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Elk out in the Baca Grande Grants. photo by Lenore Ryan who's photography is on display at the Crestone Artisan's Gallery. Please see feature article on page 28 on how human population and growth impacts the Baca Elk herd. To see this photo in color and more, visit our website at www.crestoneagle.com

300 mile Rio Grande Water Walk starts April 8

Walk for the water, walk for the rivers, walk for our future

Starting on April 8 a diverse group of nonprofits, water protectors and environmentalists will join together in Santa Fe, NM for the Rio Grande Water Walk. They will gather around the Santa Fe Capitol Building and in the Railyard Park three days before they set out on a walk of over 300 miles to the headwaters of the Rio Grande River in Creede, Colorado. They will be cleaning up riversides, planting trees, holding awareness concerts and ceremonies while ad-

vocating for Rights of Nature for the Rio Grande in New Mexico and Colorado. This is also the 28th anniversary of the Global Peace Walk which is in support of this water movement and will be walking in collaboration with it.

The Rio Grande Water Walk will begin in Santa Fe on April 10; the destination is Creede, CO on May 10. The walk will collaborate locally through northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, with a variety of events to educate people about

the Rights of Nature. There will be an educational event in Crestone on May 1 with the Crestone Energy Fair, as well as a final ceremony at the headwaters of the Rio Grande River in Creede on May 10.

Why Rights of Nature for the Rio Grande?

The Rio Grande Water Walk believes that giving legal rights to The Rio Grande River will protect it for future generations to come. Rights of Nature is similar to legal

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Calamity Jane, sharpshooter, star of Wild Bill's Wild West Show. Orphaned early Jane was a self made woman rearing her siblings. See page B- 1 for

Tall Tales of the West

Alamosa City Council votes to expend funds on recall of DA—Victims of violent crime are heard

by Lisa Cyriacks

Crime is on the rise in Colorado, and citizens in the San Luis Valley are dissatisfied with the local District Attorney, Alonso Payne, skirting justice by allegedly granting "sweetheart" deals to perpetrators of serious crimes.

On March 16, the Alamosa City Council voted to fund the recall of DA Payne. The one "no" vote came from Councilman Charlie Griego, who stated his support for

the recall, but not using taxpayers' dollars to fund it. Neither DA Payne nor any 12th Judicial District staff attended the meeting.

The city council's move will allow city staff to now work on the recall election "up to the point of the certification of signatures."

Residents crowded Alamosa City Council chambers during two meetings in March where they watched as council members took an unprecedented step forward

towards recalling Payne. The forum allowed for public comment and members of the public took the opportunity to express their frustrations about the lack of accountability on the part of Payne and his office. Several of the comments were from victims who felt that Payne failed to be accountable to them, leaving them feeling re-victimized by the judicial system that is meant to protect them.

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River Walk

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human rights or even corporate rights in the way they are recognized in the courts of law. Rights of Nature often include the right to legal personhood, independent right to flourish, right to exist, regenerate its vital cycles, and naturally evolve without human-caused disruption. Rights of Nature also provide for various subsidiary rights, such as the right to restoration, the

right to its natural processes, and the right to ecosystem functioning without interference.

The Rio Grande Water Walk has created a website, logo, and an assortment of promotional materials that are available to the public via our website, so anyone can spread the message. Visit www.water-walk.com for more information and to contact us with questions, and to learn more about the Rights of Nature movement, please visit www.celdf.org.

Recall of DA

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Payne is currently under investigation by the State Attorney General's office for violation of the Victims' Rights Act in multiple instances.**

District Court Judge Amanda Hopkins, on March 7, 2022 issued a Citation for Contempt to Payne for his conduct in her court. In her statement alleging Payne's malfeasance, she outlines escalating concerns about Payne's failure to comply with several trial management orders. Referencing a recent case from March 2022, Hopkins, in her Factual Allegations in the citation, asserts, "I believed Mr. Payne was dishonest about his reasons for dismissing this case."

Further on in the citation, Hopkins continues, "Mr. Payne was included on all of this correspondence and did not respond in any way to the conversation."

Law enforcement officers across the valley are also concerned about the lack of action on warrants that include domestic violence, assault, forgery, theft, burglary and felony menacing.

Payne, who ran on a platform of advocating for criminal justice reform and keeping low-level offenders out of the judicial system; now that seems to apply to all levels of crimes, and that jail is not productive.

The city council's actions come after Payne appears not to take the City's employees' concerns seriously.

