High Country News

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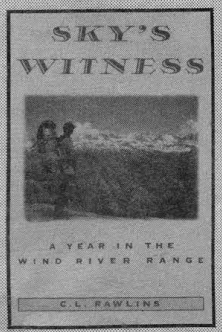
INSIDE:

Carlsbad Caverns National Park



The continuing saga of New Mexico's Gray Ranch

by **Bruce Selcraig**

Three years ago I met some ranchers in the remote southwestern bootheel of New Mexico who were distraught over the sale of a famous local ranch. They were suspicious of the new owners and fearful that the dreaded public — a word they often spat out like tobacco juice — would soon come to ruin the ranch and their solitude.

"Come back in 10 years," one rancher's wife told me bitterly, "and see what's happened to this land ... There'll be people from the East and people from universities who have read some books coming down here telling us how to conserve things."

As you may have guessed, the new landlord was neither a rancher nor the government, but the world's largest private land-conservation group, The Nature Conservancy, which had just spent $18 million to buy New Mexico's immense and biologically exquisite Gray Ranch.

The Conservancy's purchase of the 502-square-mile property, about 200 miles west of El Paso and east of Tucson on the Mexico border, enthralled biologists; within its boundaries are believed to be 718 species of plants, an estimated 75 species and subspecies of mammals, and 52 kinds of reptiles and amphibians, including three on the federal list of endangered species. Some 150 types of birds breed here, and more than 70 plants are rare or endangered. Bill Waldman, director of the Conservancy's New Mexico office, said at the time:

"More separate species and subspecies of mammals are found on the Gray Ranch than on any existing national wildlife refuge or national park in the continental United States."

So why is the Conservancy now willing to turn the Gray Ranch over to private interests?

What has the Conservancy accomplished in three years?

And what does Jane Fonda have to do with all of this?

Ah, the mysteries of the Gray. What appears to be the impending sale of the ranch to a non-profit organization headed by a rancher is only the latest plot twist in what has been a three-year saga of confusion, controversy and high-stakes preservation politics.

From ranch to refuge

Our story starts in late 1989, when word trickled through Hidalgo County that Pablo Brener, the reclusive Mexican billionaire who owned the Gray Ranch, might finally sell it to The Nature Conservancy. Waldman had been pursuing Brener for years and finally struck a deal, as Waldman tells it, just before some less conservation-minded buyers began making serious proposals.

Many New Mexico ranchers weren't thrilled about the news. Few of them seemed to know what the Arlington, Va.-

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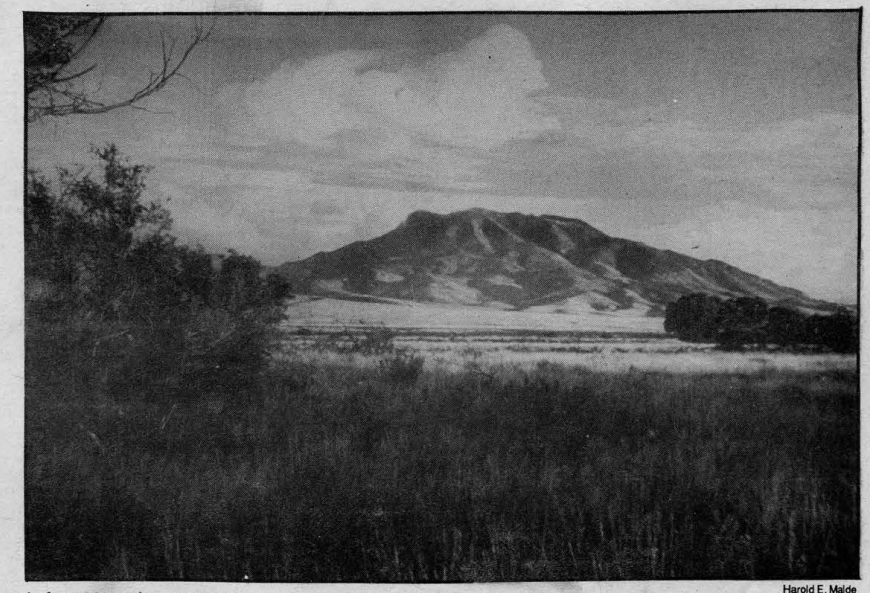

Animas Mountains at sunset Harold E. Malde

The $18 million ranch is like Grand Canyon — virtually impossible to appreciate with our limited senses

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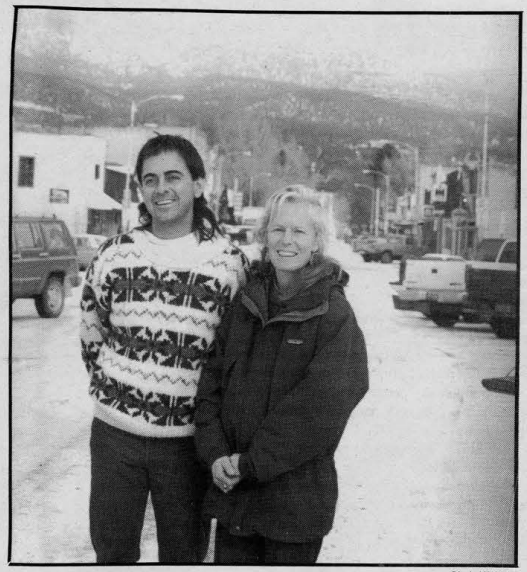
Dear friends,

New intern

New intern Ernie Atencio and his wife Elsbeth arrived in Paonia to spend the winter after a year of far-flung wanderings. Leaving Yosemite in late 1991, they spent last winter in Nepal and India, then landed happily on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon (the side without a McDonald's), where they worked as park rangers for the season and reveled in their return to the Southwest.

Ernie comes originally from New Mexico, where tangled family roots go back centuries. He studied anthropology at the University of New Mexico and has spent the years since working as a park ranger, outdoor skills instructor, and environmental educator. More recently he has taught Elderhostel field courses. In past incarnations he worked as a municipal planner and librarian. After all that disparate experience, now he's trying at *HCN* to sneak in the back door as a writer.

— the staff



Cindy Wehling

Ernie and Elsbeth in snowy downtown Paonia

HOTLINE

Survey attacks logging

A leaked Forest Service survey in Montana reveals that the public disapproves of the agency's logging policy in the state's undeveloped areas. The survey of 2,000 Montana residents, conducted last August by A&A Research of Kalispell, was intended for internal use, says Beth Horn, Forest Service spokeswoman. But the Montana Wilderness Association obtained and released survey results in December. Of those polled, 63 percent criticized cutting more trees in roadless areas. "Too much logging and clearcutting" was considered the major problem on eight of 10 national forests in the state. This was not the sentiment of Regional Forester Dave Jolly, who told *The Missoulian* last fall that the Forest Service would build roads and cut more trees in roadless areas. According to the survey, however, a majority of Montanans polled believe their forests should be managed more for wildlife and wilderness values. Seventy percent, for example, disagreed with opening more areas of the forests to off-road vehicles. Timber industry representatives immediately attacked the survey. These "questionable public opinion surveys" are being "grossly misused and misinterpreted," said a spokesman for the Montana Wood Products Association. A synopsis of the survey is available from the Montana Wilderness Association, Box 635, Helena, MT 59624 (406/443-7350).

Coyote kill protested

A plan to shoot coyotes from a helicopter on ranches near Eureka, Mont., in late February, threatens wolves in the area, critics say. Ranchers asked the Animal Damage Control Agency to eliminate coyotes that kill baby calves each spring. But Phil Knight of the Bozeman, Mont.-based Predator Project says the ranches are in or near the home range of the Murphy wolf pack and that marksmen could easily mistake wolves for coyotes. He cites the 1992 case of a wolf shot outside of Yellowstone National Park by a hunter who thought it was a coyote (*HCN*, 12/28/92). He also says the ADC didn't pursue alternatives such as guard dogs. Says Knight, "The ADC has a history of coming right in and shooting instead of exploring options."

Timber company fined for political fliers

Plum Creek Manufacturing Co. in Montana paid the maximum fine of $1,000 for distributing political fliers along with paychecks last fall at its Columbia Falls saw mill plant. The fliers urged attendence at a rally designed to oppose Democratic Rep. Pat Williams, who was running against Republican Rep. Ron Marlenee for the state's lone congressional seat (*HCN* 10/19/92). State law prohibits employers from including any political materials, names of candidates or inferences about political opinions with paychecks, AP reports. Plum Creek is the timber-producing arm of Burlington Northern Railroad.

Sierra old growth spared

Backed against a wall of appeals and lawsuits, the Forest Service banned clearcutting of old-growth forests for two years in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California. To protect the rare California spotted owl, no trees bigger than 30 inches in diameter can be logged and a 300-acre protected zone will be established around spotted owl nests. On 10 national forests in the Sierras, only about 10 percent of the oldest trees remain uncut, The Wilderness Society estimates. Regional Forester Ron Stewart says the guidelines, which go into effect March 1, should keep the owl off the federal endangered species list while scientists prepare a long-range protection plan. But, Stewart adds, "My long-term goal is a steady, dependable supply of timber from the national forests." David B. Edelson of the Natural Resources Defense Council called the ban "a path-breaking decision that will dramatically improve logging practices throughout the Sierra. It provides a model of environmentally sound forest management that should be seriously considered in other regions of the country."

Idaho nixes fish farm

Idaho state officials blocked a fish farm that would have turned one of the last clean springs in Idaho's Snake River drainage into a stream of fish sewage. "Perhaps the greatest significance of this case is to enforce the state's ability to say 'no' to more pollution in the Snake River and have it stick," says Trish Klahr, a staffer with the Idaho Conservation League. Klahr says the river's polluted condition was the subject of a number of hearings this past summer and also caught the attention of Gov. Cecil Andrus, who came to see the degraded river for himself. During the outing his boat got stuck in the weeds. "It sent a classic message to the governor and to the public that the river needs help," Klahr says. The Idaho Board of Health and Welfare made the final decision against the fish farm. It upheld an earlier denial by the Department of Environmental Quality of a discharge permit on Box Canyon Creek. The state said resulting pollution would violate water quality standards and accelerate weed growth downstream.

WESTERN ROUNDUP

West drinks deeply of winter storms

By the end of January, storms had broken the grip of drought on the south-central West. For the first time in six years, Utah and Nevada expected a normal spring runoff. But Western water experts cautioned that effects of the drought will linger for years.

"The drought didn't happen overnight and it won't end overnight either," said Mike Elern, a hydrologist with the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) in Salt Lake City.

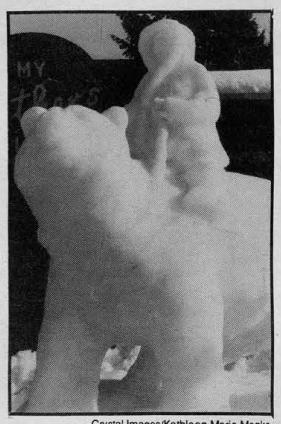
In the southern half of Utah, the La Sal and Blue mountains reported snowpacks 130-289 percent of average in late January and Zion National Park reported a snowpack 200 percent of average. SCS staffer Randy Julander predicted possible flooding in some southern parts of Utah this spring, but he said half-filled reservoirs such as Utah Lake will need at least three normal water-years to fill.

Colorado is also enjoying its wettest winter in eight years, according to SCS snow-survey specialist Mike Gillespie. Overall the state's snowpack was 112 percent of average in late January, with the southern San Juan mountains at 184 percent of average. Snowfall was so heavy in the southwest town of Durango that an auditorium at Fort Lewis College collapsed under four feet of snow. Storms also hit the northeast corner of Colorado, a region plagued by drought for six years.

In Arizona, heavy rain caused reservoirs to spill over in mid-January. A 13-day downpour forced 700 people from their homes in cities like Phoenix and Tucson and washed tons of debris downstream. Parts of the state received 10 inches of precipitation in 10 days.

On the north rim of the Grand Canyon, more than 10 inches of precipitation in January caused massive rock and mudslides that closed some trails.

Storms also buried drought-ridden Nevada. At the end of January, snowpack was at 207 percent of average at Lake Tahoe and above average for most of the state. Like Utah, most of Nevada's reservoirs remained low, said SCS staffer Dan Greenlee. Although southern Lake Mead brimmed at 103 percent of average capacity, northwestern Lake Tahoe remained two feet below its shoreline. "We need these storms to keep coming, to fill up the reservoirs and lakes," Greenlee said.



Crystal Images/Kathleen Marie Menke

Ice sculpture in McCall, Idaho

The hard winter has been lethal for Nevada's deer herds, which were already weakened by the drought. In the northeastern part of the state, fawn-to-adult ratios stood at the lowest level ever recorded. Don Reed, spokesman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said that the animals have begun roaming the cities in search of food.

