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# The Paper.

ALBUQUERQUE'S INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY NEWS

Cover by Rachel Mills







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# State Loses Millions in Federal Dollars Meant for Outdoor Recreation Projects

*Officials say it's in part because of a lack of staffing*



Luna County has prepared the ground to build batting cages on the south side of the Starmax Family Entertainment Center on North Country Club Road. The outdoor recreation project awaits funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. (Billy Armendariz)

By Elizabeth Miller, New Mexico In Depth

New Mexico has forfeited more than \$5 million in federal funding for outdoor recreation projects over the last three years because employees at New Mexico's State Parks Division missed deadlines to distribute the money to projects around the state.

The money is the state's share of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a five decade-old federal program that funnels revenue largely from offshore oil and gas leases to outdoor recreation and land conservation efforts. The fund supports several programs, including one in which communities and tribes around the nation can apply for up to \$250,000 each.

Roadblocks to distributing the funds, state staff say, included lack of staffing, a maze of bureaucratic requirements, and simple missteps, like neglecting to update an email address online. Grant applications for those funds filed by New Mexico communities two years ago still await submission for federal approval.

"Money is just flying out of our hands," Rep. Kristina Orteza, D-Taos, said at a Water and Natural Resources Committee in November when state lawmakers were briefed on the lost funds. "I can't contain the anxiety I feel about that and how that money could have gone to communities."

Robert Stokes, chief of the Program Support Bureau at state parks and currently covering the job of Land and Water Conservation Fund program coordinator, blamed a lack of employees. The work was "a big task for just one person," he said during the committee meeting.

Since 1965, federal dollars have funded 1,200 projects in New Mexico, building trails, acquiring land, and improving city parks. But the state parks division, which administers the grants, has not supported any community-based projects since 2005, when money went to a swimming

pool in Lovington. Instead, New Mexico's allocation since then has gone to state parks: building campsites, picnic tables, footpaths, bathrooms, and water systems.

The State Parks division says the Land and Water Conservation Fund's erratic history led them to stop running a community grant program. Congress used to dictate how much the national fund received each year, and underfunded it for years. The share for state and local assistance grants heading to New Mexico dwindled to less than \$500,000 annually for a few years. So State Parks decided to utilize the money rather than call for community grant applications, Stokes said.

However, the agency focused on state parks maintenance rather than community projects even in years when the funding increased to \$1 million or more. Stokes declined to comment on that decision, which preceded his arrival at the department.

The financial stakes really shifted in 2020 when, amid great public fanfare, Congress committed \$900 million annually to the Land and Water Conservation Fund so long as revenues kept it fully funded at that amount. New Mexico's share of the \$900 million for local grants worked out to about \$2.5 million per year. The National Park Service also required that states appoint a dedicated administrator, which New Mexico did in late 2020 and called for grant applications in late 2021.

"It did take a while for the state to be able to get all of those pieces in position that are required ... to start moving forward with the application process," Stokes said.

But state parks already lagged behind. The National Park Service makes money available for up to three fiscal years. After that time, any portion not dedicated to an approved project reverts to a federal contingency fund spent at the secretary of interior's discretion.

New Mexico lost access to nearly \$1 million of the \$1.9 million awarded in 2019,

and then most of the \$2.5 million allocated in 2020, according to documents obtained in response to a public records request. Stokes told lawmakers during the November hearing that New Mexico lost another \$2.1 million in 2023 but was likely to get those dollars back. The National Park Service's Land and Water Conservation Fund regional program manager told New Mexico In Depth that might not be possible.

"There were state parks projects that were occurring and they did use up some of that money that was set to expire, but not the totality of it," Stokes said. "And before the first open application period was announced in late 2021, we didn't have community applications either to potentially use some of that money."

But 11 communities and two tribes submitted applications for funding by the end of 2021. Another 14 communities applied in 2022. The press release announcing that call for proposals erroneously stated that 13 projects the previous year had been awarded \$2.5 million. In reality, those applications have not been submitted for federal approval yet.

The delays worry Kay Bounkeua, New Mexico deputy director for The Wilderness Society, an environmental organization that campaigned for full federal funding and then encouraged communities to apply.

"People will be like, 'Well I'm not going to apply for that. I did once and didn't hear for five years,'" Bounkeua said. "There's a lot of other issues that are going to come out of this because of the struggles of standing this program up."

In 2021, Luna County applied for \$250,000 to build batting cages as part of a growing recreation center in downtown Deming. The county applied again in 2022 for basketball courts, said Bryan Reedy, the county's grants and projects director, but "I've given up on that one."

Continued on page 4



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## Continued from page 3

The dirt has been leveled and ready for a while. But Reedy said he'd rather tap other funding and move on than continue chasing a string of requests for more information about this grant, the latest of which asked for details he'd submitted in previous emails.

"I have no trust in even waiting for them—I've got to get this project done," Reedy said. "We'll be done with the project before they tell us if we've been accepted or not."

Meanwhile, rising prices downsized the county plan from six to five batting cages. It might shrink again. Between the emailed clarifications and modifications as the project has evolved over two years, he said, "We've rewritten this grant like three times. It's frustrating."

The Pueblos of Acoma and Santa Clara both applied for funding in 2021, the first for an outdoor recreation center, and the second for picnic areas, restroom facilities, and day-use cabins to replace a campground destroyed by the Las Conchas wildfire in 2011. If awarded, these tribally led projects would be the first in New Mexico to receive Land and Water Conservation Fund support since 1989.

Santa Clara Pueblo has worked for a decade to restore the ecology of Santa Clara Canyon after the wildfire, said Garrett Altmann, a GIS coordinator and project manager for the tribe. This grant marked a first move toward recovering recreational spaces that allow people to reconnect with that landscape. The tribe has secured millions in other federal support since that wildfire, but this process is more cumbersome, requiring detailed estimates that are difficult to provide.

"Now we're like, is it worth \$200,000 to go through all this?" he said.

The process includes internal reviews and state parks staff transferring applications onto paperwork for the National Park Service, which can total more than 20 forms.

