

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

Thursday, July 15, 2021

**Contact:**

Antoinette Reyes, Sierra Club  
Southern NM Organizer, Rio Grande Chapter  
antoinette.reyes@sierraclub.org  
(c) 575 342-1727

Emma Pabst, Campaign Representative  
Sierra Club Beyond Coal Campaign  
emma.pabst@sierraclub.org  
(c) 512 228-9705

**Hundreds Express Opposition  
to El Paso Electric's Proposed Fossil Gas Expansion**

**EL PASO, TX** -- Yesterday, the Lone Star and Rio Grande Chapters of the Sierra Club submitted over 1,000 public comments to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) calling for action to bring El Paso into compliance with federal, health-based standards for ground-level ozone ("smog") pollution. The comments come on the heels of years of community outcry about unacceptable levels of air pollution in the El Paso area, including a 2018 lawsuit filed by the Sierra Club and Familias Unidas del Chamizal. As a result of that lawsuit, the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals **ordered the EPA to address smog pollution** in and around El Paso and southern New Mexico.

The public comments also raise concerns regarding El Paso Electric's proposal to build a new 228-megawatt fracked-gas generator, called Newman Unit 6, outside of Chaparral, NM, in northeast El Paso.

"The fracked-gas power plant in Chaparral has been polluting for years and hits hardest in fence line communities like ours" said **Ida Garcia, a member of the Chaparral Community Coalition for Health and the Environment**. "I have an analogy for El Paso Electric: If I was making drinks full of toxic pollutants, and offered to reduce (but not eliminate!) the amount of toxic material, would you want to drink the brew? Of course not! The solution is no pollution; not for El Paso Electric to say, 'Oh, at least we're polluting less.' Newman 6 must not be built, and El Paso Electric must invest in clean, renewable energy instead."

In its 2020 State of the Air report, the American Lung Association ranked the El Paso-Las Cruces area 13th on a list of the most smog-polluted metropolitan areas in the United States, worse than New York, Chicago, and Dallas-Fort Worth. Researchers at New York University and the American Thoracic Society estimate that elevated smog levels in the greater El Paso area cause about 18 premature deaths per year, 53 emergency room visits, and almost 60,000 missed work or school days. In addition to the Newman fracked-gas power plant, the Marathon Oil Refinery, which is located in the heart of a predominantly Latino and low-income neighborhood in El Paso, emits hundreds of tons of toxic and smog-forming pollution every year.

“The outpouring of support we’ve seen from our community is remarkable. It shows that borderland residents are deeply concerned about the climate crisis and dangerous air pollution, and want to see bold action to reduce emissions and transition away from fossil fuels,” said **David Baake, a native of the borderlands who represented the Sierra Club in the 2018 lawsuit**. “We need a comprehensive plan to reduce pollution, particularly in the communities of color that far too often bear the brunt of smog and other pollution, and we need El Paso Electric to accelerate its transition to 100% clean energy.”

Activists explained that it was especially important for EPA to act quickly, before El Paso Electric completes its plans to expand the Newman Generating Facility, one of the largest sources of ozone-forming pollution in the El Paso - Las Cruces area and the largest nitrous oxide emitter.

In addition to hundreds of public comments, which came from residents across Texas and New Mexico, the Sierra Club also submitted **formal technical comments** to EPA, which underscore the gravity of the regional pollution problem and call on the EPA to act quickly to protect residents of El Paso and southern New Mexico from dangerous air pollution.

### **About the Sierra Club**

The Sierra Club is America’s largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization, with more than 3.5 million members and supporters. In addition to protecting every person's right to get outdoors and access the healing power of nature, the Sierra Club works to promote clean energy, safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and legal action. For more information, visit [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org).

## **About Earthworks**

Earthworks is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting communities and the environment from the adverse impacts of mineral and energy development while promoting sustainable solutions. For more information, visit [www.earthworks.org](http://www.earthworks.org).

## **About Sunrise El Paso**

Sunrise El Paso is building an army of ordinary young people to make the climate crisis an urgent priority across America and in the El Paso area by ending the corrupting influence of fossil fuel executives on our politics and electing leaders who stand up for the health and well-being of all people regardless of class, race or economic status. For more information, visit <http://sunriseelpaso.org>.