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Environmental Priorities for New Mexico's Next Administration

From the Gila Wilderness to the Organ Mountains to Chaco Canyon, New Mexico is a place of great natural beauty, where people have come together for generations to celebrate and care for the environment. As Lieutenant Governor, I will honor our state's conservation legacy by working with the Governor, Legislature, and public to protect our air, land, water, and wildlife, while laying the foundation for a healthy and prosperous future for all New Mexicans.

Climate Change and Clean Energy

Combatting climate change must be a top priority for our next Governor. Climate change threatens life in New Mexico as we know it. Already, we are experiencing record high temperatures, deadly wildfires, and extended drought. In coming decades, the Rio Grande is expected to lose one-third of its water. Warmer winters may wipe out our ski industry. We could even lose the piñon, our state tree.

In the face of this existential threat, we must take bold, innovative action. During the 1940s, New Mexico led a revolution in nuclear technology that transformed the world. Now, New Mexico must lead another revolution—a revolution in clean energy and negative emission technology that will allow us to avert catastrophe and jumpstart our economy. As Lieutenant Governor, I will recommend policies that allow us to lead this revolution, including:

- **Affirm New Mexico's commitment to the Paris Agreement by joining the U.S. Climate Alliance.** The Paris Agreement requires participating nations to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions in order to prevent a rise in average global temperatures of more than 2 degrees Celsius. President Trump has announced his intention to leave this landmark agreement—a step that would isolate the United States from every other nation on earth. The U.S. Climate Alliance is a bipartisan coalition of 16 governors committed to fulfilling the United States' obligations under the agreement. New Mexico should become the 17th state to join this coalition.
- **Achieve 100% clean power by 2035.** The electric power sector is responsible for [roughly half of New Mexico's carbon dioxide emissions](#), with the vast majority of these emissions coming from coal-fired power plants. Coal-fired plants contribute to a host of other environmental problems, from smog and soot to mercury pollution and groundwater contamination. Transitioning away from coal towards zero-emission alternatives (like wind, solar, and geothermal) is the first step towards a sustainable future. To that end, we should update the Renewable Energy Act to require public utilities to obtain 100% of their electricity from zero-emission generation by 2035.¹ We should also support research and

¹ The Renewable Energy Act should be renamed the Clean Energy Act, to clarify that all forms of zero-emission generation can be used for compliance. [Natural gas with carbon capture and sequestration](#) is an example of zero-emission generation that isn't renewable.



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development of energy storage technologies, so we can increase our utilization of intermittent energy sources (such as wind and solar) without sacrificing reliability.

- **Adopt the nation's most ambitious energy efficiency standards.** Demand-side energy efficiency is one of the best tools we have for fighting climate change. In addition to reducing emissions, these measures [save consumers money](#) and stimulate the economy as a whole ([a 2009 study](#) of the New England states found a *ten-fold increase* in economic activity for every dollar invested in energy efficiency). To ensure we are not leaving money on the table, we should strengthen our Energy Efficiency Resource Standard to require public utilities to achieve annual electricity savings of 3% per year (relative to planned sales). Utilities [can achieve](#) this goal by offering rebates for energy-efficient products and helping consumers finance energy-saving repairs and retrofits. We should adopt [complementary policies](#)—such as decoupling utility profits from aggregate sales and strengthening building efficiency codes—to ensure we are able to meet our target.
- **Establish stringent methane emission standards to reduce pollution and waste.** Every year, venting and leaks from New Mexico's oil and gas industry result in 570,000 tons of natural gas entering our atmosphere. That is a major problem for public health, the environment, and our pocketbooks. Methane—the main component of natural gas—is a potent greenhouse gas, 86 times more powerful than carbon dioxide over a 20-year time frame. Natural gas also contains smog-forming volatile organic compounds (which can cause asthma attacks and other respiratory problems) and hazardous air pollutants like benzene (which can cause cancer). The amount of natural gas wasted each year is worth [between \\$188 and \\$244 million](#). If this gas were captured and sold, New Mexico taxpayers would receive an additional \$27.6 million in taxes and royalties every year. We should adopt methane emission standards modeled after those recently adopted in Colorado, which have led to dramatic reductions in emissions even as the oil and gas industry has expanded.
- **Invest in zero-emission vehicles.** The transportation sector is responsible for about [30% of New Mexico's carbon dioxide emissions](#), making it the second largest source of carbon pollution after the electric power sector. Passenger vehicles are responsible for the majority of emissions within this sector. These vehicles also contribute to smog and particulate pollution, which can cause respiratory problems and heart attacks. To address these concerns, we should join California and nine other states in the Zero Emission Vehicle program, which would require manufacturers who sell vehicles in New Mexico to increase production of these vehicles. We should also enact tax credits for electric vehicles and commercial charging stations and strengthen our Alternative Fuel Acquisition Act to ensure that 100% of the vehicles purchased by state agencies are hybrid or electric.
- **Develop a Climate Conservation Corps to put New Mexicans to work fighting climate change.** Putting young people and recently returned veterans to work on energy efficiency projects is a win-win-win: we create jobs, reduce emissions, and save ratepayers money. Other states have shown how this can be done. Since 2013, members of the California



