



Nature Notes



People of all abilities enjoyed time outdoors on Kwage Mesa on an accessible nature walk led by PEEC and the Los Alamos Senior Center in October. (Photo by Beth Cortright)

VOLUME 22, NUMBER 1, WINTER 2022

PAJARITO ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER, LOS ALAMOS, NM

Thank You for Giving the Gift of Nature

By Katherine Bruell, Executive Director

I write this article in the middle of our year-end fund drive; you'll be reading it when the dust has settled. So, though I don't know the final dollar value raised from our appeal to you this year, I already know that you are committed to connecting people and nature, and not just because of the gifts that have begun to pour in in response to our appeal. You do so much to give people direct experiences in nature — you donate, you volunteer your precious time, and you come to events and build community together. Every year, the staff at PEEC is blown away by how you lift up the importance of nature in people's lives and how you work to ensure that everyone experiences the gift of time outside. From all of us, thank you.

Fall brought many changes at PEEC (and in the nation). We've lost some of our valued staff members — one is going back to school to get her PhD, one is moving back to Albuquerque with her partner who got a job there, and two are staying home with new babies. All good reasons to leave — but we'll miss them. We are starting to build back our staff with amazing new team members. Mitsi Willard has joined us as an educator. She's a new transplant to Los Alamos from Texas, has a wealth and depth of teaching experience, and is fluent in Spanish. Jimmy Himes is joining us as our Marketing Manager from Albuquerque by way of Oklahoma. They are an award-winning reporter and documentary filmmaker, and will bring exciting new skills to our PEEC team. We're



Nature Playtime participants working together to make a "pumpkin soup" in our sensory bins! (Photo by Mitsi Willard)

in the process of looking for two educators to round out our interpretive department staff and are looking forward to all the great new ideas they will bring to PEEC.

As always, all of us at PEEC — staff, board, volunteers, donors, and everyone who comes to our programs or visits the nature center — are driven by our mission of enriching people's lives by strengthening their connections to our canyons, mesas, mountains, and skies. Each one of you plays an important role in making sure that people and nature can always count on each other. Thank you. I'm so glad to be on this journey with you. 🌱



A bull elk in Valles Caldera National Preserve. Visit the Caldera in the fall to hear their haunting bugles. (Photo by Larry Lamsa)

The Elegant Elk

By Marilyn Lisowski

When you think of elk, do you imagine a stately, powerful figure, on a bluff sporting a huge rack of antlers, surveying his domain below? This massive animal is one of the largest in North America. But imagine this, immense elk herds were nearly wiped out a century ago by humans, in the whole of the United States.

The elk subspecies that existed in the mountains of Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado, known as Merriam's elk, a larger animal, went completely extinct by 1906 due to relentless hunting and habitat loss. Private ranchers and the State of New Mexico introduced Yellowstone elk during the first half of the 20th century. Hunting elk was outlawed for decades while the population increased. Now numbering about eighty thousand, the transplanted elk travel the Sangre de Cristo, Jemez, San Juan, and Sacramento Mountains where Merriam's used to roam.

These handsome, nimble elk, with dark necks and

thick, light bodies may be a bit smaller than Merriam's elk, but you'd rather not run into one on an evening stroll, especially a bugling bull during the fall rutting season. They can tower over you at eight feet tall, including the antlers, and weigh 700 pounds. Cow elk are smaller, without antlers. All sport a white rump.

During the fall rutting season, bulls bugle a high-pitched call to attract females, and to warn other bulls away. Visit the Valle Grande at dusk in October to hear the calls. Persistent challengers to a dominant bull will spar — crashing their huge antler racks together until one is wounded, dying, or simply gives up. Imagine the headaches. The winner finds cow elk in the newly gathered harem herd that are ready to mate. His rack falls off after rutting season, to regrow the next year.

A pregnant cow elk carries her young, usually one calf, until birthing in late May or June. She hides in foliage to give birth, and stays aloof from other cow elk until her calf is several months old. The spotted calf remains perfectly still, emitting no scent, next to a log or in bushes and is practically invisible to predators while its mother goes in search of food.



A mother elk with two spotted calves at Valles Caldera National Preserve. (Photo by Larry Lamsa)

Like deer, elk are ruminants with four-chambered stomachs. They can tolerate tough food, as it is twice-digested. Given a choice, however, elk will head for grasses, which is why meadows near the protection of forests are their favorite hangout. They also munch on plants, leaves, baby aspens, and if those are scarce, they stoop to ripping bark from trees. Deep snows of winter force elk to descend from the safety of their mountains to lowlands in search of food, sometimes to the edge of farms and ranches. Together with beef cattle or horses, they can chomp bales of hay. This practice enrages farmers and ranchers, who might shoot the trespassing elk.

