

2015 annual report



High Country News



Photo: Patty Whitley



Dear Readers:

It's hard to believe that High Country News has been in business for 45 years, reporting on issues and ideas from our nation's most spectacular region – the West. But we like to think that we're not just getting older, we're getting better: This year brought an abundance of great stories documenting the challenges facing the region, the country and indeed the entire world.



With your generous financial support, our writers, editors and production team published 22 issues of the print magazine, with major features on topics including imperiled wildlife like the greater sage grouse, climate change, energy booms and busts, and the growing impact of recreation on our public lands. These were supplemented by more than 100 shorter news stories spanning our 11-state, 1-million-square-mile beat, and by a steady flow of essays, op-eds and book reviews exploring issues from more personal perspectives

Some of the topics we covered were timeless and would have been recognizable to any time-traveling reader from the 1970s. In *This Land is Their Land*, for example, we took a new look at the old conflict between hunters and other recreationists and the wealthy private landowners who sometimes cut off the public's access

to the West's public lands. Others, such as senior editor Jonathan Thompson's essay about how cellphones and mobile apps are transforming our experience of the wild, were entirely of the current digital age.

Rapidly evolving technology has changed how *HCN* does its work; to satisfy a savvy readership that now gets much of its news through digital channels, we have increased the quality and pace of our reporting for our website, hcn.org, often responding in a day to breaking regional news. Some of these stories, with the aid of our vibrant Facebook and Twitter networks, went viral. In August, Thompson took some of the first pictures of the Day-Glo-orange Animas River flowing toward Durango, Colorado, following a mine-waste blowout in the San Juan Mountains. The photos, together with an in-depth, contextual analysis of the spill, were devoured by hundreds of thousands of readers, and landed Thompson on eight radio shows, including NPR's Science Friday.

To meet the challenges of producing timely journalism for print and digital audiences, *HCN* expanded its editorial staff. Early in the year, we hired three part-time field correspondents – Josh Zaffos in Fort Collins, Colorado, Krista Langlois in Durango, Colorado, and Ben Goldfarb in Seattle, Washington, – and in March, they were joined by Elizabeth Shogren, *HCN*'s very first full-time Washington, D.C., correspondent. Shogren's weekly D.C. dispatches, as well as her periodic

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THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT'S BIGGEST EXPERIMENT:

In August, senior editor Jodi Peterson examined the serious conservation efforts ranchers, public-lands agencies and energy companies have undertaken to protect the greater sage grouse and keep it off the endangered species list. In September, Interior Secretary Sally Jewell announced that the flamboyantly strutting bird does not warrant federal protection at this time.



Photo: Jolyn Ortega

magazine stories and features, deliver up-to-date reporting on critical national policy issues affecting the West, complementing the boots-on-the-ground work of our correspondents and contributing editors.

We also made forays into multimedia journalism, working with videographer Dakin Henderson on *Wild Science*, a six-part video series profiling the work of field scientists studying everything from mule deer in western Colorado to phalaropes on the Great Salt Lake.

HCN's commitment to journalistic excellence did not go unnoticed. The American Geophysical Union named Douglas Fox its 2015 Walter Sullivan Award Winner for his story "Dust Detectives," which appeared on the cover of our Dec. 22, 2014 issue. And contributing editor Cally Carswell's "The Tree Coroners" (Dec. 15, 2014) received the National Association of Science Writers prestigious 2014 Science in Society award.

Reaching New Audiences

For the second year in a row, we offered free semester-long subscriptions to the students of professors or teachers who wanted to use *HCN* in the classroom. Nearly 200 instructors from 100 institutions around the country responded — enabling us to reach 4,700 students! To provide an additional interactive venue for participants in the *HCNU* Classroom Program, managing editor Brian Calvert conducted a live "Soundtable" event in April that explored the prospects for prolonged drought in the West. The hour-long program, streamed on *HCN's* website, brought together policymakers, climatologists and economists for a conversation with students, who participated



“With our average print reader in his or her 50s and our average online reader only slightly younger, the HCNU Classroom Program has become a critical way to achieve HCN’s mission, as well as to secure our long-term economic viability.”

by tweeting in their questions. With our average print reader in his or her 50s and our average online reader only slightly younger, the HCNU Classroom Program has become a critical way to achieve *HCN’s* mission, as well as to secure our long-term economic viability.

