

holiday gift guide

High Country News

For people who care about the West

Profit and Politics

How public lands fare in state hands

A Special Report

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The not-so-grand entrance to Little Missouri State Park in North Dakota, where a saltwater disposal facility is a sign of the oil wells that can be seen within the park. ANDREW CULLEN

SPECIAL REPORT: Profit and Politics

On the cover
A well pad complex is constructed just outside Little Missouri State Park, its lights flooding the park campground.
ANDREW CULLEN

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Editor's note

Land's true worth

One of the planks in the Republican platform calls for the transfer of an undisclosed number of acres of federal public lands to Western states. This land transfer, the party argues, would benefit states "and the nation as a whole," because "residents of state and local communities know best how to protect the land where they work and live." It is unclear how the transfer of public lands would benefit the entire country, but it seems to me that such a transfer on any scale would change the character of the American West.



Given that, and given that the GOP holds the Oval Office and both chambers of Congress, the so-called "land-transfer movement" is worthy of a hard look. Over the last nine months, this magazine set out to learn what it could about how states treat the lands they already have, in order to see whether the public would benefit from a transfer. Writer and former *HCN* intern Emily Guerin went to North Dakota to see what happens to state and federal parks under an oil boom, while Contributing Editor Cally Carswell investigated how rare plants are treated on different lands in New Mexico. And we spent many long hours analyzing the policies of Western states when it comes to land use.

The bottom line is that land generally fares worse under state management. And even if local constituencies do know best how to protect the land, they ultimately have less say in how state land is used. I come from two families of High Plains homesteaders, and I understand the value of public lands, where we hunted, fished, gathered wood and camped. I'd hate to see them leased, sold or otherwise lost to the highest bidder.

Federal lands belong to all of us, but they came at a high price. They were the product of the expansion of the United States, much to the disadvantage of Indigenous populations who had no say in how the lands were disposed. The West was seized through war, treachery and a doctrine of greed, and then divvied out to a mostly white population, who gained tremendous capital from its resources. That's why any decision we make about the public lands now should be made with the greatest good in mind, not the continued financial benefit of a single class of people.

The West's vast landscapes are more than just a source of wealth. They are a place for contemplation and beauty, of restoration and bounty. They are the last vestige of the American frontier, a reminder of our brutal, bloody past as well as a sign of our hope for a healthy future. And they are not to be taken — or given away — lightly.

—Brian Calvert, editor-in-chief



Buttons with images of Cliven Bundy's son Ammon Bundy and Arizona rancher LaVoy Finicum, who was killed during the Malheur Wildlife Refuge standoff in Oregon in 2016, are shown outside the federal courthouse in Las Vegas in November. REUTERS/LAS VEGAS SUN/STEVE MARCUS

The big Bundy trial gets underway

In mid-November, the federal trial of Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy, his sons Ammon and Ryan, and Ryan Payne of Montana got off to a tumultuous start. The men face decades in prison for charges including threats against federal officers and obstructing justice for their parts in the 2014 armed standoff with federal land managers over Bundy's illegally grazing cattle. The trial was delayed twice — first in response to the Oct. 1 mass shooting in Las Vegas that left 58 people dead and could have prejudiced jurors against Second Amendment court arguments. The judge delayed trial again when information surfaced that the government had used camera surveillance of the Bundy property, days before the standoff. In opening statements, defense attorneys portrayed the events as a peaceful protest. "The escalation has always been by the government," said Cliven Bundy's lawyer, Bret Whipple. Prosecutors depicted a starkly different scenario, in which the Bundys forced federal officers to leave under threat of violence. TAY WILES MORE: hcne.ws/bundy-delayed

Trending

The Park Service needs to connect

August Franzen, an intern at Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Park in Seattle, Washington, reflects on the National Park Service he knows and loves. After growing up camping and hiking in places like Yosemite and Yellowstone, Franzen finds it hard to explain why parks matter when talking with people who haven't experienced them. His own difficulty in effective outreach, Franzen says, is pervasive in an agency that has gotten complacent. "The parks have worked so hard to appeal to people who look like me — white, male and comfortable in hiking boots — that they have trouble going any further," Franzen writes. His internship is meant to address that gap in outreach, and help spark a wider interest in national parks.

You say

KATHY DIMONT: "In my personal experience, the NPS has been attempting various ways to reach wider audiences since 1970."

ROBERT STEWART: "No, the Park Service should focus on preserving the quality of the parks. Marketing and 'connecting' are not valid functions of the Park Service."

BROOKE MCDONALD: "I think a class lens explains the lack of diversity better than a race lens. ... I'd like to see the parks rent out tents, sleeping bags, and so forth so that working-class people don't feel like they have to shell out hundreds of dollars for an activity they may not enjoy."

MORE: hcne.ws/broader-connection and [Facebook.com/highcountrynews](https://www.facebook.com/highcountrynews)

\$375 million

Amount of Westlands Water District debt that would have been forgiven, had a rider to a defense bill succeeded.

25

Percent by which Westlands' water contract deliveries from the Central Valley Project would be reduced under that agreement, which requires congressional approval.

Lawmakers finalized an annual, must-pass military policy bill in early November. They considered — but ultimately dropped — a rider, the San Luis Unit Drainage Resolution Act, that would have confirmed a 2015 settlement transferring federal responsibility for dealing with contaminated water in Southern California's Westlands Water District to the district.

In exchange, the government agreed to forgive millions in debt. The settlement, which critics see as a bid for control by Westlands, would make the district's federal water supply contract permanent in addition to cutting it. But the future of the agreement is now in limbo — another example of the often-convoluted nature of Western water policy. EMILY BENSON MORE: hcne.ws/water-deferred

A 'war on the Republican establishment'

President Donald Trump promised to drain the swamp, but to one of his most controversial political allies, that morass has only deepened — to now encompass the Republican Party. Appearing on Fox News' *Hannity* show in October, former White House strategist Steve Bannon called the GOP a "globalist clique." Bannon, who is executive chair of the far-right Breitbart News Network, promised to use his media platform and funding connections to challenge Republican incumbents with his own "coalition" of candidates for the 2018 midterm elections.

"We are declaring war on the Republican establishment that does not back the agenda that Donald Trump ran on," Bannon said, adding that it would be a long-term effort to first replace Republican incumbents, and then Democrats. That has put some Western Republicans who have been either tepid in their support, or outright critical of Trump, in Bannon's crosshairs. Here's a list of potential targets.



ARIZONA SEN. JEFF FLAKE, who has clashed with Trump since his campaign, is not seeking re-election. "Mr. President, I will not be complicit or silent," Flake said in a Senate speech. "We were not made great as a country by indulging in or even exalting our worst impulses."

NEVADA SEN. DEAN HELLER is one of the most vulnerable Republican senators up for election, and is behind in the polls against his primary challenger, Danny Tarkanian, whom Bannon supports.

WYOMING SEN. JOHN BARRASSO is considered a safe incumbent, though Bannon has reportedly encouraged Erik Prince, founder of the controversial security contractor Blackwater and the brother of Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, to run against Barrasso.

UTAH SEN. ORRIN HATCH is also on Bannon's list, though he has been an ally of Trump, supporting his Supreme Court pick and his administration's review of Utah's national monuments. Hatch has also been critical at times and has not announced whether he's running for re-election. ANNA V. SMITH

MORE: hcne.ws/republican-infighting

What a new climate report portends

In November, the government released the *Climate Science Special Report*, the first part of the 2018 National Climate Assessment. Here are some highlights from the report, released every four years, which looked at current and future climate change impacts of our current trajectory: **The West has warmed** by 1.5 degrees and lost two weeks of cool

nights in the past century. **The Northwest's warmest day** of the year will be 6 degrees warmer by midcentury than it was a decade ago. **Alaska will be 12 degrees warmer** by the end of the century. **By 2100, snowpack in the West's** southernmost mountains will have virtually **disappeared**. The report also shows the lessened effects of climate change if we reduce our emissions to meet the standards set by the 2015 U.N. Paris Climate Agreement, something that West Coast states are eager to support. MAYA L. KAPOOR MORE: hcne.ws/west-warming

Projected changes in how much water winter snow will hold

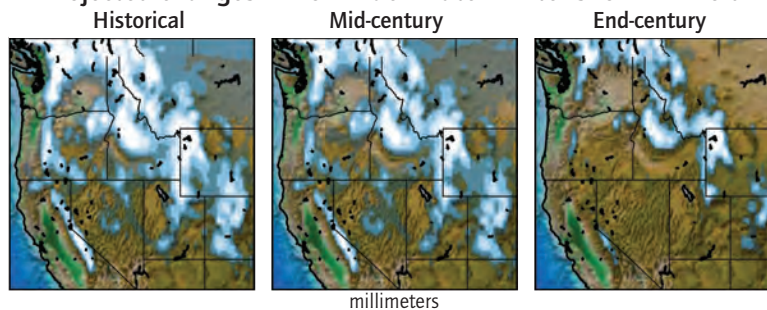


FIGURE SOURCE: H. KRISHNAN, LBNL, ADAPTED FROM THE CLIMATE SCIENCE SPECIAL REPORT, FOURTH NATIONAL CLIMATE ASSESSMENT (NCA4), VOLUME I

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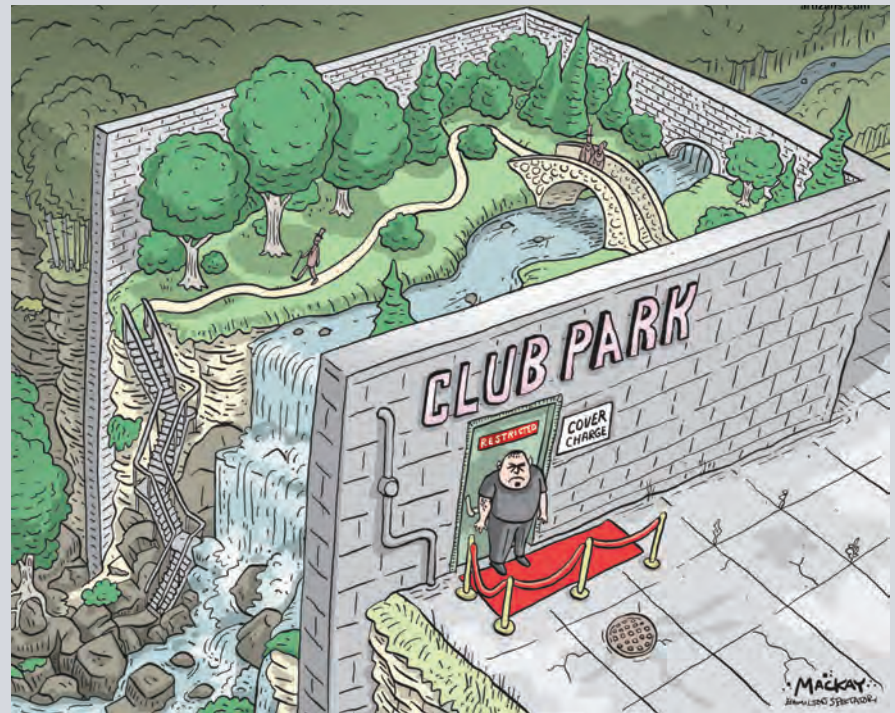
THE BEST JOB IN THE WEST

Thank you, Hal Herring, from the bottom of my tree-planting heart. You presented the situation for forest workers that many of us have been trying to address for the last 20 years (“The Changing Face of Woods Work,” *HCN*, 10/30/17). You connected the dots in just the right way. You didn’t blame the victims (guest and local forest workers) for the greed and worker abuse of unscrupulous contractors and the complicity of the Forest Service in awarding below-cost bids and refusing to enforce labor laws or its own contract specifications. Like you and others in the story, I had the good fortune of being a forest worker. For all of my 35-plus years in the woods, I always thought of it as the best job in the West!

*Cece Headley
Eugene, Oregon*

TURNING AMERICANS AWAY
FROM PUBLIC LANDS

Toward the end of his excellent essay “The Changing Face of Woods Work,” Hal Herring gets to the core issues of what is — yes, Hal — a “vast right-wing conspiracy” (*HCN*, 10/30/17). The goal is to create, in the minds of as many people as possible, a distaste for anything associated with the federal government, while impoverishing them and forcing them into helplessness. It’s an incredibly simple principle at its core: Steal, or buy at fire-sale prices, the vast natural and human resources of the United States for use by corporations, so that a few people can become almost infinitely wealthy and powerful. Placate the masses at the same time you slowly erode all their safety nets, take away their rights via the judiciary, and make education and health care too expensive to afford, until the masses become beaten-down and compliant. This conspiracy was hatched decades ago by folks like the Koch brothers, Dick Cheney, etc. Right-wing talk radio hosts like Rush Limbaugh were paid to essentially brainwash, slowly through the years, millions of Americans, so they would vote for politicians who would carry out the marching orders of the bigwigs who bribe those officials with campaign contributions. Think tanks like the American Legislative Exchange Council literally write the legislation for the politicians. It’s pretty blatant now with Donald Trump. In past decades, we could have fought against him, but a large enough chunk of the population



GRAEME MACKAY/ARTIZANS.COM

has now been brainwashed by right-wing radio, books, and TV “news.”