At this point, five communities have withdrawn their 2021 applications, citing reasons such as insufficient matching funds. The Land and Water Conservation Fund requires that communities identify other sources for 50% of the project cost.

In 1973, the state created and allocated the equivalent of millions in 2022 dollars to a supplemental fund for that

matching requirement, but lawmakers haven't deposited money into it since 1994, according to an analysis by Western Resource Advocates.

"I had reached out to folks at state parks on when the last time money was appropriated [to that fund]," said Jonathan Hayden, a senior policy advisor with Western Resource Advocates. "They didn't even know it existed."

Hayden is working with Sen. Pro Tem Mimi Stewart, D-Albuquerque, on a bill to address some of the program's issues, including directing money to that fund. The changes might also allow the state to spend some of that financial support on outreach and administrative time and training, including technical support for rural communities, and perhaps ease some eligibility requirements so more communities qualify.

"Because we already have the fund, because we have experience using it and because it's really designed to help rural areas of the state, I just think this could be a real benefit," Stewart said.

The eight applications remaining from 2021 were ready to submit this July. But the state had changed its email address format, and no one had updated the federal web portal for uploading applications. State staff didn't recognize the problem until they tried to submit documents, and were unable to log-in until after the deadline. Those applications may finally be submitted in January, and New Mexico does have funds remaining to cover their requests.

Staff are now starting on the federal forms for applications from 2022.

Requests for additional information, from a missed signature that takes mere minutes to correct, to more exhaustive environmental inquiries, are common, according to the National Park Service's Land and Water Conservation Fund regional program manager. It's also not unheard of for a state to leave some money unspent, but losing millions is "unusual."

The state's Land and Water Conservation Fund program coordinator position—the full-time employee dedicated to administering these grants—has been vacant since October. Stokes anticipates a new full-time program coordinator starting in January and perhaps, eventually, a second employee or interns. Even without a program coordinator, the state issued another call for grants this fall, with applications due at the end of December.





There are dozens of balls, masquerades and dance parties happening all over Albuquerque this coming New Year's Eve. But if you've got kids who can't stay up late (or if you just don't have the holiday stamina you used to), maybe partying until midnight isn't in the cards. In that case, the City of Albuquerque has a number of daytime events you can attend. **New Year's Eve Before Dark** takes place at the **Albuquerque Museum (200 Mountain Rd. NW)** from **10am to 2pm**. Create art, listen to music from Entourage Jazz and enjoy the Georgia O'Keeffe exhibition. Admission is **free**. NYE Before Dark is also at **Anderson Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum (9201 Balloon Museum Dr. NE)** from **10am to noon**. There are fun New Year themed science activities, a mesmerizing Bubble Show by Lauren Coons and food trucks. **The Albuquerque BioPark Zoo (903 10th St. SW)** features special animal enrichment activities from **9am to 2:30pm** in honor of NYE Before Dark. Events are included with **regular admission**. And finally, the **New Mexico Museum of Natural History & Science (1801 Mountain Rd. NW)** is celebrating early as well. Visitors can enjoy hands-on holiday activities, free with **regular admission**, in the museum's atrium, from **9am to 11am**.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 28

Community

Winter Wonderland NM \$49  
6-9 pm EXPO New Mexico 300  
San Pedro Dr NE

Exhibit

Colors That Speak Words/Phase II 9am -4pm Indian Pueblo Cultural Center 2401 12th Street NW

IPCC's 43rd Annual Native American Student Art Show: Celebrating Our Pollinators 9am - 4pm Indian Pueblo Cultural Center 2401 12th Street NW

Festival

Pueblo Gingerbread Experience All Day Indian Pueblo Cultural Center 2401 12th St. NW

Food

Adventures Around The World Dinner \$179 6:30-10 pm Teddy Roe's 3222 Central Ave. SE

Music

Black Hearts Club - The Nightmirrors Before Christmas 8-11 pm Monterey Motel 2402 Central Ave. SW

Irie Kristoff 7-9 pm Tractor Brewing Nob Hill 118 Tulane SE

Quiero Baliar: A Reggaeton Experience \$10 9 pm-1:30 am Revel Entertainment Center 4720 Alexander Blvd NE

Sadness, Madness, & Mayhem: A Haunted Folk Formal with Dust City Opera \$25-\$30 6:30-9 pm FUSION | 708 708 1st St NW

Veneraxiom \$10 8-11 pm Launchpad 618 Central Avenue Southwest

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**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 29**

