

SAN JUAN CITIZENS ALLIANCE

A night photograph of a desert landscape. In the foreground, a low stone wall made of dark, angular rocks runs across the frame. The ground is dark and rocky, with some sparse, low-lying vegetation. In the background, a wide, flat desert valley stretches out to a distant horizon. The sky is dark, filled with numerous stars, and the Milky Way galaxy is visible as a bright, hazy band of light stretching across the upper half of the image. The overall scene is illuminated by the ambient light of the stars and the Milky Way, creating a sense of vastness and timelessness.

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

PHOTO OF CHACO BY MASON CUMMINGS



DEAR SUPPORTERS,

Momentum continued in 2023 on the lasting transformation of the San Juan Basin from a historical focus on fossil fuel extraction into a region embracing a 21st-century energy future.

We saw inflection points across the landscape of northwest New Mexico. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland approved the Chaco mineral withdrawal, which creates a 10-mile buffer prohibiting new oil and gas leases surrounding Chaco Culture National Historical Park in an area comprising 338,000 acres of federal lands. The decision buffers Chaco from future impacts associated with oil and gas leasing, coal mines, or uranium development.

The Alliance won important legal victories in 2023, ratcheting back prior approvals for hundreds of new oil and gas wells farther east of Chaco, beyond the mineral withdrawal buffer. The decision enjoined the Bureau of Land Management from acting on 161 pending drilling applications, and required additional analysis for almost 200 additional wells.

Combined, the mineral withdrawal and court decision charts a new course for the San Juan Basin, one where fossil fuel extraction will no longer be the dominant use.

The shape of our region's energy future came into focus with a ribbon-cutting for the San Juan Solar project, a 300-MW project immediately northeast of the now shuttered San Juan Generating Station coal plant. San Juan Solar is the first of the replacement projects for the defunct coal plant, and importantly will offset lost property tax revenue for the school district and local governments.

Colorado's wildlife future underwent dramatic changes in 2023 as well. After an absence of 75 years, wolves returned to Colorado in December with the reintroduction of 10 wolves from Oregon. The release occurred in northern Colorado, but the San Juan Mountains are prime habitat and are anticipated to welcome wolves in coming years.

Bighorn sheep gained a welcome respite from the threat of respiratory disease transmission from domestic sheep herds when the National Wildlife Federation retired over 100,000 acres of sheep grazing allotments in the San Juan Mountains. The allotment retirement removes domestic sheep from almost all of San Juan County, making the high country the exclusive domain of bighorns for the first time in a century.

San Juan Citizens Alliance ended 2023 in a strong financial position, thanks to the generous support of our members and donors, and strong partnerships with charitable foundations. The Alliance's success is rooted in its enduring perseverance in our region.

In gratitude,



Mark Pearson
Executive Director

Michael Rendon
Board President



STREAM RESTORATION

LOW-TECH METHODS TO IMPROVE STREAM RESILIENCE

The Alliance's Animas Riverkeeper spurred regional focus and conversation on stream restoration opportunities within the San Juan river basin. We hosted a Stream Restoration Workshop in September at Fort Lewis College with over 70 participants. Our goal was to break down barriers and help in the implementation of low-tech process-based restoration projects.

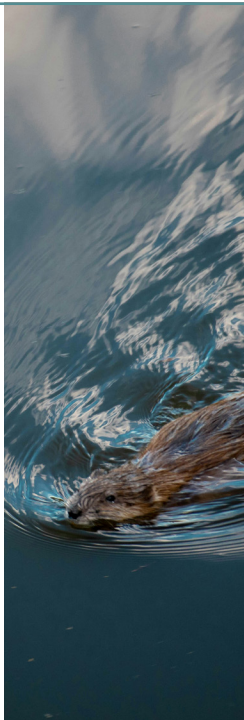
The workshop included a field trip to a restoration site on the Mancos River in Mesa Verde National Park where participants received a demonstration of installing post-assisted log structures and had the opportunity to see in person the immediate benefits of implementing restoration structures to a stream. Alliance staff will be working to identify additional suitable locations for restoration structures in 2024.

