

## About High Country News

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*High Country News*, a multimedia news outlet based in Paonia, Colo., is *the* leading chronicler of the West's unique cultural, environmental and natural resource issues. It has sustained itself as a nonprofit journalism outlet that has consistently produced unique, in-depth coverage of the West for almost 40 years — longer than either *Mother Jones* or *Orion Nature Quarterly*.

*High Country News*' loyal readers include leading national reporters looking for breaking news, Beltway powerbrokers trying to stay in touch with their roots, and thousands of Westerners hungry for strong journalism and spicy opinion. The paper continues to flourish with its robust Web site and its Writers on the Range service, which began in 1997 and has given voice to more than 1,000 citizen writers over the past decade.

The magazine will only continue to grow in importance as more and more journalism outlets look to the nonprofit model, and as regional newspapers and magazines slash environmental and natural resource coverage, or fold altogether.

### **What is *High Country News*' reach?**

The publication's coverage area spans 11 Western states, from the northern tip of Montana to the Texas-Mexico border and from the Great Plains to the West Coast. It reaches about 1.2 million people each year through its print publication, Web site and syndication service.

### **How is *High Country News* thriving in today's media market, even as other media outlets fold?**

Today, *High Country News*' 23,000 print subscribers and its additional 35,000 pass-along readers (58,000 total audience) directly fund about 60 percent of its operation through subscriptions and donations, with an additional 28 percent of the publication's funding coming from foundation and major donor support. Modest revenues from advertising and the Writers on the Range op-ed and news syndication service make up nearly the rest of the publication's annual income.

This mix of funding makes *High Country News* less susceptible to the influence of a poor economy on advertisers' and key donors' finances.

The publication is also expanding its digital reach with a vibrant online presence ([www.hcn.org](http://www.hcn.org)), which hosts some of the West's leading bloggers and draws about 70,000 visitors each month.

### **What does *High Country News*' future look like?**

Like many other publications, *High Country News* has not been immune to the recent economic downturn. Paid circulation dipped 6 percent in its 2008-2009 fiscal year, and advertising revenue declined. However, *High Country News*' staff remains bullish on the product. Through greater reader contributions and a slight uptick in subscriptions, the magazine has held on to its entire staff and maintains a healthy financial reserve.

### **What are some of *High Country News*' journalistic accomplishments?**

In the last two years alone, *High Country News* and its reporters have received a number of prestigious journalism awards, including:

- The 2008 Sidney Hillman Foundation Journalism Award for "[Death in the Energy Fields](#)."
- The 2006 George Polk Award for Political Reporting for Ray Ring's "[Taking Liberties](#)," which also won an American Planning Association Award (2007).
- The 2006 James V. Risser Prize for Western Environmental Journalism for Matt Jenkins' "[Squeezing Water from a Stone](#)."
- The 2006 Science Journalism Award from the American Association for Advancement of Science for Michelle Nijhuis' "[The Ghosts of Yosemite](#)," "[Save Our Snow](#)," and "[Dust and Snow](#)."
- The 2006 Utne Independent Press Award for Best Local/Regional Coverage.
- The 2006 Nancy Dickerson Whitehead Award for Excellence in Reporting on Drug and Alcohol Problems for Angela Garcia's "[Land of Disenchantment](#)."

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### When did High Country News start, and how has it survived as a nonprofit for almost 40 years?

*High Country News* traces its roots back to August 1969, when Tom Bell, a native of Lander, Wyo., bought *Camping News Weekly*, a small outdoor recreation publication geared toward anglers and hunters. Bell, a World War II veteran, wildlife biologist and high school teacher, wanted to do more than just provide fishing tips and camping hotspots. He wanted to write in-depth stories on the important environmental issues of the time — a focus that Bell knew local advertising wouldn't support. So he decided to make his fledgling publication a nonprofit. He knew it was the only way to support his unique vision of environmental reporting in the West. In 1970, he rechristened his publication *High Country News*.

By early 1973, *High Country News* faced mounting financial difficulties. Bell announced to readers that it would cease publication by the end of the month. He wrote: "We have done our best. It was not good enough." In response to Bell's editorial, "his fiercely loyal readership responded with \$7,500 in actual contributions and pledges of another \$8,000," according to a *Los Angeles Times* article published a month after his editorial. In the article, the *Times* said *High Country News*' influence, even then, spread "well beyond" its former base in Lander, Wyo.

At the time, Bell's readers probably didn't know of his sacrifices to keep the paper alive. He sold his ranch and he spent all of his savings. He was working for almost nothing, surviving on money from uranium stock he acquired when he was a teacher. "He even hopes that one day, the paper will earn enough so that he can collect an annual salary of around \$6,000 and can take an occasional vacation," the 1973 *Los Angeles Times* piece reported.

Once *High Country News* regained its financial footing, the stress of putting out the paper became too much for Bell and his family. In 1974, he turned it over to Bruce Hamilton and Joan Nice Hamilton, the paper's full-time staff writers. *High Country News* faced another emergency in the late 1970s, but again, devoted readers donated \$32,000 to keep it going, according to a March 6, 1988, article in the *Rocky Mountain News*.

In 1983, the publication's board of directors voted 5-to-4 to hand over control of *High Country News* to Ed and Betsy Marston, who moved it to Paonia, Colo. Under their leadership, the paper grew into the West's leading independent publication. It became essential reading for Westerners and lawmakers concerned with the region's cultural, economic and political landscapes. The 1988 *Rocky Mountain News* article reported that former Colorado Sen. Tim Wirth read it cover to cover. Aides to then-Sen. Alan Simpson, a conservative from Wyoming, clipped stories from the magazine.

Almost two years later, *Rolling Stone* magazine, in a long profile, reported that the paper was read by reporters who regularly appropriated stories for urban dailies. "(Its) clear, balanced writing, a nuts-and-bolts understanding of the issues, and a freedom from the reprove of advertisers" helped the paper to become "a center for provocative thought on ecological issues," the magazine said almost 20 years ago.

Now approaching its 40th anniversary, *High Country News* remains true to its mission – to produce compelling and groundbreaking reporting. And it's touching more lives than ever. Its robust journalism has provided unique glimpses of the West, from African workers serving the rich in Vail, Colo., to the threat of urban sprawl and the internal conflicts within the environmental community. Amid the current economic downturn, *High Country News* is more valuable than ever, as regional newspapers and magazines slash environmental and natural resource coverage, or fold up shop altogether. It also is an example of how nonprofit journalism can flourish, especially as more nonprofits news organizations form and other news outlets consider going in that direction.