**Comedy**

**Comedy Roast Battles** \$10-\$100 8-10:30 pm Revel Entertainment Center 4720 Alexander Blvd NE

**The Show - Live Comedy Improv** \$12 8-9 pm The Box Performance Space 114 Gold Ave SW

**Community**

**Holidazed Open Mic** Featuring Savannah Rodriguez 6:30-9 pm Ancora Cafe and Bakery 148 Quincy St NE

**Winter Wonderland NM** \$49 6:00pm to 10:00pm EXPO New Mexico 300 San Pedro Dr NE

**Literature/Poetry**

**Mindwell Poetry Night** 6-9 pm Ancora Cafe and Bakery 148 Quincy St NE

**Miscellaneous**

**River of Lights** \$7-\$17 5-10 pm ABQ BioPark Botanic Garden 2601 Central Ave NW

**Music**

**Chapter House Presents Home for the Holidaze!** 8-11:30 pm Launchpad 618 Central Avenue Southwest

**Designated Mind** 7-10 pm Voodoo Girl Pizza & Pints 1401 Second St. NW

**Lani Nash** 7-9 pm Albuquerque Distilling 5001 Central Ave NE Suite A5

**Money Man** \$40-\$200 10 pm-2 am Cake Nightclub 515 Central Ave NW

**Soul & Rocksteady All Vinyl Night** 7-9 pm Tractor Brewing Nob Hill 118 Tulane SE

**Wild Friday with DJ Tony** \$5-\$20 9 pm-12 am JUNO brewery + cafe + art 1501 1st Street Northwest

**Youngsville Single Release Party** 8-11 pm Tractor Brewing Wells Park 1800 Fourth St. NW

**Performance**

**Star Wars Holiday Special Burlesque Variety Show** \$20-\$60 7-10 pm Historic El Rey Theatre 622 Central Ave SW

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30**

**Comedy**

**The Show - Live Comedy Improv** \$12 8-9 pm The Box Performance Space 114 Gold Ave SW

**Community**

**Winter Wrap Up Food & Clothing Drive** 2-8 pm Santa Fe Brewing Co. (Albuquerque Taproom) 3600 Cutler NE

**Dance**

**Kaltonaka Dance Group (Chichimeca Mexica Azteca)** 12-1 pm Indian Pueblo Cultural Center 2401 12th Street NW

**Miscellaneous**

**River of Lights** \$7-\$17 5-10 pm ABQ BioPark Botanic Garden 2601 Central Ave NW

**Music**

**505 Unchained Pre New Year's Eve** 7-11 pm Voodoo Girl Pizza & Pints 1401 Second St. NW

**Flashback 80s Video Music Dance Party** \$10-\$15 8 pm-1 am Sister 407 Central Ave. NW

**JD Nash** 7-9 pm Tractor Brewing Nob Hill 118 Tulane SE

**Keeping Up With the Joneses** 8-10 pm Tractor Brewing Wells Park 1800 Fourth St. NW

**New Year's Eve Eve** 7-11 pm Bow & Arrow Brewing Co. 608 McKnight Ave NW

**Once in a Lifetime - Pink Freud & Start Making Sense Pre New Years Eve Bash!** \$10 8 pm-12 am The Historic Lobo Theater - Lounge & Event Venue 3013 Central Ave NE

**Seth Hoffman** 7-9 pm Marble Brewery Westside 5740 Night Whisper Rd. NW

**Sorry Papi Tour: The All Girl Party** \$25 8 pm-12 am Revel Entertainment Center 4720 Alexander Blvd NE

**Violet Rising** \$10 8:30-11:30 pm Launchpad 618 Central Avenue Southwest

**Performance**

**1st Street Cabaret** 2-4 pm FUSION | 708 708 1st St NW

**Sports**

**Duke City Championship Wrestling: Countdown to Chaos** \$20-\$40 7:30-9:30 pm Historic El Rey Theatre 622 Central Ave SW

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31**

**Comedy**

**Frankie Quinones** \$50 9:30-11 pm Quezada's Comedy Club at Santa Ana Star 54 Jemez Canyon Dam Road, Santa Ana Pueblo, Santa Ana Pueblo, 004

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Community

**The Historic Lobo Theater's Pajama Brunch and a Movie!**  
\$10 10 am-2 pm The Historic Lobo Theater - Lounge & Event Venue 3013 Central Ave NE

**Winter Wonderland NM** \$49  
6-9 pm EXPO New Mexico 300 San Pedro Dr NE

Dance

**Kaltonaka Dance Group (Chichimeca Mexica Azteca)**  
12-1 pm Indian Pueblo Cultural Center 2401 12th Street NW

Games

**Noon Year's Eve at Skidmore's**  
\$20 10:30 am-2 pm Skidmore's Holiday Bowl 7515 Lomas Blvd NE

Miscellaneous

**New Year's Eve Before Dark** 10 am-2 pm Albuquerque Museum 2000 Mountain Road NW

**New Year's Eve Met Gala** \$40-\$480 9 pm-2 am Bama's 1865 6001 Osuna Rd. NE

**New Years Eve Party with El Gozao + DJ Darly - Two Rooms of Music** \$25-\$75 8 pm-1:30 am JUNO brewery + cafe + art 1501 1st Street Northwest

Music

**A Black & White New Years Eve Affair** \$100 7:30 pm-1 am Sheraton Albuquerque Uptown 2600 Louisiana Blvd NE

**A Very Emo New Year's Eve** 9 pm-12:30 am Tractor Brewing Nob Hill 118 Tulane SE

**A Very Taylor Swift NYE w. DJ FLo Fader** 9 pm-12:30 am Tractor Brewing Wells Park 1800 Fourth St. NW

**Baila! Baila! 25th Anniversary Gala** \$75 6 pm-1 am Uptown Marriott Hotel 2101 Louisiana Blvd NE

**Black Tie Ball** \$2-\$120 5 pm-1 am Marriot Pyramid Hotel North 5151 San Francisco Rd NE

**Canvas NYE 2024 All Day Party** \$25-\$600 12 pm-1:30 am Canvas Artistry - Kitchen Bar Art Music 1 Central Ave NW Suite 3A

**Dance Through the Decades: New Year's Eve Celebration**  
\$175-\$300 9 pm-12:30 am Hotel Andaluz 125 Second St. NW

**En Vogue** \$75 9 pm-12 am Sandia Resort and Casino 30 Rainbow Road

**Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! NYE Special with ABBA** \$15 7 pm-1 am Sister 407 Central Ave. NW

**Hello Future: NYE 2023** \$23-\$49  
9 pm-2 am Electric Playhouse 5201 Ouray Rd. NW

**Levi Platero's New Years Eve Bash** \$10 8 pm-1 am Launchpad 618 Central Avenue Southwest

**Lorenzo Antonio: New Year's Eve Show and Dance** \$69 9 pm-1 am Revel Entertainment Center 4720 Alexander Blvd NE

**Music on the Patio: Slim Belly Blues Band** 4-7 pm Canteen Brewhouse 2381 Aztec Road Northeast

**New Year's Eve Dance Party**  
\$10 8 pm-1 am Historic El Rey Theatre 622 Central Ave SW

**New Year's Eve Masquerade**  
\$40-\$120 8 pm-1:30 am Embassy Suites Hotel and Spa 1000 Woodward Pl NE

**New Year's Eve at Skidmore's**  
\$15-\$25 9 pm-1 am Skidmore's Holiday Bowl 7515 Lomas Blvd NE

**New Year's with the Opera!**  
\$15-\$70 2:30-4:30 pm National Hispanic Cultural Center 1701 4th Street Southwest

**New Years Eve w/ Jeremy Studdard** \$20-\$125 6 pm-12:30 am The Dirty Bourbon Dance Hall & Saloon 9800 Montgomery Blvd NE