For years, readers have urged us to send subscriptions to policymakers in Washington, D.C. This summer, you helped us raise \$10,000 through an online fundraising campaign to provide yearlong subscriptions to all 535 members of Congress. We can’t wait to hear what they think!

Planning for the Future

This summer also found the staff and board thinking critically about the future of *HCN*, a process that culminated in the adoption of a new strategic plan in September. It calls for new investments in staffing, technology and marketing to increase *HCN’s* ability to produce high-quality journalism and deliver it seamlessly across multiple platforms. It also calls for significant growth in readership, building on this year’s success: In

August, *HCN* topped 30,000 in total paid circulation for the first time in history, and our website saw more than 250,000 unique visits. In five years, when *HCN* turns a ripe 50 years old, we are shooting for a circulation of 50,000 and 400,000 unique website visits a month.

None of this year’s work would have been possible without our loyal readers, more than 5,000 of whom made financial contributions beyond their subscription fees. *High Country News* remains a reader-fueled enterprise, just as it was in the early days, and for that we are very grateful.

For the staff and board,

Paul Larmer,
Executive Director



A BIGGER BURN:

Award-winning science writer and *HCN* contributing editor Michelle Nijhuis revisited the scene of Washington’s massive 2014 Carlton Complex wildfire, the biggest in the state’s history. She provided an intimate look at the lives of those who survived and stayed, even as climate change makes the Pacific Northwest increasingly vulnerable to drought and fire. Much of the same area in Okanogan County burned again this summer.

2015 Financial Statement

High Country News' financial statements for the fiscal year of October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015 are audited by John Cutler CPA. Note that during 2015, we collected \$100,000 in grant funds that were recorded as income in prior years, per GAAP rules for nonprofit organizations.