"We're proposing to cut the '93 hunting season in half right now," he said. "The population just can't take it.

Oregon also reported that many of its deer herds were devastated by deep snows and sub-zero temperatures on the eastern side of the Cascade Range. At the beginning of February, the state's snowpack was 140 percent of average with the habitually dry southern part of the state 163 percent of average. "Last year at this time we were only 40-50 percent of average," said SCS hydrologist John Lea. Lea said that with a few more storms the state should have a lush spring.

Some states missed out. Washington state reported its snowpack fared slightly better than last year while total precipitation for the state was worse.

"We just haven't been hit with the southern track of storms," said Chris Bieker, a spokeswoman for the SCS in Spokane. In the eastern part of the state, snowpack was only at 84 percent of average in late January, she said.

Idaho also reported below-average snowpack, though the state gets wetter farther south. In late January, parts of the northern Panhandle reported a snowpack 87 percent of average, while the southern part of the state reported snowpacks 122-136 percent of average. Overall, the SCS said the state is faring better this year than last.

Wyoming is also wetter this year though the state reported average-to-below-average snowpack. "If these conditions continue, we're looking at another dry summer," said SCS water survey specialist Ted Gilbert

Jerry Beard of the SCS in Montana agreed. "We're not out of the woods by any means." Although the state started off strong, he said, snowfall tapered off in January.

The combination of heavy snow following years of drought created a winter fish-kill in Bean Lake in southwest Montana. A 12-inch snowfall stunted plant growth in the half-filled lake and robbed the trout of oxygen. Beard said that Montana's lakes and reservoirs remain well below capacity. He says the upcoming months will tip the water balance in Montana's favor. "We hope the typically wet months of February, March and April will dump generously on the state."

— Arden Trewartha

BLM manager in Wyoming gets trampled

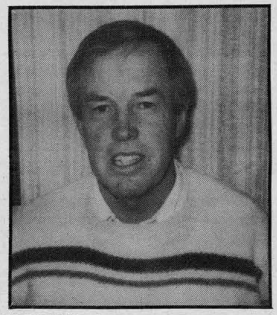
Darrel Short was negotiating the break-up of the massive Cumberland grazing allotment in southwestern Wyoming when the Bureau of Land Management abruptly took him off the job in early January.

According to state BLM Director Ray Brubaker, Short was hostile to ranchers. "Darrel made the statement to a group of permittees in his office that he was going to put all of them out of business and have them investigated," Brubaker told AP.

In a telephone interview, Short, a 27-year Bureau of Land Management veteran, said he made the statement in reference to a different issue and that his ouster was politically motivated. Short said his outspokenness about the poor condition of the 500,000-acre allotment led to a falling out with ranchers in June. Ranchers, he said, then went over his head to Rock Springs, Wyo., district manager Gene Kinch.

Short had been the point-man in negotiating a plan with ranchers to restore the allotment. Last September an environmental assessment concluded that the range was in bad shape, and recommended dividing the tract into 12 grazing allotments.

Short believes that smaller parcels, which ranchers support, aren't enough to restore the range. What got the ranchers mad, he continued, was telling them intensive management was needed — hiring more riders, putting up fences, reducing the number of cattle and fencing off some riparian areas entirely. To do this, ranchers learned they might have to spend 10 times as much as they currently do to properly maintain the land.



Darrel Short

"They don't like it when I say this," he said.

Ranchers weren't the only ones troubled by Short speaking out. Short said some BLM employees told him they disagreed, too.

Robert Bown, an attorney who represents 25 ranchers who own land and control leases on the allotment, told the *Casper Star-Tribune*: "We've taken the position we can't work with this man at all." June Rain, executive director of the Wyoming Wildlife Federation, said Short's release "shows you how powerful those lessees are."

Short's dismissal marks another delay in the BLM's three-decade effort to break up the Cumberland, an area covered mostly by sagebrush.

District manager Gene Kinch, who replaced Short on the Cumberland team, says a final decision on the subdivision plan is due later this month. But Kinch said it is "anybody's guess" how long it will take to complete the process, as ranchers have the option of appealing the decision.

Short still works for the BLM as Kemmerer area resource manager.

— Adam Duerk

HOTLINE

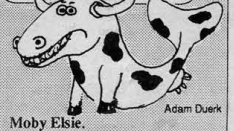
Calls for reform

Spurred by what's been called the state's worst mine pollution disaster, Colorado's Department of Natural Resources wants to tighten its regulations. The state agency came under fire after cyanide wastes from the bankrupt Summitville heap-leach gold mine leaked into Colorado streams, leaving taxpayers with an estimated $15 million in cleanup (*HCN*, 1/25/93). Natural Resources chief Ken Salazar says he favors higher reclamation bonds, shorter-term permits and more frequent inspections of Colorado mines. "We need some sweeping change," he told *The Denver Post*. He also asked the Mined Land Reclamation Board to delay opening any new mine until two years of baseline water-quality analysis are completed. Other reactions came from Colorado Sen. Hank Brown and Rep. Scott McInnis, who called for Superfund designation of the Summitville site. And Phil Hocker, of the Washington, D.C.-based Mineral Policy Center, said his organization, along with three gold mining companies, will fund an engineering study of the Summitville mine to determine what went wrong.

Yosemite the 'model'

Yosemite National Park may gain a new concessionaire contract that will earn the government much more money. The National Park Service selected Delaware North Co. Inc., of Buffalo, N.Y., to take over all commercial business in the park when the current contract expires in October 1993. The 15-year agreement will increase the park's annual revenues to about $20 million, up from the $700,000 received under the 30-year-old contract with the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. That translates to 25 cents out of each tourist dollar compared to the one cent per dollar the park now receives. Other bidders for the contract offered a slightly higher return to the park but were not willing to shoulder open-ended environmental liabilities, the agency says. However, Delaware North still has a gantlet to run before confirmation. A lawsuit filed by YRT Services Corp., one of the disqualified bidders, challenges Delaware North's selection. YRT was established by non-profit interests specifically to win the Yosemite contract and carry out the park's long-delayed management plan. The plan calls for an environmental cleanup and removal of shops and hotels. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt also said recently that he will review the agreement to make sure it can be a prototype for future concessionaire deals in national parks, reports *The Arizona Republic*.

BARBS



Adam Duerk

Moby Elsie.

The journal *Nature* reports that all whales descended from hooved, plant-eaters, and that the giant sea creature's closest relative is the cow.

HOTLINE

Boom town for sale — cheap

Ticaboo, Utah, casualty of lofty plans and a strapped nuclear power industry, is up for sale. Solitary in the high desert 20 miles north of the Bullfrog Marina on Lake Powell, Ticaboo was once a boom town. In the early 1980s a Michigan power company poured nearly $70 million into the new community and state-of-the-art uranium mill. That led state officials to predict a population of 1,500 by 1985. The company, Consumers Power, wanted a uranium mill in Ticaboo to supply a new nuclear power plant it was building in Michigan. But bad timing killed the mill, which operated for only two months, in 1982. "It was a factory making widgets that nobody wanted," said Roger Berg of Consumers Power. "The uranium market went down so drastically, and the political and economic environment changed so much it just wasn't feasible to operate the mill." The company never completed the Michigan plant and its customers got stuck with part of the $2 billion bill through increased rates. Now, Berg says, the company is ready to sell Ticaboo and willing to take a loss on its $70 million investment.

Words into chairs

Earth Partners, a company in Baker City, Ore., wants to turn old newspapers into new furniture. The company plans to break ground in eastern Nevada this spring for a plant that will produce high-quality fiberboard out of newspapers recycled from Reno and Sacramento.

Company president Ron Pratt says the smooth gray panels can be used for siding, doors, dressers, desks, cabinets and more. The Nevada plant, which Pratt hopes will be the first of many, will consume the daily newspaper leavings of a city of 300,000 to manufacture more than 2 million four-by-eight-foot sheets a year. The equipment was designed by Compak Systems, a British company that is building similar plants in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. There the panels will be made of wheat straw and sugar cane wastes.

High pressure bust

A North Dakota firm with a history of environmental laxness must pay a $1 million fine for disposing of wastewater illegally in eastern Montana. A federal judge in Billings ordered the fine after the EPA brought suit against the company, Balco Inc. The EPA said that by injecting the salty wastes, a by-product of oil and gas production, at illegally high levels, the company risked fracturing the ground and contaminating drinking water. Besides the fine, the judge also issued an injunction ordering the company to stop exceeding legal pressure limits. The Environmental Protection Agency pointed out that in the past, Balco had operated for 1,360 days without authorization.

Predator control in Utah is attacked

The federal government's Animal Damage Control program is under fire in Utah. Earlier this month an ADC hunter was charged with a third-degree felony count of wanton destruction of protected wildlife. The criminal charges come after another ADC hunter resigned following a state investigation. Wildlife enforcement officers had discovered mutilated bear carcasses at his home in the La Sal Mountains near Moab.

"I don't think these are isolated instances — obviously there's a trend here," says longtime ADC critic George Nickas of the Utah Wilderness Association. "This is the way a renegade agency that has operated without accountability for 60 years does its business."

But ADC's state director James Winnat defends his staff. "They perform very professionally. We've had a couple of instances. They're very isolated. It was unfortunate and we addressed it in a timely fashion."

Winnat addressed the latest incident by firing ADC agent Steve Watson of Delta, Utah. The 30-year-old Watson was arraigned Feb. 2 on charges of wanton destruction of wildlife and also accused of falsifying or altering a government document about the incident.

Divison of Wildlife investigator Kevin Conway says Watson violated procedures by killing at least one black bear cub after killing its mother as part of a legal control action. The state allows bears to be killed if they're preying on livestock, but specifies that any orphaned cubs must be left alone and the state notified. Instead, two cubs were found shot, and investigators traced the kills back to ADC.

Earlier this year, a second ADC agent, who was never charged, was found violating ADC policies by taking valuable gall bladders and paws from black bears in the La Sal Mountains near Moab. State investigators question if the bears killed in that incident were harassing livestock, since the snares set weren't in the immediate area of livestock.

In December of 1991, state investigators were called to a leg-hold trap in which a bald eagle was trapped. One of the eagle's talons was deadened by the jaws of the trap, and although raptor rehabilitators tried to save it, the eagle had to be killed.

Winnat points out that in the eagle case, proper procedures were followed: The trap was baited only with a scent, which would not have attracted the eagle. The eagle got caught because a coyote or other animal dragged a sheep carcass over the trap.

"We changed our procedures after that," Winnat points out. "Now when there's a carcass near one of our traps we stake the carcass so it can't be moved."

Animal Damage Control is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, but most of its two dozen full-time hunters and trappers in Utah are paid by the state and treated as state employees. That puts one state agency, Wildlife Resources, in the position of investigating and arresting fellow state employees.

Many of ADC's critics don't object to the killing of specific identified predators which are killing sheep, lambs and cattle. In Utah in 1990, ADC reported over 31,000 lambs and sheep were killed by predators, mostly coyotes, with additional kills by cougars, black bear, bobcats and eagles. ADC says in 1991 in Utah, its trappers killed over 4,000 coyotes, 16 black bears, 11 bobcats and 37 cougars.

"We take no pleasure in killing wildlife," Winnat says. "When wildlife comes in conflict with man's interest, then we step in and address the problem in a professional manner."

— Larry Warren

Larry Warren is a reporter at KUTV News in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Montana wolves lose their advocate

MISSOULA, Mont. — Mike Jimenez, the wildlife biologist who tended a pack of wolves and their human neighbors in the Ninemile Valley, has lost his job to federal budget cuts.

Jimenez said the hands-on approach to wolf management he pioneered has been replaced by management from a distance — by biologists stationed in Helena and Kalispell.

"What worked was to go out and honestly and sincerely listen to all the different opinions and concerns," said Jimenez, 45, who often went door-to-door talking to Ninemile residents. "That was the strength."

Jimenez said wolves are adaptable and resilient. "Wolves are not animals you need to babysit. But people need reassuring and somebody to yell at and chew out when things don't go right," he said. "You need to be there to facilitate or mediate to hear very diverse concerns."

Jimenez, who was classified a temporary biologist, received a form letter from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service saying that his job had been eliminated. His last day on the job was Jan. 22.

Since the spring of 1990, he had watched over an evolving pack of wolves in the Ninemile. At one point, he provided for six orphaned wolf pups after the adult male and female were killed.

Those pups survived in the wild and one of them may now be part of a new Ninemile pack that includes two adults and five pups.

