High Country News

Smart, Courageous Journalism
When It Matters Most
The West is now the nation’s fastest-growing region, and in order to meet the increasing environmental and social challenges it faces — and continue to serve as an antidote to the polarization of the nation — High Country News must transform itself. Our scrappy team of journalists, who currently serve 36,000 subscribers, must evolve into a fully resourced, cutting-edge news organization with the power to inspire millions of citizens to make a difference in their communities. This is the moment — as High Country News enters its 50th year of service — to achieve this transformation and to secure our public-interest journalism for generations to come.

Please join us!

Our goal: raise $10 million for ...

Priority 1
DEEPER AND MORE COMPREHENSIVE COVERAGE OF THE WEST
Hire more writers and editors to do deep-dive journalism focused on the West’s mounting environmental, political and social challenges.

Priority 2
A LARGER AND BROADER AUDIENCE
Expand our marketing efforts to ensure that our work reaches 100,000 subscribers and inspires them to act on behalf of the West.

Priority 3
STABILIZE AND SUSTAIN HIGH COUNTRY NEWS’ BUSINESS MODEL
Bolster our fundraising capacity to ensure the magazine’s quality and independence for generations to come.

Priority 4
TECHNOLOGY THAT SUPPORTS A MODERN NEWS OPERATION
Deploy 21st-century technology to reach new audiences, safeguard our journalists, and better serve and engage readers. This includes a new content management system for our website, social media platforms, a robust customer database, and cyber protection tools in an age of hackers and misinformation.

Priority 5
ESTABLISH AN ENDOWMENT FOR OUR INTERN AND FELLOW PROGRAM
Train the next generations of ethical, highly skilled media professionals.
In January 1969, Tom Bell’s first editorial rolled off the presses in the pages of Camping News Weekly. A high school science teacher in Lander, Wyoming, Bell was worried about the mounting threats to the West’s land, air, water and wildlife. His new weekly publication was his way of raising public awareness and holding those who would degrade the environment to account. In January 1970, Bell renamed the publication High Country News. At that time, with just a couple thousand readers, he had no way of knowing that he was launching what would become the most authoritative magazine of the American West.

For 50 years, through often-lean economic times and radical changes in information technology, High Country News has remained true to its mission: to inform and inspire readers, through in-depth journalism, to act on behalf of the West’s diverse natural and human communities. We continue to help our readers understand this vast, complicated region, one that is an idea as well as a geography, and, to borrow from Wallace Stegner, is “America, only more so.” We never stop asking: What is the American West, and what does it mean to act on its behalf?

Today, our journalism serves more than 35,000 subscribers and reaches millions more through our website and partnerships. With our in-depth reporting and insightful criticism, High Country News is a leader in a volatile news environment.

Smart, courageous journalism when it matters most

Journalism has changed in ways Tom Bell could not have imagined. News these days is consumed at a furious pace, with fewer and fewer outlets taking the time to verify facts or provide the context needed to get stories right. Fake news travels at the speed of a tweet, while national media chase the news of the moment. “Alternative facts” allow cynical lawmakers to make policy decisions based on whim and belief, instead of informed discussion and democratic debate.

High Country News has not succumbed to these trends. Because we are supported by readers, our reporters and editors have the freedom to dive deeply into the issues without the restraining influence of corporate owners or advertisers. And we are committed to examining not only the many problems and conflicts in the West, but also the ways people are working together to find solutions, bridging divides instead of creating them.

High Country News is widely recognized for its excellence and has won numerous national awards, including the George Polk Award, the Utne Media Award for Environmental Coverage, the AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Award, and many others. Our reporting on the West not only deeply informs the people who live in our region, but also provides tip sheets for the national conversation, from The New York Times to the U.S. Congress and the president’s Cabinet.

Audience Growth 2009–2018

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This chart shows the audience growth from 2009 to 2018.
ANDREW CULLEN

EXPAND OUR EDITORIAL TEAM TO DEEPEN AND GROW OUR COVERAGE OF THE REGION’S MOUNTING ENVIRONMENTAL, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES.