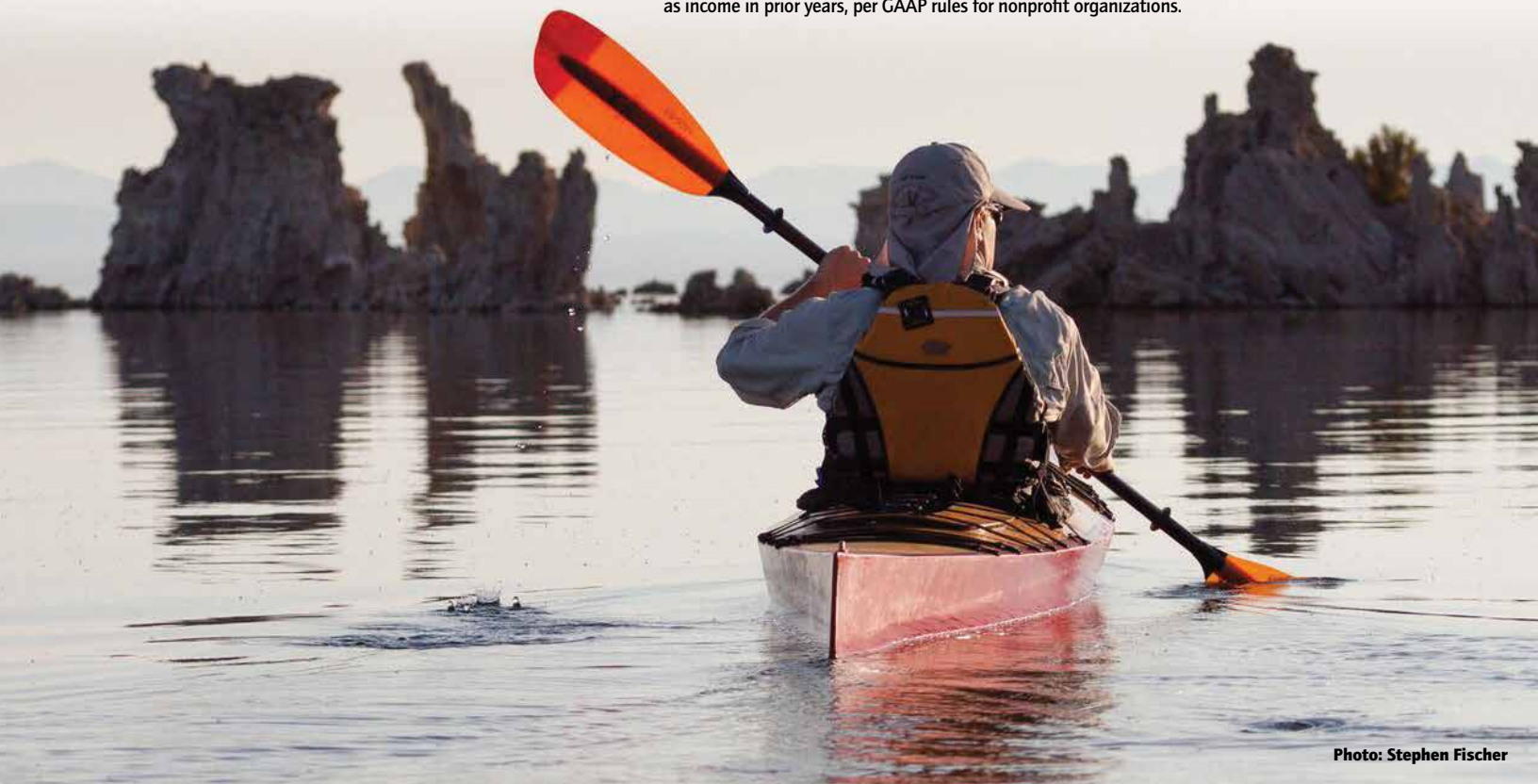
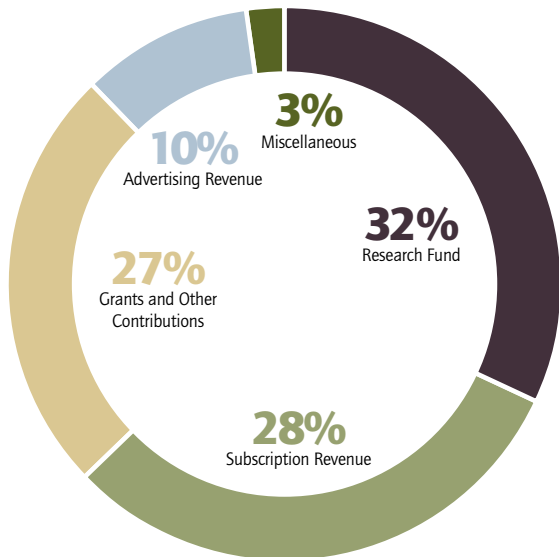