The latest salvo is to raise the admission prices to our national parks so high that Americans become disgusted and stop visiting them. When they no longer visit the parks, they will stop caring about them and won’t fight when they are taken away. Many folks who live around Olympic National Park would love to get their chainsaws into those thousand-year-old trees. I know this; I just visited the area and spoke to people about that. There are so many things for me to be sad about, but watching as Americans turn against the idea of federal public lands and allow them to be sold off, clear-cut, fall into disrepair, or be fouled by mining, drilling, etc., breaks my heart as nothing else. Americans, especially Westerners, have been given so much in terms of this beautiful and rich land and its wildlife, and now we are just giving it away.

*Crista V. Worthy
Hidden Springs, Idaho*

SOULLESS CHOICES

I was appalled by Linda Hasselstrom’s poem “Spring” and your newspaper’s commentary on it (“Heard Around the West,” *HCN*, 10/30/17). Hasselstrom categorizes drowning kittens and bashing them with a wrench as “taking responsibility.” What she calls “taking responsibility” is really a grotesque and wholly unjustifiable lack of responsibility. Her “stark choices” are no more than false

choices because she presents the only choices as killing them or letting them freeze to death during the winter. Has this Neanderthal never heard of spaying and neutering? That is the third and only moral choice. Ms. Hasselstrom has no soul, conscience or moral compass. Some people are just like that, but it’s both galling and insulting that she and you attempt to glorify it and pretend that amorality and the lack of common human decency are integral parts of Westerners’ lives.

*Claire Vinet
Santa Fe, New Mexico*

Heard Around the West
Editor Betsy Marston replies:

Yes, killing the kittens was cold-blooded, but it is something that Linda Hasselstrom learned from her rancher father decades ago, as horrifying as it sounds. Hasselstrom’s point in the poem was that as she was growing up on the ranch, finding the animals frozen in the dead of winter was worse — and ultimately more cruel — than ending their lives quickly, by killing them herself and thereby taking responsibility for the act. What she wrote was shocking, perhaps, but it’s the way she saw her life on the land in South Dakota, a place of tough choices every day. I admire Hasselstrom for her honesty, and I wanted to reveal just how tough she is, even though some might find her choices offensive. There are certainly much better methods of controlling feral cat populations today.

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The Navajos' wild horse problem

The tribe doesn't have funding to manage exploding population

BY KIM BACA

Up to 40,000 wild horses wander the Navajo Nation, according to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the population is expected to double in five years. Already, feral horses compete with domestic animals and wildlife for water and sparse vegetation. Yet a tribal oversight committee recently denied a \$800,000 funding request from the Navajo Fish and Wildlife Department to help reduce the population. Those dollars were needed, warned Leo Watchman, Navajo Nation Agriculture Department director, adding, "The issue will come up again."

Out-of-control horses present a unique quandary for tribes: What do you do about a creature that is an integral part of your culture but that wreaks havoc on land, water, traditional foods and wildlife?

The Navajo Nation has long grappled with the problem. Tribal officials say the population burgeoned when the last U.S. horse slaughterhouses closed and Congress pulled funding for meat processing and banned new plants. In 2007, the U.S.

Kim Baca is a freelance journalist based in Albuquerque, New Mexico. [@kjbcaca](#)

Court of Appeals upheld Texas and Illinois laws that prohibited horse slaughter and the sale or possession of horsemeat. Meanwhile, the economic downturn caused hay prices to soar. Many people, unable to care for their horses, let them go.

In 2013, then-Navajo President Ben Shelly publicly supported a slaughter operation in Roswell, New Mexico, and approved \$1.4 million to allow Chapter Houses, a form of local government on the reservation, to inspect and process horses for selling. The 1971 Wild Free-Roaming and Burros Act prohibits sending feral horses to slaughter, but tribes are sovereign nations.

In March, Gloria Tom, Navajo Fish and Wildlife Department director, broached the idea of a hunt, telling *The Navajo Times* that "previous attempts to trap, round up, or allow horses to be adopted had not made a large enough impact." But that proposal was derailed by critics. In May, horse enthusiasts and advocacy organizations met with the tribal Wildlife Department to promote a more humane way of managing herds, such as the use of the contraceptive PZP (porcine zona pellucida). Accord-



ing to studies of urban deer populations, feral horses could become infertile after five years of annual PZP injections. Some Chapter Houses have held roundups, borrowing temporary pens and other equipment from the Navajo Agriculture Department to trap horses or unclaimed livestock.

Any solution — roundup, birth control, horse hunt or adoption — will cost money, however. Tribal officials planned to address the problem again at the Navajo Nation's annual Natural Resource Summit, which was underway at press time. □

Navajo horse breakers tame a mustang at La Tinaja in Ramah, New Mexico.
AARON MILLAR

Lessons from the Holocene

An ancient potato survived climate shifts, and could again

BY MAYA L. KAPOOR

Between 7,000 and 9,000 years ago — during the Middle Holocene — the Four Corners area endured a slow but dramatic climatic shift. As the region became hotter and drier, game animals grew scarce, and Indigenous communities turned to less nutritious foods like grass seeds and quinoa-like chenopodium seeds. Recently, however, archaeologists working with local tribes discovered an unexpected addition to the menu: a unique species of potato, harvested by people at the North Creek Shelter, a rock overhang in southern Utah's Escalante Valley. The nutritious tuber apparently helped communities survive when other food sources disappeared. It's the earliest known use of potatoes in North America.

By analyzing residues on grinding

Associate Editor Maya L. Kapoor writes from Tucson, Arizona. [@Kapoor_ML](#)



stones, archaeologist Lisbeth Louderback made a surprising discovery: Almost 11,000 years ago, people ate *Solanum jamesii*, a variety of potato different from *Solanum tuberosum*, the kind found in grocery stores today. *Solanum jamesii* grows in the piñon-juniper and oak forests of the Mogollon Plateau in central Arizona and New Mexico, though it's not common in Utah.

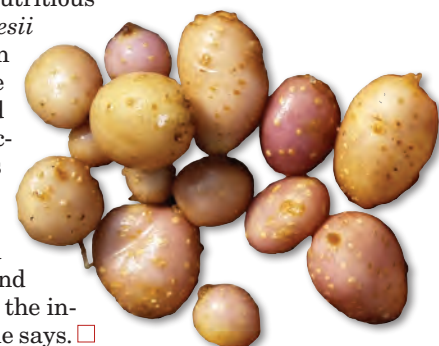
Louderback teamed up with Bruce Pavlik, conservation director at the University of Utah's Red Butte Garden, and Cynthia Wilson, traditional foods program director at Utah Diné Bikéyah, a nonprofit organization that supports the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition, to learn more. The evidence suggests that ancient peoples introduced potatoes to the region,

likely more than once. "Native Americans have managed the potato for thousands of years," Louderback says. "It still exists because of them. This is their resource." Connecting its current distribution to ancestral history has profound meaning for contemporary Navajo, Hopi and Zuni, some of whom still grow *Solanum jamesii*, though others lost traditional food practices during forced relocations.

For Wilson, the potato is yet another example of the traditional knowledge preserved at Bears Ears National Monument, along with petroglyphs, potsherds and ancestral structures. Wilson's grandfather taught her about the tuber — called "leeyi' naa' mááz," or "rolling around under the soil," in the Diné language. Today, the monument may help local tribes to once again access traditional — and nutritious — food sources. *Solanum jamesii* has twice the amount of protein and calcium and three times the zinc, iron and manganese found in most potatoes today. And, according to Louderback's own less scientific experiments, the hardy spud is delicious roasted in butter and served with salt and pepper. "It was kind of nutty and earthy, and it was really fluffy on the inside and crispy on the outside," she says. □

◀ Lisbeth Louderback holds *Solanum jamesii* with tuber attached to the plant.
▼ Multihued *Solanum jamesii* tubers, known in the Navajo language as "rolling around under the soil."

PHOTOS BY LISBETH LOUDERBACK AND BRUCE PAVLIK, NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF UTAH



Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke enters a celebration for the 100th anniversary of U.S. control of the Virgin Islands. He visited the islands in March on a taxpayer-funded trip related to the Interior Department's role overseeing the U.S. territory. On the same trip, he attended a Republican Party fundraiser.

DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR



Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke faces investigations

Legal and ethical questions have triggered scrutiny

BY LYNDSEY GILPIN

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has brushed off criticism over his expensive use of private and military planes for travel, telling conservative supporters that the whole issue is just “a little B.S.”

But several watchdog agencies, congressional Democrats and legal experts believe it's more than that. After only eight months in office, Zinke's taxpayer-funded travel, meetings with political donors and other actions have led to several official probes. “We've been tracking Zinke and what he's been doing at the Department of Interior,” says Daniel Stevens, executive director of the nonprofit, nonpartisan Campaign for Accountability. “It led us to look into whether he's violated any rules or laws.”

In August, Interior's Office of Inspector General — which investigates reports of government corruption — opened a preliminary investigation into phone calls Zinke made to Alaskan Republican Sens. Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan, in which he allegedly threatened to block energy projects in their state after Murkowski voted against the GOP health-care bill.

The OIG is also investigating Zinke's decision to move 50 senior federal

employees to new positions within the Interior Department, after a whistleblower said he was transferred because of his work on climate change. (*See story page 7.*) In October, the Campaign for Accountability asked the Office of Government Ethics to look into the millions of dollars Zinke has funneled into conservative “scam PACs” accused of misleading donors. Additionally, the Office of Special Counsel is examining Zinke's appearances at political fundraisers during government trips, and the Interior OIG and Government Accountability Office are scrutinizing his \$12,000 flight from Las Vegas to Montana in a plane owned by oil and gas executives, following an event with political donors.

Though the investigations are serious, watchdog agencies and legal experts say they're unlikely to result in criminal charges or impede Zinke's plans to remake Interior. “This situation with the Interior secretary is abnormal,” says Kathleen Clark, law professor at Washington University in St. Louis. “But it could be likely he will have more of a political price rather than any specific legal price to pay.” Meanwhile, the barrage of charges and countercharges further erodes trust in the federal government.

Congress has established OIG offices in most government agencies to investigate potential abuses of power,

misuse of funds and other ethical violations. After investigations — which can take weeks, months or even years — the Inspector General is required to issue public reports. Historically, though, Interior's OIG has published only a “small fraction” of these, says Jeff Ruch, executive director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility. In 2014, for instance, the department released reports on just three out of 40 cases.

In light of this, some watchdog groups worry that any findings about Zinke's conduct will simply pass unnoticed without outside pressure. Investigations are only effective “because of people's reaction,” Ruch says.

The Interior Department has faced scandals before. In 2008, the OIG found that Interior was riddled with them under the George W. Bush administration, including substance abuse, sexual misconduct and conflicts of interest with oil and gas companies. In 2012, an investigation found an Interior report was edited to suggest that the Obama administration's proposed drilling moratorium after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill was peer-reviewed by scientific experts.

But the Trump administration is “unusual” because of the number of complaints, says Stevens. The OIG and other agency watchdogs have yet to respond to some of the allegations, including whether David Bernhardt, deputy secretary of Interior, violated lobbying laws.

A month after it launched the investigation into Zinke's call to the Alaska senators, the Interior OIG dropped it. The senators declined to be interviewed, according to Deputy Inspector General Mary Kendall, acting head of the agency since 2009, so “the OIG does not believe that it could meaningfully investigate.” Interior OIG spokeswoman Nancy DiPaolo declined to comment on the other, ongoing investigations, and Interior did not respond to requests for comment.

Other federal agencies may later weigh in. The independent Office of Special Counsel, for instance, is determining whether Zinke violated the Hatch Act, which prevents employees from engaging in political activity, by allegedly attending political fundraisers while on duty. The Government Accountability Office is also expected to release a legal opinion on Zinke's call to the Alaskan senators.

It could be months before the investigations yield results, but congressional Democrats vow to prioritize the issue. “Secretary Zinke deserves a chance to explain himself, so we'll be patient and let the investigations take place,” says Congressman Raúl Grijalva, D-Ariz. “But if the investigation finds violations of the law or waste, fraud or abuse, then I can promise you that we'll raise hell until everyone involved is held accountable.” □

Lyndsey Gilpin is a former HCN fellow and the editor of *Southerly*, a newsletter for the American South. [@lyndseygilpin](#)

Interior's lonely whistleblower

Before he quit, climate change official Joel Clement was one of the few staffers to openly resist Zinke's priorities

BY ELIZABETH SHOGREN

Many of the Interior Department's 70,000 employees were outraged when Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke — speaking to the National Petroleum Council, an Energy Department advisory group composed largely of industry representatives — complained in September that 30 percent of his staffers were “not loyal to the flag.” But while the vast majority suffered in silence, Joel Clement, then the department's top climate change official, took to Twitter. “Civil servants are loyal to the flag and also know a demagogue when they see one,” he tweeted. Clement also retweeted negative comments from others about Zinke's speech.