If not killed by hunters or other predators, elk can live 10 to 13 years in the wild. Humans hunt them (with a state hunt draw for specific dates and places) from early September through December. Adult elk are also prey to wolves and mountain lions. Calves are likely to be targeted by bears and coyotes. And, an elk can step into an illegal trap or get into other trouble. A bull elk, spotted in the Colorado mountains, was found with a tire around its neck. Wildlife officials tranquilized it and removed the tire but not without having to sever the elk's five-point antlers to slip it off. The steel-belted tire was impossible for them to cut through. The elk, minus his necklace and headgear, awoke shortly and streaked off to the safety of the forest.

Elk now freely roam our mountains, meadows, and forests in sustainable numbers thanks to efforts by conservationists and the State of New Mexico. With care and planning, this graceful animal will continue to exist for us all to appreciate. 🦌

Introducing PEEC's Land Acknowledgment

A group of PEEC staff, led by Visitor Services Manager Christa Tyson, has been working to write a statement that acknowledges that our work takes place on unceded Indigenous land. Christa invited many experts and community members to join our discussions, which led to careful thought and to the following statement.

We plan to incorporate this acknowledgment into our programming and exhibits, and to work to incorporate Native voices into the work we do. We'd love to hear your feedback, comments, or suggestions along these lines. Please share by emailing director@peecnature.org.

We'd like to thank Pamela Agoyo, Victoria Atencio, Julie Dare, Geraldine Jojola, Rosemary Maestas-Swazo, Dr. Matthew Martinez, Monica Murrell, Ethan Ortega, Elysia Poon, Landis Smith, and Dr. Assata Zerai for the time, advice, and feedback they provided to PEEC while we were writing this Land Acknowledgment.

As a community of nature lovers and educators, it's our responsibility to learn about the history of the land on which we live, work, and play. We'd like to take this time to acknowledge that the Los Alamos Nature Center sits on unceded Indigenous land. This area was home to Ancestral Pueblo populations, including peoples that spoke the Tewa, Towa, and Keres languages. This area also holds ancestral significance, through trade and migration, to the Athabaskan speaking peoples, including the Diné and Apache. We acknowledge the Tanoan, Keresan, and Athabaskan speaking peoples, their elders, and future generations and their past, present, and future ties to this land.

We commit to learning more about the ongoing legacy of settler colonialism on the Pajarito Plateau and incorporating our learnings into PEEC's educational offerings for the public. We welcome dialogue and will continue building connections with Indigenous peoples and local Pueblo communities.

We invite you to take the time to learn more about these communities and their histories at peecnature.org and through the All Pueblo Council of Governors at apcg.org. 🦌



Madalyn Baily participating in a cross country skiing race in Durango, CO. Madalyn started skiing when she was young and has started competing competitively in recent years. She says her favorite thing about the sport is the community. (Photo courtesy of the Southwest Nordic Ski Club)



Madalyn Baily (right) on the podium at the December Junior National Qualifier races in Crested Butte, CO in December 2019. (Photo courtesy of the Southwest Nordic Ski Club)

Winter Sports Feature: Cross Country Skiing

Interview by Elizabeth Frost, Young Adult Advisory Group Member

As winter rolls around, seasonal sports (and hopefully some snow!) are right around the corner. Madalyn Baily, an 8th grader and avid cross country skier, is gearing up for this winter season.

Here's what she had to say about upcoming competitions, the cross country community, and the sport as a whole.

When did you first start cross country skiing and why?

I first started cross country skiing when I was really little because my whole family was doing it, but it wasn't until later that I decided to do it competitively. I started competitive cross country skiing because I found a team and they felt like a great community that I wanted to be a part of.

What is your favorite part of the sport?

My favorite part of cross country skiing is the community. Within the team as well as between teams. I really enjoy traveling with a team and competing together and getting to meet new people.

Tell me what a typical practice entails.

A typical practice on snow usually consists of an easy warm up ski where one can chat with teammates; then we either do a few short sprints, a drill set, or a long distance ski. After this we do a warm down while we ski back to where we started.

We practice year round, which means a lot of practice off of snow. These practices follow a similar format to what we do on snow, but we are doing things such as rollerskiing (similar to rollerblading), hikes, runs, weight lifting, and other aerobic activities.

In what ways did COVID-19 impact your ability to cross country ski?

COVID-19 impacted skiing in many ways. It has caused many of the ski races to be canceled and made it harder to go to practices. COVID-19 has also made it harder to connect with the team.

What are you most looking forward to this upcoming season?

This upcoming season I am looking forward to being able to connect and practice more with the team, as well as actually racing. This last year has made it hard to go to any races due to the fact that they are in Colorado, and

this season I will actually be able to travel to these races.