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Conservation Corps [have performed energy audits and simple retrofits](#) at schools, low-income homes, and national forest facilities. Minnesota [has put AmeriCorps participants to work](#) in residences, installing smart thermostats and power strips, door weather stripping, and other energy-saving technologies. We should create a Climate Conservation Corps here in New Mexico, using these programs as a model.

- **Create a Carbon Farming Task Force.** Research at [New Mexico State University](#) and elsewhere suggests that regenerative agriculture and ranching practices—such as shifting from inorganic to organic fertilizer, planting cover crops, and applying compost to rangeland—have the potential to substantially increase the amount of carbon sequestered in the soil while increasing yields and enhancing water retention. We should establish a task force, similar to the one [recently established in Hawaii](#), to study these practices and develop methods of quantifying and verifying their climate benefits. The task force should draw upon the experience of farmers and ranchers in New Mexico [who are already working](#) to increase carbon sequestration in the soil. In addition, the task force should have authority and funding to commission field trials to quantify the amount of carbon that can be sequestered through various practices.
- **Create a Center for Climate Solutions in our university system.** There is [growing recognition](#) in the scientific community that we must deploy negative emissions technologies (NETs) in order to prevent catastrophic climate change. NETs are technologies that remove carbon from the atmosphere and sequester it elsewhere—examples include bio-energy with carbon capture and sequestration, direct air capture, and enhanced weathering (the accelerated reaction of silicate minerals with carbon dioxide to form carbonate minerals). New Mexico is well positioned to develop and deploy NETs, because we sit atop geological formations that are well-suited for carbon sequestration and have an oil and gas industry that already purchases carbon dioxide for enhanced oil recovery. We should establish a state-of-the-art institution in our university system to research and develop NETs and identify policy options to facilitate their deployment.

Environmental Justice

Throughout our history, minority and low-income communities—including people of color, migrant farmworkers, and Native Americans—have been disproportionately affected by environmental hazards. In response to this history of discrimination, Governor Richardson issued an executive order in 2005 requiring state agencies to provide all New Mexicans with fair treatment and the opportunity for meaningful involvement under the state’s environmental laws, regardless of race, color, ethnicity, religion, or income or education level. Notwithstanding this commitment, New Mexico has a long way to go towards making environmental justice a reality. As Lieutenant Governor, I will advocate policies that promote environmental justice, including the following:

- **Accelerate remediation of Superfund sites and identify other contaminated areas where remediation may be needed.** Many of the Superfund sites in New Mexico are



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located on tribal land or near other environmental justice communities. Cleaning up these sites in a timely manner—and in a way that is respectful of the affected community—must be a top priority. We should also be taking steps to identify, monitor, and remediate contaminated areas that are not yet covered by the Superfund program.