**Salt Yard Westside NYE Party!**  
\$25-\$30 8:30 pm-2 am The Salt Yard - West 3700 Ellison Drive Northwest

Performance

**Jordan Jonas: A Night of Haunting Magic** \$30 7-8 pm Painted Lady Bed & Brew 1100 Bellamah Ave. NW

**The Adobe Theater second annual Fundraiser - New Year's Eve Cabaret** \$50 5-7 pm Adobe Theater 9813 4th St NW

MONDAY, JANUARY 1

Music

**Old Time Jam Band** 7-10 pm Tractor Brewing Nob Hill 118 Tulane SE

Sports

**Resolution Maker and Breaker 5K** \$25 1-4 pm Canteen Brewhouse 2381 Aztec Road Northeast

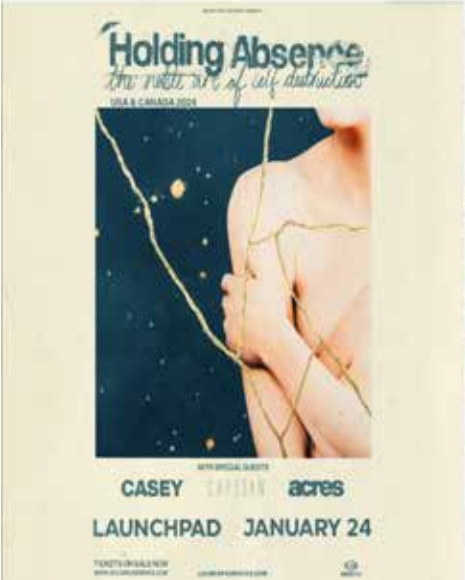
TUESDAY, JANUARY 2

Games

**Brain Gang Trivia** 7-9 pm Lizard Tail Industrial 3351 Columbia Dr. NE

Music

**Sacred 20's** \$10 8 pm-12 am Launchpad 618 Central Avenue Southwest



# The Paper.



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# The Business of Being Green

*With widespread pollution as a backdrop, some local businesses are doing what they can to fight back*

By Josh Lee, The Paper.

Supporting sustainable businesses in New Mexico is more important than ever as the state struggles with air pollution and missed environmental goals. With pollution from oil and gas production heavily contributing to pollution, some local businesses—and their customers—are doing their part to chip away at further polluting our air and water.

“When you look at what’s going on with the oceans and with the temperature, you can see that what we’re doing is creating problems,” says Trishelle Kirk, CEO of Albuquerque-based Soilutions. “There are a bunch of people trying to address it, but even more importantly, corporations need to address it.”

Soilutions is a locally-owned and operated compost soil and mulch company that delivers to residents, municipalities and companies. Its products are created from yard clippings and waste that would otherwise end up in a landfill.

“It’s a very sustainable way to create a product that goes back into our environment,” says Kirk, “We’re ensuring that we’re maintaining biodiversity in New Mexico.”

Kirk says the company is focused on intervening in the cycle of waste.

“There’s a lot of plastic going into the ocean. Once it leaves our homes, it’s just out of sight,

out of mind,” says Kirk. “In the composting space, we’re saying not all waste is created equal. Some waste goes into our ocean and causes water problems.”

Soilutions takes some of that waste and uses it to beautify the community instead.

Some of the waste that they utilize for their products comes from local curbside food scrap collection company Little Green Bucket.

“Being green is the heart and soul of our business,” says Little Green Bucket founder, Brad Weikel. “The whole reason I started it was because I wanted to have a positive environmental impact—both locally and globally.”

Little Green Bucket picks up food waste from residents and companies and delivers it to Soilutions, where the waste is turned into mulch. Weikel says diverting food waste from going to the landfill and converting it into local soil helps improve water retention and contributes to biodiversity.

Both Kirk and Weikel say their customers are excited to support green businesses. According to a 2022 Greenberg Quinlan Rosner poll, the majority of New Mexico voters support state policies to address drought, climate concerns and methane emissions.

“Our customers are people who already care about the environment and want to do the right thing,” says Weikel.

Brandon Condrey, co-

founder of Sandia Green Clean, says New Mexicans are willing to show their support for green models with their dollars.

“We speak to that customer,” he says. “They’re our ideal customer—someone who’s concerned about the environment in general.”

Sandia Green Clean provides residential cleaning services based on a green model. Staff use environmentally—and people-friendly—cleaning solutions and reusable equipment to minimize the company’s footprint.

“We are more expensive than your average housekeeper,” says Condrey, “There’s a reason for that. A green cleaning company is not the same as a housekeeper.”

Last month, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham pointed proudly at a study showing Texas was responsible for nearly four times the number of super emitter carbon events as New Mexico and has twice the greenhouse gas emissions from gas and oil companies.

“This study proves what we in New Mexico already know: We are doing the right things at the right time to produce the cleanest barrel of oil in the country,” said Lujan Grisham in a news release. “It also proves that state leadership matters—and New Mexico will not abdicate its responsibility to future generations.”

The governor said the state will be looking into renewable energy options and making electric vehicles available to residents. She also said New Mexico will be “shaping a cleaner oil and gas industry,” and “holding polluters accountable.”

The governor’s office was quick to remind voters that Lujan Grisham issued a climate change executive order that directed state agencies to develop “comprehensive rules for reducing emissions from the oil and gas sector.”

The news release highlighted New Mexico’s methane waste rules, which require companies to capture 98 percent of their produced natural gas by the end of 2026 and prohibit routine venting and flaring.

It was an important statement, considering the blowback New Mexico has received over the last several months about its reputation as an environmentally-unfriendly state.

A lawsuit was filed in May against the New Mexico Legislature, Lujan Grisham and state agencies alleging air quality in counties where gas and oil is produced fails to meet federal safety standards.

“New Mexico’s failure to control oil and gas pollution violates our constitution and fundamental human rights to clean air, land and water,” said lead counsel Gail Evans in a news release. “If concern for our environment and public health won’t push New Mexico’s leaders to control the reckless oil and gas industry, we hope legal action will.”