Mike Jimenez and a mother wolf

Jimenez worked with landowners to provide breathing room for the wolves. When a wolf killed a cow last spring, he arranged safe pasture for the remaining cows and compensation for the rancher.

Joe Fontaine, wolf-recovery project leader for Montana, said all 20 temporary biologists in the region lost their jobs because of the budget cut.

The Fish and Wildlife Service, Fontaine said, is reallocating money away from Montana, Wyoming, Washington and Oregon because a lawsuit said the agency was not proceeding fast enough to protect threatened and endangered species in California and Hawaii.

With Jimenez's loss, Fontaine said he will "have to prioritize" and will look for "clusters of sightings" rather than investigating each new report of a wolf.

"The intensity won't be there as it was before, but we will respond to the best of our ability," he said. "Mike is a good biologist. But with the economic times that we are in, I'm sure we will see a lot of cutbacks in a lot of agencies."

Jimenez said he doesn't know what he will do now. For the past six years he has specialized as a wolf biologist — and the Fish and Wildlife Service is the primary employer of wolf biologists.

"I'm a dinosaur," he said.

— Sherry Devlin

Sherry Devlin reports for *The Missoulian.*

BARBS

How shocking: Using official State of Colorado secret information to save money and protect the environment.

Former Colorado state water engineer Jeris Danielson has been accused by Ken Salazar, the director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, of using state secrets to design a low-cost, low-impact alternative to the proposed Animas-La Plata water project.

Who said environmentalists have no sense of humor?

"Livestock are said, by the black comics of environmental terrorism, to be adding dangerous levels of methane gas to the atmosphere," reports the *Farmer's Own Newsletter*, published in Eugene, Ore.

Colorado is likely to get a so-so wilderness bill

After a bitter, 12-year stalemate, Colorado's congressional delegation has settled on a compromise wilderness bill. It has been introduced in both the House and Senate, and most observers expect easy passage.

If the measure becomes law, it will be the the first wilderness bill of its kind. Like standard wilderness bills, the Colorado compromise would ban road-building, logging, mining or other development on 711,170 acres of high altitude national forest lands in 21 tracts. Another 55,500 acres would be managed as "special recreation areas" that permit logging, dirt-bikes, snowmobiles and mountain bikes.

But unlike all other wilderness areas in the U.S., the new Colorado lands will not have title to the rivers and streams running through them. Instead, the bill bars development of those waters.

That carefully worded agreement marks a growing trend in Western states to abandon the 1964 Wilderness Act in favor of negotiated compromises between special interests. Colorado environmental groups, which unanimously support the bill, say they did not want to set a precedent to "Balkanize" the wilderness system, but argue it was necessary to end a dispute that has killed more than a dozen wilderness proposals since the early 1980s.

The battle dates back to 1985, when U.S. District Judge John Kane Jr. awarded the Sierra Club a stunning victory over water developers. He ruled that federal wilderness areas carry an implied, or "reserved," water right, in effect barring water developers from wilderness forever. Although later dismissed by the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals on procedural grounds, Kane's ruling deeply shook Colorado's water community.

Since then, Colorado water developers, allied with former Colorado Republican Sen. Bill Armstrong, have insisted that all future wilderness bills include specific language that eliminates reserved water rights. Environmental groups, allied with former Colorado Democrat Sen. Tim Wirth, have refused, arguing in part that they could never allow a precedent that denies wilderness water rights to Colorado and all other Western states.

Although Wirth never ceased pushing the issue by organizing wilderness area fly-overs and horseback tours for the media, no progress occurred until Armstrong retired. He was replaced by a more moderate Republican, Hank Brown.

"Hank Brown understands water; Armstrong did not," explains Greg Hobbs, attorney for the Northern Water Conservancy District.

On election night 1990, a victorious Brown vowed to make the wilderness compromise a top priority. Instead of keeping Armstrong's water advisor, Harold Miskel, director of the Colorado Springs Water Department and a notorious hard-liner on federal reserved water rights, Brown brought Denver water attorney Bennett Raley on staff.

Their first solution, the Wirth-Brown wilderness bill of 1991, explicitly denied federal reserved water rights, but also banned water developments in all headwater wildernesses. Downstream wilderness areas were denied water protection altogether.

Colorado and national environmental groups rejected the compromise, and attacked Wirth, leading in part to his decision to not run for re-election. Before he left office, however, Wirth and Brown tried again.

This time, Raley wrote the bill to eliminate reserved water rights without specifically denying them. Instead, the bill forbids anyone from asserting a federal reserved water right in court or anywhere else. At the same time, the bill expressly forbids dam construction or expansion of existing water projects in wilderness. The bill also drops a traditional provision that gives the president authority to issue an executive order allowing construction of a water project within any of the new wilderness lands.

The bill sidesteps the question of three downstream wildernesses — the Piedra, Roubideau and Tabeguache — by simply designating them as "Areas," and ordering that they be managed as if they were wilderness. No water projects may be built in these areas, but they are not protected from being dewatered by upstream developments.

While the compromise has been accepted by all the major players, including the Colorado Water Congress, the Denver Water Board, the Sierra Club, the Colorado Environmental Coalition and The Wilderness Society, virtually everyone agrees that it's a precarious solution.

"This bill is the best we can do," says Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, D, who won Wirth's seat. "If it's not good enough then there will be no bill at all. There is no room for any more change."

Darrell Knuffke, head of The Wilderness Society's Denver office, says the environmental community worries about concessions it made in the compromise. He says: "We can't give another inch."

Knuffke explains that The Wilderness Society and other groups agreed to the bill because in the last 12 years of fighting they have gotten to know the proposed areas very well. "We can say with confidence that for these lands this formula works."

But he worries that other states will attempt to copy Colorado's solution and misapply it, or invent whole new sets of rules. "What gives us heartburn is that this (water compromise) is the first real chink in the Wilderness Act. All wilderness lands in the nation are now managed to a single standard. This is a Colorado-specific solution and our fear is that it will lead to the Balkanization of the wilderness preservation system."

Knuffke points to many other compromises made by the environmentalists. The bill only protects 711,00 acres, or about half the 1.5 million acre "Citizen's Proposal" they started with. Several key areas, like the Kebler Pass corridor in western Colorado, were eliminated, and one area, the Farr Wilderness, was reduced by about 70 percent to allow the Denver water board to retain the option of expanding an existing water project in the future.

In two other wilderness study areas — Fossil Ridge near Crested Butte and Bowen Gulch near Grand Lake — off-road vehicle and snowmobile groups won the right to continue driving on trails they have been using illegally for the last decade. Logging is also allowed in these two areas to "the minimum necessary to protect the forest from insects and disease."

The bill also prevents the U.S. Forest Service from managing surrounding lands as buffer zones to protect the new wildernesses. As is customary, it lets ranchers keep their grazing allotments, and allows them to repair and rebuild stock ponds, dams, ditches and other existing facilities

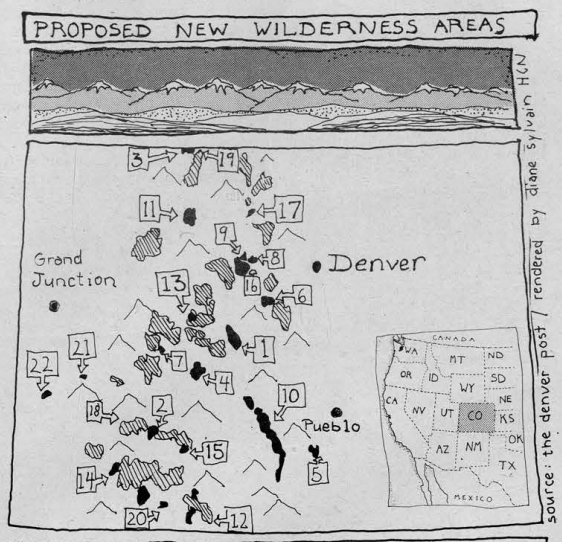
Finally, the 19,000-acre Spanish Peaks wilderness study area was by-passed because of extensive private lands located between the two peaks. The bill gives the Forest Service three years to buy or trade for the inholdings. If the agency is successful, another wilderness will be created; if not the area will be released to multiple use.

"There is very little, ultimately, for conservationists to celebrate here," concludes Knuffke. But faced with another decade of impasse and conflict, he says, it was better to accept the compromise than "continue to lose lands acre by acre" to vehicle use and poor management by the Forest Service.

For their part, the state's cities and water conservancy districts, with the exception of Colorado Springs, have endorsed the bill and are pushing for fast approval.

Behind the scenes there is another, unmentioned reason why everyone is so eager to resolve the wilderness debate on Colorado's national forest lands. That is the coming fight over Bureau of Land Management wilderness areas. In one of his last acts, former President George Bush gave Congress the BLM's recommendations for Colorado wilderness. The official recommendation is for 18 areas totaling 395,792 acres. Colorado environmentalists want 20 areas totaling about 1.5 million acres. Again, water will be the key issue.

— Steve Hinchman and Barry Noreen



KEY

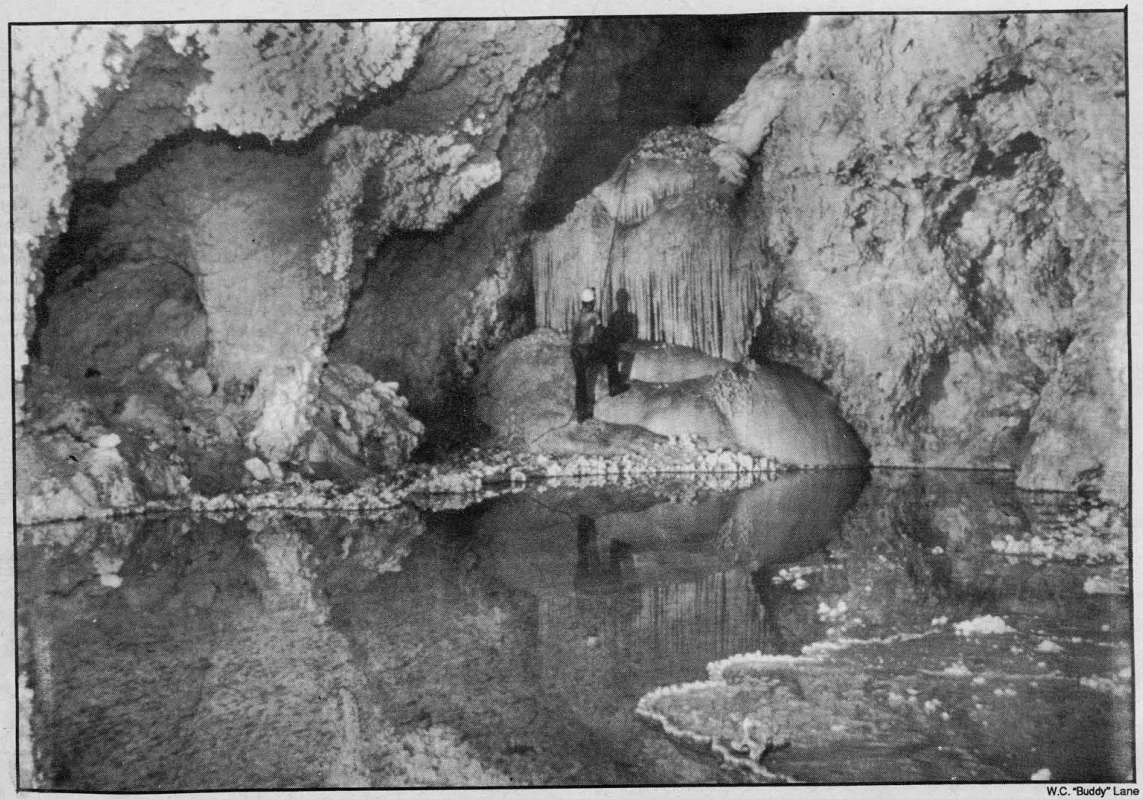
EXISTING WILDERNESS AREAS

PROPOSED AREA	ACRES
1. Buffalo Peaks	43,410
2. Powderhorn	60,100
3. Davis Peaks	20,750
4. Wren and Tim Wirth	33,060
5. Greenhorn Mtn.	22,040
6. Lost Creek	14,700
7. Oh-Be-Joyful	5,500
8. Byers Peak	8,095
9. Vasquez Peak	12,300
10. Sangre de Cristos	226,455
11. Service Creek	47,140
12. South San Juan	31,100
13. Spruce Creek	8,330
14. West Needle	28,740
15. Wheeler Geologic	25,640
16. Farr	13,175
17. Bowen Gulch	6,990
18. American Flats	3,390
19. Bill Hare/Larson Crk.	815
20. Piedra	62,550
21. Roubideau	19,650
22. Tabeguache	17,240

HOTLINE

Ornery grand jury

An edited version of the grand jury report on environmental crimes at the Rocky Flats nuclear bomb plant near Denver, Colo., leaves out calls for the criminal prosecution of eight government and corporate workers. Released Jan. 26, the 124-page report details charges against the Department of Energy and its Rocky Flats contractor, Rockwell International, that were previously leaked by jurors to the press, reports *The Denver Post*. The report says the DOE and Rockwell knowingly violated federal laws by storing radioactive waste without permits and dumping hazardous and radioactive matter into creeks and rivers. U.S. District Judge Sherman Finesilver simultaneously released the Justice Department's defense with the report. It accuses the grand jury of ignoring facts, botching legal conclusions and making sweeping proclamations designed mainly to inflame public opinion. But the prosecutors agreed with the jurors' claim that the DOE "acted often as the 'puppet' of Rockwell." A congressional report released Jan. 4 revealed further evidence that federal prosecutors were thwarted in their investigation. The report, released by the House Science, Space and Technology Committee, says prosecutors wanted to fine Rockwell up to $60 million but higher-ups in the Justice Department were willing to settle for as little as $4 million. The final plea bargain levied an $18.5 million fine against the company but spared individuals from criminal charges. Meanwhile, the Justice Department is investigating whether the grand jurors violated their secrecy oath. An attorney representing the grand jury members said the jurors will not cooperate with the investigation. Instead, they want to testify before Congress under a grant of immunity.