Current and former federal employees and others interpreted Zinke's comment in two ways: Some thought he meant the U.S. flag, while others believed the “flag” represented Zinke himself and his leadership

Correspondent Elizabeth Shogren writes *HCN's* DC Dispatches from Washington. [@shogrene](#)

of the department. Clement said that, as a longtime Navy Seal, Zinke should understand the serious connotation of his words. “I think he is so arrogant that he thinks his special interest agenda is the same as what's best for America. He is bought and paid for by oil and gas and political ambition.”

Clement, who resigned in early October, was, at least for a few months, one of a rare breed: A vocal dissident inside a Cabinet agency in the Trump administration. He was among the dozens of senior executives at the Interior Department that Zinke reassigned this summer in an unprecedented shakeup of top career staff. In July, Clement started publicly criticizing the new administration and filed a whistleblower complaint. Before he left, he urged other civil servants to join him in exposing the ways the administration is betraying the core missions of federal agencies.

To get a feel for his colleagues' reac-

tions to Zinke's September speech, Clement went to the cafeteria at Interior's D.C. headquarters. “Everyone was super ticked off. What they were saying was they were offended. The refrain was, ‘We are really good at our jobs; we are dedicated to the mission of this organization.’”

Zinke's comments are “ludicrous and deeply insulting,” according to a statement signed by leaders of various groups that represent retired Interior officials, including the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks, the Public Lands Foundation and the Association of Retired Fish and Wildlife Service Employees. Clement was the only current employee to speak out, however — perhaps because he had less to lose than his colleagues. After all, he says, Zinke already had stripped him of the job he loved. As director of Interior's office of policy analysis, Clement advised top Interior officials on climate change and led department efforts to aid Native Alaskan villages at risk of being swept into the sea because of rising sea levels. Clement, who has a background as a field biologist, worked for a philanthropist supporting climate adaptation and conservation before joining Interior in 2011. But Zinke moved him to the Office of Natural Resource Revenue to oversee the staff collecting oil and gas payments. “I'm a scientist and policy

Please see **Whistleblower**, page 28



A rendering of the tram that would shuttle people in and out of the Grand Canyon.

GILMORE PARSON/GRAND CANYON ESCALADE

THE LATEST

Backstory

In 2011, a developer proposed building hotels, restaurants and shops on Navajo land on the Grand Canyon's remote East Rim, with a tram shuttling up to 10,000 visitors per day down to the confluence of the Colorado and Little Colorado rivers. Supporters said the Escalade development would provide 2,500 jobs in an impoverished region. Opponents, including Hopi and Navajo people, Grand Canyon park officials and conservationists, cited religious rights, tribal sovereignty and environmental impacts — plus the \$65 million cost to the Navajo for roads and infrastructure (“Will Navajos approve a Grand Canyon megadevelopment?” *HCN*, 12/10/12).

Followup

At the end of October, after years of controversy, the Navajo Nation Council voted 16-2 against authorizing the project. Navajo President Russell Begaye said the council opposed it from the start and is seeking other economic development projects, such as a manufacturing plant. “Thankfully, the legislation was defeated,” Navajo activist Renae Yellowhorse told *NBC News*. “But, for certain, the idea won't go away.”

JODI PETERSON



Children play next to a water storage tank — one of the only places to get fresh water in Newtok, Alaska. The village is one of many that has to relocate due to melting permafrost and rapid erosion of its landmass. Joel Clement had been urging the Department of the Interior to respond to the climate threats in Alaskan villages and believes that it was part of the reason he was reassigned. ANDREW BURTON/GETTY IMAGES

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YELLOWSTONE MIGRATIONS

Joe Riis; 176 pages, hardcover: \$29.95. Mountaineers Books, 2017.

Pronghorn, mule deer, elk, bison, moose, bighorn sheep: All of these ungulates migrate seasonally through the landscape surrounding Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks. They spend the summer foraging in high-elevation areas, then move to milder, low-elevation regions to survive the winter, all within the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem.

In *Yellowstone Migrations*, photojournalist and former wildlife biologist Joe Riis documents the movement of pronghorn, mule deer and elk through the region. His images show the many obstacles the animals face — from fast-moving rivers to fences, highways, homes and other development. Riis, who grew up on the Northern Plains, has spent close to 10 years following the migrations, using motion-activated camera traps to document the animals without disturbing them. “Every step of the way,” writes Wyoming-based author Gretel Ehrlich in the introduction, “we ponder what it will take for humans to exist in this vast territory such that the herds can move through.” **REBECCA WORBY**

A pronghorn migrating south for the winter, caught in a wire fence. The photographer was able to pull the fence apart, setting the animal free. JOE RIIS

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A Bears Ears trip, holiday open house and new staffers

After reading, writing and thinking so much about Bears Ears National Monument in Utah, several members of *High Country News*' editorial staff took a field trip to see the place in person in mid-November. We spent an afternoon soaking in the sun on a hike through piñon-juniper forests below the buttes that inspired the monument's moniker. At sunset, we stood atop Muley Point, on the edge of Bears Ears, and gazed out over the twisting canyon of the San Juan River and the red- and gold-painted cliffs of Cedar Mesa. We came back refreshed and inspired anew to write about the landscapes and communities of the West.

If you'll be in Paonia, Colorado, *HCN*'s hometown, on Dec. 7, please join us for our annual holiday celebration. We'll be hosting an open house at our office from 5 to 7 p.m. We'd love to see you there; otherwise, consider dropping by any time, as subscribers **JoAnne** and **Richard Petersen** of Longmont, Colorado, recently did. The pair brought along their canine companion, Tess, who promptly charmed the entire office. Thanks for stopping by, Petersens!

We'd like to welcome two new staff members to the *HCN* team. **Graham Lee Brewer**, as our newest contributing editor, is helping steer our coverage of tribal affairs. Graham is a board member of the Native American Journalists Association and a member of the Cherokee Nation. He's based in Norman, Oklahoma, where until recently he covered cops,

courts and crime for *The Oklahoman*. “I'm really excited to be here to help *HCN* tell the stories of Native peoples,” Graham says. “Accurately representing Indigenous communities is something we really care about, and I'm thrilled to be a part of this effort.” We've had the pleasure of hosting him for two weeks here in Paonia as he settles into the job — welcome, Graham!

Lisa McManigal Delaney is our new customer service assistant. She's been reading *HCN* for more than 20 years, since coming across the magazine while working at the Rocky Mountain Institute in Basalt, Colorado, in the mid-1990s. Lisa says she always tried to snag the office copy before anyone else could take it. “It just connected everything I was interested in,” she says. It also put Paonia on her radar; she and her family moved to town about four years ago. “Ever since I moved here, I thought, ‘Oh, I want to work there someday,’” she says. We're so glad to have you, Lisa!

Finally, we have a clarification to make. In a recent story about the Glen Canyon Dam (“Busting the Big One” *HCN*, 9/4/17), Jack Schmidt, the former chief of the U.S. Geological Survey's Grand Canyon Monitoring and Research Center, should have been described as being one among a group of scientists who came up with plans for experimental pulse flows through the canyon; he was not the sole originator of the plans.

—Emily Benson, for the staff



Graham Brewer, second from right, with editorial staff members watching the sunset in Bears Ears. ANNA V. SMITH

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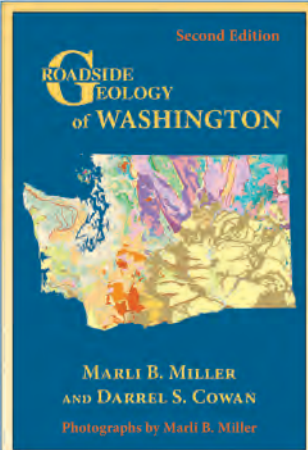


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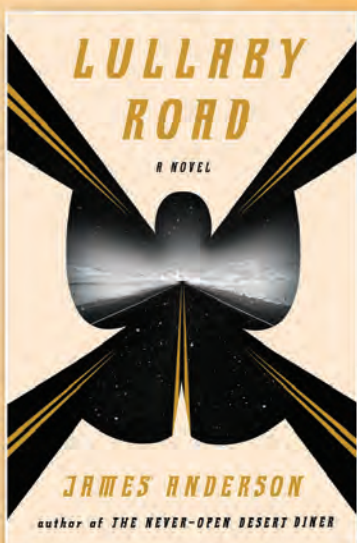
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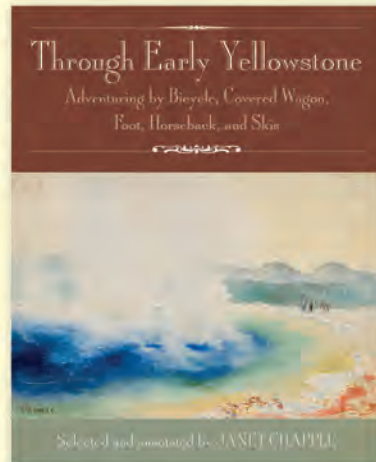
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Profit and Politics

Right-wing efforts to transfer federal public lands to the states are gaining prominence, with the movement finding purchase with counties and state legislatures across the West. Transfer on the scale envisioned by its most fervent advocates would change the region's very nature, so it's worth asking: How do states manage the lands they already control? And how do their approaches to issues like energy development, endangered species and recreational access differ from those of federal agencies?

State lands aren't perfect analogues to federal lands, but they are the best indication we have of how public lands might change under local control. The stories that follow show how significant those changes could be: State lands are generally less regulated and more open to development; public access to them is less secure; and citizens have less influence over how they are developed or preserved.

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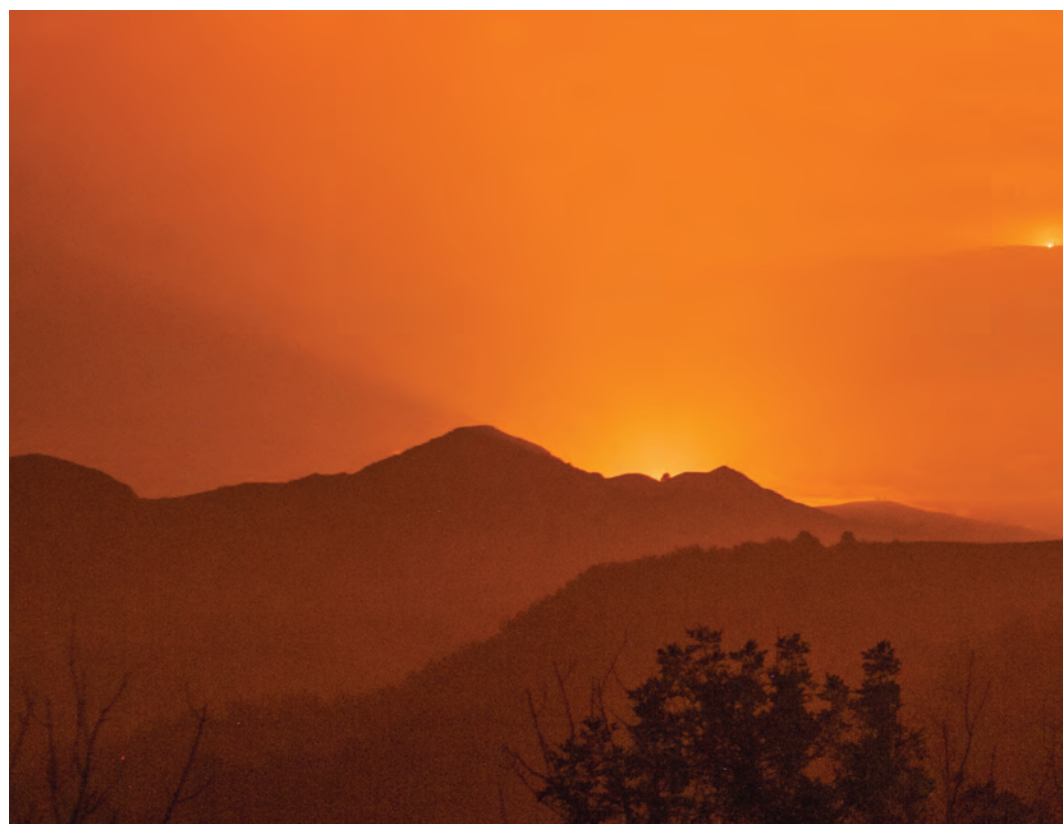
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In Utah, public access to state trust lands comes at an increasing cost



How the Bakken boom transformed one of North Dakota's

I moved to North Dakota for the same reason everyone else did: because oil was selling for over \$100 a barrel, and there was work to do. I drove in from the south on June 8, 2014, on highways crowded with semis hauling oil, saltwater, pipes and gravel. I bottomed out my Honda Civic turning into a rutted gas station in Belfield, where men in coveralls waited to use the bathroom while a sign on the empty ladies' room announced: "No Men!"