Example RESTORATION METHODS

- + Low-tech process based restoration is a method that **aims to restore certain natural processes to streams** where they have been lost. Some examples are the installation of beaver dam analogs in streams where beavers once habituated, but are no longer living. **Mimicking beavers by constructing beaver dam analogs** slows the flow of water in the stream, allowing for groundwater recharge to riparian habitat, and reducing incision of the stream that increases erosion. Slowing the flow and increasing groundwater depth can help reconnect a stream to its floodplain, which is critical to allow for flood reduction, increased water storage, natural wildfire mitigation, and promoting the overall healthy function of ecosystems within headwater drainages.
- + Other methods include **construction of post-assisted log structures in streams** where woody debris no longer naturally accumulates. These structures are installed where the geomorphology of the system has lost complexity. Allowing flow to bounce off wood structures improves habitat for aquatic species, and can create overbank flow to help reconnect streams to their floodplain.



JACK BRAUER



CLIMATE & **ENERGY**

*THE ALLIANCE'S ENERGY AND CLIMATE
PROGRAM MADE GREAT STRIDES IN 2023*

The start of a **NEW ERA**

The most tangible evidence yet of the region's accelerating energy transition occurred with the October ground-breaking ceremony for the San Juan Solar project. The 200-MW photovoltaic project with 100-MW of battery storage is situated on about 2,000 acres of private lands a half-dozen miles northeast of the now closed San Juan Generating Station coal plant. The location takes

advantage of proximity to existing transmission lines and substations associated with the coal plant. It also is situated within the Central Consolidated School District, providing crucial replacement for the property tax base. The power will be delivered to Public Service Company of New Mexico starting in 2024.

A breakthrough at **CHACO CULTURE NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK**

After two years of environmental review and associated public comment, **Interior Secretary Deb Haaland approved the Chaco mineral withdrawal in June, which creates a 10-mile buffer prohibiting new oil and gas leases around Chaco Culture National Historical Park** in an area comprising 338,000 acres of federal lands. The 20-year ban on new leasing protects cultural landscapes and local communities from impacts caused by expanded oil and gas development. The withdrawal also ensures the region's protection against future interest in coal leasing or uranium mining.

The Alliance won important legal victories in 2023 ratcheting back prior approvals for hundreds of new oil and gas wells farther east of Chaco, beyond the mineral withdrawal buffer. The court found that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) violated the National Environmental Policy Act because it failed to take a hard look at the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions and the cumulative impact of hazardous air pollution emissions for 199 of the drilling permit approvals, and revoked those approvals. The court further enjoined BLM from taking action on 161 pending applications until identifying appropriate remedies to address the deficiencies in analysis.

Combined, the Chaco mineral withdrawal, court decisions on drilling approvals, and construction of the San Juan Solar project chart a new course for the San Juan Basin, one where fossil fuel extraction and combustion will no longer be the dominant use.

An update on **OIL & GAS REGULATIONS**

Meanwhile, in April, **La Plata County passed the strongest local oil and gas regulations on Colorado's Western Slope.** Alliance staff and members advocated for over seven months for strong community protections that

include a **2,000-foot presumptive setback of new wells from homes and schools**, one that can only be modified at the direction of La Plata County, rather than the state Energy and Carbon Management Commission.



A scenic landscape of a mountain valley. In the foreground, a river flows through a dense forest of evergreen trees. The middle ground shows rolling hills covered in forest, with mist or low clouds hanging between the ridges. In the background, majestic mountains rise, some with patches of snow or light-colored rock. The sky is a pale blue with soft, wispy clouds.

PUBLIC **LANDS**

*ADVOCATING FOR FOREST
RESILIENCY IN THE SAN JUANS*

Taking action **PROTECTING MATURE FORESTS**

Forest health in the form of vegetation management to increase forest resilience to climate change and climate-change induced insect and disease outbreaks was a motivator for the Alliance's participation in an abundance of community-based forest health collaboratives.

