



Open Space Alliance Newsletter, December 2025



A Message from Open Space Alliance President Steven Glass

Happy holiday season, OSA members! I hope your holiday plans include spending quality time with family and friends enjoying the many incredible Major Public Open Space properties uniquely available to us as residents of and/or visitors to the greater Albuquerque area. We are indeed fortunate to live in a city that boasts one of the highest ratios of parkland per capita in the entire nation. Of course, experiences in those open spaces are enhanced by special programs, brought to us by a talented, dedicated and well-informed staff within the Albuquerque Open Space Division; and by the work of hundreds of volunteers who help the staff maintain the over 40,000 acres of MPOS owned and operated by the Division. It's the mission of the Open Space Alliance to support these dedicated staff and volunteers by providing funding for tools, gifts, snacks and annual banquet food; staff professional development; special musical and art events; supplies and transportation for educational programs; and much more. We know you're

probably deluged with end-of-year donation requests but we'd like to encourage you to renew your annual membership and possibly make a donation to the Open Space Alliance, because your financial support stays 100% local and 99% of all donations go directly to supporting the Open Space program that makes Albuquerque such a uniquely wonderful place to live

Best regards, Steve

OSA Mission: OSA will enhance the experiences of all users of Albuquerque Open Space lands by providing financial support for Open Space programs; by advocating for sustainability and expansion of Open Space programs; and by encouraging increased public involvement with and use of Open Space lands.

OSA Board members: Steve Glass, president; Bill Pentler, Colleen Shackley, Jeannie Allen, Lance Chilton

From Kudzu to Russian Thistle: Eric Bezner Fights Invasives



Most New Mexicans are aware of the invasive tumbleweed, to the right; most Tennesseans know the similarly troublesome kudzu; Open Space Division parks program Specialist Eric Bezner, knows and has done battle with both.

Coming from eastern Tennessee, where he studied geology and paleontology in college, Eric worked for the Southeast and then the Southwest Conservation Corps before joining OSD about 1 ½ years ago. Other parks program specialists work in the East Mountains, the foothills, or others of our wonderful Open Space properties, but Eric's special area is the Rio Grande Bosque, and fighting invasive species and encouraging the growth of native species like cotton-woods and drought-tolerant shrubs are part of the work that he and the Bosque Stewards Volunteer Program, which he leads to try to maintain our Bosque as itself: a wonderful natural environment running right through Albuquerque.



Eric works with groups of Albuquerque Public School children on many of his Bosque restoration projects – he says he works hard to acquaint children who may know nothing more of the outdoors than their own backyards to realize the beauty and enjoyment a little beyond those back yards. With his leadership, school groups and volunteers eliminate invasives like the Russian thistle (tumbleweed), the bicyclist's prime enemy, the puncture vine (goathead) and kochia (fireweed). The groups instead plant cottonwoods, coyote willow, the willow Baccharis and wood roses, in part to provide habitat for the endangered southwest willow flycatcher.

Eric and a number of others, many of them volunteers, took part in the annual Dia del Rio in October, removing trash from the banks of the wonderful river that has given rise to the Bosque. He also works with the Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program, often known as BEMP, which, among other things, disperses native seeds and checks on the viability of the animals that live in our Bosque – the beavers, raccoons, skunks, porcupines, among others.

Eric expressed concern over the past summer's drying out of the river, wondering whether that was due to climate change, exploitation, lack of winter snowfall... He hopes that that drying out will not occur again, catastrophic as it may be for migratory birds and other animals depending on the river.

Eric and his wife Alexandra, who also works for OSD, often walk the trails in the Sandia foothills near where they live, identifying the plants they see and the birds they hear, using [iNaturalist](#) and [Merlin](#). Like the Bosque, which Eric tends to so well, the Elena Gallegos Grant in the foothills is a treasured part of our open space.



The Albuquerque Volcanoes: “The Three Sisters”

By Richard Shackley

The Three Sisters-National Park Service

Photo by Daniel Leifheit



New Mexico is known as the Land of Enchantment, but to many, New Mexico is called the Volcano State. There are well over one thousand volcanoes of every type known to science that have spewed, spattered, gaped, and erupted with lava, cinders, and ash covering much of the landscape within the boundaries of the state. From the top of the Sandias, scanning 360 degrees, one can see dozens of volcanos and volcanic features. The volcanoes found throughout the state range in age from a mere 2 to 3 thousand years old to over 35 million years old. Humans may have actually witnessed some of these eruptions. The best-known volcanic features within 75 miles of Albuquerque are the massive composite volcano we call Mount Taylor (Tsoodzil to the Navajo) on the western horizon; to the northwest, the volcanic neck known as Cabezon; the 12-mile-wide Valles Caldera within the Jemez Mountains; and just west of the Rio Grande, our own “Three Sisters”, the Albuquerque Volcanos.