W.C. "Buddy" Lane

Lechuguilla Cave in Carlsbad Caverns National Park

Two underground resources clash in New Mexico

One thousand feet underground, below the sunburnt hills of southern New Mexico, lies a pristine lake so clear its bottom seems inches away. It is called Lake Castrovalva, and it may be part of the largest cave system in the world. To protect its purity, the National Park Service has allowed only two or three expeditions into this cave system, called Lechuguilla, since it was discovered in 1986.

But Lechuguilla could host a more permanent visitor. A New Mexico oil and gas company wants to drill for natural gas on public land within a short distance of known cave passages, and, until last December, the Bureau of Land Management seemed eager to let it drill.

The agency's initial environmental impact statement approved Yates Energy's permit for gas exploration after developing a series of drilling procedures designed to protect potential cave resources. At the time, BLM's Lechuguilla team leader, Joe Incardine, called the drilling plan a middle-of-the-road approach. "We have a valid legal right to drill here. We can't just close our eyes, say 'don't drill' and walk away," he says.

But a flood of anti-drilling sentiment, punctuated by the Environmental Protection Agency's rejection of the agency's EIS last November, forced the BLM to back off.

Now the agency is writing a new EIS that favors a "no drill" option, says Incardine. He says the option calls for Congress to approve a buy-out of Yates' lease or to find some other means of compensating the company, such as a lease exchange.

"Even though there is a remote chance drilling could intercept the cave, we feel this unique cave system warrants this new alternative," says Incardine. The new EIS is due in May.

The BLM's abrupt about-face on the issue is a sweet, though not final, victory for cave advocates. As Incardine says, the EIS is not the final decision and anything could happen, especially if the BLM state director or the secretary of Interior weigh in.

"I'm very encouraged by these developments," says Rick Bridges, president of the private Lechuguilla Cave Project. "Three months ago the BLM was ready to drill. But we won't rest until Yates leases are repurchased and the government withdraws them."

Bridges, who once worked for the oil and gas industry, helped spearhead a letter-writing and lobbying campaign that flooded the BLM with more than 500 anti-drilling comments last fall. He and other cave advocates say the agency made its initial decision to drill without proper knowledge of Lechuguilla's layout. Sixty miles of the cave have been mapped, which qualifies it as the eighth longest in the world, but it could be even larger. Airflow studies indicate that 98 percent of Lechuguilla remains unexplored.

"The cave is a world-class resource; it needs world-class protection," says Joe Sovick, environmental coordinator with the National Park Service in Albuquerque. Because Lechuguilla extends past the protection of Carlsbad Caverns National Park's boundaries, "drilling could intersect part of the cave," says Sovick.

Concern is high because Lechuguilla is unique. It was created by gases rising from nearby subsurface oil reserves, causing the cave to form from the bottom up. Its unusual formations are found nowhere else in the world and include helectites, delicate strands of calcite that hang suspended in the warm waters of the cave's pools, and 20-foot-long gypsum "chandeliers" that emerge from the ceilings.

Rare, chemical-feeding bacteria eat the rock itelf, processing the minerals in the cave's limestone walls. Fungi feeding off the bacteria, in turn, may affect other cave formations, completing a closed biological system not found in other, more exposed caves of this size.

Experts worry that even one gas leak would circulate throughout the cave and destroy its formations. Carlsbad Caverns Supervisor Frank Deckert agrees that an entire cave system is at risk because Lechuguilla Cave could be connected to Carlsbad Caverns. Lechuguilla's known passages lie just three miles from Carlsbad.

Protection for the cave won't come cheap. The BLM's Joe Incardine says fair market value for the leases could run into the "tens of millions" of dollars. The agency appraised the value of Yates' lease at $30 million.

Critics question this figure. "There may be no gas in there," says Kelly Cranston, a former geological engineer now living in Arizona. But Fred Yates, the owner of Yates Energy, which acquired the lease near Lechuguilla in 1985, believes gas is there and that it is valuable.

"We are in the business of drilling for and producing natural gas," Yates says. "We're not there to be out there; we're there to develop a resource."

If Yates is blocked, he may seek relief through the courts. The BLM's Incardine says the agency received a 23-page letter from the New Mexico Oil and Gas Association that outlined its opposition to excessive regulation on drilling. The group said a no-drill option on Yates' lease would be a "taking" under the Fifth Amendment (*HCN*, 2/8/93).

Drilling opponents criticize the BLM for creating this financial quagmire. "Why did the BLM lease land for a buck an acre that now has to be bought for $10-30 million?" says Rick Bridges. "They should never have leased there in the first place."

Bridges is also critical of the National Park Service, which he says suspended new exploration of the cave between October of 1991 and January of 1993, when the BLM was writing its EIS. Had exploration uncovered a critical "Northwest Passage" linking the cave with the lease area, the drilling proposal would have instantly died, he says.

The Park Service says Bridges' Lechuguilla Cave Project — the only team approved for scientific exploration in the cave — was taken off mapping duties over a disagreement concerning methods.

In any case, the plan may die a slow death. Public support for the cave has turned the BLM, and now Congress is beginning to move. Rep. Bruce Vento, D-Minn., introduced legislation in late January that would put 5,000 acres of public land near the cave, including Yates' lease, off-limits to gas drilling. Vento will hold a March 2 public hearing on the bill.

"This is the subcommittee's first legislative hearing on a new bill," says Stan Sloss, a staffer for Vento's subcommittee on national parks and public lands. "It is a priority matter for him."

Sloss says Vento's Lechuguilla Cave Protection Act of 1993 does not address the issue of compensation for current lease holders. But the secretary of Interior has "considerable discretion" to work out an agreement with Yates without the help of Congress, he says.

For more information about the BLM's Lechuguilla EIS, contact Joe Incardine, BLM, P.O. Box 27115, Santa Fe, NM 87502.

— Zaz Hollander and Paul Larmer

Can a collegial approach at the top transform DOE?

Four years ago, when retired Navy Admiral James Watkins took over the Department of Energy, he found himself at the helm of "a rudderless ship," as he admitted recently in a candid farewell address to the agency.

The department had been cut adrift by ever-dimmer prospects for peaceful uses of nuclear power. The Cold War was ending and the arms race slowing.

Revelations of widespread mismanagement and contamination in the nuclear weapons complex forced Watkins to acknowledge what outsiders had long proclaimed: that the agency "emphasized production goals over basic environment, safety and health requirements." It faced an immense cleanup challenge, but had no plan, Watkins said.

He tried to transform the agency's culture through a top-down, command-and-control approach consistent with his military background. By most accounts, the admiral ran a tight ship. But his watch was marked more by damage control than by a new sense of direction.

Now, with a new administration in power, the Department of Energy faces its biggest challenge since the 1940s — charting a course into a new era.

The Clinton administration has a clearly stated energy agenda. In *Putting People First*, Clinton and Gore promise to promote conservation, efficiency and renewable energy. They also say they will oppose increased reliance on nuclear power. Finally, they promise to "stop spending 60 percent of the Department of Energy's budget on nuclear weapons."

If the administration implements these promises, it would be a revolution in the Department of Energy — an agency still firmly wedded to the can-do engineering approach that enabled the top-secret Manhattan Project to build the atomic bombs that ended World War II.

The person that Clinton chose to lead the DOE could hardly be more different from Watkins.

Hazel O'Leary is a 55-year-old African-American lawyer, former federal bureaucrat, energy consultant and utility executive. She

Hazel O'Leary

resembles Watkins only in her supreme confidence. "The last 20 years of my life have prepared me for this job and I am more than ready to take it on," she told the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee at her confirmation hearing.

Until now, O'Leary was virtually unknown outside of utility and policy circles. In recent years, she was a top executive in charge of public and environmental affairs for Northern States Power Company in Minnesota. Before that, she ran an energy consulting and lobbying business with her late husband, a top energy official in the Carter administration. O'Leary also worked in federal energy agencies under Carter and Ford.

In a written statement at her confirmation hearing, Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary said, "For now, we must look first at energy conservation and (the) efficiency option." She also said the Clinton administration foresees cutting energy consumption by 20 percent by the end of the decade, reports the Kennewick, Wash., *Tri-City Herald*.

She is an inside player with experience in both government and industry. But she also brings to her new post a savvy respect for the consumer market, grass-roots politics, and environmental concerns. And she has spent "years attempting to learn a collaborative style" that she now hopes will transform the Energy Department.

O'Leary's collegial approach will be tested immediately by three major challenges: making tough choices about funding priorities and where to cut dead wood, transforming the DOE's culture to regain public trust, and cleaning up the legacy of the Cold War and dealing with nuclear waste.

Establishing priorities and cutting dead wood: To increase support for such non-nuclear programs as conservation, solar and clean coal, O'Leary will have to convince Congress to cut long-running subsidies for nuclear power and scientific pork such as the Superconducting Super Collider.

The National Energy Act that was passed just last fall — with more than 150 new mandates for the DOE — will have to be modified. "There's no way in the world there can be an appropriation for all that activity," O'Leary says.

The rapidly dwindling nuclear weapons program is unlikely to be a source of savings because the cleanup budget, driven almost entirely by legal obligations, is quickly taking up the slack.

Weapons plants such as Hanford and Rocky Flats are no longer producing bombs. But they are still consuming lots of money in the Environmental Restoration and Waste Management program, which has grown to nearly a third of the agency's budget.

Ending the Cold War at DOE: Admiral Watkins staked his reputation on cleaning up the "DOE culture," which, under the guise of national security, has long tolerated contamination, cover-ups, and intimidation of whistle blowers and watchdogs. He didn't get the job done. Public trust is at an all-time low, according to a report by an advisory board to the secretary. Now it is O'Leary's turn to try to turn the DOE from the secrecy-shrouded production of nuclear weapons to cleanup and development of competitive civilian energy technology.

Cleanup and radioactive waste: Cleaning up after the Cold War will be incredibly expensive and time-consuming. Disposal of high-level nuclear waste is the toughest problem. The DOE is now trying to force two Western states to accept the nation's most dangerous radioactive wastes: at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico and Yucca Mountain in Nevada. O'Leary concedes that the whole mess warrants an independent review.

In Minnesota, O'Leary pushed for an interim solution to the nuclear waste problem: above-ground, dry-cask storage of spent reactor fuel. It did not win her friends locally, but it showed that she was willing to pursue a path that could provide some breathing room on the issue. Breathing room and flexibility have been, until now, in short supply at the Department of Energy.

— Jon Christensen

Jon Christensen is Great Basin regional reporter for *High Country News* and lives in Carson City, Nevada. He can be reached at 702/885-2023.

A melting pot for unrelated agencies

Over the years, like barnacles attaching themselves to a huge, lumbering ship, the DOE has become encrusted with scores of responsibilities.

Today, it remains responsible for nuclear weapons. But it is also in charge of nuclear power plants, solar power, coal-fired electricity, selling the power produced by the West's federal dams, high-tech science research, and much more.

The DOE's genealogy goes back to the Manhattan Engineer District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It built the bombs that were dropped on Japan at the end of World War II.