SJCA staff kept involved in separate collaboratives on the three San Juan National Forest ranger districts, and an overarching Southwest Colorado Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration project.

For the first time in decades, the Alliance resorted to litigation to challenge a **timber sale on the San Juan National Forest**. We filed a lawsuit on the 22,000-acre Salter timber sale in June, a project west of Dolores that entails more than 100 miles of new roads, and **harvesting ponderosa pine as large as 27 inches in diameter**. Despite years of engagement by Alliance staff and members

during the development of this project, all of our concerns about the project's purported benefits for forest resilience were rejected by the Forest Service out of hand.

With no other recourse, we resorted to filing the litigation that would allow for the public to review and engage in decisions about site-specific location of the 100+ miles of new roads contemplated by the logging project, and to express concerns about impacts to recreation, wildlife or cultural resources. The agency refused to evaluate alternatives that might better achieve the stated purpose of increased forest resiliency, such as retaining large trees generally more than 20 inches in diameter, and instead conducted a straight-forward timber harvesting analysis.

The litigation remains pending, but one immediate response has been improved agency analysis on similar projects elsewhere across the San Juan National Forest.

WHY MATURE FORESTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Large, mature trees sequester carbon, slowing climate change and improving air quality, provide wildlife habitat, provide ecosystem services by cycling water and nutrients, are resistant to wildfire and drought, stabilize soils, and enable subsistence and cultural uses.



WILD **LIFE**



The return of **WOLVES IN COLORADO**

Colorado voters in November 2020 approved restoration of wolves to the state, and in December 2023, ten wolves captured in Oregon by Colorado Parks and Wildlife were released in north central Colorado. The Alliance was heavily involved in stakeholder efforts that resulted in Colorado's wolf management plan, and in advocating for prevention of wolf conflicts.

Among those efforts for conflict prevention was the Alliance's support for House Bill 23-1265 in the Colorado legislature that established the

"Born to Be Wild" specialty license plate, with revenues going to Colorado Parks and Wildlife for prevention of wolf conflicts with livestock. It is expected license plate sales will generate more than \$500,000 annually for prevention of conflicts between wolves and livestock producers.

Successful reintroduction of wolves will continue progress in southwest Colorado towards recovery of extirpated species. Notably, lynx have made a successful comeback after reintroduction into the San Juan Mountains 20 years ago, and river otters previous to the that in the 1980s.

COLORADO'S WOLVES BY THE NUMBERS

10 WOLVES

RELEASED IN **2** COUNTIES

VOTED ON BY **PROPOSITION 116**

What's happening with **COLORADO'S BIGHORNS?**

SJCA's priority wildlife programs include native bighorn sheep, Colorado's state animal. **We have focused public scrutiny on domestic sheep allotments**, since the primary culprit preventing recovery of bighorns is a respiratory disease transmitted by domestic sheep. One tangible outcome of this additional public attention was the **agreement of the area's largest domestic sheep grazing permittee to retire**

his allotments in a financial deal with National Wildlife Federation in November. The deal retires grazing permits on over 100,000 acres of alpine tundra habitat across the San Juan Mountains surrounding Silverton. The removal of domestic sheep after a century of grazing is a **huge step for creating large spaces for bighorns to roam in the high country without risk of contact with domestic sheep bands.**



New faces of **SAN JUAN CITIZENS ALLIANCE**

MEET OUR NEWEST BOARD MEMBERS BROUGHT ON THE TEAM IN 2023!



JENNY GOESSEL

What drew me to SJCA?

I have long been grateful for SJCA as advocates, protectors and defenders of the natural spaces I love throughout the Four Corners. SJCA is a force and it is an honor to serve on the board of this critical local organization with its stellar staff and dedicated members.



SANDY KOBROCK

What drew me to SJCA?

