

How to Write a Letter to the Editor (LTE), Sierra Club,

Why LTE's are important

- They are an important way for the public, policymakers, and the press to **get a better informed understanding** of an issue and how the public views it.
- LTEs are especially effective for campaigns related to politics and legislation, because **congressional/legislative staff closely monitor** the opinion pages of newspapers in their districts and/or watch for letters published by constituents.
- LTEs are an excellent media tactic for **“rapid-response”** situations and campaigns where we need to demonstrate public support/opposition/pressure to a decision-maker.
- Because many people read letters-to-the-editor (LTEs), they are a quick, effective and continuing means of **communicating your campaign message** to a wide audience.
- Even in the age of social media, there are **tens of thousands of people reading your letter** both in print and online. And it's free. You're not going to have a viral Facebook post necessarily.
- They can be used to **correct and clarify facts** in a news story, editorial or op-ed piece, oppose or support actions of an official agency, direct attention to a problem, spur news editors to cover an issue that is being overlooked, and urge readers to support your cause.

Experiences from training participants

- Linda - Got [published](#) in the Washington Post because she made a snarky comment about needing Trump to see an issue on TV for him to be willing to act.
- Paula - I have written in the past and haven't followed up to see if it was published. (FYI - It's important to check to see if you got published, if not resubmit, if yes share the letter link with the rio-write list, with your friends and on social media).
- Lynn - Sometimes writing a letter feels like a one off. You send it and then it's onto the next thing. (FYI - Ideally you're writing on an issue that you're involved with in the long term that's part of a comprehensive campaign. But that shouldn't keep you from submitting on issues that come up that are generally important to you.)
- Aku - I've written 3, all published, each of them had an humorous edge that helped get them published. One was about how if as a standard practice the PRC responds to corporate requests for rate increases, why don't we save some money and just replace PRC with software. (FYI - Don't feel bad if your letter isn't published, remember that you are helping bring the issue to the eye of the paper. They may get ten letters about an issue and pick two, and yours helped make that happen.

- Lynn - How should I identify myself? FYI- the strategically. Is the organization you are writing from the right messenger, if not write as a citizen. If you are the right messenger, see if the paper publishes titles, if they don't work it into your letter.

How to write your letter

Just Write — As soon as you feel inspired to write, sit down and do it. Do not wait, do not look up data, do not get distracted. Just write. Get your initial thoughts out. Add data, correct and edit later. Once you are ready for feedback send your letter to rio-writers@lists.sierraclub.org. Or just submit it to the paper asap. If you wait too long it will no longer be timely.

Pick a Timely Topic — Newspapers rarely publish letters about topics that are not being covered in the news. Referring to a previously published article or column will increase your letter's chances of being published. Look at each paper to see how they like to reference the article in LTEs they publish. A specific reference is not always necessary and you shouldn't let not having a reference keep you from submitting.

Research the Guidelines — Most papers' length limit on LTEs is around 250 words. Stick to this so that an editor does not cut out the important points of your letter. Often newspapers want your address and phone number so they can verify that you wrote the letter. You can usually find a paper's guidelines on the letters page in print or online. If not, call the paper directly. Spend some time looking at letters that the paper has already published to get a sense of what opinion editors usually choose to publish.

Assume Nothing — Do not assume that your readers are informed on your topic. Give a concise but informative background before plunging into the main issue. Refer to any newspaper article or editorial by date and title. Also include any relevant credentials that prove you are informed about your topic.

Be Brief — State your position as succinctly as possible without eliminating necessary detail. Keep your paragraphs short. Long rambling sentences and digressions will cause people to lose interest quickly. Stick to one subject.

Maintain Composure — It is okay to express outrage, but it should be kept under control. Avoid personal attacks and focus instead on criticizing specific policies or ideas. Appeal to shared values.

Find a Local Angle — Readers are more interested in an issue when they see how it affects their lives and communities. Find a way to show how budget cuts or environmental policies will affect this particular readership.

Make it personal — Personal stories and anecdotes are particularly compelling to editors and readers. The less impersonal a letter is the better. Tell a story about who you are and where we are from and why we care about the issue.

Adapt Form Letters — If you are working from a form letter or a sample letter that was provided to you take some time to personalize and localize it. If you don't have time, don't let that keep you from sending it in. Something is better than nothing.