I drove on to Bismarck, where I moved into the spare bedroom of a 20-something car salesman from Washington. Once a month, I went to the oilfield to report stories. I interviewed a farmer whose soybean fields were ruined by saltwater spills; an RV park owner who got rich renting sites to oil workers for \$800 a month; a woman who sold pepper spray and stun guns to other women. Everywhere I drove, I saw drilling rigs. There were almost 200 then, and oil production was at its peak. Over a million barrels a day flowed from the Bakken shale.

The oil boom also overlapped with the state's most beautiful and rugged region: the Badlands. It was to these Badlands that a young Theodore Roosevelt fled in 1884 to mourn the death of his wife and mother. In the wide-open spaces of western North Dakota, Roosevelt became a conservationist.

The Badlands became an escape

for me, too: On its public lands I could retreat from the oilfield's manic energy and the monotonous squares of wheat and sunflowers. Grassy plateaus — the largest remaining swaths of native short-grass prairie — gave way to wildly eroded buttes, ridges and coulees that were bushy with juniper and aspen. Along the undeveloped Little Missouri River plain, the cottonwood lowlands meandered for miles. Out here, I could breathe more deeply.

During my two years in North Dakota, I regularly visited two parts of the Badlands: Theodore Roosevelt National Park and Little Missouri State Park. Although they encompass nearly identical terrain, the parks feel distinctly different. The national park is an oasis from the oil boom. Little Missouri State Park, meanwhile, has been engulfed by it. There are even oil wells within park boundaries.

When I first discovered this, I was shocked. A state park should be a refuge from the grind of industry, I thought, not its host. So what happened? Who decided to open this state park for business? And what were the consequences of that choice? I also wondered if, once I looked into it, my perspective would change. "Engulfed," after all, is a matter of opinion.

I MET JIM FUGLIE at the Rough Riders Hotel in Medora last Labor Day weekend to talk about Little Missouri State Park. Fuglie is the former head of the state

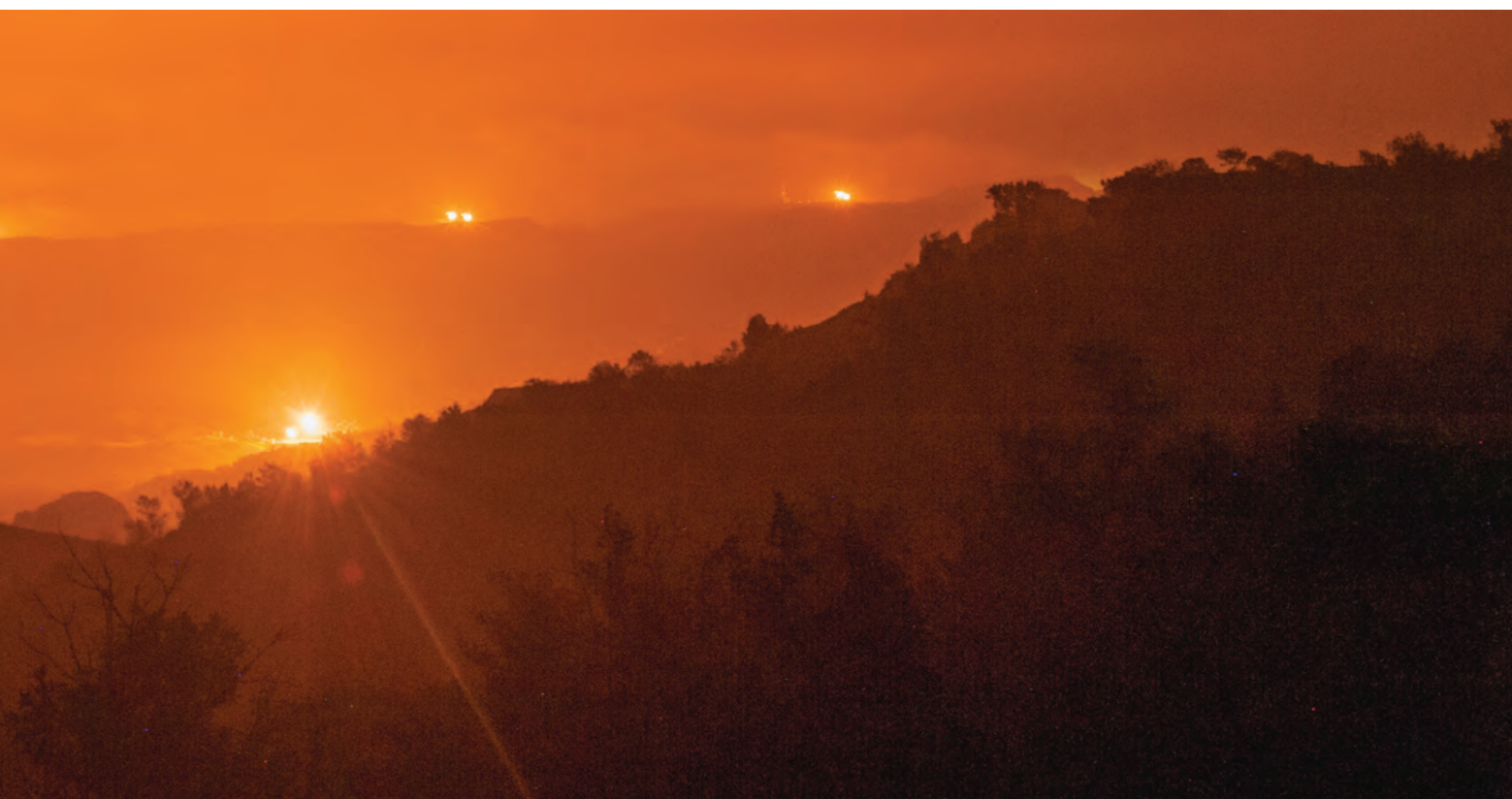
K P A R K

ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

The differences in how a national park and a state park responded to the Bakken oil boom reflect the region's laws, culture, history and politics.

Natural gas flares from oil pads cast an apocalyptic glow in the night sky, when seen from the campground at Little Missouri State Park in North Dakota.

ANDREW CULLEN



most special landscapes FEATURE BY EMILY GUERIN

Democratic Party, and when I worked in North Dakota, he was my go-to angry conservationist. When I interviewed him about oil development in the Badlands, his voice rose so frequently that I used to think he was mad at *me*.

Fuglie was there on Labor Day celebrating his 70th birthday with his siblings. He probably would have gone to Little Missouri State Park, if not for the oil boom. “Literally, I don’t go there anymore,” Fuglie said loudly. “They’ve trashed it.” There’s some evidence that Fuglie is not alone in his opinion: Visitation to the state park has fallen by almost a third since the oil boom began, in 2007. At Theodore Roosevelt National Park, by contrast, where officials have worked to shelter the park from the boom, there were 65 percent more visitors in 2016 than in 2007.

As Fuglie sees it, the fate of Little Missouri State Park was sealed on Dec. 20, 2011, in the basement of the State Capitol in Bismarck. There, three men — then-Gov. Jack Dalrymple, Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem and Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring — agreed to allow ConocoPhillips to extract up to 43 million barrels of oil from land in and around the state park. The three elected officials sit on the North Dakota Industrial Commission, which regulates the oil industry. They also accept campaign contributions from the companies they regulate.

At the meeting, the commission

discussed an unusual arrangement that would allow ConocoPhillips to drill wells wherever it wanted inside a 50-mile area in and around the park, instead of within two-square-mile units, as the state usually required. This arrangement, state oil and gas staff said, would allow the company to cluster its wells, minimizing the number inside the park while also allowing it to extract even more oil from the rugged terrain. One option not discussed at the meeting was leaving the park alone — whether it might be too special to drill.

Two years later, though, Stenehjem brought up that issue with what he called his “extraordinary places” proposal. It came after a state parks employee was driving around Theodore Roosevelt’s Elkhorn Ranch, now part of the national park, and noticed flags in the ground. The oil company XTO had staked out a well pad about 100 feet from the park’s border. The public outcry was fierce, and Stenehjem was surprised. So he proposed creating a buffer zone around 18 “extraordinary” places in western North Dakota, including Little Missouri State Park, where drilling permit applications on private or public lands would undergo extra review.

“There are some areas we need to let everybody know we are paying particular attention to,” he told me in July 2014.

Oil companies, however, hated the idea and responded forcefully. “For the moment, Continental Resources remains commit-

ted to North Dakota, but a sustained commitment will depend largely upon the policy decisions being made today,” Harold Hamm, CEO of one of the largest oil companies in the Bakken and a major political donor, threatened in a letter. “The Bakken is not the only attractive play in America.”

Stenehjem backed off. His watered-down proposal applied only to public lands. And as it turns out, that does not actually include Little Missouri State Park.

THE EVENT that continues to influence everything is the creation of the park in 1971. In the late 1960s, state officials decided that the people of North Dakota deserved a park in the Badlands. They approached local ranchers and asked them to sell land to the state. One couple agreed to part with just over 1,000 acres. Depending on who you ask, there either wasn’t enough money left to buy more land, or nobody else was interested in selling to the government. “What could the state do to protect the place that we couldn’t?” one local landowner told me.

So the state opted for long-term leases with three families. The leases allow public access, and the state built and maintains the trails, but 80 percent of the park remains private property. The state has even less control of the mineral rights; it owns less than 7 percent in the area ConocoPhillips developed. That matters, because in North Dakota, mineral

Ruthmarie Lawson, host at the Little Missouri State Park campground, can see oil wells on land adjacent to the campground.

MARTIN EBERLEN, FROM THE DOCUMENTARY PROJECT OUR LAND AND (S)OIL, MARTINEBERLEN.COM/OUR-LAND-SOIL/



“Literally, I don’t go there anymore. They’ve trashed it.”

—Jim Fuglie, former head of the Democratic Party in North Dakota, speaking of Little Missouri State Park

owners have a constitutional right to develop their property.

“We do the best we can to balance the interests of people who want to recreate against the right of people to develop their own minerals,” Stenehjem told me. “I think on balance, we’ve done a pretty good job.”

By the time I first visited Little Missouri State Park in August 2014, a wide oil road had just been constructed across a high grassy ridge where a horse trail used to be. Below the ridge, ConocoPhillips had carved a well pad out of the side of a butte. The scoria was still fresh, the color of undercooked beef. The drill rigs, with their piercing white lights, were just across the river. The wells were coming.

When I returned this fall, two salt-water disposal wells marked the turnoff to the park. ConocoPhillips had built six well pads in the park, and new horse trails switchbacked around them. At night, I counted 28 flares from the campground, some so bright and close they looked like bonfires.

I visited with a husband and wife who lease land to the state park. The development had been mixed for them. The quality of their everyday life had diminished in small but significant ways. The view of the Badlands from their home was obstructed by pump jacks, and they’d lost their sense of privacy. The main road to town was choked with trucks, and at night, they could hear the roar of flares and the moan of pump jacks. Not being mineral owners, they didn’t receive the

legendary “mailbox money” that had transformed the lives of so many western North Dakotans. Still, they received nominal payments for an oil road lease, and for the loss of farmable land due to five well pads on their property. They rented spots in their RV park to workers, and let a drilling company store its rig in their field. Overall, they were financially better off. “I don’t think I’m emotionally better off!” the wife said, and they both laughed.

Although they agreed to an interview, they asked me later not to use their names. They feared appearing to criticize how the state handled oil development, of looking like they disagreed with their neighbors, and of publicly disclosing that they got some oil money. “We have to live within all this and don’t need a lot of people banging down our doors or calling us because we didn’t do the right thing, in their mind, to protect the land, to allow oil development, etc.,” the wife wrote me later. “We find both good and bad with the changes.”

MOST PEOPLE I spoke to about the changes seemed to view them as inevitable, a march of progress they were powerless to impede. But just 40 miles west, at Theodore Roosevelt National Park, it was a different story.

It was always clear that drilling would not be allowed inside the national park, but that didn’t mean the park was protected from the boom. Teddy Roosevelt National Park is 70,000 acres, but because it is split into three units, each section of it feels small. A visitor standing atop a high butte

sees a mosaic of state, federal and private land. Your experience in the park is thus affected by what happens outside of it.