The suit found that Eddy and San Juan Counties received an “F” from the American Lung Association for high ozone days, and Lea and Sandoval Counties got a “D.” The suit notes that oil production in the Permian Basin has increased nearly 10-fold since 2010.

The suit calls for the state to suspend permitting new oil and gas wells and comply with its constitutional duty to protect New Mexico’s environment.

In September, an assessment reportedly funded by Matin Real Estate in Oregon ranked New Mexico the third least environmentally-friendly state in the country. According to the report’s authors, the biggest concern had to do with water quality. It found that 1.1 million New Mexico residents depend on unreliable water sources.

The assessment also noted the state’s poor air quality and high level of coal production.

So at least part of the burden of correcting New Mexico’s environment will likely fall on the shoulders of the state’s residents, and supporting local green businesses is one of the few ways that people can actually move the dial. But it certainly won’t be enough to change the course.

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# The State of Travel in 2023

By Merritt Hamilton Allen

I am a fairly frequent flyer. There are some basic survival skills and etiquette points modern airport travelers should know: never check a bag if you can help it; don't crowd the boarding area ahead of your boarding group; the armrest is for the center seat; if you bring a meal on a plane, consider its aroma; keep your shoes on; exiting the plane is done by row, not a mob rush.

But none of these can prepare travelers for times when airlines show complete disregard for their staffs and their passengers. Dear readers, I present to you American Airlines in 2023.

I flew at least 60 segments on American this year, in 15 round trips, or 30 inbound and outbound legs. On 28 of these legs the final arrival was delayed by two hours or more. These delays were caused by mechanical problems in 24 instances. I was rebooked onto new flights in the middle of the night hours before my flight three times. I missed connections three times.

Finally, this month, after flying nearly 2 million miles with American, I had had it. I sent in a complaint. I received a response within hours: "We realize you are more likely to experience a flight delay or cancellation than our average

customer would due to your frequent travel."

This is akin to the plumber you called on Christmas Eve telling you that the flooding in your basement was most likely caused by liquid.

Here's the thing. I get that hotels and restaurants have really struggled since the pandemic. I know many have closed and those that are open struggle to find and retain staff. I temper my expectations accordingly.

The airlines received \$54 billion in three separate bailouts related to the pandemic. They were also offered \$25 billion in loans. The bailouts came with strings: dividends and stock buybacks were prohibited through September 30, 2022, and the airlines were to keep their employees.

On this latter condition, the airlines reneged stealthily. They encouraged early retirement or voluntary employee buyouts. Then, as travel picked back up again, the airlines made it difficult for these employees to return to the workforce and hired more junior replacements. Between the first and second bailout, American saved \$500 million by reducing its non-unionized workforce by 30%.

The airlines also used the

lull in travel to retire older aircraft. This created additional scheduling problems. Seniority rules in the pilot unions resulted in younger pilots being bumped off the planes they were flying to accommodate senior pilots from the retired fleet, forcing retraining of the younger pilots.

The more junior workforce overall has resulted in less seasoned airline management that does not do as good a job in scheduling maintenance, managing crew transit, or even managing flight schedules themselves.

The departure of the "graybeards" has left the airlines without the institutional knowledge of how to accommodate massive travel interruptions due to weather or technology.

The front-line staff and passengers suffer. This year, I once waited two and a half hours for a plane to be moved from the other side of O'Hare airport to our gate. The gate agent and the captain tried in vain to get our departure gate moved to where the aircraft was, or find another, closer aircraft. No luck. A hundred passengers and crew just stood around, and stood around, until the plane could finally be towed.

Well, the passengers did. After about 90 minutes, the crew

for our 45-minute flight timed out. So, then we had to wait for a new crew. Oh, and a plane.

Not one airline went out of business due to the pandemic. There are about 73,000 fewer restaurants in the U.S. than there were in 2019.

As we continue to struggle with our ever-increasing federal debt, it's worth considering if "too big to fail" should carry any weight these days. I am still not clear whether the massive automaker bailout was anything more than very expensive corporate welfare. It did not directly drive the electric vehicle innovation that was an expected by-product from the Big Three automakers. But it was very, very expensive and set the country on a path to record deficits to which we still cling.

As for my 2024 travel plans, well, my first trip is booked. I'm trying Delta.

*Merritt Hamilton Allen is a PR executive and former Navy officer. She appeared regularly as a panelist on NM PBS and is a frequent guest on News Radio KKOB. A Republican, she lives amicably with her Democratic husband north of I-40 where they run one head of dog, and two of cat. She can be reached at [news.ind.merritt@gmail.com](mailto:news.ind.merritt@gmail.com).*

## Commentary



Merritt Hamilton Allen





## The Year in Weed

*Top 5 weed stories of 2023*

By Josh Lee, The Paper.

The year is coming to a close, and it's been a pretty crazy ride. Tensions in the middle east have widened the political divide in the U.S. The rise of artificial intelligence and the cost of living have made the future of the middle class uncertain. Political junkies are digging in for what is guaranteed to be a wild presidential race in 2024.

The world of weed has been comparatively quiet. More states have legalized marijuana and some are quietly moving to legalize psychedelics too. But overall, there wasn't a ton of boat-rocking going on. And with the ever-encroaching collapse of society on everyone's minds, it was easy for people to miss the small dramas surrounding the unassuming weed plant.

Here are the top five weed stories of the year that you may have missed while you were watching the apocalypse unfold:

### SAFER Banking

Lawmakers once again tried and failed to deliver legislation that would ease restrictions on cannabis banking.

Federal law prohibits banks from working with clients that are known criminals. Since cannabis is still federally illegal, state-approved marijuana companies are technically criminals as far as federal regulators are concerned.

For years now, lawmakers have tried repeatedly to pass legislation that would allow banks to work with state-licensed cannabis operations—a situation that would benefit both the cannabis industry and the banking industry.

The bill, called the SAFE Banking Act, has repeatedly failed to make any leeway in the Senate, although it has passed in the House a number of times.

