The Climate Change Leadership Institute

A Year of Pain, Protest & Profound Possibility

As the current Administration and fossil fuel industry are busy pillaging and destroying the prospect for a livable climate on earth. As the Land of Enchantment hangs in the balance from: greedy attempts to rollback successful methane rules; onslaughts to bust open the sacred buffer around Chaco Canyon; desperate ideas to use fracking water for agriculture; and the colonization of data center Project Jupiter planning to use over 100 million gallons of fresh water we don't have and emit over 8 million tons of GHGs we can't afford.



Security guard asks Robb Hirsch with the Climate Change Leadership Institute & NM Healthy Soil Working Group to leave the Capitol during a protest of a Produced Water related Water Quality Control Commission mtg. Jim Weber/The New Mexican

As these and so many other transgressions are happening left and right, a powerful counterforce is building at the grassroots level. The public, not cowering in the darkness, is rising up and pushing back against the craziness. We the people are standing up for common sense, defending cherished life forces (like our precious water & the return of the bison - per below) and planting seeds for soil health, human health and democracy health—seeds that are now sprouting!

As more people witness the gross corruption, preventable pain and unnecessary suffering, the more we are not tolerating it any longer. Instead we are protesting, we are voting for change, we are growing a sustainable long term movement (including by investing in promising students & honoring daring climate leaders - as shown below). Promise is unfolding before our eyes. Hope is prevailing (even in the face of extreme campaign financing abuses and imbalances) and a politically viable pathway to responsible climate action is developing in the form of affordability!

Let's keep the pressure on by putting ourselves out there - **RACE for the Climate** - encouraging brave climate leadership through our own bold actions.

Let's collaborate for public and soil health: learn about & **join NM's regenerative agriculture campaign in progress** at @ nmsoil.com.

Let's invest in youth like CCLI does in teamwork w/ LANL Foundation by **providing annual Climate Change Leadership Scholarships. Honor the 2026 recipients:**

Marissa Cosio is a first-generation Native American student at NMSU, pursuing an Environmental Science Degree. She embodies extraordinary resilience as a single mother, overcoming adversity and dedicating herself to community by helping the homeless. Her goal is to synthesize environmental science & social service.

Penelope Barry-Hoffman is at Los Alamos High School planning a dual major in Ecology & English. During summers she is a camp counselor at the Pajarito Environmental Education Center mentoring elementary students in stewardship and a love for the outdoors including wilderness back packing trips. Penelope is a member and soloist of the Santa Fe Youth Symphony as well as the marching band manager. Penelope aims to be an environmental lawyer or professor educating and using literature to advocate for the environment.

Ada Armstrong is a senior at Mandela International Magnet School, planning to concentrate in Earth Science and Hydrology. She is a scholar athlete leading her Cross Country team to the state championship all 4 years of high school. In her free time Ada helps repair and build bike trails with Santa Fe Fat Tire Society as well as works to protect wildlife migration. In conjunction with her passion for nature, she loves writing and has published her own poetry book.

Let's celebrate 2026 Climate Leadership Award Winners:

Climate Courage Award to Rithika Ramamurthy, with the Climate & Community Institute, for being one of the premier writers, researchers and activists formidably focused on the intersection of climate leadership and affordability. In other words, Rithika argues persuasively that bold climate action meaningfully lowers the cost of living for working people and all communities. We can bring down prices to manageable levels if we get a handle on and rapidly phase out our GHG pollution. On the flip side: reckless neglect of the problem and "entrenching fossil fuel dependency" are causing crippling harms including widespread inflation. The extreme weather of climate change along with fossil fuel dependency and price volatility (including the unstable cost of imported toxic fertilizers) are together jacking up the cost of insurance premiums, housing, transportation, food, health care and much more. Rithika—for sounding the alarm and wisely centering her work on the connection of climate and cost of living—is creating a politically viable pathway to solving the climate crisis.

Justice Award to Pueblo Action Alliance for vigorously defending the 10 mile conservation buffer around Chaco Canyon which is at risk by the current administration's colonization.

Innovation Award to Mary & David Lucero of JAL Farms in Fort Sumner, NM, for their innovative approach to agricultural stewardship and their efforts to raise awareness of the importance of soil health. The Luceros have applied their backgrounds in agriscience and agribusiness to the development of management practices that emphasize soil biological activity, nutrient cycling, production of nutrient dense crops, and the ecological and economic sustainability of their operation. Their approach has substantially reduced their reliance on costly synthetic nitrogen fertilizers and pesticides. JAL Farms also serves as a setting for educational workshops and the exchange of practical knowledge. Through these activities and presentations at agricultural events, the Luceros encourage others to explore soil health principles that can reduce input costs and environmental impacts while contributing to economically viable farming operations.

Conservation Award to the Western Watersheds Project which challenged BLM's move to revoke American Prairie's authority to graze bison on public land—which conflicts with plain statutory language, defies decades of settled law, and contradicts BLM's own prior decisions. We should honor Western Watersheds Project's work to protect the Bison and advance their territory. Bison are native to North America, national treasures and keystone species—making the environment around them better by the way they interact with and graze on the land. Considering their heritage value, human health attributes (visa-vi nutrient density and bison meet being low in fat and calories), stewardship capability as water and prairie protectors and climate resiliency, they have common good cause and inherent right to graze on public lands.

Education Award to Taos High School Eco Club, for their ecological projects & sustainable classroom initiatives. This resourceful group is learning academic fundamentals while helping solve societal challenges like pollution and wastefulness. They researched that their school throws out as much as 100 pounds of food per day, and they have worked to rescue food, diverting it from the landfills (reducing methane emissions) and utilizing it to address food insecurity as well as supporting composting beneficial to healthy soil, water infiltration and climate resilience. The Eco Club does bokashi composting, researches how to legally repurpose food, and develops healthy school lunch offerings, among other initiatives including recycling.

Direct Action Award to Fight Chihuahuas Desert Extraction which is a local group protesting the Project Jupiter development in Doña Ana County. FCDX are grassroots organizers standing up to the projects' long-term water usage, energy demands, and economic consequences in our desert ecosystem. The project is backed by multi-billion dollar AI companies, Open AI, Oracle, and their "local" partner, Borderplex Digital Assets. They object to the bogus approval process, county and state government loopholes, ease of financing and permitting moving this forward—all without sufficient public input, transparency or accountability.