The park is renowned for its dark, starry skies, but when the boom began, rangers noticed a creeping glow on the horizon. When a team of researchers investigated, they found that between 2010 and 2013, the amount of manmade light visible in the North Unit had jumped by 500 percent — faster than at any other national park in the country.

So in 2011, when a facility to load crude oil onto rail cars was proposed less than three miles from the park boundary, national park staff sat down with the developers and asked them for a simple favor: Would you mind pointing your floodlights down? The company didn’t have to agree — the Park Service has no regulatory authority — but it did. Small adjustments like this can make a big difference. In a video two rangers made on an August night in 2015, they stand just outside a facility with downward facing lights. Their faces are dark, and the northern lights are visible in the background, streaks of green against the expansive, prairie sky. In a second shot, they’re outside a truck yard with floodlights that hadn’t been redirected, and they look as if they’re on a professionally lit film shoot.

“You can affect change outside that boundary by asking,” Superintendent Wendy Ross told me in September, as we sat in her office in Medora. Ross grew up in the National Park Service. She was born at Mount Rainier, where her



The view looking over the Little Missouri River from the rim of the Badlands, left, in Theodore Roosevelt National Park's north unit in North Dakota. Wells aren't allowed in the park, although some are visible beyond the fence line, below. ANDREW CULLEN



father was a climbing ranger, and she lived in the Tetons, Yosemite and the Great Smoky Mountains. In 1990, her dad became superintendent of Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Ross took the same job in 2015.

Ross wants the views from the park to look the way they did when her father oversaw it. "We don't try to talk the companies into anything," she explained. "We say, 'If you put your well right here, you're not going to see it from the park. There's no impact whatsoever.'" Most companies have been responsive. XTO moved its well pad back from the Elkhorn Ranch. Companies have painted their tanks beige to blend into the landscape, relocated well pads to avoid building new roads, and hooked up to power lines in order to forego diesel generators, whose sputtering and backfiring echo throughout the Badlands.

Ross still has to assure some visitors that there are no oil wells in the park. You can see some pumpers from a 1980s boom from the scenic drive in the South Unit. There are wells visible from the North Unit, too, but they're far away, fuzzy in summer heat, best seen through a camera's zoom lens. The campgrounds are dark and quiet, and when you turn into the North Unit from Highway 85, you regularly see bison grazing alongside the fee booth.

PARK SERVICE STAFF felt empowered by their agency's culture to take action — to look outside the park to preserve what's inside it. "You have that national park brand," Ross told me, "an arrowhead that is recognized for natural and cultural resource preservation throughout the United States." State officials, for cultural and political reasons, didn't share that sense of empowerment.

North Dakota is a place whose population peaked at 682,000 in 1930. It would not surpass that for 80 years, until 2011, when horizontal drilling, hydraulic fracturing and high oil prices unleashed a rush on hydrocarbons. North Dakota is a place whose other major industry, agriculture, cannibalizes itself, requiring fewer and fewer people as it becomes more

efficient. It's a place where officials were so desperate to reverse the population loss that they considered changing their state's name to "Dakota" in 2001, because "North" sounded too cold and forbidding.

I've talked to Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem about this a lot. He is a tall man with big hands and a throaty laugh, like he's constantly getting over a cold. Stenehjem grew up in Williston, at the heart of today's oil boom. As the state's top law enforcement officer, he is acutely aware of the rise in violent crime, drugs and sex trafficking during the oil boom. But he also remembers what life was like before. "Those towns and cities were dying," he told me. "On balance, (oil) has been a good thing for us."

There's also a deep reluctance here to taking working land out of production. In order for land to have value, at least among the white, non-Native population, it must produce something. This attitude is so deeply ingrained that, by law, the governor must personally approve the sale of private property to any nonprofit conservation organization.

Energy development in Little Missouri State Park may have been seen as a way of extracting value, once again, from a place that had not been productive for decades. At an Interstate 94 rest stop overlooking Theodore Roosevelt National Park, I asked a man how he felt about oil development encroaching on the park. He stared at me with wide eyes. "I think we should see oil wells all along the fence line!" he yelled. "It's about time we used our natural resources!"

Even minor government efforts to lessen the impact of oil development are sometimes met with resistance. Mark Zimmerman, the former head of the State Parks and Recreation Department, told me many people thought Wendy Ross went too far. "There were a lot of local folks who thought she was too tough, too strong on the oil companies," he said.

Because of the local politics, and because industry is viewed as an economic lifeboat, the state parks department didn't ask much from oil companies.

"Sometimes I felt inadequate," Zimmerman admitted. "I would have liked to have seen no development around Little Missouri State Park. But I don't have the right to say that to a private landowner."

Zimmerman confessed that he often felt envious when he went to conferences for state park directors. North Dakota has fewer park acres than any state besides Rhode Island. But he also envied the attitude he saw in places like Maine and New York, where well-to-do families will donate their estates for public enjoyment, in perpetuity. "Just the mindset of North Dakotans to set aside land. . . ." He trailed off. "The culture is not there yet."

CONOCOPHILLIPS clustered its wells in the eastern portion of Little Missouri State Park, so over Labor Day weekend, I set out west on an early morning hike, seeking a more pristine experience. The trail traversed narrow ridges sprouting prickly pear and sage, and plateaued in a grassy valley. I stopped, listening. I heard the engine brakes of a semi going down the long grade towards the Little Missouri River, and could see clear to the Fort Berthold Reservation, where flares flickered on a butte.

I recalled something Zimmerman had told me about hiking in the state park. "I don't want to sound like a jerk," he said. "But I gotta put gas in my truck to go out there. If I look over and see a pumper, well, OK. I look the other way."

There is a pragmatism here that I respect. More than anywhere else I have lived, North Dakotans are willing, even eager, to live alongside the production of the natural resources they — and all of us — consume. Yet I couldn't help feeling that they had gone too far. If no landscape was too special not to drill, what would the West become? I was grateful that there was at least one place in the Badlands — a national park named for Teddy Roosevelt — that had been spared.

Here, though, the wells had arrived. So I took Zimmerman's advice: I pulled my hat over my ears, turned my back to the flares, and hiked on. □



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ENDANGERED SPECIES

The Endangered Species Act is already under attack in the U.S. Congress, but federal land transfers could also have big consequences for rare species — especially plants.

Plant Blind in New Mexico

Politics, land ownership and the protection of imperiled plants

FEATURE
BY
CALLY
CARSWELL

Last January, Will Barnes and a few colleagues from the New Mexico State Land Office fanned out across a small ridge in the Chihuahuan Desert near the Black River, south of Carlsbad. It was a clear winter day, and they walked slowly, heads down, scrutinizing the soil. They were responding to a rancher's complaint about erosion issues that could result from a planned oil well pad. But Barnes, a biologist and the Land Office's deputy director of field operations, was also concerned about a rare wild buckwheat — a diminutive, waxy-leaved plant found nowhere else in the world but on 234 acres in Eddy County, New Mexico.

Murchison Oil and Gas planned to build the well pad on a lease on state-owned land, right on the boundary where it meets federal land. The company would cut a 37-foot-deep incision through the middle of a gypsum ridge, the remains of an ancient sea that once covered this desert. Not many plants thrive in gypsum soils, but this wild buckwheat requires them.

The side of the ridge under federal Bureau of Land Management jurisdiction is managed to protect the plant, which is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. On the federal side, you can't build oil pads, new roads, pipelines or anything else within the buckwheat's habitat. On the state side, though, no such rules apply.

Still, Barnes thought state officials might be able to work with the company to move the pad if they found any plants. On the federal side, they spotted dozens — small and partially desiccated in their dormant state, their leaves red, dappled with green. On the state side, "there weren't tons," Barnes says. "But there were some" — three, as far as they could tell.

Two days later, back in his office in Santa Fe, Barnes began typing out a memo, outlining the erosion risks and threats to the buckwheat. He planned to suggest relocating the pad — to somewhere with less fragile soils and no listed species — or at least completing a biologi-

cal survey and erosion-control plan. But on Jan. 23, before he could get feedback and finalize the memo, he got a call from the land office's man in Carlsbad. The well pad had already been built.

PLANTS DON'T GET a lot of respect, and certainly not what's lavished on mammals, fish and birds. Botanists call the inability to appreciate, or even notice, flora "plant blindness." It's the tendency to see botanical life as a mere stage set for life forms more like us — the things with eyes, ears, mouths and feet. New Mexico is the fourth most botanically diverse state in the nation, with over 4,000 native species. But "most people just see green," says state botanist Daniela Roth, a view of the world she calls "pretty flat."

Even the Endangered Species Act suffers from plant blindness. Though 57 percent of listed species are plants, they get only 4 percent of the money spent under the law, according to one recent study. And while legal protections for listed animals apply to federal, state and private lands, plants are protected only on federal land.

That means it is up to states to pass laws to protect rare plants everywhere else. "There are some states that do have strong endangered species laws," says Alejandro Camacho, a law professor at the University of California-Irvine. "But they tend to be significantly less protective." And sometimes they're nonexistent: Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Utah, Washington and Wyoming provide no protection to threatened and endangered plants, according to Camacho's research.

New Mexico has good intentions, but spotty execution. In 1978, the Legislature ordered the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department to study the state's native flora, create an endangered list, and figure out how to keep the plants on it alive. "Under the state law, I'm in charge of all 4,000 species in New Mexico, and I'm supposed to make sure none of them go extinct," Roth told me, when I visited her at her office in late September. She gave me a look that seemed to say, *That sounds crazy to you, too, right?*

"I'm the only one who speaks for rare

plants," she added. "Which is a serious responsibility, because we have rare plants that are so rare."

It's also nearly impossible, because Roth has so few tools to wield. She's a carpenter without a hammer, saw, nails or wood glue. There's little money for on-the-ground conservation, and her agency has no regulatory authority over how plants are managed on state lands. Those decisions fall to the State Land Office, and more specifically to its elected commissioner, who has sweeping authority over the 9 million acres held in trust for New Mexicans and managed to optimize revenue to help fund public schools.

The only thing the state's endangered plant law explicitly prohibits is the collection of listed plants without a permit. It is illegal to drive down to Carlsbad, covertly dig up a gypsum wild buckwheat, and plant it in your garden. But it is not illegal to buy an oil lease and bulldoze it, killing plants in the process. And in the midst of the hottest onshore oil play in the U.S., bulldozers are undoubtedly the more formidable threat.

THE CHIHUAHUAN DESERT doesn't loudly advertise its botanical riches. From a distance, it can look pretty bleak — rubble hills, lanky shrubs and dry bunchgrass, blending together into a dull Army green.

It takes time and patience to appreciate this place. You have to walk slowly, look carefully, get closer. It helps to get down on your knees, bring your nose within inches of the soil. Beauty lies in the details: The fist-sized cactus growing at a 90-degree angle from a rock ledge. Black and red lichen crusted to the surface of the soil. The delicate, reflective hairs on the gypsum wild buckwheat, which help deflect the oppressive summer heat.

"This one is beautiful," says Jaclyn Adams, crouching down beside a 4-inch-wide buckwheat in a BLM research plot close to the Murchison well pad. It's a cloudy October morning, just after a nice rain, and she bends one of its smooth leaves like a soft taco. They're succulent and flexible. "This guy's pretty healthy."

Adams spent the field season as an



“I’m the only one who speaks for rare plants. Which is a serious responsibility, because we have rare plants that are so rare.”

*—Daniela Roth,
New Mexico
state botanist*

Gypsum wild buckwheat (*Eriogonum gypsophilum*) is found only on a small tract of land in southeast New Mexico. It’s protected as a threatened species on federal land, but can be destroyed by development on adjacent state land.

**MIKE HOWARD/
BLM NEW MEXICO**



The Murchison well pad, set in gypsum wild buckwheat habitat near Carlsbad, New Mexico. CALLY CARSWELL

intern with the BLM, setting up long-term research plots in the three locations in Eddy County where the buckwheat grows. Trained as a wildlife biologist, she expected the work to be simple. “I would think, ‘Oh, plants, they don’t move, that’s going to be easy,’” she explains. But desert plants are opportunistic and can be surprisingly squirrely. “We’ll have them all tagged in a plot, and then depending on the monsoon, all of a sudden you’ll see a bunch more. And you’re like, where did these come from overnight?”

Adams and Katie Sandbom, the Carlsbad field office’s resident botanist, show me around the buckwheat’s haunts. Of the three populations, the Black River one is the hardest to manage. Its population runs across both state, federal and private land in an area that’s booming with new energy development. This part of southeastern New Mexico lies in the Permian Basin, which currently produces roughly as much oil as all other onshore plays in the U.S. combined, from a mix of federal, state and private lands.

We scramble down and up a draw and traverse a ridge to the Murchison well pad. Sandbom points out that the well pad on the state side is close enough to buckwheat plants that, if it were BLM land, the agency wouldn’t have permitted it there, whether or not the pad impacted plants directly.