- **Create a Climate Justice Task Force.** Climate change will disproportionately harm low-income and minority communities. Deadly heatwaves and worsened smog will have the greatest impact on people who work outside and those who cannot afford air-conditioning. Wildfires and drought pose the greatest threat to people living in rural communities, while low-income people will be hit hardest by reduced food security. We should assemble a Climate Justice Task Force to document the ways in which New Mexico’s environmental justice communities are threatened by climate change and develop strategies for improving their resilience. The task force should also report on how climate policies can be designed to benefit environmental justice communities.
- **Incentivize energy efficiency and solar projects in low-income communities.** Low-income households typically have older, less efficient appliances and HVAC equipment. In addition, these households are especially sensitive to energy costs. Energy efficiency and solar projects in these communities provide a triple benefit, reducing emissions, creating jobs, and increasing the disposable income of our most vulnerable communities. New Mexico should offer performance incentives to utilities that undertake these projects.
- **Invest in public transportation.** Public transportation cuts down on the number of vehicles on the road, reducing air pollution and congestion while helping people without vehicles get to school, work, and medical appointments. It also [creates jobs and increases economic activity](#). Our next administration should work with local governments to increase funding for public transportation, particularly in rural and low-income areas.

Public Lands and National Monuments

Our public lands are places of incredible beauty and great cultural, historical, and biological value. Many of us spend the most precious moments of our lives on these lands, hiking and hunting and fishing with our families. As Lieutenant Governor, I will work to protect these special places and ensure that all New Mexicans are able to enjoy them. Specifically, I will recommend the following measures:

- **Resist the Trump Administration’s war on national monuments.** President Trump has issued executive orders that purport to shrink the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments in Utah. These orders threaten land that is sacred to the Pueblo and Navajo people and set a dangerous precedent that could be used to shrink national monuments in our state. I will recommend that our Attorney General join lawsuits filed by the Navajo Nation, the Zuni Pueblo, and others to enjoin these orders.



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- **Protect the Greater Chaco Region.** Chaco Canyon is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, home to the densest concentration of Ancient Pueblo ruins in the United States. Chacoan roads, artifacts, and sacred sites are scattered throughout the high desert, which has been occupied by native people for millennia. Unfortunately, the area's magnificent cultural and natural resources are being threatened by oil and gas development. Our next administration should work with tribal leaders, environmental groups, local officials, and our congressional delegation to seek greater protection for the Greater Chaco Region.
- **Protect Otero Mesa.** Otero Mesa is the largest desert grassland in the United States. It is a breathtaking wilderness, with few signs of modern civilization, but ample evidence of ancient cultures and animal life. Hundreds of pronghorn antelope call the mesa home, as do mountain lions, black-tailed prairie dogs, golden eagles, and the endangered aplomado falcon. The mesa also sits atop the largest reserve of freshwater in New Mexico. Unfortunately, the Trump Administration wants to open the area for oil and gas drilling—something that could destroy this magnificent landscape, contaminate its water, and harm its unique wildlife. Our next administration should push back against this assault on our natural heritage and seek to have the area permanently protected.

Water

In 2016, the Standing Rock Sioux inspired us with a simple message: Water is life. Nowhere is that fact more apparent than here in New Mexico. Every person, every industry, every city, every wild creature in New Mexico depends on water to survive. But water is scarce, and it will become increasingly so as the planet continues to warm.

As Lieutenant Governor, I will advocate for comprehensive management of our most important resource to ensure the long-term sustainability of our communities, our economy, and our natural ecosystems. Specifically, I will recommend that the following policies:

- **Improve groundwater management.** Although groundwater constitutes [about 75% of New Mexico's public water supply](#), our state lacks a comprehensive plan for maintaining this resource. Developing such a plan is necessary for long-term water security and may soon be legally required if the Supreme Court agrees with Texas that current rates of groundwater pumping in southern New Mexico violate the Rio Grande Compact. We should consider developing legislation modeled on Arizona's Groundwater Management Act to ensure that our groundwater is managed for equitable and sustainable use.
- **Promote Water Conservation.** In an arid state like New Mexico, water conservation is an essential component of any effort to achieve long-term water security. New Mexicans are already leading the way: Over the last 20 years, Albuquerque [has nearly halved its per capita water consumption](#) by educating the public about the need to conserve water and [offering incentives](#) for water-saving products like low-flow showerheads and toilets. Other cities can follow Albuquerque's example, and the state can support these efforts by