Thank you, Madalyn! If you'd like to try out cross country skiing yourself, Los Alamos has numerous areas reserved for cross country skiing, with Pajarito Mountain ranked as one of the top 9 best cross country skiing trails in the state.

Hopefully there will be enough snow for you to check out the peaceful solitude of Cañada Bonita this winter season! 🌀

Do you want to share your winter sports experiences? Email Christa Tyson at visitorservices@peecnature.org to get connected with our Young Adult Advisory Group!

Discovering the Meaning of Nature

By Logan Lathrop, Young Adult Advisory Group Member

I'm incredibly grateful for my time and upbringing in Los Alamos, but I don't think I understood how to appreciate nature until I moved away. Running through the canyons and biking the mesas as a kid are memories that I love, but it took leaving the area for me to really understand how to see nature.

I recently moved to Flagstaff, which still provides plenty of access to wilderness, but is a bigger city than Los Alamos. Nature was an inescapable part of my daily routine in Los Alamos. I saw deer and coyote every morning, to the point where it was almost a nuisance. Once I moved to Flagstaff, my commute from my apartment to work became more urban, and the little things I took for granted in Los Alamos were gone. I would leave for work before the sun had fully risen, and I'd have fifteen minutes of daylight when I got home. Unless I tried to get out of town on a weekend, I didn't really encounter what I thought of as "nature" at all.

Had you asked me what my idea of "being outside" or "being in nature" was as a Los Alamosian, my answer would have been rooted in mountain biking, climbing, or some other sport that, by nature (pun intended), required being outside. I didn't appreciate the casual sight of a fox in the canyon or consider the thirty-second walk to a trailhead to be a part of being outdoors.

Once those things get taken away and you're forced to look for nature, rather than have wildlife regularly walk to



Logan Lathrop on a trip to Iceland in the summer of 2021. He recently moved away from Los Alamos after growing up in town, but remains an active member of PEEC's Young Adult Advisory Group. (Photo courtesy of Logan Lathrop)

your front yard and eat some grass, the true magnitude of what nature is becomes much more evident.

Now that I have a full-blown adult schedule in a place where being outdoors requires effort, finding little aspects of nature is difficult. Acclimating from Los Alamos to pretty much anywhere else requires a more open-minded scope of what nature is and where it can be found — for me, that means the thrill in seeing a hawk land on the building next to mine, or in noticing some native plants in a place I pass by every day.

I still love being in nature for the sake of sports, but being deprived of something that I never knew was so idiosyncratic to my upbringing has made me appreciate the slivers of nature and the wild that we encounter every day and seldom appreciate. 🌀

Meet PEEC's New Board Member

Janet Griego joined the PEEC Board of Directors in October 2021. Originally from Dixon, NM, Janet graduated from the University of New Mexico School of Medicine. In 1995, she and her family moved to Los Alamos where her husband worked for LANL. Janet joined Pathology Associates of Albuquerque, working in Albuquerque and Española as a surgical pathologist and Medical Director. Retiring after 20 years of practice, she began volunteering in Los Alamos and in neighboring communities. In addition to volunteering, Janet enjoys running, gardening, hiking, and baking.



Los Alamos Citizen Task Force Working on Climate Change

By Sue Barns and Katie Leonard, Los Alamos Resiliency, Energy, and Sustainability Task Force

Massive wildfires, dry winters, weeks of 90°F or higher temperatures, and prolonged drought — if you’ve been in Los Alamos more than a few months, you’ve undoubtedly noticed these extreme events. You may have family or friends elsewhere who have experienced floods, intense hurricanes, heat waves, or other disasters. The effects of climate change are alarming, increasing, and impacting everyone.

In 2020, a group of Los Alamos citizens took action to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and help our community continue to thrive. They presented a petition to the County Council with hundreds of signatures from residents who shared this desire for action. From this was born the Los Alamos Resiliency, Energy, and Sustainability Task Force (LARES), a citizen body given a 1-year charter to explore ways for the County as a whole, including government, businesses, and residents, to achieve net zero GHG emissions and improve climate change resiliency.

To tackle this enormous project, LARES formed subcommittees to address the range of sources of GHG emissions: Community Planning & Zoning; Electrical Supply & Demand; Natural Gas Reduction; Transportation & Mobility; and Waste, Consumption & Natural Resources. The Task Force and subcommittees meet several times each month to research, discuss, and draft recommendations.

The “good news” regarding climate change is that there are so many things that can be done, and so many of them will not only reduce emissions, but improve the well-being of residents, the economy, and our environment at the same time! LARES members have worked diligently to explore what other communities have been doing and what is a good fit for Los Alamos. We have reached out to residents for ideas and vetted our recommendations through discussions with County staff.

In August, we prepared an Interim Report for the County Council, which was well received, and in which you can see our draft recommendations in detail.