As it turns out, Murchison owns a lease on the BLM side, too. Earlier this year, before even applying for federal drilling permits, company representatives visited the site with BLM staff to look at options for locating wells away from the plants and minimizing disturbance. If and when they do apply to drill, the BLM would formally review the plans, as mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act, looking for impacts to endangered species, archaeology, and sensitive soils, as well as potential hazards like floodplains.

This points to a major difference in how the feds and the state address — or

neglect — the biological impacts of development. The feds have a framework for flagging issues such as sensitive plants when companies want to drill. When conflicts arise, they have a legal obligation to try to mitigate impacts before construction.

The state, for the most part, does not impose this level of planning and review. For certain types of infrastructure — pipelines, for example — companies do submit plans to the State Land Office for approval. In those cases, a biologist who works under Barnes checks the location of the proposed development against GIS data on rare species, and may make mitigation recommendations.

Exactly how biological issues are handled at any given time is influenced by the priorities of the elected commissioner. The last commissioner, Ray Powell, a Democrat, had no formal policy for how the land office should deal with impacts to rare plants. But the office did, at least in some cases, work with companies to transplant rare cacti in northwest New Mexico’s San Juan Basin out of the path of pipelines. The current commissioner, Republican Aubrey Dunn, instituted a formal policy to bring clarity and consistency to the process. It requires the land office to notify companies of the presence of state and federally listed plants on their leases. It’s then up to the companies to decide how to address any impacts.

And for run-of-the-mill leases for oil and gas wells, there’s no biological review whatsoever. The terms of these leases are specified by a state statute, and after a company buys one, it applies for drilling permits through another state agency. The Oil Conservation Division scrutinizes drilling plans for potential impacts to groundwater, but does not look at issues aboveground, including the possible presence of rare plants, or hazards like wells and tanks sited in floodplains.

“We don’t do any field review before the sales happen,” Barnes explains. “It just hasn’t ever been done.” As a result,

he says, “We only find out about stuff when things go wrong. So a series of well pads built in a floodplain get washed away. Well, we didn’t know they were there until the flood happened.”

The narrow nature of the review helps explain why the state takes only 10 days to process drilling permits, compared to an industry-reported average of 250 days for the BLM in Carlsbad. And it also explains why the buckwheat plants on state land were plowed under, while next door — on BLM land — they’re scarcely disturbed.

“There’s no infrastructure for protecting plants,” Barnes says. “The state statute is pretty ambiguous, and it doesn’t give anyone any particular authority to stop anything from happening,” he says. “In my mind, the land office could be more assertive about habitat and species protections. But that’s a political choice.”

IN APRIL OF 1995, David Dearnoff, a biologist with the State Land Office, sent a seven-page memo up the chain of command, analyzing the arguments for and against protecting gypsum wild buckwheat.

Dearnoff cautioned that if all the Black River plants on state land were lost, the population would fragment into two, leaving small, isolated islands on federal land, which might eventually die out. Since the plants occupy less than 30 acres here, it would be relatively easy for oil and gas producers to work around them. Still, the politics were delicate: The oil and gas industry, he wrote, appeared “skittish and frightened that their industry will be shut down to protect some weed.” He recommended navigating these choppy waters by protecting species on a case-by-case basis.

At the time, gypsum wild buckwheat was the only imperiled plant that had been inventoried on state lands. So Ray Powell, then a couple years into his first stint as land commissioner, had hired botanist Bob Sivinski to survey trust lands throughout the state for rare plants.

“This is a weird office with a lot of autonomy, and if you don’t pay attention, bad things can happen,” Powell explains. “If you do pay attention, you can be really creative and do good things.” His goal, he says, was to figure out “what the heck was out there,” and eventually, to do more to protect the health of the land.

In the absence of real legal protections, however, the impact of any one commissioner can be limited, for better or worse. When I met him this fall for lunch, Sivinski told me his 1990s surveys had revealed new rare plant populations on state land, including a dense colony of Tharp’s bluestar, listed as endangered under state law, in the Permian Basin. I asked him how the land office had used that information. He shrugged, unsure. “The site I did locate, the next land commissioner built a well pad right on top of it,” Sivinski said. “So it didn’t really do much good knowing it was there.” □



Contributing Editor Cally Carswell writes from Santa Fe, New Mexico. [@callycarswell](#)

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How states generate money from trust lands

When Western states joined the Union, the federal government granted them parcels of land in order to provide sustained revenue for public institutions, primarily schools, and to spread democratic ideals in the growing region. Older states, such as California and Oregon, have little acreage left today because they quickly sold off their “trust lands” to generate money – a move that clashed with the federal government’s long-term vision for those lands. So when newer states like Arizona and New

Mexico received their trust lands, the federal government, and sometimes the states themselves, placed restrictions on sales, such as minimum prices. Today, these states retain much of their original acreage, and generate money primarily by leasing parcels to developers and the extractive industry. There are 46 million acres of state trust land in the U.S., most of it in the West. Here’s a look at the different approaches Western state take to these lands. ANNA V. SMITH

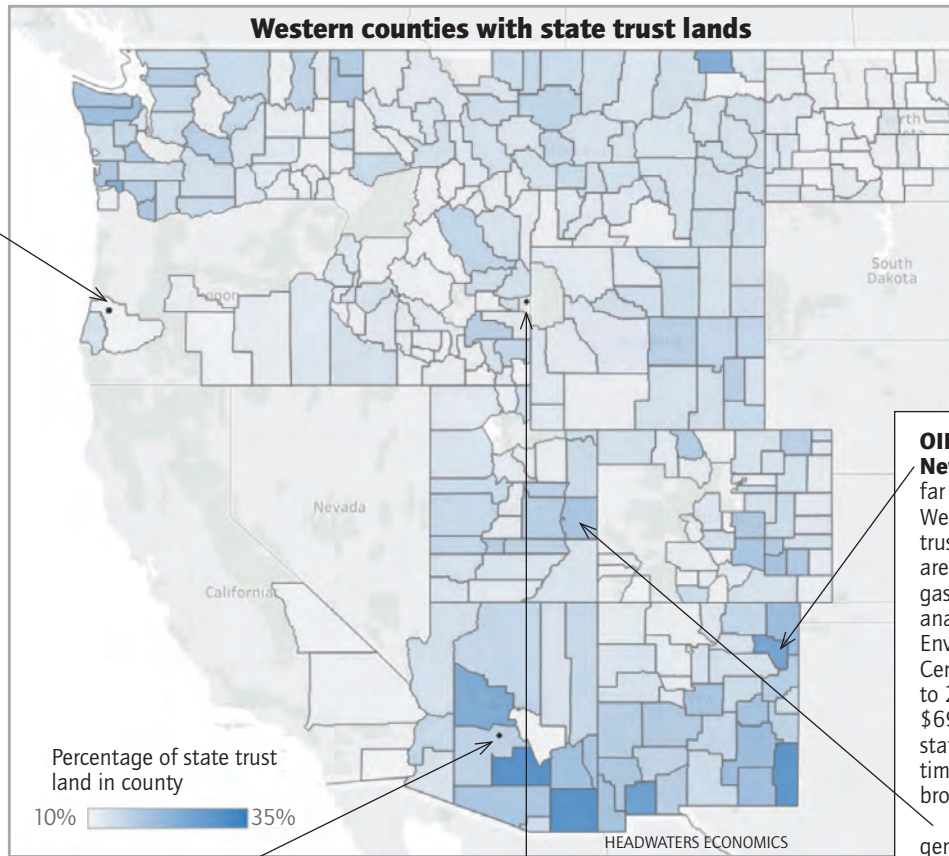
TIMBER

In the Pacific Northwest, timber is the main source of revenue from state lands. But Oregon is beginning to take a broader approach: Instead of focusing only on logging, it’s managing its lands for conservation and recreation, too. The transition hasn’t been easy. Last year, the **Elliott State Forest**, which shelters endangered species and is popular with hunters and hikers, was put up for sale. Timber revenue was low, and managing the forest cost the state money rather than enriching it. After intense public outcry, the state resolved to find a way to keep the forest in public hands. Now, it’s planning to buy out tracts of its own forest. That way, schools would get money, while areas occupied by endangered species would be relieved from the pressure to be profitable. Other parts of the forest would still be logged, however.



Old growth in Elliott State Forest.

C. GRIFFIN PHOTO COURTESY OF CASCADIA WILDLANDS



OIL AND GAS

New Mexico makes by far the most money of the Western states from its trust lands, many of which are in booming oil and gas-producing basins. An analysis by the Property and Environmental Research Center found that from 2009 to 2013, the state made \$69 in revenue per acre of state trust land. Montana’s timberlands, by contrast, brought in only \$20 an acre.

The biggest revenue generator on **Utah’s** state lands is also fossil fuel leasing. Of the \$700 million in gross revenues generated by the state’s oil and gas sector since 1994, around 20 percent has come from one 127,000-acre unit in Carbon County. The state has also permitted tar sands mines and oil shale operations on 32,000 acres of trust lands. Though environmentalists fiercely opposed these developments, which are even more carbon-intensive than conventional oil, they had limited legal options to stop them on state lands. The tar sands industry is still struggling, however, and commercial production has yet to begin.

REAL ESTATE

Before the 2008 recession, Arizona raised huge sums by selling or leasing land to real estate developers. In 2007, the state raked in over \$600 million this way, with bids from developers coming in as high as 15 percent above the lands’ appraised value, and one 26-acre parcel in northeast **Phoenix** selling for \$28.5 million. Overall, however, Arizona has sold about 10 percent of its state lands. It retains 9.2 million of the 10.2 million acres it was originally granted.

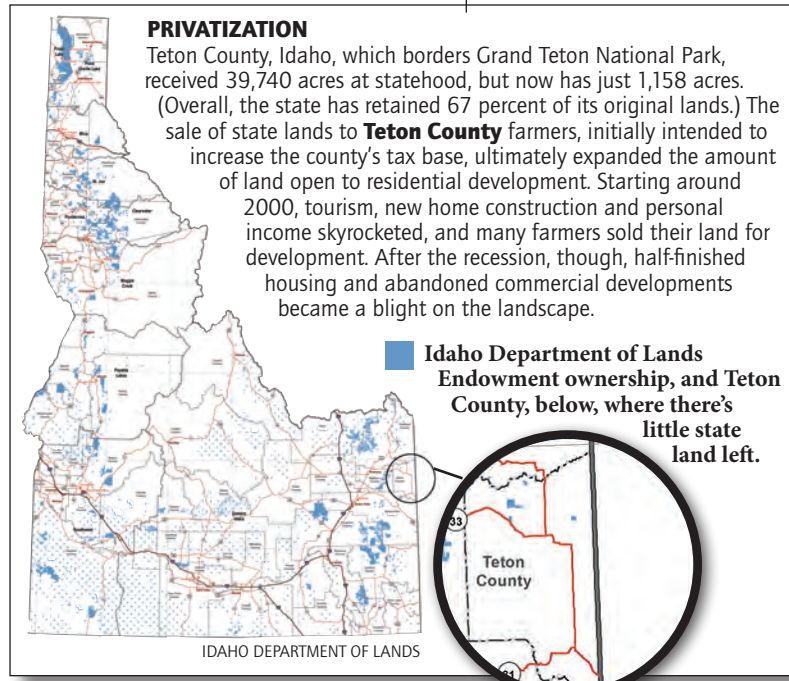


Construction underway at a new development in northeast Phoenix, purchased from the Arizona State Land Department. BROOKE WARREN

PRIVATIZATION

Teton County, Idaho, which borders Grand Teton National Park, received 39,740 acres at statehood, but now has just 1,158 acres. (Overall, the state has retained 67 percent of its original lands.) The sale of state lands to **Teton County** farmers, initially intended to increase the county’s tax base, ultimately expanded the amount of land open to residential development. Starting around 2000, tourism, new home construction and personal income skyrocketed, and many farmers sold their land for development. After the recession, though, half-finished housing and abandoned commercial developments became a blight on the landscape.

Idaho Department of Lands Endowment ownership, and Teton County, below, where there’s little state land left.



Pay to Play

In Utah, public access to state trust lands comes at an increasing cost

How much is hunting and fishing access to 3.4 million acres of land in Utah worth? Last year, the answer was \$776,000. That was the amount the Utah Department of Natural Resources paid another state agency, the School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA), to secure public access to state trust lands, granted to Western states by the federal government to generate money for schools and other public institutions.

This fall, however, the deal between the Natural Resources Department and SITLA expired. In negotiating its renewal, SITLA wanted to raise its fee to market rates, estimated at \$1.8 to \$3.9 million a year for the 1 million acres that have commercial hunting value. If the department didn't pay up, SITLA seemed ready to lease exclusive access to beloved places like the Book Cliffs — a vast wilderness of rugged bluffs and forested valleys teeming with elk, mule deer and cutthroat trout — to wealthy hunters. Access to prime areas would be scooped up mainly by customers willing to pay thousands of dollars for a single hunt, with only a handful of permits issued through a public lottery.