Around 20 to 30 million years ago, the earth’s crust began to thin and spread in a line from south central Colorado in the north into Mexico in the south. This scar in the earth’s surface is known as the Rio Grande Rift. Along the boundaries and within the rift, many cracks, fissures, and faults were created and in places, allowed molten rock from below to escape onto the landscape. This is how the Albuquerque Volcanoes were born.

Between about 190,000 and 220,000 years ago, molten basalt began erupting along a fissure line to the west of what is now the city of Albuquerque. After a while, the molten rock solidified in places and the molten mass found its way to the surface through the remaining cracks, creating cinder and spatter cones that are visible today. There are about a dozen of these cones and eruptions. A few have been quarried for their cinders to be used in construction and treating icy roads.

The most prominent volcanoes are the Three Sisters, named for the Native American vegetable staples Corn, Beans, and Squash. The southernmost volcano is named JA Volcano, just to the north of JA is Black Volcano, and further north is Vulcan Volcano. Scattered around these three are other smaller cones and eruptions. There were about six major lava flows, the first being the largest and most widespread. The molten rock spread onto the sandy landscape to an average depth of about 5 to 10 feet, and flowed into arroyos and other depressions to over twenty feet. As the underlying sand eroded from weathering, and erosion occurred from the ancestral Rio Grande river channel, the blocks of basalt began tumbling downslope creating the 17-mile-long basaltic escarpment we see today. The jumble of black rock along the escarpment created a magnificent cultural and spiritual canvas where Native Americans and others, for many generations, have pecked about 20 thousand beautiful petroglyphs onto the blackened surface.

For more detailed information on New Mexico’s volcanos and volcanic history, check out the New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science’s website by Larry S. Crumpler, PH. D. at <https://www.nmnaturalhistory.org/space-science-curators/larry-s-crumpler-ph-d>

West Side Open Space Opens New Trail, Honors Ruth Eisenberg



New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division Program Manager Carl Colonius, Open Space Division Director Colleen Langan-McRoberts, Mayor Tim Keller and Parks Director Dave Simon at opening of Ruth Eisenberg Trailhead. Photo by Lance Chilton

At high noon on Friday, October 24, a surprisingly large group of happy people found themselves under tents overlooking the Sandia Mountains at the far northwest edge of Albuquerque, not far from the Double Eagle Airport. The occasion was the long-awaited opening of the Ruth Eisenberg Trailhead, the completion of the first phase of the Open Space Division's West Mesa Trail Project, eventually to stretch to some 25 miles.

The trailheads for both the newly repaved Paseo de la Mesa Trail and for the new hiking and mountain biking Volcano View Trail are just behind the fence in the background of the photo above, just east of the private-use airport and just off of Atrisco Vista Blvd., and both meander down the slopes to 81st Street, where the two trails have separate parking lots.

Speeches by our mayor, our city parks director, and our open space division director lauded Ruth Eisenberg, known as "The Volcano Lady," for having "made a difference," in the words of Open Space Advisory Board chair Diane Sauder – forestalling the seemingly inevitable climb of housing up the sides of Albuquerque's chain of rift volcanoes on Albuquerque's

west horizon. Ms. Sauder also noted that Pueblo elders consider the volcanoes the most significant part of the Petroglyph [and Volcanoes] National Monument.

Ms. Eisenberg's persistence led to the area around the volcanoes being preserved as city open space and as Petroglyph National Monument; you can read more about

her on the informative signs at the Atrisco Vista Blvd. trailhead. Carl Colonius, program manager for the Outdoor Recreation Division of the state Economic Development Department, noted his division's support for the project. City Parks Director Simon mentioned the contribution of the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps to construction of the new trail.

Before that happy Friday event, the area north of the volcanoes, part of the West Mesa Open Space, had been closed to visitation. And following tribal consultation, virtually all of Petroglyphs National Monument has been closed for mountain biking. The new Volcano Vista Trail, which lies entirely outside of the Monument, is a fine addition to the city's bikeable trails.