The next 50 years

Priority 1

EXPAND OUR EDITORIAL TEAM TO DEEPEN AND GROW OUR COVERAGE OF THE REGION’S MOUNTING ENVIRONMENTAL, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES.

Fundraising goal: $1.5M

• Hire additional editors, writers, copy editors, fact checkers and specialists in data and multimedia, and locate them strategically around the West to ensure that our coverage of the region’s essential beats is deep, accurate and compelling.

• Provide competitive pay for our staff and freelancers so they’ll want to stay with — and do their best work for — High Country News.

• Provide more training and resources for the editorial staff to hone their reporting, writing and editing skills, as well as their ability to engage the communities they cover through digital media and in-person encounters and gatherings.

• Fund more special reporting projects that break new ground in the most entrenched and intertwined challenges confronting the West.

• Redesign the print and digital magazine with a focus on sophisticated storytelling and eye-catching layout and photography to make sure it remains appealing to a wide spectrum of readers.

Even as High Country News celebrates 50 years on the planet, we are preparing for the next half-century of journalism in the public interest.
The essential beats

*High Country News* is dedicated to the creation of a thoughtful, ethical magazine that represents the entire West and illuminates and challenges the many assumptions and myths about this extraordinary region. Here are the core beats we will continue to cover for the next 50 years.

**ENERGY**

The 2000s brought an unprecedented oil and gas boom, spurred by $100/barrel oil prices and hydraulic fracturing or “fracking” technology, which allowed producers to tap new reservoirs of hydrocarbons, particularly in Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico. *High Country News* was there as drill rigs and bulldozers moved into pristine landscapes, labor camps sprang up overnight, and boomtowns became hotbeds for easy money, violence and drugs. Senior Editor Ray Ring published a groundbreaking investigative piece — which won the George Polk Award — about the dangers workers face in the energy fields and the lack of financial and medical support provided by the energy companies. More recently, our reporters have focused on the rapid transition, driven by technology, markets and policy, from coal to wind and solar generation.

**CLIMATE**

When the evidence that climate change was already damaging the West and affecting its economy became undeniable in the early 2000s, *High Country News* Editor Michelle Nijhuis began a groundbreaking climate series we called, simply, “Hot Times.” It addressed a very basic question: How can journalists, through on-the-ground reporting, help citizens make sense of an extremely complex problem? The series was awarded the 2006 Sullivan Award for Excellence in Science Journalism.

Today, *High Country News* covers the accelerating effects of climate change, from wildfires, floods and drought and imperiled wildlife and ecosystems to the potential displacement of human communities, as exemplified by our 2018 story about Imperial Beach, California, a small city whose leaders are planning to move inland as the ocean rises. As a key player in the Climate Desk, a collaboration of many news organizations with a combined reach of millions of readers, we are addressing the defining challenge of our time.

“I thought your article on Bears Ears was off the charts. I’ve been doing quite a lot of work on that and found your piece to be fair and deep. Really fine work.”

—Charles Wilkinson, Professor of Law Emeritus at the University of Colorado

Letter to the editor, 2016
LAND, WATER AND WILDLIFE
The conservation and exploitation of the West’s landscapes and natural resources has always been *High Country News*’ quintessential beat.

Our four-part series on the West’s major river systems — the Colorado, Columbia, Missouri and Rio Grande — won the 1986 George Polk Award, and we continue to lead the way with our coverage of the West’s most precious resource, documenting the removal of dams, the fights over trans-basin water diversions, and the efforts of farmers to use their water more efficiently.

*High Country News* has covered the numerous battles over Western wildlife, from game species such as elk and mule deer, to endangered salmon, wolves and bears. Gloria Dickie, who graduated from our intern program, recently reported on the protracted effort of states to remove the grizzly from federal protection and once again allow hunting of the bear.