Kim Christy, SITLA's deputy director, argued that the agency was merely fulfilling its obligation under the state Constitution to optimize revenue. But many sportsmen saw it differently. Bill Christensen of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation says

access to state lands shouldn't be reserved for the highest bidders. And SITLA's demands underscored his fears about what could happen should federal lands be transferred to state control: privatization and loss of access. "I have been very concerned about how greedy SITLA has been in recent years," Christensen says.

STATE TRUST LANDS are owned by public entities, but they aren't "public" the way federal lands are. Most states don't have to manage them for multiple uses, so there's no guarantee of public access for hunting, hiking and camping. Instead, these lands are managed to make money, traditionally by leasing them for grazing, mining, timber or energy development. Sometimes the land is sold outright.

"The mandate that states have is often interpreted as this really rigid thing," says Shawn Regan, a research fellow at the Property and Environment Research Center, a Montana-based free-market think tank. But hunting, especially, can be a source of revenue for state trusts. "There are ways to allow access or provide conservation benefits while still meeting the requirement to benefit the trust."

Public access to trust lands varies widely from state to state. Idaho and Wyoming allow free access, while New Mexico and Colorado have interagency payment schemes similar to Utah's. Still, access is provided primarily at the discretion of state agencies, leaving the public

with little say in whether certain parcels are put up for sale, threatened with development or closed to the public.

Colorado's interagency agreement, for instance, only allows public access to about 20 percent of state trust lands. Another 8 percent is leased for private recreation, mostly to individuals or outfitters for hunting or fishing. "They go out to the highest bidder," says Tim Brass, director for state policies for Backcountry Hunters and Anglers.

Utah's interagency agreements have so far prevented the state from privatizing hunting access. The money the Department of Natural Resources pays SITLA ensures access to any trust lands that are "unencumbered" by potentially dangerous activities, like an active mine or oil well.

As on federal lands, energy development can also threaten the integrity of wild places and cause conflict, even when access isn't lost. In 2013, for instance, SITLA leased almost 100,000 acres in the Book Cliffs to Anadarko for oil and gas development. Following outcry from powerful politicians and hunters, who value the vast, game-rich roadless area, the company agreed not to drill the most ecologically sensitive portion of the leased area for a few years. That meant that the public could still hunt there — at least as long as SITLA got its fees to preserve public access.

In October, the two agencies settled on a new agreement: The Natural Resources Department will pay SITLA nearly \$800,000 this year, with the fee increasing annually to almost \$1.3 million in 2031 to account for inflation. Utah's Legislature will contribute another \$1 million in taxpayer money each year. The department's money comes from federal taxes on bows, guns and ammunition, which are passed on to states to manage wildlife and restore habitat. This year's SITLA fee amounts to 5 to 6 percent of this revenue, a relatively small chunk. But if the fee skyrockets, "it will mean less wildlife habitat projects will happen, and fewer acres will be improved, enhanced or conserved," Christensen says.

SITLA's Christy calls the deal a "win-win outcome," that benefits both the state trust beneficiaries and sportsmen and women. But for Christensen, the ever-increasing annual fee is a lingering worry. "I look at my kids and my grandkids, and I'm concerned," he says. "Are we going to price future generations out of the opportunity to access lands?" **EMILY BENSON**

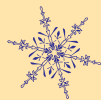
Bison roam Winter Ridge, which includes a large parcel of SITLA land in the Book Cliffs, about 60 miles south of Vernal, Utah.

UTAH DIVISION OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES



Emily Benson is an editorial fellow at *High Country News*. [@erbenson1](#)

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Photo by Ron Wolf

Whistleblower continued from page 7

expert. I have no skills in auditing and accounting,” Clement said in his whistleblower disclosure. He believes that Zinke’s goal was to get him and other reassigned senior executives, especially those with backgrounds in science and natural resources, to quit, so they would no longer be in position to question his policies, and so he could replace them with staffers whose thinking reflects his own.

In his whistleblower complaint, Clement charges that he was reassigned because of his efforts to get Interior and the White House to relocate four Alaskan coastal villages — Newtok, a Yu’pik community, and the Iñupiat villages of Kivalina, Shishmaref and Shaktoolik. These Native Alaskan settlements, and dozens of others, face imminent danger from erosion and storm surge caused by melting sea ice. Clement’s complaint is being considered by the Office of Special Counsel, an independent agency charged with protecting federal workers. Meanwhile, the Interior Department’s Inspector General is investigating the reassignments of all the senior Interior staff shuffled around by Zinke, including Clement.

Clement didn’t quit right away, he says, because of the “very slim chance” he could return to his previous position, which remains unfilled, and push his agency to take climate change seriously. “Every one of the bureaus is going to have mission failure if we don’t pay attention to climate change,” he warns. For instance, the U.S. Geological Survey can’t be a world-class scientific agency if it ignores climate change. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service won’t be able to protect rare species if it ignores the risks posed by sea-level rise, increased wildfire and other consequences of climate change. And the Bureau of Indian Affairs cannot assist the Interior Department in

adequately fulfilling its trust responsibilities to Indians and Native Alaskans, unless it responds to the problem.

When he finally quit, Clement sent his resignation to Zinke, accusing him and the president of being “shackled” to special interests like oil, gas and mining: “You and President Trump have waged an all-out assault on the civil service by muzzling scientists and policy experts like myself.” And before he departed, Clement urged other civil servants to join him in documenting examples of the administration violating laws and abandoning agencies’ missions. Clement recommended they pass incriminating documents to the Capitol Hill or file complaints with the Inspector General.

Veterans of Interior say it’s not surprising that Clement had to make his stand alone; the department’s culture doesn’t tolerate dissent. “I think that’s a hard thing to ask of career employees. I think they’re afraid for their jobs,” says Maureen Finnerty, president of the Coalition to Protect National Parks, who spent 31 years as a National Park Service manager. “I understand why they don’t want to stick their necks out.”

Still, Finnerty wholeheartedly agrees with Clement’s assessment of how the Trump administration is changing Interior. “Here’s the trends we see coming out of Zinke: Everything he’s done is skewed towards industry and development and allowing private companies to profit off of public resources.”

And Clement has received a lot of support. Eleven law professors wrote a letter to the Office of Special Counsel asking for his reinstatement if his allegations are confirmed. Clement had been one of 225 Interior employees in the senior executive service, a group of career managers created by Congress to provide consistent leadership and guard against abuse of ex-

ecutive authority by political appointees. “The alleged treatment of Mr. Clement contravenes Congress’s design and illustrates the danger to the healthy functioning of our Federal Government of senior executives subjected to undue political influence,” the professors wrote. Eight Democratic senators called on the Inspector General to look into the reassignments, and more than 170,000 people have signed an online petition demanding an investigation. The Senior Executives Association chimed in: “There is great concern about the reassignments and their corrosive effect on morale and leadership effectiveness at affected agencies.”

In November, Clement sued Interior demanding the release of documents related to Zinke’s transfer of Clement and the other career senior executive service employees.

Meanwhile, Clement became a mini-celebrity in Washington. Stories about him appeared in major newspapers and websites, and he was interviewed on NPR’s *Morning Edition*, the *PBS News Hour* and MSNBC’s *Morning Joe*. “It doesn’t matter what administration you’re in, you have to be discreet talking to the press and talking to the Hill,” Clement said. “I only wish there were more civil servants who felt the freedom to do it. It’s a commentary on our Big Brother mentality at the Department of Interior that nobody does.”

But Clement never got to speak his mind directly to Zinke. Before he left, he fantasized about how he might achieve that. Zinke, who wants to encourage a hunting ethic among his staff, had installed an arcade game called “Big Buck Hunter Pro” in the department’s cafeteria and offered a reward: The employee with the best score gets to visit with Zinke in person. The chance of winning, Clement said with a smile, “made me really want to learn how to play this game.” □

“Every one of the bureaus is going to have mission failure if we don’t pay attention to climate change.”

— Joel Clement,
on the need for the
Department of the Interior
to take climate change
seriously

A house in Shishmaref, Alaska, in 2006 that was damaged by erosion. Joel Clement, far right, former climate change official for the Department of the Interior, resigned in October and has filed complaints about how the agency has been ignoring its core mission and efforts to respond to climate change. THE ASAHI SHIMBUN VIA GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF PBS NEWSHOUR





Former neo-Nazi Timothy Zaal poses in front of a newspaper article about his past involvement in hate crimes, part of his presentation about his personal experience as a skinhead, at the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, California. There, he gives talks about his personal experiences with white supremacist groups. ROBYN BECK/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

California, state of hate

A rise in hate crimes, in the eyes of a former white nationalist



LETTER FROM CALIFORNIA
RUXANDRA GUIDI

The red spray paint appeared one late October morning at the site of a future state park in Los Angeles. Sloppily written slogans, including “Trump rulez,” “Hail the Aryans” and other messages encouraging violence against Jews and blacks covered a couple port-a-potties and benches. Known as the Bowtie, the 18-acre open lot is frequently host to the colorful work of LA graffiti artists, because police rarely venture there and the city doesn’t bother to destroy the work. But the new graffiti was different: It was a disturbing visual reminder of the current rise in hate speech and crimes throughout the state.

California has been known for hate activity since the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 opened the gates to coordinated attacks against Chinese immigrants in Los Angeles. These days, it has the highest number of active groups in the country — 79, with nearly half of them based in or around Los Angeles, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. The SPLC began to keep a tally in 1999, when demographic projections noted that the growing Latino and Asian population was expected to challenge whites’ nationwide majority status by the middle of the 21st century. In California, that demographic prediction is already nearly a reality. With it has come a rise in hate crimes: According to the latest annual report by the California Department of Justice, there was an 11.2 percent rise last year in crimes committed against people based on their race or ethnicity, with attacks against African-Americans coming in first and Latinos second.

Faced with those numbers, Timothy Zaal told me over the phone that he’s

been “feeling overwhelmed.” At 6-foot-3, he remains intimidating, with his strong build and shaved head, even at the age of 52. Zaal is a former skinhead, and though he hasn’t been active in three decades, the old feelings rise again whenever he sees footage of racist attacks like the ones he used to commit. “I would compare it to relapsing as a drug addict, or to going into a bar when you’re an alcoholic,” he said. In the past year, such attacks have

Anger and grief acted on him like a call to arms and became his way of making sense through perpetuating the violence.

been in the news, most notably the one committed last summer by white nationalists and neo-Nazis in Charlottesville, Virginia. Zaal has to remind himself that the adrenaline rush he still feels is “a lie, because I know I’ve been conditioned and indoctrinated,” he said.

As a teenager growing in a working-class suburb of Los Angeles, Zaal sought out neo-Nazis. It started when his parents, feeling outnumbered by their new Latino neighbors, decided to move out of his childhood home. Around that time, a black gang member shot Zaal’s older brother, whom he had looked up to, on the street. Zaal’s anger and grief acted on him like a call to arms and became his way of making sense through perpetuating the violence. Before long,

Zaal reached out to the national leader of White Aryan Resistance (founded by former Ku Klux Klan Grand Dragon Tom Metzger), who put him in touch with a local chapter. Zaal wasn’t interested in proselytizing. He was the “boots on the ground,” the guy known among his peers for brutally beating a young homeless gay teen in the streets of Hollywood in 1981, leaving him for dead.

In 1990, Zaal was sentenced to one year in jail for his involvement in an attack on an Iranian couple. State hate crime laws were lax back then; today, Zaal would likely face a much lengthier sentence. A proposed bill, if passed, would further expand those laws by punishing similar crimes committed by white supremacists as acts of terrorism.

Southern California’s racial and ethnic diversity only aggravated Zaal’s racism. “We’d say, ‘Multiculturalism is taking over, we have these illegal, undocumented people coming into the country, and we’re being outbred.’” Similar rhetoric is galvanizing much of the alt-right today, but the landscape is much more fractured, though thriving online. It’s not just skinheads, neo-Nazis and white nationalists; there are also Holocaust deniers, neo-Confederates, and anti-LGBT, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim groups. Many of these groups piggybacked on Donald Trump’s rise to power to bring their ideology into the mainstream.