Follow Up — If your letter doesn't get published within a week. Resubmit it and call the paper. Ask for the opinion editor and ask the person if (s)he received the letter and if it will be published.

Questions

1. **What is the role of the editor and publisher in selecting letters?** The editor of the editorial page is supposed to represent the view of the publisher. The letters editor selects an array of letters to reflect the view of the readers. The more we submit on our view the more likely the letters are to be published. Follow up also really helps.
2. **What kind of format do the papers look for? Can I use bullets?** Use bullets when it really makes sense for the content of your letter. Take a close look at the letters the paper you are submitting to publishers.
3. **I feel like a broken letter. How many times do I need to say the same thing?** Most members of the public have not heard our message. They also are subject to thousands of messages everyday - information they get by text, email, facebook, billboards, tv, etc. We have to say the same thing over and over again and still we'll have work to do.
4. **Can you submit your letter to more than one paper?** If you are responding specifically to an article in a given paper I wouldn't submit the LTE elsewhere. If you want a more general letter in a given paper because of local relevance, I wouldn't submit it elsewhere. But NM is spread out enough that papers will publish the same letter, especially if it's general enough. You can also do different versions.
5. **I see that some papers title their letters to the editor, should I write my own?** Definitely, they won't always use it but it can't hurt to suggest one.
6. **Sometimes I think I sound too wonky, how can I speak to be heard?** Think about your hook. What's the joke or anecdote you can use to draw people in. Once they're there share one compelling data point (not ten). Send your letter to someone who doesn't pay much attention to your issues and ask them to read it and let you know what they think.

Letter to the Editor Examples

Thank or Scold Elected Officials

Santa Fe New Mexican

Posted: Saturday, July 4, 2015 7:00 pm

By Teresa Seamster

Thanks to Public Regulation Commissioner Valerie Espinoza for representing her constituents and the future of New Mexico this week when she cast the lone vote against once again giving Public Service Company of New Mexico an extension on its disastrous and risky plan for the coal-fired San Juan Generating Station.

It's time to vote PNM's plan down right now. Solidifying coal-mining contracts and PNM's plan to become "owner of last resort" of the San Juan plant, as the PRC's hearing examiner put it, doesn't make these ideas worthwhile.

The two units being retired at San Juan can be replaced far more responsibly — and cheaply — with a much larger share of renewable energy than PNM's current plan of more coal, nuclear and natural gas.

Commissioner Espinoza seems to have listened to the thousands of New Mexicans who have commented on this disastrous plan to shift PNM's money-losing liabilities to ratepayers. The cities of Santa Fe and Albuquerque, Bernalillo and Santa Fe counties, dozens of Native American, faith, community and environmental groups, and now, even New Mexico Attorney General Hector Balderas all agree:

PNM's expensive plan is a disaster.

Thanks, Commissioner Espinoza, for being a strong voice of reason at the PRC.

Teresa Seamster is co-chairwoman of the Northern New Mexico Group of the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club.

Albuquerque Journal

Gov. casts shadow over solar industry

26 May 2015

THE SOLAR INDUSTRY in New Mexico is growing at a fast and furious pace. Between 2012 and 2013, the industry grew 73 percent and now employs over 1,600 New Mexicans. This is happening because we have policies in place to support the solar industry, including a tax credit for residential solar installations. But this tax credit is set to expire at the end of 2016.

Fortunately, our state Legislature had the foresight to pass a bill, SB 391, sponsored by Sen. Mimi Stewart, D-Albuquerque, to extend these tax credits through 2024. This bill passed with solid bipartisan support in both chambers of the Legislature.

But our governor decided not to act on this bill, creating some uncertainty for the solar industry and all those employed by solar in New Mexico. For someone who claims to

support job creation in our state, it is disheartening to see the governor ignore a bill that would have helped maintain an industry with so many jobs. THOMAS SOLOMON Albuquerque
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Help Support Campaign Issues

Albuquerque Journal

PNM's plan is both expensive and risky

2 June 2015

PNM'S PLAN TO spend more customer money and to continue burning more coal at the San Juan Generating Station is unreliable, risky and expensive for customers. The hearing examiner charged with this case recently found that PNM's proposal "is not fair, just and reasonable and in the public interest." The PRC should take his recommendation and reject this risky proposal.