After World War II, it became the Atomic Energy Commission, and in 1977 the Congress consolidated scores of existing or new bureaucracies into one cabinet-level agency: the Department of Energy.

Whatever the name, the building and testing of nuclear weapons has remained at the agency's center.

Today it has a budget of $18.8 billion and roughly 161,000 employees — 20,000 employed by DOE and the rest by contractors.

Its bureaucracy is more than twice that of the Interior Department. DOE's 2.3 million acre domain includes the most dangerous radioactive sites on earth, including cleanup projects in "damn near every state," according to a spokesman.

Almost half the DOE's activity is in the West. It spends nearly $8 billion a year here and employs close to 75,000 Westerners. The West also has more than 50 contaminated nuclear reactors, processing plants, labs, testing grounds, waste dumps and uranium mill tailings piles.

Bureaucratically, the DOE chain of command is divided into two unequal parts. The undersecretary of Energy oversees the nuclear side of the DOE, which exploded under the Reagan arms buildup to 70 percent of the agency's budget. Although the DOE no longer produces nuclear weapons, the weapons complex cleanup budget rose as quickly as the production budget dropped. The undersecretary is responsible for cleanup of weapons plants such as Hanford, the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory, and Rocky Flats; the national scientific laboratories such as Los Alamos, Sandia and Livermore, which are searching for new missions; plus the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant for transuranic military trash in New Mexico and the proposed commercial high-level radioactive waste repository at Yucca Mountain in Nevada.

On the other side of the department, which atrophied in the 1980s, the deputy secretary of Energy supervises energy research, programs to promote conservation and renewable energy, fossil energy programs such as clean coal, the strategic oil reserves, and the agencies that market power from federal dams in the West, including the Bonneville, Southwestern, and Western Area power administrations. The deputy secretary's clout could grow under the Clinton administration.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is an independent body within the DOE that licenses hydroelectric projects and regulates rates charged for electricity, natural gas, and oil pipelines. Other independent agencies that have a special relationship with the DOE, and which are funded under the same Energy and Water Development budget, include the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the Army Corps of Engineers.

— Jon Christensen

HOTLINE

Earl Velk

Looking south to Mt. Richmond from the Badger-Two Medicine area

Drilling approved in Montana

Six days before George Bush left office, the BLM approved a controversial exploratory oil well south of Glacier National Park, in the Badger-Two Medicine area. The 116,000 roadless acres of prime grizzly bear habitat were proposed as a wilderness study area in Montana wilderness bills axed by Congress last October (*HCN*, 12/14/92). Wilderness groups say the battle is far from over. "The Badger-Two Medicine area is the flagship of roadless areas," says Bob Decker of the Montana Wilderness Association, a group that has fought the drilling for the last 10 years. During that time, he says, opposition grew, with public appeals jumping from nine in 1985, to 53 in 1991. At public hearings for an environmental impact statement, Decker says local people including members of the Blackfeet Tribe testified more than 10-1 against the drilling. Decker says opposition groups will appeal the BLM decision to new Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt.

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Gary Weissmann
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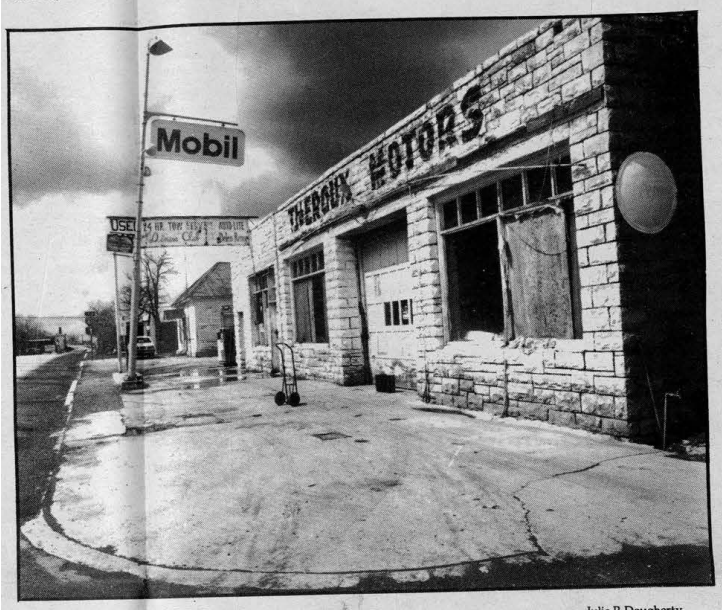

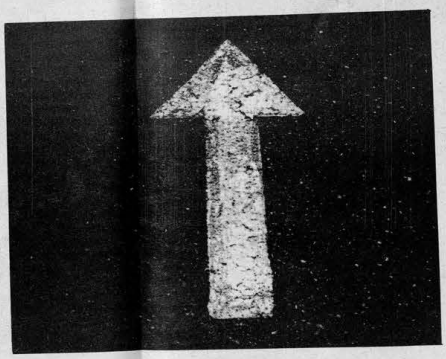

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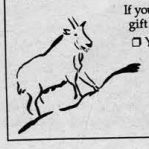

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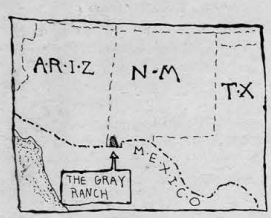
The continuing saga ...

continued from page 1

based organization exactly did or stood for, but they learned soon enough. They discovered that the Conservancy's mission is "to protect plants, animals and their natural communities by protecting the land and water they need to survive."

In practice that means since 1951 the 670,000-member organization has protected more than 6.3 million acres in the United States and Canada by acquiring land and then leasing or selling it to government agencies or like-minded conservation groups, which then often create wildlife refuges. In 1992, the Conservancy transferred land valued at more than $109 million to such agencies, while receiving only $90.7 million in return.



Jack Williams

Roundup on the Gray Ranch

If The Conservancy limits the number of cattle to its lease limit of 6,500 head, some ranchers say it would become a money-loser

What may sound like a mom-and-apple-pie proposition to urban environmentalists infuriated some local ranchers because the Conservancy intended to sell the ranch to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The agency had already announced it would call the place the Animas National Wildlife Refuge and that it could attract as many as 30,000 visitors and generate $500,000 annually to the economically depressed county. This meant campgrounds, hiking trails, rowdy Methodists. It was like telling ranchers Hillary Clinton was the new county extension agent.

The Hidalgo County ranchers, among whom are several "wise use" followers, were incensed that in a state where only 43 percent of the land remains in private hands, the government might acquire one of the world's great cattle ranches. They believed the Conservancy would eliminate or drastically reduce cattle grazing, and they loathed the thought of sharing roads with thousands of politically correct tourists. So they wrote their congressmen and railed against this Nature Whachamacallit acting as the front man for the government.

Everyone chose up sides. The New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association passed a resolution saying the Conservancy had "contempt for local communities ... the viability of rural and small-town economies, trespass laws and ethical behavior" and questioned whether it even believed in the Jeffersonian ideals of property ownership.

Further, they sought an end to the Conservancy's tax-exempt status and asked the state attorney general to investigate the Conservancy on grounds of "conflict of interest" and "conspiracy" with the government.

The New Mexico Department of Agriculture claimed the Gray wasn't all that unique biologically, that the feds had inflated its value, and so it was unworthy of federal refuge status. The state Game and Fish folks replied that the Agriculture Department didn't know a beaver from a wombat, and sided with the Conservancy.

Even within the conservation community there was disagreement. Some environmentalists faulted the Conservancy for not agreeing to bring bison, wolves and grizzlies to the ranch.

"Everyone had their own agenda for the Gray," a Conservancy staffer said in an interview. "We were never going to please everyone down there."

Government pulls out

Later, in 1990, then-U.S. Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan, himself a wealthy New Mexican with strong ties to ranching, mining and timber interests, finally settled things by saying the government was no longer interested in buying the Gray Ranch.

Left alone at the dance without its steady government date, the Conservancy decided it might try to manage the Gray on its own. It then launched an ambitious fund-raising campaign to reimburse itself of the $18 million purchase price. This was an unusual step since the Conservancy only manages a handful of refuges, none as large as the Gray.

Before long philanthropists like Arkansas' Winthrop Rockefeller and board members of the MacArthur Foundation were buzzing into the ranch on chartered Cessnas and $450-an-hour helicopters. They dined at mountaintop banquets with long-stemmed roses, and motored across ranch roads in hopes of seeing an aplomado falcon or coatimundi.

Some wrote big checks. And all saw a place that, like the Grand Canyon, is virtually impossible to fully appreciate with our limited senses. The Gray is so enormous — exactly 321,703 acres, including state and Bureau of Land Management leases — that it could contain all the cities of Baltimore, Denver, Paris, Vienna, Buenos Aires and Cairo. One pasture alone — an ocean of blond grama grass called the Fitzpatrick, is 44,000 acres — three times the size of Manhattan.

One woman resident of the ranch said she used to drive her son 75 miles round trip twice a day just to meet the school bus.

What makes the ranch so biologically significant is the collision of several habitats in one place. The northern extreme of Mexico's Sierra Madre meets the southern limits of the Rocky Mountains: Thousands of soaptree yuccas and cholla cactus grow just downhill from 8,000-foot rises in the Animas Mountains that are covered by Douglas-fir and aspen.

This confluence of habitats on the riverless ranch has created what U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Charles Ault calls "a unique place on the face of the earth." With some awe, Ault relates tales of a fence lizard that has never been found farther west than the Gray Ranch, of the river toad that has never ventured farther east, of a Mexican chickadee which flies no farther north and of a tanager that goes no deeper south. All found what they needed on the Gray.

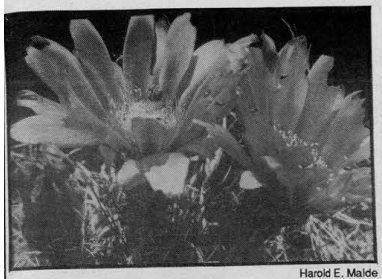
"At least 99 percent of those species (found on the ranch) are native to that land," Ault told me. "I would defy anyone to show me an area as intact biologically."

But what's amazing is that it has all remained in excellent condition even though the Gray has been a working cattle ranch for most of this century. Ault says the soft contours of the land, the lack of deep erosion and the high amount of vegetative cover all indicate that cattle-grazing over the years has done little serious damage. "We really need to study what has happened here," Ault said. "It's an ideal laboratory."

Enter Turner and Fonda

But the Conservancy two years ago was having trouble raising the needed $18 million, and so it began to search for a buyer. (Conservancy officials, however, don't tell it quite this way and insist they always intended to bring in a "partner" on the Gray. In 1990, when I was working on the story, this was never mentioned.) There aren't a lot of qualified buyers for an $18 million ranch that would carry with it considerable land use restrictions. But in spring 1992, a buyer emerged in Atlanta's cable TV and sports magnate Ted Turner.

Turner already owned a 115,000-acre ranch in Montana, plus property in



Harold E. Malde

Hedgehog cactus with polinating insects

C.W. Painter

***Lampropectis pyronecana* in the Animas Mountains**

Florida and South Carolina, on which he allowed the Conservancy to place conservation easements, thus preventing future development. He ran buffalo on his Montana ranch and wanted to do the same on the Gray; some local ranchers opposed buffalo, but not nearly as stridently as they opposed Turner's new wife, Jane Fonda. Some ranchers remembered her as "Hanoi Jane."

"When we heard the Turners were coming," said Vivian Walt, the Conservancy's former Gray Ranch office manager and wife of a Gray cowboy, "we didn't know what to expect. It was all very low-key. We weren't supposed to talk about it with anyone."

Walt found the couple to be friendly and unpretentious. "Jane was very intelligent, relaxed, and she kept eye contact with you when you were talking. She was a good listener. They weren't condescending."

But Conservancy sources say Turner was bothered by some unwanted newspaper accounts of his visit to the ranch and was also concerned about how Jane would be treated by right-wing locals. Another theory has it that the IRS would have viewed Turner's bison business as more hobby than occupation, eliminating some tax advantages.

Eventually Turner backed off the deal. Turner and Fonda, with whom the Conservancy says it still has good relations, later bought another huge New Mexico ranch. Turner did not return my calls.

Under normal circumstances it's not easy to get information out of Conservancy officials about a land deal. They are able to work so closely with corporate America, in part, because they can keep secrets. But after the Turner fiasco the Conservancy was even less willing to divulge its plans for the Gray Ranch.

"I have no deal of any kind right now," Conservancy vice president John Cook said in December. "We are prepared to take as long as it takes to do it absolutely right. And that could be a long time." True enough, the Hidalgo County tax assessor's office had no record of any new Gray transaction as of late January.