Encouraging rooftop solar for the community is one of the recommendations that the LARES Task Force made to the County Council. (Photo by Chick Keller)

Among our recommendations were:

- Perform a baseline GHG emissions study to set goals and monitor progress, and create a Climate Change Action Plan
- Assist property owners in upgrading/retrofitting their homes for energy efficiency
- Continue to pursue “carbon free” energy sources as well as energy storage options
- Encourage rooftop solar and electric vehicles, heat pumps, and appliances
- Incentivize public transportation and healthy, active transport (walking, biking)
- Divert all waste from the landfill through waste reduction, recycling, and composting
- Increase water conservation and watershed stewardship
- Increase carbon sequestration in soils, trees, and other vegetation, and make our urban and natural landscapes resilient to climate change
- Provide information and support to help the community understand and reduce their carbon footprint

Our final report will be submitted in February, then the Council will decide which recommendations, if any, to take action on.

A large part of our efforts include reaching out to our community for ongoing dialog and ideas, and providing education. Building on their decades of work in support of a vibrant, sustainable environment, PEEC has embraced helping us. Starting in January, LARES will offer a series of lectures and hands-on programs at the Los Alamos Nature Center to show residents how to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. We look forward to welcoming the community to these events to learn, discuss, and begin to implement actions.

In the meanwhile, we encourage residents to explore ideas at our LARES website, and make comments at LARES meetings and by email to LARES.TaskForce@lacnm.us. To learn about and take meaningful action today, check out the world's most complete listing of climate solutions at the Nexus website of Project Regeneration. Please join us in charting a sustainable, resilient future for our community! 🌱

Join the LARES Task Force and PEEC for "Climate Change Basics" talks on January 6, January 20, and February 3 at 6 PM!

Our Mission: Enriching people's lives by strengthening their connections to our canyons, mesas, mountains, and skies.

PEEC Board of Directors

Elizabeth Allen, President
Jennifer Macke, Vice President
Mouser Williams, Secretary
Linda Zwick, Treasurer
Directors: Galen Gisler, Janet Griego, Nan Sauer, Rick Wallace, Shelly Wiemann

PEEC Staff

Katherine Bruell, Executive Director
Kristen O'Hara, Director of Interpretation
Beth Cortright, Adventure Programs Manager
Jimmy Himes & Rachel Landman, Marketing Managers
Christa Tyson, Visitor Services Manager
Ashleigh Lusher, Gift Shop & Programs Coordinator
Mitsi Pair Willard, Educator
Elizabeth Watts, Educator



Aspen School students exploring the trails on snowshoes during a field trip in January 2019. (Photo by Elizabeth Watts)

Free Snowshoe Rentals for Members

Did you know that PEEC members can borrow snowshoes for free?! Get outside and explore the trails this winter!

Members in good standing can request to borrow snowshoes by visiting peechnature.org/snowshoe-rentals. Email Christa Tyson at visitorservices@peechnature.org with any questions. 🌱

Passport Praise

"I've been here for 17 years and done all the 'normal' hikes. ... The PEEC Passport has dragged me out to locations that I didn't know of and I've seen some great trails. I know that's the point, but it's probably good to know it works :)."

— Passport the Pajarito Plateau Hiker

Nature Center Hours:

Monday: 10 – 4
Tuesday: Closed
Wednesday: 10 – 4
Thursday: 10 – 4
Friday: 10 – 4
Saturday: 10 – 4
Sunday: Closed

Visit us online!

www.peechnature.org
facebook.com/peechnature
instagram.com/peechnature
youtube.com/c/peechnature
flickr.com/photos/peechnature

Leave us a review on Trip Advisor, Google, or Yelp



PEEC
Pajarito Environmental
Education Center

PEEC at the Los Alamos Nature Center
2600 Canyon Road
Los Alamos, New Mexico 87544
505.662.0460
www.pecnature.org

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
LOS ALAMOS, NM
PERMIT NO. 152



Students on our kindergarten field trips enjoyed free play time in our Nature Play Area and Rotary Treehouse to build forts, play in the mud, and make new discoveries. (Photo by Rachel Landman)

INSIDE

- 1 Thank You for Giving the Gift of Nature
- 2 The Elegant Elk
- 3 Introducing PEEC's Land Acknowledgment
- 4 Winter Sports Feature: Cross Country Skiing
- 5 Discovering the Meaning of Nature
- 6 LARES Task Force Works on Climate Change

UPCOMING EVENTS

Big Brothers, Big Sisters Game Night **JAN. 16**
Virtual Backcountry Film Festival **JAN. 21 - 23**
Las Conchas Snowshoe & Ski **JAN. 22**

**Do you want to go green for your quarterly
Nature Notes mailing?**

LET US KNOW!

Please email director@pecnature.org if you'd like
to opt out of paper newsletters.