

[Environmental advocacy groups see several wins this legislative session \(daily-times.com\)](https://www.daily-times.com/story/news/2021/03/18/environmental-advocacy-groups-see-several-wins-this-legislative-session/7044440002/)

## **Air quality, environmental database and trapping ban among the environment wins this session**

**Hannah Grover**

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AZTEC — As the legislative session winds to its end, several bills related to energy and the environment are headed to the governor's desk.

One of those bills would allow the state to enact air quality standards that are more stringent than the federal standards. Proponents say that will protect the health of New Mexicans while opponents say it targets the oil and gas industry, which is a key economic driver in the state.

Local Government Air Quality Regulations, or Senate Bill 8, passed the House of Representatives on a 39-29 vote on March 18. The bill itself does not adopt more stringent standards. Instead it gives New Mexico the authority to look at its air quality rules as well as its hazardous waste rules to determine if there is an area where there can be improvement to the health and safety of New Mexico residents, Rep. Christine Chandler, D-Los Alamos, explained during the House debate. Chandler is among the bill sponsors. She said it creates the tool for a thorough inspection in the future.

“Communities of color are disproportionately impacted by pollution and the effects of climate change,” said James Povijua, the policy director for Center for Civic Policy, in a press release following the passage. “SB8 will further the environmental and health protections that our communities deserve. Passage of this legislation ensures that the state of New Mexico fulfills its duty to set strong standards to protect all New Mexicans.”

Opponents of the bill, such as Rep. James Townsend, R-Artesia, argued that the industries that form the backbone of the state's economy will be hurt if the state enacts more stringent air quality standards. He highlighted that some parts of southern New Mexico have their air quality impaired by pollution from outside the state, such as Mexico or Texas.

"I represent San Juan County, and we have a lot of oil and gas and coal mines and power plants," said Rep. James Strickler, R-Farmington, as he began his remarks on March 18.

He said the air quality in San Juan County is some of the cleanest in the nation, citing an American Lung Association report from 2017.

The Farmington Metropolitan Statistical Area ranked as some of the cleanest air in the country in terms of particle pollution for the time period between 2013 and 2015. However, the same report stated that ozone levels in San Juan County were a concern. The ozone levels have worsened since then, according to American Lung Association reports.

Strickler argued that the bill would put New Mexico at a disadvantage for attracting businesses to the state because its air quality standards could be more stringent than neighboring states.

"I think the existing regime is quite adequate for our small state, rural state," he said.

Another bill, the Environmental Database Act, or House Bill 51, creates an environmental database that is easy to search and includes information on various emissions sources. House Bill 51 passed the Senate on March 14 on a 29-12 vote and is now headed to the governor's desk.

On the energy side, the Community Solar Act is also waiting for the governor's signature. This bill would authorize small, local solar facilities shared by multiple subscribers. These subscribers have a share of the power produced by the facilities and can receive credit on their bills for that electricity.

But not all of the environment bills that were passed focused solely on emissions and clean energy. One of the controversial measures that is now headed to the governor's desk would prohibit trapping on public lands. The Senate bill narrowly passed the House of Representatives on a 35-34 vote late at night on March 18.

The bill is named Roxy's Law after a dog that was killed in a snare set on public lands in 2018 in New Mexico.

Proponents of the bill say that trapping on public lands clashes with the increased outdoor recreation, puts pets at risk and leads to a torturous death for animals caught in the traps and snares. Meanwhile, opponents say trapping for fur provides money for people in rural areas while also controlling populations of species like coyotes and bobcats.

"Tonight's final vote to ban leg-hold traps, snares, and poisons on New Mexico public lands is historic. Starting April 1, 2022, we will know there will be fewer wolves, dogs, coyotes, cats, elk, fox, birds, beavers, and other animals that will experience terror, pain, permanent injury, and even death," said Senator Brenda McKenna, D-Corrales, in a press release. McKenna is among the bill sponsors. "We will not read about people retelling their excruciating experiences of trying to free their four-legged family members from the devices that are designed to incapacitate while they are on a hike at any of our public federal, state, or municipal lands. I thank the bill co-sponsors, wildlife scientists, and dedicated advocates who helped carry the baton to the finish line."

Some of the bill proponents disagreed with opponents' assertion that trapping controls population of small predators.

"The Legislature's thoughtful and humane vote will spare so many vulnerable animals," said Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity in Silver City. "Bobcats, foxes, badgers and ringtails play vital ecological roles and don't deserve horrific deaths just so their pelts can be sold internationally. And I'm

particularly grateful that banning these traps means we won't see any new three-legged Mexican wolves limping through the Gila National Forest.”

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