Comes now Drummond Hadley

Things changed in February. The Conservancy confirmed that on Feb. 24 a buyer would be announced. Sources close to the negotiations say the buyer will likely be a newly formed, non-profit organization founded — or at least partially controlled by — an Arizona rancher named Drummond Hadley, a publicity-shy member of the Anheuser Busch brewing family. He is also an environmentalist and published poet.

Negotiations with Hadley, who is a great-great-grandson of brewery founder Adolphus Busch, have been the subject of persistent rumors in New Mexico. The small Conservancy staff on the Gray knew as early as last July of Hadley's interest, and negotiations were far enough along in October that the staff was told it should look for other employment.

Rancher Ladd Pendleton, who owned a ranch next to the Gray and recently sold it to Hadley, confirmed that Hadley has had the ranch surveyed and suggested that he may be getting it for considerably less than $18 million.

"He's a character," Pendleton says of Hadley, who owns the Guadalupe Ranch near the Gray on the Arizona-New Mexico border.

"He's not a hippie, but some of the Mexicans (who work for Hadley) call him a hippie. He's got his own unique style of Western dress. He's kind of shy, but I asked him once to read his poetry at the Rotary Club in Silver City and Drummie was just fantastic." Hadley's daughter, Sadie, told me in a phone conversation that her father had written two books, *Spirit of the Deep Well Tank* and *Strands of Rawhide*. Hadley did not return phone calls.

Bill Waldman, director of the Conservancy's New Mexico office, says Hadley received his state organization's Aldo Leopold conservation award last year for preservation of a riparian habitat on his Guadalupe Ranch. Yet Hadley is enough of a real rancher that other Hidalgo County ranchers look favorably upon his buying the ranch. Translation: He'll keep cattle on the Gray.

The Gray has been a working cattle ranch since the early 1900s, when it was part of the vast empire known as the Diamond A Ranch, owned by George Hearst, the California mining figure and father of publisher William Randolph Hearst. Despite its reputation to the contrary among local ranchers, the Conservancy has never tried to ban cattle grazing on the Gray.

"A properly managed livestock operation," says Gray Ranch project manager and biologist Ben Brown, "which takes into account sensitive plant communities and doesn't interfere with ecological processes is appropriate for this part of the world. We're not anti-cattle, and that point has been made over and over again."

Brown says that in 1989, just prior to the Conservancy's purchase of the Gray, the ranch was "overstocked" at 14,000 head. Thus, when the Conservancy began to drop the herd to less than 5,000 head some local ranchers figured cows were on the way out completely.

If the Conservancy limits the number of cattle to its current lease limit of 6,500 head, some ranchers say it would become a money-loser.

"You can't pay the utilities with 6,500 cattle," says Ernie Hurt, a local third-generation rancher with an agriculture economics degree. Figuring that an $18 million purchase price, divided by 6,500 cattle, comes out to $2,769 per animal, Hurt and others wonder how a rancher would make the Gray profitable.

"A cow will only service the debt of about $1,000 to $1,200 in this country," says rancher Butch Mayfield. "It's just arithmetic. There's no way the ranch will pay for itself at that price."

What has the Conservancy achieved?

The more interesting question is what can the Conservancy say it has accomplished?

The organization prides itself on maintaining good relations with local residents, and can point to several cases around the country where it has turned enemies into allies. The Conservancy admits, however, that the Gray Ranch experience was not the best example of this.

"The neighbors had so many concerns about different things," says Vivian Walt, the former Gray Ranch office manager who has now moved to a similar Conservancy job in Idaho. "But no one (with the Conservancy) really put their fears to rest. There's always been this shroud of uncertainty and paranoia that the Conservancy was up to something."

A common complaint is the difficulty in getting candid responses from its officials. Sometimes that is due to confidentiality agreements in real estate transactions, but often it seems to come from the corporate ethic that permeates the organization. Conservancy vice president John Cook, who has directed negotiations on the Gray, not only refused to disclose the potential buyer's name or affiliation, but declined to discuss in even the vaguest of terms what any future owner of the Gray might do in the areas of grazing, conservation easements, public visitation policies or the basics of managing the Gray. Other sources say that the Conservancy will retain some influence over the management of the ranch.

"We prefer not to conduct our business in the press," Cook said. "People make fun of our business approach to conservation, but we think we have a pretty good record."

Perhaps he has a point. No journalist likes secrecy and obfuscation, but the Conservancy's first priority is not public relations. Its job is to protect land and natural habitats.

Before the Gray Ranch was bought by the Conservancy it was being eyed by land merchants who might have allowed oil and gas drilling, mining or over-grazing. With New Mexico's active "wise use" movement cheering from the sidelines, a remarkable piece of the West could have been parted out. The Conservancy stopped that, and with luck and Drummond Hadley's help, it will be able to prevent it from ever occurring on the Gray. ■

An investigative reporter for many years, Bruce Selcraig writes about the southwest for *Harpers*, *New York Times Magazine* and other publications from Austin, Texas.

'Everyone had an agenda for the Gray. We were never going to please everyone.'

— Nature Conservancy staffer

Harold E. Malde

BULLETIN BOARD

BOTTLES UP

Coors Brewing Company says it will build a $4.5 million plant to recycle glass from Wyoming and Colorado. Glass intended for recycling has tripled in volume over the past three years, the company says, overwhelming its bottle manufacturing plant in Wheat Ridge, Colo., the only glass recycling plant in the state. Expected to open early next January, the new facility will process 100,000 tons of recycled container glass annually. That's enough to cover a football field with a pile of crushed glass 180 feet high. After removing labels and other unwanted materials, workers at the plant will crush and then store the glass in silos until it can be melted and formed into new bottles. Coors expects to use more than 50 percent recycled glass in its bottles in the first year of the new plant's operation, reports the *Dubois Frontier*.

BROADER THAN OREGON

The Oregon Rivers Council changed its name to the Pacific Rivers Council in January. Director Bob Doppelt says the new name fits the river advocacy group better since it expanded several years ago to work on national river legislation. Formed in 1987, the group is based in Eugene, Ore., and currently has over 2,000 individual members as well as a network of 51 group members. Along with the new name will come new offices in Portland, Ore., and Washington, D.C. Doppelt says council board members no longer need to be Oregon residents but can hail from any state in the Northwest. For more information, write to The Pacific Rivers Council, P.O. Box 309, Eugene, OR 97440 (503/345-0119).

JUST LOOKING = $$

Flocks of "eco-tourist" bird-watchers descend each year on two natural areas in southeastern Arizona, leaving $2.7 million in their wake. According to a study by the University of Arizona, protected natural areas attract high-income, well-educated visitors who like to look at birds and other wildlife as well as hike and take pictures. While doing this they also pump dollars into the local economy. One magnet for tourists is the federally managed San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area, whose cottonwood-willow forests attract more than 60 percent of North America's inland bird species. Another nearby attraction is Ramsey Canyon Preserve, a nationally recognized bird-watching area owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy. "This report reinforces the fact that protecting the environment does not mean sacrificing the economy," says Duane Shroufe, director of the Arizona Game and Fish Department. The free report, *Nature-Based Tourism and the Economy of Southeastern Arizona*, is available from the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, The University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721 (602/621-6241).

THE WHOLE ENCHILADA

Tired of fighting defensive battles for isolated pieces of land, some Colorado environmentalists have charted a new course for conservation in the 1990s. The Colorado Environmental Coalition calls the new approach, which began at an annual wilderness meeting last November, the Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project. It will start with the daunting task of mapping the major ecosystems of the southern Rockies: the San Juans, central mountains, greater Rocky Mountain National Park, Medicine Bow Range, Flattops and Sangre de Cristos. By mapping and promoting a system of large wilderness reserves connected by protected corridors of land, the coalition hopes to reunite the entire ecosystem—from alpine tundra to river valleys—and encourage recovery of the state's native plants and animals. With a solid base of biological information, conservationists say they will be better prepared to fight off proposed developments while promoting a vision of the wild mountains. Interested activists and volunteers can contact Rocky Smith at the Colorado Environmental Coalition, 777 Grant St. #606, Denver, CO 80203-3518 (303/837-8704).

A NEW PEER GROUP

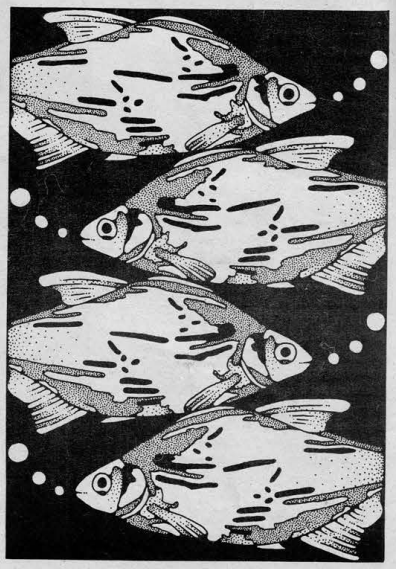
Jeff Debonis, the forester who formed the Association of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics (AFSEEE) four years ago, is leaving to help start a new group. It's called PEER, which stands for Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility. DeBonis says it will perform the same organizing, educating and whistle-blower protecting functions as AFSEEE, but extend the mission to other agencies. Workers from the BLM, Bureau of Reclamation, and some state agencies are helping form the new group, which is planning a national conference in Denver this year. AFSEEE, now looking for a new executive director, has grown to a 10,000-member organization; Debonis hopes PEER can do the same. PEER can be reached at P.O. Box 428, Eugene, OR 97440 (503/484-7158).

WILD FLICKS

Wildlife enthusiasts who enjoy the silver screen might want to take in the 16th International Wildlife Film Festival March 27 to April 3 in Missoula, Mont. Wildlife films from around the world are on tap and filmmakers will compete for prizes. Workshop and forum topics include violence in wildlife films, the clash of cultures and perspectives during filmmaking, and music and sound in films. Contact the film festival office at 280 E. Front St., Missoula, MT 59802 (406/728-9380).

FISH AND THE COLORADO RIVER

To protect four endangered fish in the Colorado River basin, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed a "critical habitat" designation that encompasses 2,094 miles of river in six states. In making the proposal for the Colorado squawfish, the humpback chub, the bonytail chub, and the razorback sucker, the agency met a Jan. 25 deadline set last fall by a U.S. District Court in Denver. But the agency made it clear that the proposal is just a starting point. Regional director Ralph Morgenweck says three economists will analyze the economic impacts of the proposal, which affects Colorado, Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming. The study, to be completed by June, will weigh the costs and benefits of designation "so that we can balance all interests," he said. Under the Endangered Species Act, river stretches designated as "critical habitat" for the fish must be managed for their recovery. That means federal dams such as Glen Canyon and Blue Mesa, near Gunnison, Colo., will have to release more water in the spring to replicate natural conditions under which the fish evolved. Large irrigators and utilities, which rely on the dams for substantial amounts of water throughout the dry summer months, have already complained that could hurt them financially and affect the power needs of cities such as Phoenix and Los Angeles. The proposal is in the Jan. 24 issue of the *Federal Register;* comments should be sent by March 25 to the Utah State Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2060 Administration Building, 1745 W. 1700 S., Salt Lake City, UT 84104.



ENERGY REPORTS

The Energy Department wants public comment on two reports that examine problem areas in the agency. The *Environmental Restoration and Waste Management Five Year Plan, Fiscal Years 1994-1998* details cleanup efforts at contaminated facilities nationwide. The *Draft Final Report of the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board Task Force on Radioactive Waste Management* suggests measures the DOE should take to strengthen confidence in its nuclear waste program. The draft concludes that public distrust of the Energy Department "is not an irrational reaction." The public comment deadline for the *Five Year Plan* is March 31. Deadline for the *Draft* is March 11. Both reports are available from the Department of Energy, 1000 Independence Ave. SW, Washington, D.C. 20585 (202/586-5000).

REVISITING THE FRONTIER THESIS

Speakers at a conference hosted by California's University of Redlands will resume a 100-year-old debate initiated by Frederick Jackson Turner. *Revisiting the Frontier Thesis: Debating Change in the Modern West* focuses on the impact of immigration and population density on the region, as well as the relationship between Western communities and political institutions. Organizers say it also emphasizes the role of the arts "as dynamic indicators of Western cultural values." The conference features T.H. Watkins, editor of *Wilderness* magazine; Teresa Jordan, author of *Cowgirls: Women for the American West;* Allan Savory, center for Holistic Resource Management; and Ed Marston, publisher of *High Country News*. It takes place March 12-13 at the University of Redlands, and the A.K. Smiley Public Library in Redlands, Calif. For more information contact History Department, University of Redlands, 1200 E. Colton Ave., P.O. Box 3080, Redlands, CA 92373-0999, or call 909/793-2121, ext. 3540.