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providing funds to repair leaky water infrastructure. However, because agriculture is responsible for [79% of annual consumption in our state](#), any effective water conservation campaign must include this industry. We should incentivize water-saving practices such as drip irrigation, microjet spray, and border flood systems, and encourage farmers to grow crops that require less water.

- **Restore the Oil Conservation Division’s authority to impose civil penalties for violations of the Oil and Gas Act.** Oil contamination constitutes a major threat to water quality throughout our state. The Oil Conservation Division has authority to regulate oil and gas wells to prevent contamination, but unfortunately, a 2009 ruling of the New Mexico Supreme Court deprived the Division of authority to impose civil penalties for violations of these regulations. Our next administration should work to restore the Division’s penalty authority, to ensure there is an adequate deterrent against risky behavior that threatens our water.
- **Restore the Rio Grande.** There’s no nice way to put it: the Rio Grande is being grossly mismanaged, to the detriment of all of the communities and ecosystems that depend on it. In central and southern New Mexico, the river goes completely dry for parts of each year, causing significant harm to native plants, fish, and wildlife, as well as loss of recreational opportunities. Meanwhile, massive amounts of water are wasted every year due to evaporation at manmade reservoirs. (Elephant Butte Reservoir [evaporates more than twice the annual consumption of the city of Albuquerque](#)). We could save significant quantities of water by storing more water at upstream reservoirs (which are cool and deep) and less at downstream reservoirs (which are hot and shallow). Other options, such as planting native shade trees alongside reservoirs and deploying black plastic “shade balls,” may also have the potential to save significant quantities of water. These options—and other innovative ideas—should be evaluated as part of a comprehensive plan to restore year-round flow to the Rio Grande.
- **Keep the Gila River wild and free.** The Gila is the last free-flowing river in New Mexico, and one of the last free-flowing rivers in the southwest. The river originates in the world’s first designated wilderness area, before flowing southwest through the Chihuahuan Desert and into Arizona. The river provides outstanding habitat: hundreds of bird species, including the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, have been recorded along its cottonwood-lined banks, while native fish, including the endangered spike dace and the threatened Gila trout, thrive in its waters. The river supports world-class recreational opportunities for anglers, birdwatchers, hikers, and hunters, and is cherished by thousands of New Mexicans as a spiritual center of the region. Unfortunately, a scheme to divert water from the river has been proposed by the Interstate Stream Commission. This scheme threatens the ecological and recreational value of the river and would cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. Our next administration should work to prevent any diversion of the Gila, while identifying alternative sources of freshwater for the region.



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Wildlife

Since time immemorial, New Mexicans have revered the wild animals with whom we share our state. The first New Mexicans were fascinated by the creatures around them: their petroglyphs and pictographs depict rattlesnakes, songbirds, coyotes, eagles, deer, and bighorn sheep, among other species. Like their forebears, modern New Mexicans cherish wildlife, spending countless hours on activities such as birdwatching, nature photography, hunting, and fishing that bring them close to wildlife and allow them to learn about the natural environment in which they live.

As Lieutenant Governor, I will advocate for responsible wildlife management that reflects modern science and New Mexico values. I will fight to ban cruel and outdated practices like wildlife killing contests and the use of traps and strangulation snares on public land. I will support the Mexican wolf recovery, while working to ensure that ranchers are compensated quickly and completely for livestock losses due to predation. And because construction of a border wall would cause habitat fragmentation and disrupt migration patterns—causing potentially irreparable harm to endangered species such as the jaguar, the Mexican wolf, and the Sonoran pronghorn—I will advocate alternative strategies for securing the border.