Photo: Stephen Fischer

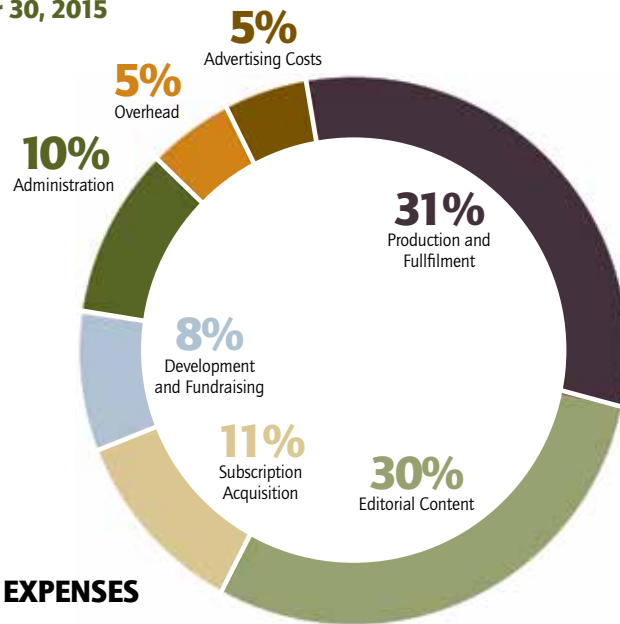


High Country News Profit and Loss October 1, 2014 - September 30, 2015



ANNUAL SUPPORT AND REVENUE

Research Fund	\$ 873,921
Subscription Revenue	\$ 782,571
Grants and Other Contributions	\$ 758,500
Advertising Revenue	\$ 276,638
Miscellaneous (single issue sales, syndication sales, royalties, investment income, etc)	\$ 69,351
TOTAL	\$ 2,760,981



EXPENSES

Production and Fulfillment	\$ 825,793
Editorial Content	\$ 801,761
Subscription Acquisition	\$ 302,265
Development and Fundraising	\$ 226,510
Administration	\$ 264,644
Overhead	\$ 123,593
Advertising Costs	\$ 123,710
TOTAL	\$ 2,668,277
NET INCOME	\$ 92,704



Florence Williams – Washington, D.C.

Florence Williams' unique relationship with *High Country News* dates back to the 1980s, when she first stepped into our then-tiny and cramped Paonia office as an intern. She had received a college grant for nonprofit work because, as she notes, back in those days, interns received no stipend or housing like they do now. Since then, she has worked as an *HCN* staff writer, served for 10 years as a board member and faithfully made financial contributions to support the organization.

A Yale graduate, Florence also interned with *Time magazine* in San Francisco before launching a career as a journalist. She is currently a contributing editor at *Outside Magazine* and a freelance writer for *The New York Times*, *The New York Review of Books*, *Slate*, *Mother Jones*, *O-Oprah*, and *Bicycling* – and, occasionally, even *High Country News*. Her first book, “Breasts: A Natural and Unnatural History,” was named a notable book of 2012 by *The New York Times* and received the 2013 LA Times book prize for science and technology.

One might think a gal from New York City would have trouble adapting to the rugged West, but Florence fell in love with the region at an early age. Every summer, her father loaded the family into the van and drove across the West to camp and canoe. Though she currently lives on the East Coast, Florence has spent

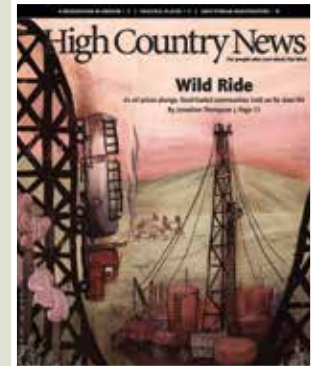


two decades in the West and tries to “get back” every chance she gets. “The landscapes and people of the West get into your bones,” she says. “I will always have a deep affinity for the West, especially the public lands.”

“The landscapes and people of the West get into your bones... I will always have a deep affinity for the West.”

She's delighted that *HCN* has begun covering political issues more thoroughly, with the help of our new D.C. correspondent, Elizabeth Shogren. Like it or not, as she points out, Washington, D.C., “controls some of the levers that move the West, and *HCN* needs to be present to examine those levers.” And the relationship goes both ways: Many D.C. residents (like her) care deeply about the West and are working hard to protect it. That's why *High Country News* is sending free subscriptions to each of the 535 U.S. senators and representatives.