While PNM charges ahead with its plan to commit our state to coal for decades to come, cities and utilities across the region are pushing back. Even in Farmington, home of the San Juan Generating Station, city leaders announced the city would not acquire an increased portion of the plant due to the huge costs that would be passed onto the community.

Rather than lock our state into a future of more dirty, expensive coal, we should seize this opportunity to commit to a future powered by clean, renewable energy like wind and solar. New energy jobs are also growing. From 2012-2014, solar jobs grew by 45 percent, creating 1,600 new jobs to PNM's 1,500 jobs during the same period.

It's time for New Mexico to transition from the fossil fuel economy to sustainable energy production. MELINDA SMITH Albuquerque

Rapid response to urgent issues

Albuquerque Journal

26 May 2015

I HAVE FOLLOWED the saga of the beleaguered Sandia bears for years, and the reckless so called "management" of them. We were told by NM Game and Fish there were 50-73 bears, and then they killed 130-140 bears in three years 2011-2013. NMG&F had assured the public there was plenty of forage, which was not true, and the proof was the number of bears going down into Albuquerque because they were starving. There was also a drought.

Now NMF&G is saying there are 28 bears left. I question the accuracy of those population statistics because of their unscientific counting methods and assumptions. To vastly increase the numbers of bear kills in the next five years will be a devastating blow to their survival.

This is not sustenance hunting. It is trophy hunting or killing for fun. There is no real wildlife management and stewardship in New Mexico.

Gov. Susana Martinez is completely indifferent to wildlife across the board, as her callous track record proves. We may as well call this The Killing Fields of New Mexico, not the Land of Enchantment. KAREN BORCH Albuquerque

Albuquerque Journal

Shame on PNM for misguided priorities

2 June 2015

A DIFFICULT PITCH to make — that CEOs and executives at PNM are worth every dime of their skyrocketing salaries — when our focus should be on the future generations who will live and suffer under the impacts of skyrocketing CO2 levels and a destabilizing planet.

PNM has raised our residential rates more than 50 percent since 2008, but only 7 percent of that increase has gone toward providing customers with renewable energy! That's a travesty in the land of sun and wind. Shame on PNM for its misguided priorities.

As a residential ratepayer, I demand PNM executives take responsibility and present a plan that transitions New Mexico to clean, safe, renewable energy. I'll hold a bake sale for their executive compensation packages. LORA LUCERO Albuquerque

Albuquerque Journal

Copper Rule threatens many

26 August 2015

IT IS IRONIC that Gov. (Susana) Martinez and Environment Department Secretary (Ryan) Flynn are outraged that the EPA accidentally caused the Animas River spill.

The spill is a serious problem, but Gov. Martinez and Sec. Flynn are intentionally responsible for the adoption of the Copper Rule, which allows copper mining companies to pollute vast amounts of ground water beneath their facilities. The Animas River spill may affect the drinking water systems of several communities, but 90 percent of New Mexicans get their drinking water from ground water.

Because of the precedent that the Copper Rule may set for other industries, it has the potential to affect many more communities throughout the state. Governor Martinez and Secretary Flynn should consider the inconsistency between their own conduct and their criticism of the EPA.

DOUGLAS MEIKLEJOHN

Executive director, New Mexico Environmental Law Center
Santa Fe

Building the case in the long term

Albuquerque Journal

Solar is green in more ways than one

12 April 2016

A LITTLE PIECE from the Journal's "Around New Mexico" (April 3) noted that a coalition of environmental groups and community leaders are pushing for more electricity in our state to come from renewable sources, especially in light of the fact that with our abundant solar and wind natural resources, we could be leaders in transitioning to renewable energy. **On the opposite side of that same page was an article giving a compelling reason to make that transition: saving a lot of money! Roadrunner Food Bank will save \$2 million over 25**

years by using solar to generate electricity. Any local business with an eye on the bottom line should be considering the same thing.