What attracted me is the San Juan Citizens Alliance mission, and the dedication and professionalism of each member of the staff.



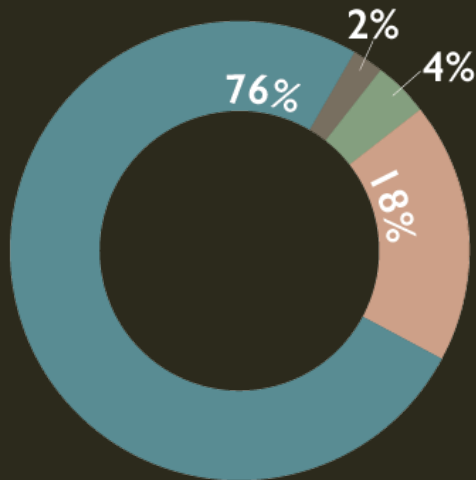
LINDA BAKER

What drew me to SJCA?

SJCA focuses on issues important to the wide diversity of life and ecosystems in this region, which in turn protects, improves and sustains quality of life on so many levels.

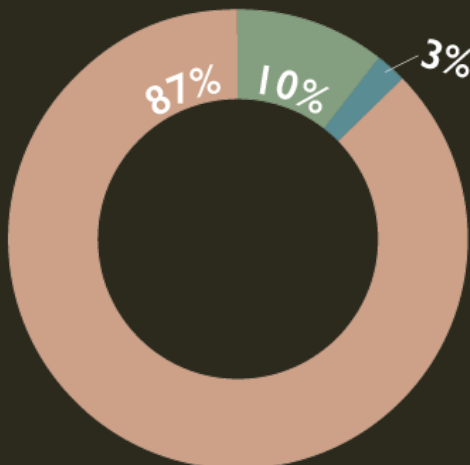
2023 FINANCIAL REPORT

REVENUE



GRANTS	\$888,961
MEMBERSHIP/CONTRIBUTIONS	\$216,425
EVENTS	\$33,666
OTHER	\$23,314
TOTAL REVENUE	\$1,162,367

EXPENSES



PROGRAMS	\$729,222
GENERAL & ADMINISTRATIVE	\$87,340
FUNDRAISING	\$33,017
TOTAL EXPENSE	\$849,579

BALANCE SHEET (IN THOUSANDS)

ASSETS

Current assets:

Cash and cash equivalents	870
Donations receivable	17
Other, prepaid health insurance	1

Non-current assets:

Equipment and deposits	1
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TOTAL ASSETS **889**

LIABILITIES & EQUITY

Liabilities:

Accounts Payable	11
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Payroll Liabilities:

Accrued PTO	15
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Other Liabilities	9
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TOTAL LIABILITIES **35**

Equity:

Retained Earnings: Unrestricted	116
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Retained Earnings: Temporarily Restricted	425
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Net Revenue	313
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TOTAL EQUITY **854**

TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY **889**



MASON CUMMINGS



JOHN FIELDER



MASON CUMMINGS



MASON CUMMINGS



BOARD

- Michael Rendon, *President*
- Ryan Huggins, *Vice President*
- Jenny Goessel, *Treasurer*
- Rose Rushing, *Secretary*
- Kobe Biederman
- Chris Wilkins
- Sany Kobrock
- Linda Baker

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- Mark Pearson, *Executive Director*
- Mike Eisenfeld, *Climate & Energy Program*
- Gary Skiba, *Wildlife Program*
- Emelie Frojen, *Climate & Energy Program*
- John Rader, *Public Lands Program*
- Sara Burch, *Animas Riverkeeper*
- Brian Rogers, *Membership & Finance*
- Rane Dickerson, *Communication & Events*

San Juan Citizens Alliance

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Visit our website to learn more about our 20+ active campaigns.

sanjuancitizens.org

+ a special shoutout to Jack Brauer, who has generously donated his photography.

All other photos were shot by staff, donated, or from Pexels or Unsplash.