In 2016, in one of his final acts in office, President Barack Obama established the 1.3 million-acre Bears Ears National Monument in Utah, protecting a wealth of historic, cultural and natural resources on public lands in partnership with five Native American tribes. A year later, in December 2017, President Donald Trump reduced the size of the monument by 85 percent and sliced another national monument, the Grand Staircase-Escalante, in half. Our stories on these monuments, from their designation to their abrupt shrinkage, revealed that the Trump administration ignored the input of tribes and many local residents, instead deferring to industry and anti-federal politicians in Utah.

THE SAGEBRUSH REBELLIONS
In 2014, armed sagebrush rebels faced off against law enforcement agents over Cliven Bundy’s failure to pay over $1 million in grazing fees for use of federally owned land in Nevada. Two years later, Bundy’s son, Ammon, led an armed occupation of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon, demanding that federal lands be turned over to individual states. *High Country News* not only covered these incidents on the ground, but also provided the deeper context for understanding them as part of a century-long “sagebrush rebellion” against the federal government in the West.
**NATIVE AMERICA**

High Country News may be the first non-Native news organization in the United States to devote an entire desk to covering Indian Country. Our reporting on the tribal-led opposition to the Dakota Access Oil Pipeline near the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in South Dakota provided a nuanced view of the complex history that culminated in the standoff, and since then we’ve brought that same authenticity and depth to more than 100 stories from Indian Country. Our 2017 story “Reclaiming the Klamath” profiled the young Indigenous lawyers rising to argue for the environmental rights of California’s Yurok Tribe, and a recent update on the tribe’s declaration of rights of personhood for the Klamath River has been republished or quoted by publications as varied as Mother Jones, Earth Justice and Breitbart. In 2019, we earned 19 National Native Media Awards from the Native American Journalists Association.

**THE BORDERLANDS**

High Country News has been delving into the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands since 1973, when we reported on a fight between a copper-mining company and conservationists over the proposed Aldo Leopold Wilderness in southern New Mexico. Our 2018 article “Two countries, one border and their shared pollution” examined sewage and garbage pollution in Tijuana and San Diego and what the two communities are doing together to address it. Well before the divisive policies of the Trump administration, High Country News was reporting on the connections between communities and ecosystems on both sides of the border. And we continue to explore the ways in which immigrants, both documented and undocumented, have carved out vibrant but often insecure lives across the West.

**CORPORATE AND GOVERNMENT POWER**

High Country News has long pioneered reporting on the outsized influence of corporations and industries on the management of public lands and other resources. We’ve also shone some much-needed light on the inner workings of government agencies: In 2016, we broke the story of the long-standing pattern of sexual abuse and discrimination in the National Park Service. This inspired widespread policy changes at Grand Canyon National Park and rippled throughout other federal agencies working in the West.
If High Country News has one major problem, it’s this: Not nearly enough people are reading us. With your support, we’ll expand our marketing reach to build a wider community of engaged, informed citizens who care about the West.

Modernized technology and infrastructure will not only help us to better serve our readers, it will enable us to put our resources where they matter most: journalism.

Priority 2
BROADEN OUR COMMUNITY OF READERS TO INSPIRE MORE PEOPLE TO ACT ON BEHALF OF THE WEST’S HUMAN AND NATURAL COMMUNITIES.
Fundraising goal: $1.75M

• Invest in new marketing initiatives, led by a new marketing director, to double the size of our paid subscribership (currently at 36,000) and reach millions of people through digital channels.

• Double the reach of our HCNU classroom program, which currently provides free subscriptions to 15,000 students a year.

• Send complimentary copies of the magazine to lawmakers in every Western state, informing the region’s influential decision-makers.

• Hold inclusive editorial events around the West to engage more communities in serious discussion and help us all better understand the region and the critical issues we face.

Priority 3
DEPLOY 21ST-CENTURY TECHNOLOGY TO REACH NEW AUDIENCES, SAFEGUARD JOURNALISTS, AND SERVE AND ENGAGE READERS.
Fundraising goal: $750K

• Deploy and maintain a cloud-based database that seamlessly handles customer information, helping us serve our readers quickly so they can get back to reading our stories.

