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The federal government doesn’t regulate everything, however. New Mexico employees handle many environmental matters: groundwater quality, air quality and hazardous waste are just some of the issues under their jurisdiction. For the past six years, the Martinez administration has worked hard to weaken environmental protections and erode the public’s ability to participate in decision-making. And it’s about to get worse, currently the New Mexico Environment Department receives 27% of its $79 million annual budget from the federal government. Amidst the uncertainty, what we do know is that public interest lawyers play an important role in times like these. As we’ve seen with Governor Martinez, politicians have a habit of adopting unconstitutional policies and regulations. The Law Center gives New Mexicans the ability to challenge them when they do.
NMELC specializes in local and state casework, but we still have plenty on our docket that could be impacted by the Trump administration.

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A 30th Anniversary Proposal from our Director

I started the New Mexico Environmental Law Center in response to the election of a State Attorney General who had no interest in protecting our environment; 30 years later – long after his term ended – the Law Center is going strong. In fact, because of your support, we have challenged scores of officials (and companies and schemes) who would endanger our most vulnerable communities and vital resources. Together, we have made a real difference for our state’s people and places.

I thought that when Governor Martinez was elected, the Law Center was facing its greatest executive challenge. Her very first executive order tried to prevent the printing of regulations limiting greenhouse gas emissions – and since then her administration has not let up on its anti-environment, anti-science, anti-public agenda. Given our new president’s actions and appointments to date, however, I think I was wrong about the governor.

But there is something that we can do, right now, to prepare for the future. In the face of adversity, the Law Center seeks to become an even stronger force for the public interest in our state. That is why we are undertaking the NMH2O Campaign during our 30th year. This year, we are raising funds to hire an experienced water attorney, a recently graduated water fellow to mentor in public-interest water law, and a paralegal to help all of our attorneys accomplish more. With threats from climate change, privatization, and legalized pollution, water is threatened today in our state like never before. We need great lawyers who will focus on its protection, and who will develop solutions to protect our rural communities and our urban communities and their drinking water supplies.

The price tag? Roughly $150,000 for year 1 (starting in 2018). I’m pleased to say that we’ve already been given the opportunity to obtain a $50,000 challenge grant, and now I need to ask for your help to get the rest of the way.

I am humbled by the trust you have placed in the Law Center and me. Together, I am optimistic about what we can do in a time that will threaten our people and our resources. If you would like to contribute to this campaign, or can help, please contact Elizabeth Lee, Director of Philanthropy, at (505) 989-9022.

Thank you,

Yours truly,

Doug

1% of Population – 28% of Air Polluters – 0% of Regulators Who Care

Your support helps residents challenge bulk fuel facility permit to pollute

CLIENTS: SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP) and Esther and Steven Abyeta (San Jose residents)

For years, the Law Center, our clients, and others have fought a prevalent practice by the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Air Quality Board (Board) and the Environmental Health Department (EHD) to permit air polluting facilities in low-income neighborhoods of color. (Clients, Esther and Steven live in the San Jose neighborhood, which is home to 1% of the County’s population but 28% of the County’s air pollution permits. Other neighborhoods affected by this practice include Mountainview in the South Valley of Albuquerque and the Greater Gardner neighborhood of the North Valley.)

In January, Staff Attorneys Eric Jantz and Jon Block represented SWOP and the Abyetas in a hearing on a permit granted to the Honstein Oil Co. for its 6,000 gallon bulk fuel facility in San Jose. (EHD argued strenuously against the granting of the hearing.) Key to our case is this point: under the Air Quality Control Act, EHD is required to take into account “cumulative impacts” from multiple sources of air pollution in a neighborhood when determining if a new facility or expansion would exceed air quality standards. EHD denies that it is required to do so, and even denies that there is poor air quality in these neighborhoods, despite significant anecdotal evidence and data from citizen air sampling. SWOP streamed the hearing on Facebook, and its staff tweeted their impressions of the hearing. We submitted our closing arguments in March, and are awaiting a ruling.

A Win for Water in Central New Mexico

Eight years after it began, the Law Center and our client, the Rio Bonito Preserve, closed a case that will help keep water in Lincoln County’s beautiful Rio Bonito. The Law Center took over the case from private attorney Ed Newville, and assisted our clients in negotiating a settlement that will lead to a regional water solution.

Rio Bonito Preserve’s President Reginald Richey said at the end of this lengthy process, “Our small group is forever grateful to the Law Center for representing us in these important issues and knew that without the legal guidance provided by Ed and Law Center Attorney Bruce Frederick and Jon Block, our advocacy on behalf of the Rio Bonito would likely have gone unheard.” For more information about the nuts and bolts of this case, see nmelc.org.
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Welcome!
Janiece Jonsin Joins the Law Center

We’re thrilled to welcome Janiece Jonsin to the Law Center family. Janiece is our new Administrative Assistant – the first formal office support that the Law Center has had in 8 years! Janiece will be taking a giant load of paperwork off the shoulders of our attorneys; she’ll also be the smiling face at our front desk and the first person you hear when you call our office.

Janiece grew up in Idaho riding horses and backpacking, but she has lived in several states since. Her education began with a business degree, but she soon turned to journalism at the University of Georgia, where she revitalized the campus magazine as an undergrad. Georgia, like Silicon Valley, was an early high-tech center and there Janiece discovered her passion for technology, which led to co-founding a successful software company in 1984. After a stint in California, she moved to Santa Fe, and in 1994, she started the foodie magazine, Local Flavor. She has been an activist for many social causes, but from the first Earth Day, her desire to protect the environment was ignited. She says it is an honor and true calling to be a member of the team at NMELC.

Welcome, Janiece! We’re so glad you’re here.

Thank you, Bonnie

Longtime friend of the Law Center, Frances (aka Bonnie) Jacobs passed away in September of last year. Bonnie was the beloved partner of Dale Pontius (who survives her), who served as a Board member of the Law Center for four years. According to an obituary in the Santa Fe New Mexican, Bonnie was born in Asheboro, NC, and grew up in Southern California; she obtained a BA with honors in Art History at Hollins College in Roanoke, VA, and later in life served as a museum curator and also worked with many nonprofit organizations.

In great generosity of spirit, Bonnie provided for the Law Center with a surprise bequest from her IRA, and we are honored to include her name as a member of the Meiklejohn Legacy Circle. Her significant gift will make a major difference in fighting on behalf of communities throughout the state to safeguard their air, land and water. We are deeply grateful to Bonnie for her friendship and support.

Development & Organizational News

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See you at Sweetwater in March!

Still savoring their Souper Bowl win in late January, Sweetwater Harvest Kitchen is honoring the Law Center with a donation of 2% of all cash proceeds through the month of March! Sweetwater took awards for Best Overall Soup and Best Savory Soup this year with their Thai Cambodian Coconut Chicken Soup crafted by Chef Nath. The menu features “responsibly-produced” seasonal ingredients and regional beer and wine selections.

Sweetwater Harvest Kitchen
will donate 2% of every cash purchase in March to NMELC. Let’s eat!

www.sweetwatersf.com • 505.795.7383
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Environmental Defense in the Trump Era:
and what we’re up against

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