Following the congratulatory speeches, the group that gathered, including Open Space Alliance board members Bill Pentler, Colleen Shackley and Lance Chilton, divided up into groups to walk or ride some or all of each of the two trails.

Open Space Division director Colleen Langan-McRoberts and Mr. Colonius led three Open Space law enforcement

New Trailhead Honors Prominent Conservationist, Ruth Eisenberg

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The newly repaved Paseo de la Mesa trail heading east from the Ruth Eisenberg Trailhead. Photo by Bill Pentler

officers and several others on the new packed-earth Volcano View Trail. The trail heads first south toward the volcanoes and then east toward 81st Street. Six- and one-half miles long, the trail winds along the grasslands, up and down arroyo banks and across numerous lava flows. Views of the Sandias, the river valley and the city to the east and the volcanoes to the south, are breathtaking. Colleen led a fast pace down the hill – it was essential to keep an eye on the trail to avoid those deposits of basalt.

Several of us went the whole way and some turned around after enjoying the start of the trail. The hardest among us rode the same trail back up to the trailhead, while others took the wonderfully smooth Paseo de la Mesa Trail back to the upper parking lot. Have a well-serviced mountain bike or good hiking boots, and take your time if you try the Volcano View Trail – you’ll love the scenery.

It’s a great addition to Albuquerque Open Space – many thanks to Ruth Eisenberg and our wonderful Open Space Division staff.

A volcano view from near the Ruth Eisenberg Trailhead. Photo by Bill Pentler



What's Happening in Space (ABQ Open Space) in Dec., Jan. and Feb.?

There are too many wonderful events happening every three months in city and county Open Space to list in each issue of a short newsletter. So here are some highlights of coming attractions, and details are available on the [City's Open Space Division events website](#) and on [Bernalillo County's Open Space](#) webpage. We had a wonderful Festival of the Cranes in November, attended by almost as many cranes as people!

A few extra-special events to highlight these three months (go to those websites for more info and to register):

Dec. 13, 9 to 11 am, Intro to the Outdoors | Learn to Birdwatch, Boca Negra Canyon. A guided introduction to birdwatching for all ages! This session is perfect for beginners and those looking to enhance their bird identification skills. Participants will explore why birding captivates so many enthusiasts, gain helpful tips, and practice using field guides and binoculars to identify local birds.



Dec. 20, 10 am-12 noon, OSVC. Family Nature Club | All About Adaptations. Let your family's imagination soar during a 1-mile hike in the bosque focused on the incredible world of adaptations. From becoming a beaver to flying like a falcon, families will explore how different cottonwood forest creatures survive and thrive. Through hands-on activities and observations, participants will discover the unique physical and behavioral traits that help these species succeed in their environment. The hike will conclude at the Open Space Visitor Center with a brief wrap-up and reflection led by an Open Space Educator.

Jan. 3, 9–11 am, Candelaria Nature Preserve. “Wing in the New Year”: Birding bio blitz co-hosted by the Bird Alliance of Central New Mexico. Perfect for anyone new to birding. Tour includes an introduction to basics including binoculars, field guides, and identification. Please, download the eBird app on your phone and will provide the rest.

Jan. 10, 10 am to 12 noon, Rinconada Canyon, Family Nature Club | Carving Out History: This 2.2-mile roundtrip, family-friendly hike will inform how human societies and cultures have developed in this area with activities suited for all ages.

Feb. 7, 10 am to 12 noon, Volcanoes Day Use Parking Area, Family Nature Club | Geology Rocks: This 1-mile round trip, family-friendly hike will bring us to a scenic overlook of the Middle Rio Grande Valley and will focus on the local geology with hands-on learning activities to engage in together as a family.

Feb. 21, 9 to 11 am, OSVC, Intro to the Outdoors | Learn to Birdwatch: Join the Open Space Division on a birding adventure! Learn how to identify common species and the best locations around the city to spot our feathered friends. You can practice using binoculars of your own or we will loan you a pair, along with a field guide. This guided walk will include experts from the Bird Alliance of Central New Mexico helping participants practice their new skills. The group will leave from the parking area at the designated start time for a roughly one-mile walk around the park or open space. Foothills walks include moderate hiking. Beginning and experienced birders of all ages are welcome! Seated and stationary birding will also be available.

We want you!... to join us and/or to donate toward our work.

Please see how to support our efforts at openspacealliance.org. And you're always welcome at our meetings.