This year was supposed to be different. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) took up the bill, renamed it SAFER Banking and added some piggyback provisions.

Despite Schumer's promises and claims that the bill would be a Senate priority, SAFER Banking has floundered in recent months, and it won't see the light of day this year.

### Chinese Pot Farms

Law enforcement agencies say raids of illicit marijuana farms in New Mexico and other states with legal cannabis markets have revealed a money-making scheme for criminal enterprises based in China.

Officials say Chinese criminal organizations are setting up illicit grow sites in states that allow personal cultivation, then transporting the products to states where the drug is still prohibited for illegal sales. The money made is reportedly used to fund criminal enterprises in China.

In September, a group of Chinese immigrants sued Navajo businessman Dineh Benally and Taiwanese entrepreneur Irving Lin for allegedly forcing them to trim illicit cannabis in a Farmington hotel. The workers said they answered ads to work at a farm that didn't mention marijuana.

The suit alleged that armed guards kept the workers from leaving the hotel, where they were subjected to unhealthy living conditions for little pay.

### Saturation Concerns

After a full year of adult-use cannabis in New Mexico, the state has had a complete makeover. Weed shops have popped up everywhere along the southern border and in the state's biggest urban centers.

In Albuquerque, dispensaries have seemingly opened on just about every street corner. Even with proximity limits, the city has unarguably become overrun with weed shops.

The state's Cannabis Control Division (CCD) has repeatedly said it cannot legally limit the number of cannabis licenses that it issues, but a number of local weed businesses are calling on state lawmakers to change the law to allow regulators to put a temporary pause on new licenses.

Reform advocates say a temporary pause will give businesses struggling with competing in an oversaturated market time to get their heads above water. Opponents say it would give legacy cannabis businesses a leg up over newcomers and interfere with the free market.

### Rescheduling?

In 2022, President Joe Biden ordered the head of the Health and Human Services Department (HHS) to make a review and recommendation about the possibility of rescheduling or descheduling marijuana. Earlier this year, the agency recommended that the drug be recategorized under the Controlled Substances Act.

Under its current designation as Schedule I, marijuana is considered a dangerous drug with a high potential for abuse and no recognized medical value. The HHS recommended that it be recategorized to Schedule III, designating it as having some medical use.

The recommendation was made to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), which will have the final say on whether the drug is reclassified.

If weed is moved to Schedule III, pharmaceutical companies will potentially be able to develop drugs from it and research barriers will be removed.

### Gun-Weed Laws

Over the last year, the battle to reform federal laws that keep marijuana users from legally owning firearms has heated up in courtrooms across the country.

The federal Department of Justice (DOJ) is fending off attacks from all sides as advocates demand that legal marijuana users be able to enjoy the same Second Amendment rights that everyone else does.

According to federal law, current pot users aren't allowed to purchase or possess a firearm. The DOJ has said the ban even applies to states where the drug has been made legal.

The agency has defended its rules by saying weed users are dangerous, forgetful and unstable.

Now the department is facing legal challenges of the rule in a number of cases, including a high profile case involving the president's son, Hunter Biden.

### Discovery of Flavorants (Honorable Mention)

It might not have made many headlines, but the recent discovery of new chemical compounds in cannabis will likely be remembered as a major turning point in the industry.

In October, researchers from a marijuana extraction company discovered what they called "flavorants,"—chemicals that are responsible for the scents and flavors of the drug. It has long been believed that terpenes (compounds that contribute to the scent of plants) are the main culprits behind weed's distinctive tastes and smells, but the researchers found that terpenes only make a small contribution.

There's no telling what this discovery will mean to the cannabis industry, but we guarantee this won't be the last time we hear about flavorants.



# "I'M SO GRATEFUL I NEVER STOPPED SEARCHING!"

Bernalillo resident Maria R had been experiencing the debilitating side effects of Peripheral Neuropathy.

**"I was beginning to have other health issues due to the lack of sleep. I needed help just standing up and when I was standing I was afraid I would fall because I had no feeling in my feet. My life felt like a nightmare."**

Then she met Albuquerque's very own Dr. Andrea Brogdon

**"I was so desperate to the point of giving up" exclaimed Maria R. from Bernalillo. "I was in so much discomfort due to the numbness, tingling, and burning on the back of both legs and in my feet."**

Maria R had been diagnosed with peripheral neuropathy and had seen a neurologist with no relief. To complicate things further, Maria had been diagnosed with two fractured discs in her back that were causing her severe pain. "I was no longer able to do surgery and all other treatments didn't work. I was starting to feel hopeless."

Maria is one of 3 million people in the United States suffering from peripheral neuropathy, a degenerative disease of the peripheral nervous system. "Those with peripheral neuropathy experience numbness, tingling, burning and even severe cramping due to the dying off of the peripheral nerves," explains Dr. Andrea Brogdon of Albuquerque Acupuncture & Integrative Medicine. "These nerves continue to die off until they have completely expired leaving sufferers with numbness and debilitating balance issues. Patients come to see me after having seen many other doctors with no relief. They have been told that there is nothing they can do or that they just have to live with it."

**"I was beginning to have other health issues due to the lack of sleep. I needed help just standing up and when I was standing I was afraid I would fall because I had no feeling in my feet. My life felt like a nightmare," says Maria.**

"I learned about Dr. Andrea Brogdon from an article I read and learned that she helped others like me, experiencing the same symptoms.

I made an appointment hoping she was going to be able to help me. It was my last resort."

Dr. Andrea Brogdon has helped thousands of patients get their life back after being diagnosed with peripheral neuropathy and living with the debilitating effects of the disease. How does she get such amazing results? "Acupuncture has been used for centuries to improve circulation but the real magic happens when I integrate ATP Resonance BioTherapy™." By using modern technological advancements alongside the time tested science of acupuncture, Dr. Brogdon is able to reverse the effects of this degenerative disease, regardless of its origin.

"Early detection is key when it comes to improving your chances of a full recovery," explains Dr. Brogdon. Which is why she starts every patient with an initial consultation during which a sensory exam is performed. "This helps to determine just how much nerve damage has occurred," tells the doctor. "This is important because if the patient has suffered more than 95% sensory loss there is very little I can do at that point."