Florence believes deeply in *High Country News's* longstanding mission to “inform and inspire” its readers. She's seen the organization develop into a successful model of sustainable independent journalism and looks forward to helping us continue beyond the next 45 years. “I just love the magazine,” she says. “I love the unique voice that is smart and analytical but also real.”



THE OIL AND GAS EXPRESS:

When oil and gas prices began plummeting a couple of years ago, communities like Farmington, New Mexico, knew the drill: Hunker down and wait for the next boom. Senior editor Jonathan Thompson's in-depth exploration of the San Juan Basin revealed the perils of over-reliance on a single industry and looked at how some local leaders are seeking a more economically diverse future.

Tom Bell's Legacy Circle

“I have named High Country News in my will because it continues my work and my vision of providing the best information possible about this place we all care so much about. I would like to see it carry on that vision long after I am gone. Please join me. Together, we can make sure High Country News serves the West with independent journalism for generations to come.”

– Tom Bell, founder of High Country News

Thank you donors, for committing to this legacy.



Bradly J. Boner



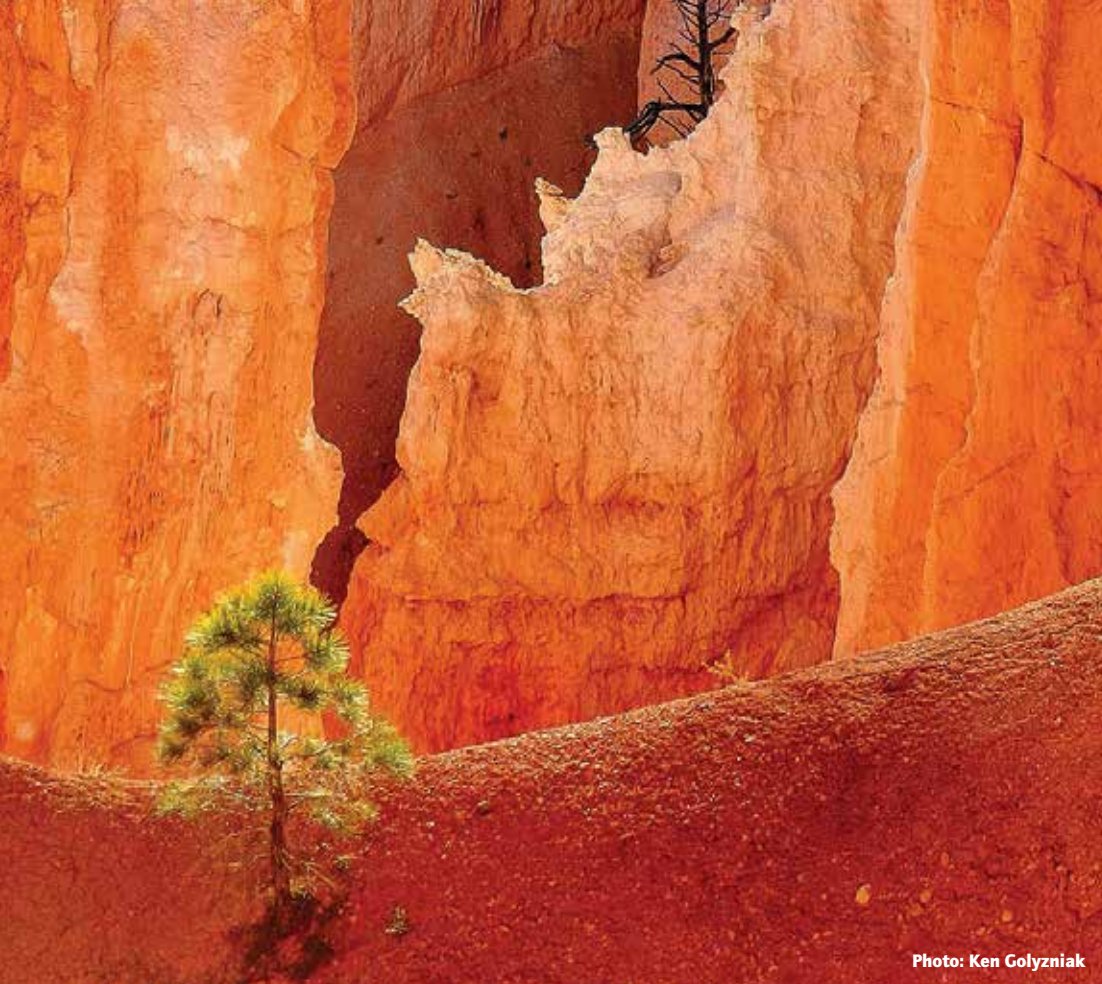


Photo: Ken Golyzniak



THE TECH-MINING HYPE:

Amid warnings that China and other global powers would control access to rare minerals needed for everything from cellphones to lasers, mining companies announced plans to open new mines around the West. The problem, as Tim Heffernan detailed in his June cover story, was that the market didn't agree. A week after the story went to press, Molycorp, owner of the only rare-earth mine in the U.S., filed bankruptcy then closed the Mountain Pass Mine.



HCNU Classroom Program

Many longtime subscribers first read High Country News in a college classroom and were inspired to learn more about the West by enthusiastic professors.

The HCNU Classroom Program is supported by readers like you and offers free semester-long subscriptions to higher-ed classrooms. Participants also have full online access to our rich 45-year archive, lists of curated stories to complement particular courses of study, as well as our interactive Soundtable radio event, in which students tweet in questions to a panel of experts on a variety of topics.

Classroom subscriptions are an important part of our outreach to the young people who will lead the West in the future and sustain HCN's work for decades to come.