Could the same savings accrue to homeowners? Why, absolutely yes! Last year I had solar panels installed on my home. They will pay for themselves within the next 10 years and will provide me free electricity for at least the next 25 years — and likely longer — including powering my driving in an electric vehicle. I've reserved a gorgeous new, made-for-the-masses Tesla 3, which gets 215 miles per charge. I'm not the first in my neighborhood to take this money-saving step — one neighbor has already done this with a Nissan Leaf.

I can't wait to drive powered by the sun — for free! HEIDI TOPP BROOKS
Albuquerque

Making it personal

- I RECENTLY LEARNED that by the end of November, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell has a critical decision on whether or not to sign off on a massive project here in N.M. called the Gila River Diversion Project. Apparently, the price tag will be close to one billion dollars and New Mexicans will be expected to foot most of the bill.

Current Gila River diversion plans include a pipeline over the continental divide to Deming. I recently read that Norman Gaume, the former head of the Interstate Stream Commission under Gov. (Gary) Johnson, testified to the N.M. Legislature last year that if it is built and Deming water users are asked to help pay for it, "the typical monthly Deming water bill would increase from the current \$13.68 per month to over \$158 per month."

I was born and raised in Deming, Luna County, where Deming is located, is one of the poorest counties in the country. Approximately 44 percent of children in Luna County live in poverty, as I did when I was growing up. Are we going to ask these families to help finance the Gila diversion instead of investing that money in their children?

Further, the proponents of the project will most certainly go the state Legislature to pay for the majority of this project. Which priorities, such as education and health care for our children, will take a hit if we earmark a billion dollars for this project? I can think of a lot better uses of a billion dollars for our state than a river diversion scheme

It is time to reject the financially irresponsible Gila Diversion Project and focus on investing in our kids. The children of Luna County deserve better.

LAURA E. SANCHEZ-RIVET Albuquerque

- We must replace fossil fuels
OUR RETIREMENT community discussion group met recently to discuss the issue of climate change and what must be done to save the planet.
Fifteen participants listened to my slide show presenting the issue of carbon emissions contributing to rising global temperature. My basic message was that the planet is in trouble and if we don't limit emissions, we may soon reach a dangerous threshold of 2 degrees Celsius temperature rise.

This 2-degree rise represents a possible tipping point, putting the climate into a new state with sinister and uncontrollable effects on the planet.

Attendees asked many pertinent questions. I'd like to address the final question, "What would you offer as a plan to the December 2015 Climate Change Conference in Paris?" My recommendation is that the president ask for a world moratorium on the use of fossil fuels to include setting ceilings on the further extraction of fossil fuel reserves. Coal is the biggest contributor to emissions and all coal plants should be eliminated by 2035. All natural gas plants should be eliminated by 2045, and no more petroleum extracted by 2050.

To replace fossil fuels, there should be a buildout of renewable energy sources like solar, wind and geothermal, as laid out in the Solutions Project developed by Mark Jacobson at Stanford University.

I base my recommendations on publications by the London School of Economics and Political Science, and the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change. They report that the remaining carbon budget — carbon emissions allowable to remain within a 2 degree Celsius temperature rise — may be as low as 500 billion tons of CO₂, such that 60-80 percent of current reserves would be in excess of the carbon budget. Yet the companies in the oil and gas sector and coal sectors are seeking to develop further resources, which could double the level of potential CO₂ emissions to 1,541 billion tons. This is not compatible with a carbon-constrained economy.

This behavior shows a lack of concern for our descendants and for the planet itself.

BENTON HOWELL

How to submit letter

Albuquerque Journal

Letters - <https://www.abqjournal.com/category/letters>

Submit LTE or OpEd - <http://www.abqjournal.com/letters/new>

Submit a Speak Out - <http://www.abqjournal.com/letters/speakup>

Speak Out - 50 words, Letters - 350 words, Column 650 words

Albuquerque Free Press

<http://www.freeabq.com/category/opinion/guest-op-eds/>

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Santa Fe New Mexican

http://www.santafenewmexican.com/opinion/letters_to_editor/

Send either letters (150 words) or My Views (600 words) to letters@sfnewmexican.com

Santa Fe Report

<https://www.sfreporter.com/news/letterstotheeditor/>

Green Fire Times

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Las Cruces Sun News

Letters - <http://www.lcsun-news.com/story/opinion/letters/2016/12/12/opinions-dec/95345732/>

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Letters - 400 words