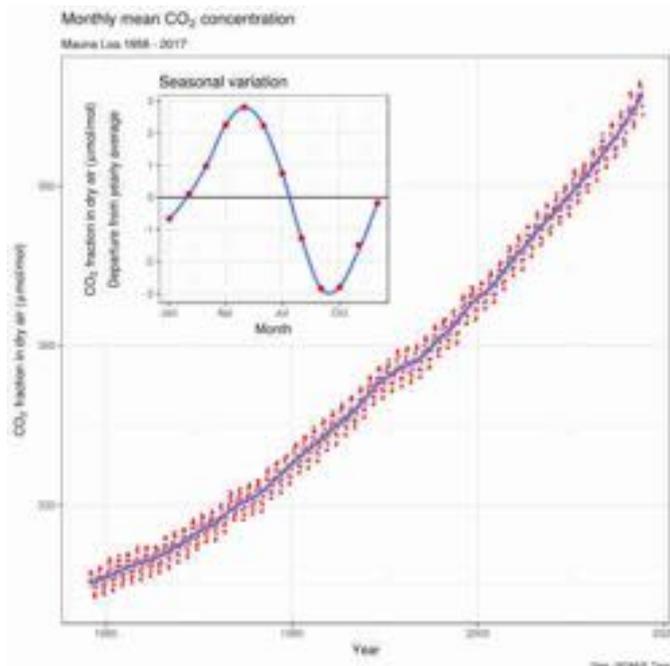
Science 13 October, 2017

Temperate Forest Dynamics and Climate

Climate change affects biota, and biotic effects feed into the climate system. In a modeling study, researchers investigated how the present cooling effect of temperate forest on local climate might change over the next 200 years as climate warming shifts the patterns of forest disturbance. Their model, applied to temperate forest in Austria, indicates marked nonlinear changes in tree species composition and disturbance regimes over time, with potential reductions in the climate regulation function of the forest. The results also indicate how the composition of these forests might best be managed to achieve optimal levels of carbon storage, evaporative cooling, and albedo to mitigate climate change.

Ecol. Monogr. 10.1002/ecm.1272 (2017)

Science 27 October, 2017





President's Column

Tom Jervis

Last year, it appeared that a Republican juggernaut was poised to attack the very structure of the environmental legacy that has been built in the last 60+ years. Control of the Congress and the Administration in hands inimical to public health and environmental protection seemed to bode ill for the future of the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), among others.

It hasn't happened yet. Having caught the car, the Republican dog doesn't seem to know what to do with it. The leadership, particularly in the Senate, seems fixated on trying to use procedural tricks (reconciliation) to pass unpopular legislation with the barest of majorities, with the result that almost nothing has been accomplished. As I write this, a familiar story is playing out on the tax front, as "must pass" legislation founders over the many side deals cut to try to keep their slim majority intact. Among the more egregious of these is the promise to open the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas development, long a pet project of AK Senator Murkowski, who by the way, strayed from orthodoxy with respect to the health-care fiasco.

To be sure, good legislation continues to be introduced in the Congress, and we need to recognize those who do so and applaud their efforts, even if the Congressional leadership is hostile to their efforts. And sometimes, these efforts succeed. A recent example is the "methane rule" which the Trump administration tried to scuttle by executive action but the Congress reinstated in law. The Administration is still trying to scuttle the program that would save money and reduce greenhouse gases (see next page).

But the complete and utter legislative incompetence has not prevented the more insidious—and arguably more effective—attack on the legislative foundation of environmental protection by the executive branch. As detailed in part on the following page, Presidential appointees are refusing to apply the laws we have and are undercutting much of the progress we have made in environmental protection. Much of this effort is likely to be stymied by the courts, but great damage can still be done that will be irretrievable.

This is where YOU come in. Our Congressional delegation is happily firm in its support for environmental protection, but it is still important to let them know that you support them. Even a short note thanking them for standing firm is important. Even if you don't have the time or inclination to follow individual bills, telling them that birds and wildlife are important to you will get their attention. And in the long run, it does make a difference!

Court Sides With New Mexico Jaguars on Critical Habitat

Here's something worth celebrating: A U.S. District Court has just upheld protections for New Mexico's endangered jaguars, deciding against three livestock-industry plaintiffs seeking to eliminate protections for 59,114 acres of critical habitat.

"This is a big win for jaguars," said the Center's Michael Robinson. "Preserving places where these great cats can still cross the border to live once again in their native range has now been found fully legal. But we should go further, preserve bigger chunks of land and take active steps to help the jaguars get here."

The Center for Biological Diversity intervened on the side of the government in this case; our previous lawsuits for the jaguar and against the government resulted in the big cats receiving endangered status in 1997 and critical habitat in 2014.