City Administrator Heather Brooks, Police Chief Ken Anderson, and City Attorney Erich Schwiesow presented concerns about the lack of professionalism in the DA office, potential violations of the Victims Rights Act, the unprecedented use of sweetheart plea deals for serious crimes, the lack of response in carrying out regular duties, risks to law enforcement officers due to emboldened criminals, concerns about animal cruelty, and, most recently,

abuse of power with the embezzlement charges filed against former DA Robert Willett, Payne's former opponent in the 2020 Democratic Primary.

Saguache County Sheriff Dan Warwick was in attendance at the March 16 meeting.

In a phone interview, Warwick shared his grave concerns about the number of cases that have been pled out, dismissed, with too many receiving reduced sentences.

Warwick referenced two cases. The latest is a major case he requested charges of First-Degree Murder on that was reduced to charges of Second-Degree Murder. The difference in jail time is significant. First-Degree Murder comes with a life sentence or death penalty, while Second-Degree Murder is an 8- to 24-year sentence. DA Payne made this judgment call after judicial review of the charges and without any discussion with the investigators of the crime.

Another, more well-known case, involved the mummified corpse of Amy Carlson, and the Love Has Won cult. Warwick found the decision to dismiss all charges to be unexplainable. "Our office doesn't know how to give answers why something did not happen. The family is re-victimized by the failure to pursue charges."

Warwick also referenced the tremendous waste of resources when his offices expend hours in evidence collection and investigation and the DA decides not to prosecute. This echoes the concerns in the contempt citation of the significant resources being wasted in this judicial district due to prosecutorial unpreparedness.

The recall campaign needs a minimum of 5,000 signatures of registered voters from the six counties that make up the 12th Judicial District.

**The Victims Right Act violation investigation was prompted by a complaint from the Rocky Mountain Victims' Law Center, a nonprofit law firm providing free legal services to victims of crimes throughout Colorado.

Is economic growth the best factor for deciding Saguache County's future?

by *Maureen Eich VanWallegan*

HEAR Series Part 4

The HEAR (Healing through Evidence-Based Actionable Reporting) series aims to focus on Solutions-based reporting.

The Crestone Eagle in its May issue will expand its coverage to include why the Land Use Commission is recommending code changes to address problems that Saguache County is facing. Continuing to consider how governance works—evolving to find solutions to pressing issues that impact the County—is the focus of this article specifically and the HEAR series in general.

Moving away from using fear as a driver for decision-making is a step towards a more sustainable model of managing places and people living on the planet. To contextualize this moment of watching a major war happening where the use of nuclear weapons is a possibility brings into focus how much humanity as a species is truly connected and linked no matter how great our geographic distances are. While wars and humanitarian crises are ongoing in many places in the world at any given moment, the complexity of the issues propelling the war in the Ukraine are particularly poignant because of the nuclear threat that can devastate the planet and humans in a single reactionary decision.

Reactionary decision-making often leads to unintended outcomes with possibly detrimental impact. In small governmental issues that constituents don't like, responding with a large outcry which rescinds a decision may be effective, but not really sustainable. Rather the goal needs to be creating more opportunities for citizen engagement to find solutions where invisible populations are actually accounted for in the decision-making process. Since COVID, utilizing Zoom has seen an uptick in participation for county government meetings, as it gives populations that might otherwise not be able to participate in governance the opportunity to listen and comment on proceedings that directly affect them.

For Saguache County, the continued label of being one of the poorest counties in Colorado has meant that governmental decision-making is often driven by a desire to move up from the bottom of the economic ladder which measures a county's growth as the only indicator of community vitality. This kind of worry about a lack of abundance often looks to immediate outcomes for fixing problems, without considering the ripple effect of how deci-

sions impact an entire community as a whole. Indicators like median income of the area, property values, housing prices, and new housing starts are based on economic drivers that are not a great measure of all that is happening in this region.

The question that is not being asked, but should be considered is: what decides what's best for the future—money, education, house size, traditionally defined notions of success, equity, water practices/uses, building models, and extracting the earth's resources. All these factors have directly informed generations of people in profoundly different ways as the US economy has ebbed and flowed since WWII. As many different generations are living in this area under very different circumstances, the most important question to be answered might be: who is Saguache County wanting to attract to live here? Depending on one's personal values, education, and age this question has very different answers. And by extension: is economic impact the only measure for saying yes to development and growth no matter the possible negative outcomes for the region?

It seems important to remember that Saguache County is not homogenous—Moffat, Area 420, Villa Grove, K-V Estates, Saguache, Bonanza, Crestone, The Baca, Center, Sargents, and La Garita—all have very different needs and populations. It seems flawed to think that the economic outcomes in Saguache County will match what has happened in Chaffee County. The permitting of this event has started a ripple effect in ways that are not yet imagined.

What needs to be asked of the County government is that there be more space for true debate in considering the longterm effects of all decisions that impact the future of Saguache County.



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