Not all these groups are as violent in real life as they appear online. But that is no consolation to Zaal, who recognizes the psychological impact of hateful speech and now dedicates himself to helping “formers” change, just as he did. It can take months or even years to help reform a neo-Nazi, and even then, the shame of having belonged to a hate group lingers. Or rather, it comes back to haunt you every time you see yourself reflected in the day’s news, or in the graffiti scrawled on a port-a-potty. □

Stanley Crawford's lesson

Dixon, New Mexico-based author Stanley Crawford defies most of the stereotypes of a “Western American Writer.” He’s more likely to wear sandals than cowboy boots. He owns a pickup truck, but his automotive passion is for working on impractical yet dapper vintage European cars; his most recent project was the restoration of a 1984 Citroen Deux Chevaux. His latest aspiration is to compete in the 2018 Brompton World Championship, a decorous folding-bike race held every summer in St. James Park, London, at which gentlemen are required to wear a jacket, shirt and tie.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the glee he takes in flouting the usual image of a Western writer, Crawford has earned a reputation as one of the most original and incisive authors writing about the region today. His memoirs *Mayordomo* and *A Garlic Testament* are celebrated for their droll yet humane reflections on how their author’s quixotic notions of the independence involved in a part-time agricultural career were upended by the complex reality he encountered: the communal modes of life and farming still practiced in his largely Hispanic community. But Crawford stayed on and adapted, and he has written and farmed in Dixon for nearly five decades now. His most recent novel, *Village*, chronicles a day in the life of San Marcos, a fictional village that resonates with Dixon as surely as Thomas McGuane’s creation “Deadrock” echoes the real town of Livingston, Montana.

Village marks a departure in Crawford’s career as a novelist. Eclectic in theme, style and setting, Crawford’s first eight novels deliver intimate portraits of a series of doomed but lovable misfits as they try to negotiate a space for themselves in a world that refuses to conform to their vision. With *Village*, Crawford weaves the bifurcated themes of his fiction and nonfiction into a quiet masterpiece.

The story of San Marcos is narrated by a cast of dysfunctional loners: a Chicano postmaster intent on sabotaging the employer he regards as a hostile occupying power, an Anglo toymaker who has been trying to eke out an existence without paying taxes (or even having a Social Security card) following his failure as a 1960s radical, and a ne’er-do-well with an almost erotic desire to be in car accidents, among others. Haunted by violent histories and troubled by visions of future apocalypse, these characters nevertheless manage to carve out an anarchic communal life in the present.

Northern New Mexico is a place with a palpable divide between recent Anglo interlopers and the Chicana/o and Indig-



Stanley Crawford, with his dogs Tesoro and Tippie on his El Bosque Garlic Farm in Dixon, New Mexico. DON USNER

enous inhabitants who preceded them, and *Village* pulls no punches in exploring that rift.

“Part of living in a multicultural society is the necessity of imagining who your neighbors are,” Crawford told me, acknowledging the risks inherent in the attempt. In taking those imaginative risks, and narrating the inner lives of his Chicana/o characters, Crawford tells a story that confronts the ongoing histories that divide us without regarding them as insurmountable.

The thread that literally and figuratively connects the lives of these characters is the Acequia de los Hermanos, the Spanish-era irrigation ditch that makes life in San Marcos possible while serving as its most reliable source of anxiety and strife. Over the course of the spring day narrated in the novel, the *acequia* is nursed back to life for the season by Lázaro Quintana, the aging mayor-domo who oversees its maintenance and operation.

As Lázaro coaxes the water downstream, clearing errant roots, beaver falls and human detritus, some local evangelicals interrupt his work. These proselytizers paint a lurid picture of the disasters occurring in the world, insisting that they foretell the end times. Pondering these calamities, Lázaro silently concludes, “They were probably happening ... be-

cause *la gente* had stopped taking care of their gardens.”

This matter-of-fact response to apocalyptic thinking carries a lesson in its apparent non sequitur. “Anglos who move here have to learn something,” says Crawford, adding wryly, “though some don’t.”

The “something” that must be learned is perhaps what Lázaro has to teach: that we can only hope to survive the calamities of our history and future if we attend to the often unseen and unpaid labor we do for each other. The chores that provide a village with water, the care of our elders and children, our devotion to small things, vital and beautiful, like gardens — this is the work necessary to build and maintain a community that might endure.

When the sun sets on San Marcos at the conclusion of *Village*, nothing has really been settled; we are left with neither a happy ending nor a tragic but dramatically satisfying conclusion. Crawford is not a writer who peddles easy fixes, either for his village or the world beyond. Instead, he provides us with something far more valuable: the humor and grace to face the absurdities and catastrophes of a new day with the knowledge that we do not face them alone.

BY ALEX TRIMBLE YOUNG



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Stanley Crawford
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Remembering Katie Lee

The 'Grande Dame of the West' passes on

BY CRAIG CHILDS

Lately, I've been writing about my old friend Katie Lee, the ink still drying on two recent books. Foul-mouthed, unforgiving foe of Glen Canyon Dam, guitar player, singer-songwriter, author and dauntless conservationist, she brought color to more than my writing, electrifying everything she touched. Trying to describe a slickrock Utah landscape, I called it "as curved and defined as Katie Lee perched like a goddess in Glen Canyon's cathedrals. What paper map could ever compare?"

I thought Katie Lee would live forever. It never crossed my mind she wouldn't be here to read the words I wrote.

Katie died Nov. 1, 2017, in Jerome, Arizona, at 98. She died in the bed of the house she shared with Joey van Leeuwen, a weathered, lanky Dutchman she met in western Australia. She was 59, he was 12 years younger, and it was love at first sight for both: He came out to meet her, she said, wearing only shorts, his viney body sun-browned by the Outback. The memory of that moment still made her flush. In old age, the two leaned on each other like ancient trees, saying they could not live without each other.

The day after she died, Joey took his own life.

To reach their home, you followed the narrow, winding highway that switchbacks through Jerome. A big wooden sign over the door of the light blue house urged you, boldly, to SING. And the house sang — filled with the life-size wooden birds Joey carved and painted, some perched on bookshelves, some hanging from the ceiling, turning slowly in the air.

A performer till the end, Katie Lee swore at her audiences, then ensnared them by singing, her guitar around her neck like a troubadour. I knew what she'd do when I saw her — throw her old bony arms around me, then grab my face with her open palms for a kiss. If we had the time, we would sit and talk about the shape of rock and canyons in the country that stole her heart.

Born in Tucson in 1919, Katie graduated from the University of Arizona with a fine arts degree, and moved to Hollywood in 1948 to pursue a career as a stage and screen actress. She turned to cabaret performances, appearing at the old Gate of Horn Club in Chicago, New York's Blue Angel, and San Francisco's historic "hungry i" nightclub. She took her first river trip on June 15, 1953, through the Grand Canyon, which at the time flowed free, no dam at the mouth of Glen Canyon. She returned many times over the years to run the elegant, calm-water stretch of Glen Canyon just upstream of Grand Canyon. In the 1960s and 1970s, she was the jewel of the Colorado mountain ski towns, performing as a folksinger. She lived for a while in Aspen — "a glamour puss with a vintage Thunderbird," in the words of local writer Su Lum. She stayed until the place got too damn rich; pissed at all that gentrifying glitz, she left with her usual panache, trailing strings of cuss words and goodbye kisses. At the age of 59, Katie spent a year vagabonding around the world. That's how she met Joey, a bird-lover who worked at a furniture factory in Perth. In 1978, they settled in Jerome, Joey with his long arborist's fingers and a smile that used every muscle in his face, fierce Katie Lee with her singsong voice and careless gift for enchantment.



BEN MOON

Once, a decade and a half ago, Katie Lee spread pre-1963 topo maps across her living room floor, reassembling the broken bones of Glen Canyon. She had a story about every bend, and began to cry, putting her hand to her mouth. After so many years, it still hurt that her beloved canyons were drowned below Powell, hundreds of miles of side-canyons buried. She refused to use the word "lake." Lake Powell, she said, is an abomination. The license plate on her Prius reads DAM DAM. Her maps resurrected the world before the dam flooded the Colorado and its tributaries. No 250-square-mile reservoir, the only blue on the paper the course of the river as it wriggled around sandbars, falling into canyon shadow below alcoves perched high up in the Navajo sandstone.

Talking about the dam, she'd growl, schooling you with her voice. The rest of the world, its interstates and smokestacks, she flicked away with her hand. When she wasn't angry, she had a sweet, squeaky drawl, and she spoke as if she were dreaming. Her hands rose in the air, outlining bays and elegant troughs in the rock.

With both of them gone, a day apart, I search the November night sky. There ought to be a new constellation, tall Joey holding Katie as she leans into him, their stars burning overhead as they float the river of the Milky Way. □

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HEARD AROUND THE WEST | BY BETSY MARSTON

ALASKA

It's better not to mess with a macho moose when he's in the mood to make whoopee. As Alberta Laktonen watched from across the street, a rutting bull moose head-butted her Toyota Prius and then turned its attention to her mailbox, whirling around to crash its antlers against the metal. Both targets remained standing, though the car suffered an estimated \$5,600 in damage, reports *The Week* magazine. This is actually typical behavior for a young bull seeking a mate, said a spokesman for Alaska's Department of Fish and Game. "Basically, it means their hormones are raging."

COLORADO

For Katelyn Zak, 29, of Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Beth Rittenhouse, 28, from Boulder, Colorado, a day hike had unintended consequences. The women, who had never met, were each hiking solo on the Dark Canyon loop not far from Crested Butte. They ran into each other on the trail as the sun was setting and the night was getting cooler. And that's when they realized they were in a fix: They were miles from their destination and thought they might be lost. But they got lucky, says *Colorado Central Magazine*: "They stumbled upon an outfitter's drop camp, complete with a tent, firewood, cots, food and a lighter, where they spent the night." And the next morning, they met two locals who gave them food and directed them back to the trailhead, where, by another coincidence, they found their cars parked side by side. "It was bizarre, absolutely bizarre," commented Mount Crested Butte police officer Matt Halverson, in the *Gunnison Country Times*.

A hunter near Vail, Colorado, was less fortunate in October. He'd spent several days in the backcountry before successfully bagging a large 6x6 bull — meaning one with a total of 12 antler points. He'd made several trips to his truck to pack out the elk, says the *Vail Daily*, but on the final one, he discovered that a thief had made off with his trophy elk's antlered head. There's a \$1,000 reward for helping to find



WYOMING We hope it's big enough. DON CRECELIUS

the culprit: Call 800-972-TIPS or go online at TipSubmit.com.

On the other hand, Gail Binkley, editor of the *Four Corners Free Press*, learned a lot about neighborliness after a sudden squall swept through Cortez. She and her husband were at home, when suddenly "there was a loud crack!" close by: A microburst had ripped a 50-foot-tall blue spruce completely out of the ground, yanking the tree's roots up from under the concrete driveway. The fallen giant completely enveloped her car and blocked the front door. Binkley barely managed to squeeze out, only to find the porch filled with broken limbs and bristly needles. Then something wonderful happened: "People started appearing" — not her immediate neighbors but folks from blocks away. "Everyone oohed and aahed over the giant tree. And then they set to work." In short order the volunteers chain-sawed the tree's strewn limbs while other people she'd never met arrived in pickups to carry off the wood, destined for the landfill the next day. Before long, her car was freed, she could open her front door and the tree had been reduced to a stump. Says a grateful Binkley: "They didn't know me, what religion I was, or what political affiliation I might have. They asked nothing in return. They simply saw an opportunity to help, and took it."

ARIZONA

Facts have found a fan in Susan Bolton, a senior U.S. District Court judge for Arizona. In a recent ruling, she said that despite receiving a pardon from President Donald Trump, former Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio may not tell the world that he was never criminally convicted. Arpaio had been charged with illegally ordering his department to target and arrest anyone who looked Mexican-American, and despite being ordered by a judge to stop, he continued his "racial profiling," reports the *Arizona Star*. But Bolton, whom a colleague describes as an "impeccable judge," said that a presidential pardon does not mean that Arpaio can expunge his criminal record. "The power to pardon is an executive prerogative of mercy, not of judicial record-keeping," Bolton wrote, and a pardon does not "revise the historical facts of this case." Arpaio, who served no time in jail because of Trump's pardon, has said he will sue to have Bolton's decision overturned.

THE WEST

Is a live bobcat worth a thousand times more than a dead one? Absolutely, says *Biodiversity and Conservation*, an international science journal. True, a hunter or trapper in Wyoming pays \$130.53 for a license, and might earn \$184.64 by selling the pelt. But a bobcat living freely for a year in Yellowstone National Park is such a valuable tourist attraction that it has a value of \$308,105. This analysis of the economic impact of wildlife came from two nonprofits, Wyominguntrapped.org and the international Panthera.org, dedicated to preserving wild cats.

WEB EXTRA For more from Heard around the West, see hcn.org.

Tips and photos of Western oddities are appreciated and often shared in this column. Write betsym@hcn.org or tag photos #heardaroundthewest on Instagram.



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“Arby’s might put a piece of meat between two pieces of bread and call it venison, but I don’t think that piece of meat deserves the name.”

Brian Sexton, in his essay, “The fast food industry is co-opting venison,” from *Writers on the Range*, hcn.org/wotr