Center for Biological Diversity



Grass-fed Beef's Carbon Footprint

Eating grass-fed hamburgers won't absolve you from climate change guilt. According to a new study, grass-fed cows and other livestock do not have lower carbon footprints than those fed grain-based diets. Some experts say that because ruminant stomachs evolved to eat grass, grain-based diets could produce more emissions—in the forms of belches and farts—of greenhouse gases such as methane, nitrous oxide, and carbon dioxide. Others have argued that grazing cattle is better because it helps sequester carbon from the air into grassland soil. The 2 October report, put out by an international group of researchers led by the U.K.-based Food Climate Research Network, says such sequestration doesn't counteract the animals' own emissions, which account for nearly 15% of all greenhouse gases. The best solution, says study co-author Pete Smith of the University of Aberdeen in the United Kingdom, is reducing global meat consumption. <http://scim.ag/cowchow> Science, 6 October, 2017



Political Issues

Is Congress Ready to Make Federal Buildings Bird-Safe?

As many as a billion birds a year are killed in the United States when they collide with glass. But that may be changing. Last month, Sen. Cory A. Booker (D-NJ) introduced the Federal Bird-Safe Buildings Act, which would require new federal buildings to incorporate bird-safe building materials and design features. ABC supports Booker's Act and is building grassroots support for this critical legislation. [Learn more about the Act and find out which birds are most threatened by glass collisions.](#)

American Bird Conservancy

Administration Moves to Thwart Congress on Methane

After Congress failed five months ago to repeal an Obama administration measure meant to mitigate the emissions of a potent greenhouse gas, the Interior Department on Wednesday took a step toward suspending the rule.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has issued a proposal to formally delay a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) rule that requires oil and gas companies operating on federal and tribal lands to capture methane that would otherwise be vented or burned off.

BLM had already [stayed](#) the rule in June, but a federal judge struck down that delay by Interior for violating the Administrative Procedure Act, which governs how agencies write regulations. With its submission to the Federal Register this week, the Interior Department is kicking off the formal rule-making process needed to permanently rewrite or undo the rule.

Washington Post 10/05/2017



Deadly Pesticide May Yet be Outlawed

We applaud the U.S. Senators who have introduced a bill to ban chlorpyrifos, a widely used pesticide that has been killing birds and poisoning the environment for the past half-century: Tom Udall (D-NM), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Kamala Harris (D-CA), and Edward J. Markey (D-MA). We're also grateful to Representatives Nydia Velazquez (D-NY) and Keith Ellison (D-MN), who have offered a companion bill in the House.

The "Protect Children, Farmers & Farmworkers from Nerve Agent Pesticides Act" would prohibit all chlorpyrifos use by amending the U.S. Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act that oversees food safety. [Read More>>](#)

American Bird Conservancy

Interior Aims to Weaken Environmental Laws

Near the end of September, officials at the Interior Department bureau that oversees hundreds of millions of acres of public land hosted a conference with state, county and local government representatives to discuss ways to loosen environmental rules.

Bureau of Land Management hosts told attendees and those joining the invitation-only meeting remotely that they wanted to streamline the National Environmental Policy Act. They asked how its rules could be smoothed out to limit delays that slow public and corporate development so that the federal government, can be a better partner rather than a hindrance. The meeting covered ways to fulfill the president's executive order to remove impediments to new infrastructure, mining and other development on federal land.

During the Sept. 21 webinar, the BLM and its guests discussed ways to water down NEPA and more. They talked about working around environmental analyses that determine whether infrastructure projects harm ecosystems, about stripping conservation groups of the power to sue the BLM if it wrongly approves a project and about limiting the number of federal Freedom of Information Act requests that allow the public to scrutinize how decisions were made.

A few days after the webinars, Zinke called employees who disagreed with Trump's vision for change [disloyal](#) and vowed to [move policymaking positions](#) at Interior's Washington headquarters to offices out West, possibly to Denver. Zinke has already [reassigned dozens of senior Interior employees](#) to positions they did not want. Interior's inspector general is [probing the legality](#) of Zinke's rapid reassignments.

Washington Post, 10/05/2017

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WHERE BIRDS THRIVE, PEOPLE PROSPER

New Mexico Rare Bird Alert

is on the Web

[New Mexico Rare Bird Alert](#)

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Audubon en Español

Audubon ha lanzado su sitio web en español para conectar con las audiencias hispanas y disfrutar juntos de la naturaleza y la protección de las aves y sus hábitats. Visita Audubon en Español (<http://www.audubon.org/es>).

Contact your Congressional Representatives
Let them know that protecting the environment is important to you!

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