**"After several treatments, I experienced tremendous relief. Life is good! I have seen a huge improvement in my walking, I sleep better, even my mood is better! I am so grateful I never stopped searching!"**  
exclaims Maria.

If you or a loved one are living a life of suffering due to peripheral neuropathy and your pain has prevented you from doing the things you love with the people you love, it's time to call Dr. Brogdon and the staff at AAIM.

Call (505) 355-1984 today to schedule an initial consultation or visit [AAIM-ABQ.com](http://AAIM-ABQ.com) to read more incredible success stories.



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# Blunts.

## cannabis news shorts



Every week, we round up our favorite cannabis-related news stories in bite sized edible pieces. Here's some of our favorites!

## Toby Keith Weed Comes to NM

By Josh Lee, The Paper.

An Albuquerque marijuana company has announced that it will soon be carrying products from country music star Toby Keith's cannabis line in its dispensaries.

This isn't the first time that Albuquerque-based Seven Clover has dabbled in the celebrity weed market. Earlier this year, the company announced it would be selling cannabis from actor Jim Belushi's production company.

Toby Keith's Big Dog Cannabis Co. is based in Oklahoma, but the company is now expanding into New Mexico for the first time. The company's products will be manufactured and packaged in the Land of Enchantment by Seven Clover. The first batch has reportedly been completed already and will be on sale at dispensaries within the next few weeks.

### Poll: D.C. Staffers Say Congress Won't Pass Weed Bills

According to a new poll, Capitol Hill staffers don't expect any marijuana reform laws to pass this Congress.

"Our survey respondents have been spot-on all year round," Punchbowl News posted on X. Its latest poll asked staffers and lobbyists to make predictions for the second half of the 118th Congress, "including on impeachment, Ukraine and border security funding, bank CEO clawback pay, cannabis banking, AI and more."

The Canvass Capitol Hill Survey asked respondents if they expected any cannabis reform bills to pass before the Congress ends, including the SAFER Banking Act, and 71 percent said it was "unlikely."

The SAFER Banking Act would allow banks and financial institutions to legally work with marijuana companies. The bill has bipartisan support and was expected to do well in the Senate, but it has apparently fallen to the wayside in light of more pressing national matters.

Democratic staffers were more optimistic—29 percent thought cannabis reform was likely, 12 percent said they were unsure and 59 percent said it was unlikely—than Republican staffers—nine percent said it was likely, eight percent said they were unsure and 83 percent said it was unlikely.

### Psilocybin Rescheduling Petition Denied Rehearing

A federal court has rejected a doctor's attempt to force the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to send a psilocybin rescheduling petition to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Washington-based end-of-life doctor Sunil Aggarwal has been battling the DEA for months regarding his petition to reschedule psilocybin mushrooms so that they can be used to treat patients who are near death.

In October, a federal court ruled that the DEA failed to fully explain why it had rejected Aggarwal's petition and ordered that it reconsider the request. But the judges did not order the agency to forward the petition on to the FDA, a request that had been made by Aggarwal's legal team.

Last week the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit rejected Aggarwal's request for a rehearing to potentially make the DEA pass along the petition. The court did not explain its reason.



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NOTICE TO CREDITORS: Estate of Mona R Schermerhorn, deceased. Notice is hereby given that on the 12th day of December, 2023, letters testamentary (or of administration as the case may be) in respect of the estate of Mona R Schermerhorn, who died September, 23, 2023 in Albuquerque, NM, were issued to the undersigned, Kenneth D Parker, by the STATE OF NEW MEXICO IN THE PROBATE COURT SANTA FE COUNTY located at 100 Catron Street Santa Fe, NM 87501 All persons, resident and non-resident, having claims, matured or unmatured, against the estate are required to file the same with the Clerk of the above named Court or the undersigned representative at 341 Creek Rd Boone NC 28607 on or before the dates prescribed in (1) or (2) otherwise their claims will be forever barred: (1) Four (4) months from the date of the first publication (or posting of this notice) (2) Sixty (60) days after the mailed receipt of this notice.



FREE WILL ASTROLOGY

Week of December 27

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**ARIES (March 21-April 19):** Among couples who share their finances, 39 percent lie to their partners about money. If you have been among that 39 percent, please don't be in 2024. In fact, I hope you will be as candid as possible about most matters with every key ally in your life. It will be a time when the more honest and forthcoming you are, the more resources you will have at your disposal. Your commitment to telling the truth as kindly but completely as possible will earn you interesting rewards.

**TAURUS (April 20-May 20):** According to tradition in ancient Israel, a Jubilee year happened every half-century. It was a "trumpet blast of liberty," in the words of the Old Testament book Leviticus. During this grace period, enslaved people were supposed to be freed. Debts were forgiven, taxes canceled, and prisoners released. People were encouraged to work less and engage in more revelry. I boldly proclaim that 2024 should be a Jubilee Year for you Bulls. To launch the fun, make a list of the alleviations and emancipations you will claim in the months ahead.

**GEMINI (May 21-June 20):** "Make peace with their devils, and you will do the same with yours." The magazine Dark's Art Parlor provides us with this essential wisdom about how to conduct vibrant relationships. I invite you to make liberal use of it in 2024. Why? Because I suspect you will come to deeply appreciate how all your worthwhile bonds inevitably require you to engage with each other's wounds, shadows, and unripeness. To say it another way, healthy alliances require you to deal respectfully and compassionately with each other's darkness. The disagreements and misunderstandings the two of you face are not flaws that discolor perfect intimacy. They are often rich opportunities to enrich togetherness.

**CANCER (June 21-July 22):** Cancerian author Franz Kafka wrote over 500 letters to his love interest Felice Bauer. Her outpouring of affection wasn't as voluminous, but was still very warm. At one point, Kafka wryly communicated to her, "Please suggest a remedy to stop me trembling with joy like a lunatic when I receive and read your letters." He added, "You have given me a gift such as I never even dreamt of finding in this life." I will be outrageous here and predict that 2024 will bring you, too, a gift such as you never dreamt of finding in this life. It may or may not involve romantic love, but it will feel like an ultimate blessing.