• Enhance our cyber-security to safeguard the integrity of our journalism in an age of hackers and rampant misinformation. Independent journalism requires the safety of our journalists, staff and infrastructure. With your help, we can ensure online security.

• Upgrade our website, digital archives and other products for a better reader experience, enabling readers to more easily share our stories with their own communities and engage in meaningful conversations about the West.
Priority 4
STABILIZE AND SUSTAIN HIGH COUNTRY NEWS’ BUSINESS MODEL TO ENSURE THE MAGAZINE’S QUALITY AND INDEPENDENCE FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.
Fundraising goal: $1M

We rely on readers and supporters, through a business model that keeps us independent and flourishing. We will expand the development staff and broaden our outreach to a wider community, ensuring that HCN will thrive for decades beyond our 50th anniversary. To guard against the inevitable economic downturns, we’ll double our financial reserves.

Priority 5
PERMANENTLY ENDOW OUR PROGRAMS FOR EDITORIAL INTERNS AND FELLOWS.
Fundraising goal: $5M

With reader support, High Country News has created a world-class internship and fellowship program, recruiting and training top journalists from across the country to hone their talents and deepen their understanding of the West. Over our first half century, we’ve nurtured more than 250 individuals who have gone on to be leaders in journalism, government, business, nonprofits, art and academia. With an endowment of $5 million generating $200,000 in operating funds, we will double the number of annual participants from six to 12.
For the past 50 years, readers like you have sustained HCN. They make donations, incredibly, on top of their subscriptions, providing three-quarters of the revenue that keeps our journalists in the field, the printing press and website humming, and all of our myriad bills paid. We supplement reader support with foundation grants and advertising from businesses whose values align with ours.

This model works, and to keep it robust for the decades ahead, we are once again turning to our readers. Together we can ensure the continuation of reliable, independent journalism that informs and inspires people to act on behalf of their communities, the West, the nation and, indeed, the world.
Your role in the future of courageous journalism

As a reader-fueled organization, we need your help to transform HCN and secure one of the nation’s most important sources of public-interest journalism for generations to come. You can give in several ways:

1. Make a one-time gift in general support of the campaign

We will use it to invest in all of the five major priorities. Please join us!

2. Make a one-time gift in support of one of the priority areas

Whether it’s our editorial expansion or our marketing efforts to reach millions of new readers, we promise that your dollars go directly to what you care about the most. Naming opportunities are available.

3. Make a multi-year pledge to general support or a specific priority

Your gift in subsequent years will mean we can keep building on our work over time, while giving you the time to spread out a significant contribution.

4. Make a planned gift

By including High Country News in your estate plans, you will join a group — the Tom Bell Legacy Society — that is committed to sustaining HCN and its values far beyond our lifetimes. Making a bequest can be as simple as naming High Country News as a beneficiary on a retirement account or life insurance policy.

5. Give to the endowment

You can designate your gift specifically to the HCN Intern and Fellow Endowment, ensuring that HCN will continue to train future generations of civic-minded journalists for decades to come.

If you are interested in making a planned contribution, please use the form in this booklet. If you would like to talk further about leaving a legacy or any other gift for High Country News, please call Development Director Laurie Milford at 970.527.4898, or email Campaign50@hcn.org. Thank you for joining us!

“This is the best effort to keep all of us informed of the many successes and failures in the battle to reverse the continuing degradation of our national environment. To you, to your staff and to all working contributors, I sincerely hope that the High Country News has a long and productive life.”

—David D. Dominick, Commissioner, Federal Water Quality Administration, Letter to the editor, 1970
50th anniversary ambassadors

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Caroline Byrd
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Craig Childs
Jon Christensen
Mark Harvey
Tom and Caroline Hoyt
John and Kathy Matter
Jim Merchant
Michelle Nijhuis
David Nimkin
Tom Page
Luther Propst and Liz Storer
Jan Robertson
Charley Rosenberry
Auden Schendler
Shane Smith
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