Photo: Rico Del Sesto



A HIDDEN HAND IN D.C.:

Conservationists who want to protect public lands and encourage progressive climate policies in the face of an often-hostile Congress have a man on the inside they can turn to: John Podesta. Podesta, who was profiled by Washington, D.C., correspondent Elizabeth Shogren, has served two Democratic administrations and is behind several of the biggest green initiatives in U.S. history. Could he do more of the same for a future Hillary Clinton administration?



Intern & Fellowship Program

HCN interns affectionately call our internship “journalism bootcamp,” but despite its rigor and challenge (or maybe because of it), the program’s alumni leave Paonia deeper thinkers and stronger writers, after working closely for months with some of the region’s finest editors and journalists. As former editor-in-chief and intern manager Betsy Marston likes to say: “HCN’s interns literally seed the West” with vitality and a keen eye – enriching newsrooms, nonprofits, governments and industries, and becoming leaders in their fields.

Our intern and fellowship program is 100 percent reader-funded; we provide interns with housing, training, a modest stipend and paid reporting trips. This program is essential not just to our news operation, but to our mission of informing and inspiring people to create a better future for the West.

Board of Directors

45 years is no small achievement for this feisty publication and I’m proud to have been a part of its evolution over the last decade. I have always valued the timely stories and unique perspectives of *HCN* writers.

And I am eager to see this work continue even as it reaches a larger audience in the years ahead. I speak for the entire *HCN* board in extending my gratitude to you for joining us in support of this remarkable organization.

For you – the community of readers and donors - are the reason *High Country News* thrives today.

– Dan Stonington, *HCN* Board President



Dan Stonington, President
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Andy Wiessner
Snowmass, Colorado

Florence Williams
Washington, D.C.

Thank you for
helping us fulfill
OUR MISSION:

to inform and inspire people –
through in-depth journalism – to act
on behalf of the West’s diverse natural
and human communities.

High Country News is a 501(c)3 non-
profit media organization that covers
the important issues and stories that
define the American West.



High
Country
News

For people who care about the West

Cover photo: Michael Remke

HCN.ORG | 970-527-4898
P.O. BOX 1090, PAONIA, CO 81428