**LEO (July 23-Aug. 22):** Renowned inventor Nikola Tesla (1856–1943) felt an extraordinary closeness with sparrows, finches, pigeons, and other wild birds. He loved feeding them, conversing with them, and inviting them into his home through open windows. He even fell in love with a special pigeon he called White Dove. He said, "I loved her as a man loves a woman, and she loved me. As long as I had her, there was a purpose to my life." I bring this to your attention because I suspect 2024 will be an excellent time to upgrade your relationship with birds, Leo. Your power to employ and enjoy the metaphorical power of flight will be at a maximum.

**VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22):** "All the world's a stage," wrote Shakespeare. He was comparing life to a theatrical drama, suggesting we are all performers attached to playing roles. In response, a band called the Kingpins released the song "All the World's a Cage." The lyrics include these lines: "You promised that the world was mine / You chained me to the borderline / Now I'm just sitting here doing time / All the world's a cage." These thoughts are the prelude to my advice for you. I believe that in 2024, you are poised to live your life in a world that is neither like a stage nor a cage. You will have unusually ample freedom from expectations, artificial constraints, and the inertia of the past. It will be an excellent time to break free from outdated self-images and your habitual persona.

**LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22):** At age 10, an American girl named Becky Schroeder launched her career as an inventor. Two years later, she got her first of many patents for a product that enables people to read and write in the dark. I propose we make her one of your role models for 2024. No matter how old you are, I suspect you will be doing precocious things. You will understand life like a person at least ten years older than you. You will master abilities that a casual observer might think you learned improbably fast. You may even have seemingly supernatural conversations with the Future You.

**SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21):** Here are excellent questions for you to meditate on throughout 2024. 1. Who and what do you love? Who and what makes you spill over with adoration, caring, and longing? 2. How often do you feel deep waves of love? Would you like to feel more of them? If so, how could you? 3. What are the most practical and beautiful ways you express love for whom and what you love? Would you like to enhance the ways you express love, and if so, how? 4. Is there anything you can or should do to intensify your love for yourself?

**SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21):** Like the rest of the planet, Scotland used to be a wild land. It had vast swaths of virgin forests and undomesticated animals. Then humans came. They cut the trees, dug up charcoal, and brought agriculture. Many native species died, and most forests disappeared. In recent years, though, a rewilding movement has arisen. Now Scotland is on the way to restoring the ancient health of the land. Native flora and fauna are returning. In accordance with astrological omens, I propose that you launch your own personal rewilding project in 2024. What would that look like? How might you accomplish it?

**CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19):** Capricorn-born Lebron James is one of the greatest players in basketball history. Even more interesting from my perspective is that he is an exuberant activist and philanthropist. His list of magnificent contributions is too long to detail here. Here are a few examples: his bountiful support for charities like After-School All-Stars, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, the Children's Defense Fund, and his own Family Foundation. I suggest you make Lebron one of your role models in 2024. It will be a time when you can have more potent and far-reaching effects than ever before through the power of your compassion, generosity, and beneficence.

**AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18):** I propose we make the shark your soul creature in 2024. Not because some shark species are apex predators at the top of the food chain. Rather, I propose you embrace the shark as an inspirational role model because it is a stalwart, steadfast champion with spectacular endurance. Its lineage goes back 400 million years. Sharks were on Earth before there were dinosaurs, mammals, and grass. Saturn's rings didn't exist yet when the first sharks swam in the oceans. Here are the adjectives I expect you to specialize in during the coming months: resolute, staunch, indomitable, sturdy, resilient.

**PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20):** In the 19th century, many scientists believed in the bogus theory of eugenics, which proposed that we could upgrade the genetic quality of the human race through selective breeding. Here's a further example of experts' ignorance: Until the 1800s, most scientists dismissed the notion that stones fell from the sky, even though meteorites had been seen by countless people since ancient times. Scientists also rejected the idea that large reptiles once roamed the Earth, at least until the 19th century, when it became clear that dinosaurs had existed and had become extinct. The moral of the story is that even the smartest among us can be addicted to delusional beliefs and theories. I hope this inspires you to engage in a purge of your own outmoded dogmas in 2024. A beginner's mind can be your superpower! Discover a slew of new ways to think and see.

The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- 1 Cave critters
- 5 Greenland sight
- 10 SpaceX CEO
- 14 Style
- 15 Variety show
- 16 Pro's opposite
- 17 Take it from the top?
- 19 Will's "Spirited" co-star
- 20 Agree out of court
- 21 Prospering
- 23 Wales pooch
- 25 Must-haves
- 26 Tourist stop
- 29 UFO museum city
- 32 Not busy
- 33 Playful chitchat
- 34 "A little \_\_\_'ll do ya..."

37 Shine

39 Rope ladder rung

41 Big Apple paper: Abbr.

42 Tire type

44 Neat anagram

45 Chewing gum brand

47 Jamaican export

48 Kind of guitar

50 Perp zapper

52 1980 parody film

55 Start a round of golf

59 Vivacity

60 Quantitative

62 Camera part

63 Blew it

64 "Grease" extra

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65 Advantage

66 Curious to a fault

67 Ogled

DOWN

1 Hospital count

2 Nautical direction

3 Mediator's skill

4 Grabs

5 Fast-food cooker

6 Boeing 747, e.g.

7 Round of applause

8 The Sultan of Swat

9 Does and bucks

10 Comics company

11 Relentless

12 Blackjack option

13 Sacramento team

18 Scheme

22 Still

24 Singer Ariana

26 Endorse

27 Without purpose

28 Sparkling

30 Layers of rock skin

33 Abacus piece

35 Theater org.

36 "Cold one"

38 Songbird sound

40 Honored poet

43 Crying

46 Restful state

47 Crystal ball gazer

48 Expensive fur

49 Done in

51 Hit the books

53 Prayer ender

54 Claudius's successor

56 Mind

57 Head for the hills

58 Ward (off)

61 Go out with

The Paper.

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Solution to Crossword:





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