FREE TO SKI

Tired of bumping into snowmobiles in the backcountry? The Backcountry Skiers Alliance, formed last April, wants to create non-motorized-use areas on Colorado public lands. Unless national forest or Bureau of Land Management acreage is designated special use, no regulations exist separating motorized from non-motorized users. The alliance says one result is that popular areas such as Vail Pass are dominated by gas-powered recreationists. The group's first project is to create non-motorized areas on Vail Pass and the area surrounding the Tenth Mountain Division huts. For more information write the alliance at P.O. Box 134, Boulder, CO 80306 (303/443-7839).

Unclassified

ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZER: North Olympic Peninsula trails advocacy organization seeks creative, energetic Executive Director. Excellent written/verbal communication skills, fund-raising, grant-writing and volunteer coordination experience essential. Familiarity with recreation/transportation issues and greenways preferred. Salary DOQ. Send letter of interest and résumé to Peninsula Trails Coalition, P.O. Box 414, Chimacum, WA 98325. (2x3p)

"OUTDOOR PEOPLE AD-Venture" lists 60-word descriptions of active, outdoor-oriented singles and trip companions nationwide. $3/issue, $12/ad. Outdoor People-HCN, P.O. Box 600, Gaston, SC 29053. (7x14p-eoi)

OUTDOOR SINGLES NETWORK, established bi-monthly newsletter, ages 19-90, no forwarding fees, $35/1-year, $7/trial issue and information. OSN-HCN, P.O. Box 2031, McCall, ID 83638. (6x3b-eoi)

NORTHERN PLAINS INDIAN TOURS — OFF THE BEATEN PATH offers two exclusive, nationally acclaimed opportunities to tour Plains Indian Reservations, led by Crow Tribal member and Montana State Senator Bill Yellowtail. One focuses on the Blackfeet, Piegan and Flathead tribes; another on the Wind River, Crow and Northern Cheyenne. Transcultural experiences are stressed during one-on-one meetings with tribal leaders, with particular emphasis on history, culture and present day issues. Call or write OFF THE BEATEN PATH, 109 E. Main St., Bozeman, MT 59715 (800/445-2995). (2x3b)

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY CATALOG for remote homes. Solar energy, wind, hydroelectric generators, wood-fired hot tubs, composting toilets and more. $2.50, refundable with order. Yellow Jacket Solar, Box 60H, Lewis, CO 81327. (6x24p-eoi)

THE UNIVERSITY OF REDLANDS, Redlands, Calif., will sponsor a conference titled "Revisiting the Frontier Thesis: Debating Change in the Modern West," on March 12 and 13. We hope to continue the debate initiated by Frederick Jackson Turner 100 years ago concerning the nature of land and resource use in the West, the impact of immigration and varying population density on the region, and the relationship between Western communities and political institutions. We will also emphasize the role of the arts as dynamic indicators of Western cultural values. For registration forms or additional information please contact: The Redlands History Department, 909/793-2121, ext. 4274. (2x3b)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR for oldest river conservation organization in the Pacific Northwest. Requires solid fund-raising and management experience. Familiarity with regional river issues desired but not mandatory. Salary $30,000-$40,000 DOQ. For job description send SASE to: NWRC, 1731 Westlake Ave. N., Ste. 202, Seattle, WA 98109-3043, Attn: Personnel Committee. Closes March 31, 1993. EOE. (2x3b)

SECLUDED BACKCOUNTRY CABIN. Surrounded by waterfalls and forest, for rent by week. Sleeps six. Located between Ouray and Silverton. P.O. Box 798, Silverton, CO 81433, or 303/387-5823 for brochure and information. (3x3b)

WILL LEASE FORESTED MOUNTAIN land as habitat for threatened animals. Wilson, Box 215, El Rito, NM 87530. (3x1p)

NEED CARETAKER with own income for remote mountain ranch. References. Wilson, Box 215, El Rito, NM 87530. (3x1p)

SOUTHWEST OREGON, a great place to live. For a free brochure of properties, call or write: Junction Realty, P.O. Box 849, Cave Junction, OR 97523, or call 1-800/238-6493. (3x1p)

LAND LETTER... the newsletter for natural resource professionals. Special introductory offer. Write 1800 N. Kent St., Suite 1120, Arlington, VA 22209, or call 703/525-6300. (24x1p)

HIGH COUNTRY NEWS classified ads cost 30 cents per word up to 50 words. Rates increase after that. Display ads 4 column inches or less are $10/col. inch if camera-ready; $15/col. inch if we make up. Larger display ads are $30 or $35/col. inch. We reserve the right to reject ads. Send ad with payment to: *HCN*, Box 1090, Paonia, CO 81428, or call 303/527-4898 for more information.

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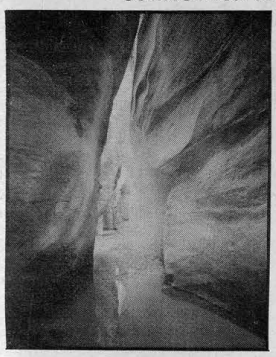

David Muench, one of our finest landscape photographers, has donated the image shown at the left for use in SUWA's first full color poster. We are grateful to **Patagonia, Inc.**, which made the entire project possible with its generous donation, and to **Arpel Graphics** of Santa Barbara, California, which donated the time and talent for the design of this beautiful 24-inch by 36-inch fine art print. We are proud to have the opportunity to share with you a piece of art depicting the intimate beauty and solitude of southern Utah's priceless canyon country.

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Vol. 25, No. 3

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GUEST EDITORIAL

by **Mike Bader**

The only hope for wilderness is to save all the parts

Over four decades ago, Aldo Leopold, the father of the modern conservation movement, wrote, "The first step in intelligent tinkering is to save all the parts."

In the lower 48 states, only the Northern Rockies support virtually all the species that roamed the area at the time of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Free-roaming populations of grizzly bear, gray wolf, caribou, lynx, salmon, bull trout, wolverine, bison, rare plants, and a host of others both known and unknown survive here. Most of the biological "parts" that Leopold spoke of remain — in an incredible diversity of landscapes ranging from high cactus desert to temperate rainforest. Yet today, most of the key indicators of ecosystem health and stability are on the threatened and endangered species lists, and the integrity of the Northern Rockies ecosystem is imperiled.

Politics vs. ecosystem integrity

Virtually everyone on the conservationist side opposes the destruction of any of our remaining roadless areas, which form the core component of our ecosystems. However, there is debate over how best to protect them. The 320 grass-roots member organizations and businesses, and the supporters that make up the Alliance for the Wild Rockies advocate a multistate ecosystem approach based on the principles of conservation biology, economics and environmental law. This new vision is represented by the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act, whose key purpose is protection of native biodiversity. Some organizations and individuals advocate a piecemeal approach grounded in parochial politics and represented by last year's failed Montana "wilderness" bill.

In arguing for the state-by-state approach, supporters claim that wilderness advocates can return to Congress at some time in the future to seek wilderness protection for those areas released (4 million acres in the Montana bill). The Alliance for the Wild Rockies advocates that either all remaining roadless areas should be protected in a given bill, or that legal means of protecting areas not included should be maintained. Moreover, history tells us that once a statewide bill is passed, there is little or no hope of passing another before what remains is gone, or hopelessly fragmented.

Consider what happened in Oregon and Washington after they failed to protect full ranges of habitat in wilderness bills and supported release language: the bad bills passed, the timber floodgates opened, and now an ecosystem is ravaged to the point where scientists don't even known if it can be restored. Release language is a green light for roading and clearcutting, and elimination of citizens' rights to appeal and litigate against development decisions. People who support release language are in effect saying, "It's okay for the Forest Service to violate national environmental laws in its efforts to destroy roadless areas."

The piecemeal approach is mired in the standard political rhetoric that "passing a bill is essential to solving the wilderness question once and for all." This speaks of finality, not future protection. With the exception of Alaska, it is extremely rare for a state to add more wilderness after passing a statewide bill.

Moreover, piecemeal advocates have not articulated a strategy for how to defend the millions of acres that are released all at once. Until such a plan exists, it is clear that no bill at all is much better than a bad bill.

A fourth of a loaf equals none

Some feel the ecosystem plan represents "an all-or-nothing approach." With wildlands in the Northern Rockies now at or below the biological minimum in terms of sustaining native wildlife populations, failure to protect the remaining wild areas does mean that for certain species we end up with nothing. Grizzly bears, bull trout and other sensitive species can't survive on a fourth of a loaf. An area-by-area legislative approach can be effective — providing it doesn't give anything else away. It can work without release language or prescriptive language facilitating development actions in other wild areas. Unfortunately, the last decade has yielded no such legislation in the Northern Rockies.

Conservationists must work in the times they are in. The days of local conservation-minded legislators like Montana Sens. Metcalf and Mansfield, and Idaho's Sen. Church, who carried the great area-by-area bills of the 1970s, have passed.

Regarding the Montana bill, conservation biologist Dr. Reed Noss said in the *Amicus Journal* (Vol. 14, No. 4): "The defeatist attitude really gets me. If the compromises that a lot of the national groups seem willing to make don't maintain ecosystems and the more sensitive species, what good does it really do? Such a strategy is less than viable, biologically."

Low expectations produce mediocre results. Examples include the numerous failed Montana and Idaho bills which had a common theme: release of virtually all forested wilderness and limitations on judicial review. Rep. Pat Williams, D-Mont., has said a 1993 version of a Montana bill will be identical to past release bills. Rep. Larry LaRocco, D-Idaho, has embarked on a similar effort to legislate logging of roadless areas throughout Idaho, totaling more than 9 million acres.

The best we can hope for with the state-by-state approach is a protracted defeat.

National constituency a must

The ecosystem approach can succeed where others have failed because there is a strong national constituency for the Northern Rockies. World-class treasures such as Yellowstone, Glacier, Hells Canyon, and the Frank Church region have captured the imaginations of millions. It's difficult at best to rally national support for just one roadless area. However, when considering the last relatively intact forest ecosystems in the temperate zones of the Earth, there is a real sense of national urgency and purpose. This constituency is being rapidly awakened by the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act effort. We outweigh the industry interests represented so ably by our regional senators and representatives the same way as before: with the sheer force of public opinion. It's *our* land. These same senators always line up against wilderness anyway, and must be overcome no matter the scope of the legislation. Let's rephrase the debate in a way that maximizes our influences.

This approach allows us to defeat bad bills while we continue building the necessary support to pass a good one. After all, the timber industry can't by itself consummate wholesale deals that release millions of acres at once to the chainsaws. If they could they would have already. Only with the acquiescence of conservationists do such deals become reality.

A state-by-state approach leads to protracted defeat

Thinking big enough to save ecosystems

Given the wealth of new biological and economic data, virtually no conservationist argues against the need to protect entire ecosystems and the essential linkages between them. Still, the fear of change is powerful, given the intransigence of Congress. But Congress works for the people, not the other way around. That's why the public must be rallied as never before. Alliance for the Wild Rockies and other grass-roots groups have a strong program of town meetings, training workshops and other grass-roots outreach that are the backbone of ecosystem advocacy. Stressing empowerment of the people and lasting ecosystem protection, the results are showing: Forest Service surveys of citizens living near the national forests in Montana and Northern Idaho show overwhelming support for roadless area protection. At least 65 to 75 percent of the people are opposed to any roadless area development and believe the national forests need to be managed more for wilderness and wildlife values, with less logging and motorized vehicle use.

Finally, effective ecosystem protection doesn't begin or end with legislation. It requires the endless coordination of programs including appeals and litigation, research and education, outreach and organizing.

While the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act is based on science, economics and law, nobody should be fooled into thinking that this vision is devoid of a political strategy. Indeed, just getting the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act introduced, and later ensuring a House floor debate over ecosystems, took considerable political skill and maneuvering. Conservationists have the experience and advice of people like Stewart Brandborg, John Craighead and many others who helped shape and enact the seminal environmental laws of this nation, including the Wilderness Act, the Endangered Species Act and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. These visionaries ran into similar roadblocks from people saying they were naive and lacking in appreciation for "political reality." They recognized that realities change. We are changing the political reality of the '90s and we will prevail.

President Clinton has charted a new course for our country, based on the belief that we must not be afraid of change. A new politics of hope and empowerment has taken hold, showing genuine promise that years of frustration and mediocrity can be reversed with a spirit of cooperation and success, and a wildlands legacy in the Northern Rockies that can make Aldo Leopold and all of us proud. ■

Mike Bader is executive director of Alliance for the Wild Rockies in Missoula, Montana. Its board of directors and advisors helped prepare this essay.

LETTERS

THE ALLIANCE HAS THE "BOLD GAME PLAN"

Dear *HCN*,

In response to the guest editorial Dec. 14, 1992, by Louise Bruce about wilderness politics, may I add a comment — a long sound bite?

First, whatever we have done in the past in saving wilderness, it has not been enough. The longer we wait to save what wilderness is left, the less there'll be to save. Through no fault of my own, I am now an environmental elder who should probably be put out to pasture, but I resist being pasturized. I'd just like to summarize what we did decades ago, and need to do more of, faster, now.

In 1949, when the Sierra Club had fewer than 6,000 members rather than the 600,000 it has now, we started the biennial wildemess conferences and held 12 of them, with magnificent support from The Wilderness Society. The Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs held its series in the Northwest in alternate years. We added books and films and full-page ads but had not yet learned how to get standing in court.

Every private interest was against us, and so was the Forest Service and the National Park Service. But by 1964 the National Wilderness System was established — just a few months after its principal architect, Howard Zahniser, had died of a heart attack.

The essential element of wilderness politics is to mobilize the electorate, to make it politically possible for elected officials, and the officials they appoint or condone, to care for the Earth adequately. In my view, that requires sparing and celebrating the entire vestige of wilderness that still remains. We can safely assume that it is no longer available to serve humanity's destructive talents, that its biological diversity, which we are slowly learning to comprehend, is essential to a living Earth, that wilderness-destroying jobs are too brief to be important and that jobs and careers in the restoration of natural and human systems will keep people busy for the foreseeable future — which will be more seeable the more intelligently we work at it.

So let's engage the public again. Create better theater. Resume the conferences, wake up the media, add the spark of humor to our demonstrations (remember Thoreau, Gandhi, and the fact that Nixon would have used the bomb had it not been for demonstrations), put boundaries around civilization, not around wildness.

And don't forget to have fun doing all this. In your own home, hold at least four wilderness parties a year (one for each season) in honor of what we cannot live well without. And get your organization to set up sister organizations that are not dependent upon tax-deductible funding and can therefore be as legislatively and politically active as a living Earth requires.

Here comes the second half. Get out there and win it!

For my money, the Alliance for the Wild Rockies has the bold game plan, the commitment. As mountaineer William H. Murray put it, "Until one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too." Celebration of this victory can be endless.

David R. Brower
San Francisco, California

David Brower is a former executive director of the Sierra Club. He also founded Friends of the Earth and the Earth Island Institute.

DON'T TRUST TO LUCK

Dear *HCN*,

David Petersen's article (*HCN*, 11/16/92) on the apparent presence of a few grizzly bears in Colorado sidesteps a critical issue — that of protecting the bears and eventually restoring a viable population. Any hope that the bears will somehow continue to survive by "lying low" is deeply undermined by both history and biology. While it is true that grizzly bears have occasionally held on for decades after their populations have been essentially destroyed, their luck invariably runs out. As Mr. Petersen mentions, the last "confirmed" Colorado grizzly met her fate when she was killed by (elk) hunters in 1979.

Publicity that the current private search for grizzlies has gotten inadvertently heightens the threat to any remaining bears. But even *without* more trouble from people, biologists know that a population of only a few animals, when unable to expand, is doomed to extinction.

For these reasons, some citizens have been asking responsible federal and state agencies to take action that will give these probable grizzly bears a meaningful chance to survive and expand their numbers. Perhaps the strongest proposal is for emergency seasonal closure of a small portion of national forest where the grizzlies apparently live. The key concern, I believe, should not be whether the bears might "threaten livestock, big-game hunting, or backcountry recreation" (which seem hardly at risk of extinction!), but whether we will act decisively on this final opportunity to save the Colorado grizzly.

Tony Povilitis
Glorieta, New Mexico

STOP LOOKING FOR EDEN

Dear *HCN*,

As another member of the 6-6 grazing group to which both Dan Dagget and Mike Seidman belong, I would like to offer a few observations of my own about both the 6-6 group and grazing in general (*HCN*, 12/28/92).

The articles and letters that followed Dagget's piece focused on who has the "right" answer to whether grazing should be allowed on public lands. To say that all cattle should be removed from all public lands or that all public lands should be open to all grazing are simplistic solutions to complex problems.

There is no doubt that the Audubon Research Ranch should continue to exclude cattle. Mark Stromberg is absolutely correct in pointing out the importance of having a large area of ungrazed land as a control plot. The USFS and the BLM should create some equally large exclosures, located in different ecosystems. Long-term research programs should be instituted to study the exclosures.

But it is both impractical and unnecessary for us to wait many years for the results of that research. Instead, adaptive management based on defined goals and monitoring ought to be implemented. If goals are in place and monitoring is done properly, the land itself will tell managers when they are off-track.

Some people believe that simply removing cattle from an area means it will return to its natural state. However, many areas have been altered so much that it is doubtful whether they will return to their natural state without some form of management. There are also problems with the idea that there is some specific "natural state" to which we can return. Because of evolutionary and climatic forces acting upon ecosystems it is better to characterize them by "constant change" rather than "natural state."

Incised arroyos, for example, can often be attributed to the effects of cattle; however, at one 6-6 meeting, we were shown how cattle can be used in a carefully controlled way to round over vertical walls of incised gullies. This practice allows grass to re-establish itself, which in turn may lead to streambank regeneration. It may be that while cattle created the problem, they may also be part of the solution. The federal government cannot afford to bulldoze and reseed all the eroded gulches in the West, but perhaps cattle grazed in a controlled manner by knowledgeable ranchers can help.

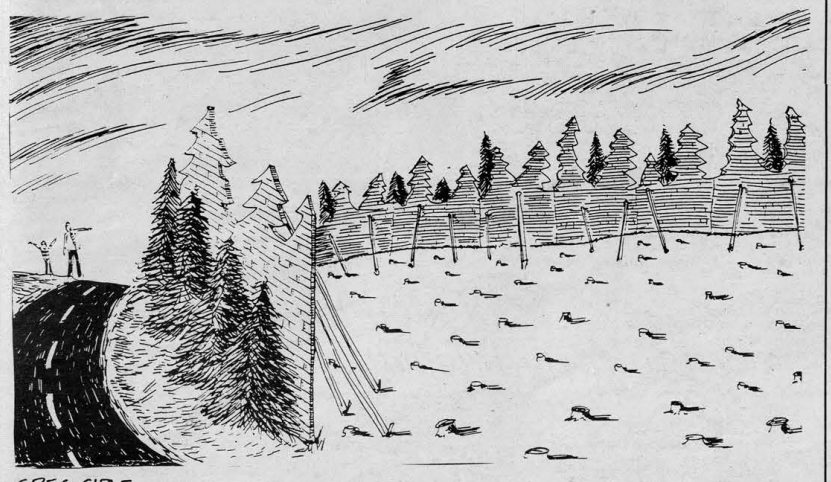
We cannot afford to ignore the power of partnerships in solving natural resource issues in the West. Diversity in human culture is important, just as it is in natural ecosystems. A significant portion of the economy of many rural communities is based on the land surrounding those communities. The proper management of the lands where natural resources are found will pose an increasingly difficult problem. Groups like 6-6 are striving to look at land use problems from as many perspectives as possible in an attempt to come up with some new ideas. One of the best ways for solving problems is through finding consensus and establishing common ground, rather than through adversarial wrangling.

The time has come to stop looking for the Garden of Eden. Instead, we should start managing ourselves in such a way that we can share this world with the plants and animals who are both our sustenance and our neighbors.

Rick Moore
Flagstaff, Arizona

The writer is a conservation associate with the Grand Canyon Trust.

OFF THE WALL



Greg Siple

"Gosh, Dad, look at all the trees!"
"Yes, Son, America's forests are a vast renewable resource."

BOOK NOTES

Searching for the city on the peaks of Wyoming

by C.L. Rawlins

John and I are beasts of the field, Temporary Technicians, the golden retrievers of science. This is our stick, thrown by the cities and their supporting cast of power plants and petrochemicals. Taken aloft by the sky. Brought back by snowfall. This sample is not as heavy as some, a queen-size pillow of ice and snow, 35 pounds at most.

We punch it to a smaller size and compress it into my pack. This is — to all appearances — the object of our trip. But it always disappoints me, this mute, frozen bundle. Having it means we have to turn back.

That's what one of my climbing partners said about summits, which he claimed were the worst part of a mountain. Worthless. All you do is stand around getting frostbite, and then you have to go back.

Out of a green canvas case comes the detested snow-coring kit — three-foot threaded sections of wrist-size aluminum tube marked in inches, a spring scale, a notebook, and a two-liter bottle, the necessities for self-torture. Snow coring is worse than rappelling. You can tell amateurs because they love rappels. Climbers *hate* rappels. No edge. Nothing but a rope and a few pissant scraps of alloy between you and the big Yahooooooo. Everyone who has ever come on one of these trips has loathed taking snow cores. The Bondage Kit, we call it. The Whip. After 30 or 40 of these gigs, you'd sooner pack a bundle of live cobras. Good thing there aren't any glaciers at hand. "Coring kit? Oh, um, well, we had this, ummm, minor epic with a crevasse and, yup, S'history."

John asks me what I'm mumbling about. "Heat," I declare. "Women," I affirm. "Food," I say, and he nods. Probably thinks I'm getting hypothermic. Hallucinating. Irrational. On second thought, he knows I'm irrational even when warm. One of my qualifications for this job. So, a sudden attack of logic would mean that danger lurks. *Logic — Killer of the Unprepared.*

The sun banks southwest and the air cools fast. Handling the aluminum tubes is like pushing frozen pins into my fingers. Wearing the scale on a cord around my neck, I plunge the coring tube into the snow while John notes the depth. Then, I hang the tube from the scale while he reads the weight. If the wind is blowing, which, fortunately, it isn't now, the tubes spin and bounce, making this a jolly interlude.

Then comes the worst part. He opens the bottle and I whack the tube, causing the core to drop into the bottle. Or at least most of it. The remainder freezes fast to the metal. I beat on the tube — which hurts when your hands are on the verge of frostbite. If you bang on the tubes with something hard, they will dent. I slap and swear. The last kiss of sun slides up my face and over the ridge. Cold. Colder. More of the plug breaks loose. I dig at it with the little chrome dagger that came in the kit, for *hara kiri*. Honorable exit after failure to collect sample for Empire. This sinister item, which looks like a medieval poniard, is actually a GSA letter opener. Standard issue in snow-coring kits. The last of the core comes free and slides into the bottle. The sequence is bemoaned — I am Chief Bemoaner — and repeated until the bottle is full, four cores this time.

This accomplished, we stuff scattered gear into our packs and hasten to leave. We switch our feet back and forth to scrub the ice from our skis, then run down the slope to the creek. Part of the snow-bridge has collapsed, leaving barely enough to trust. John makes his owl-eyes, first at the creek and then at me. Neither of us wants to break more trail to find another crossing. So I trust it first. Nothing happens, so he follows and we force ourselves up the short, steep slope to the ridge.

We regain our high point, looking west this time at the circle of peaks. The sun is leaving, and dread-locked summits already cast ragged shade across the lake ice. Given good snow, and this is nearly good, the ridge we descend is a superb run, steep enough for flashy turns, a slalom course of rocks and conifers set between nice drop-offs. With a heavy load, I telemark most of the turns, throwing in some narrow parallels where there's room between spruce and whitebark.

The telemark turn is one of those minor miracles in the otherwise discouraging progress of Western civilization: you scrooch a ski out front, weight it, and it flexes into a simple-applied-physics arc, which your body follows. Or so you hope. The advantage of the telemark is that, once learned, it almost always works. What's awkward is convincing one's lower brain to shove that foot out and lean forward on it at speed, when normal primate behvior would be to screech and sit down hard. Parallel turns are simpler in concept — the skis initiate the turn together — but more difficult on touring gear, with its flexible and somewhat tentative connection between skier and ski. The advantage of parallel turns is that they're quicker, since one doesn't need to switch feet when starting the turn. Mastered to the level of reflex, both sorts are pure, nerve-whipping fun. What took us 40 minutes to climb takes a sweet 10 to go down, gravity willing. Gravity always is. ■

Chip Rawlins, *HCN*'s longtime poetry editor, has been a campjack, cowhand, counselor, range rider, poet-in-the-schools, Stegner Fellow, and since 1986 a wilderness hydrologist in Wyoming. This essay is taken from his new book *Sky's Witness, a Year in the Wind River Range*, published by Henry Holt, 115 W. 18th St., New York, NY 10011.

Hannah Hinchman