

High Country News

For people who care about the West

A Monumental Divide

The tribal bid for Bears Ears
raises tough questions
about homelands

By Jonathan Thompson



The San Juan River, seen from the Mexican Hat formation, creates a ribbon of green between Navajo lands and the proposed Bears Ears National Monument. WHIT RICHARDSON

Editor's note

Movements, waning and waxing



Ten months ago, when a small group of anti-federal agitators occupied the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in eastern Oregon, *HCN* produced a package of stories about the seemingly revitalized Sagebrush Rebellion. Armed with guns and cellphones and backed by political forces eager to put federal lands in the hands of state and private interests, these new "insurgents" looked formidable.

Yet now, anti-federal activity in the West seems to have calmed down, and a jury in Portland will soon decide whether seven of the Malheur occupiers conspired to prevent federal employees from doing their jobs. The land-transfer fever is also cooling: Utah's governor has balked at the legal fight pushed by hardliners in his Legislature, and the issue largely has been sidelined during this brutal election season.

Instead, a different kind of campaign is gaining momentum in the West: a modern amalgamation of the civil rights and environmental movements of the 1960s, buoyed by a new generation of climate and social justice activists and led by an emboldened Native American community.

You can see it in North Dakota, where representatives from Indigenous tribes around the globe have joined members of the Standing Rock Sioux to protest the construction of the 1,172-mile Dakota Access Pipeline, which would carry Bakken crude within a half-mile of the tribe's reservation. With supplies pouring in from across the country, many plan to brave the coming winter in tents and trailers, hoping that their stand, along with a legal challenge by EarthJustice, will get the pipeline rerouted away from revred sites and water sources.

Already, the protest has caused the Army Corps of Engineers and Interior Department to temporarily halt construction and start a series of listening sessions to assess whether there should be "nationwide reform" on how tribes are consulted when infrastructure projects affect their homelands.

The five tribes that have asked President Obama to create a 1.9 million-acre Bears Ears National Monument on sacred lands in San Juan County, Utah, have their own ideas about consultation: They want a permanent seat at the table. As Jonathan Thompson reports, the proposed monument would give tribes a majority vote on a management committee, a federal land first.

Predictably, San Juan County's largely Mormon and politically conservative majority, which has periodically clashed with land managers and environmentalists over the past 50 years, strongly opposes the monument. More surprisingly, so do a number of tribal members, many of whom are also Mormon and do not trust the federal government. Thompson's story is a good reminder of just how complicated Western issues can be.

Still, if Obama decides to protect the Bears Ears, it will serve as a powerful affirmation of the claims of those Americans with the longest and deepest ties to the land. And it will signal that conservation and social justice can go hand-in-hand in the modern West.

—Paul Larmer, executive director/publisher

On the cover
Early-morning light casts shadows in the Valley of the Gods, part of the proposed Bears Ears National Monument on Cedar Mesa in southeastern Utah.

ADRIEL HEISEY PHOTO
COURTESY BEARS EARS INTER-TRIBAL COALITION

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A protester (who was unwilling to identify himself) sits outside the federal courthouse in Portland, Oregon, as his horse, Lady Liberty, gets a drink from a fountain during the early days of the trial of Ammon and Ryan Bundy and five other Malheur occupiers. AP PHOTO/DON RYAN

The aftereffects of Malheur

The trial of Ammon and Ryan Bundy and five other defendants for the armed occupation of Oregon's Malheur National Wildlife Refuge has lasted much of the early fall. As of press time, it was in its sixth week, and a verdict was imminent. The long-term impacts of the 41-day occupation will come into relief with time, but it's already clear that the events strengthened bonds within the Patriot movement nationwide. The occupation inspired a handful of Western ranchers to threaten to renounce grazing contracts with the feds this year. But those copycats have seemingly cooled off. In some cases, informal mediation efforts by locals convinced those ranchers to continue to work with the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, instead of against them. By early October, Cliven Bundy's cattle were still grazing illegally in Clark County, Nevada. Some environmentalists say that's because the BLM, intimidated by threats of violence led by the Bundy family, is reluctant to incite another confrontation. TAY WILES

MORE: hcne.ws/Malheur-impacts

Trending

Time to euthanize wild horses?

In an opinion piece, Maddy Butcher ruminates over the Bureau of Land Management's recommendation to consider euthanizing tens of thousands of equines in federal holding facilities. Inundated by negative feedback, the BLM reversed course on mass euthanization. Butcher critiqued that decision. "If the horses weren't so pretty, as well as being an icon of the Old West, we would call them 'invasive,'" she writes. "We would have sought more effective, less emotion-driven and politicized ways to manage them long ago."

MADDY BUTCHER, Writers on the Range

You say

JOEL NIEMI: "I worked for the BLM back when the wild horse roundups were just starting. Horse populations were growing because they weren't becoming dog food any more, and ranchers were objecting about their grazing allotments being reduced due to horse population growth."

JENNY RILEY: "The BLM has the answer, and it's not euthanasia, it's PZP. It makes mares sterile for two to four years, can be administered by dart, and is inexpensive, especially compared to holding."

PAUL ASHBY: "This is such a polarizing issue. It's good to see a discussion of both sides of the story."

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

\$1.7 billion

Forest Service's cost for the 2015 fire season, its costliest ever.

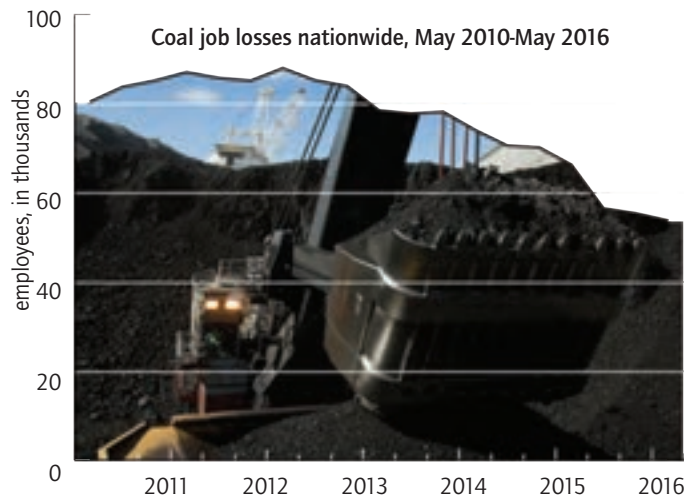
5,000

Peak number of people who worked the most-expensive wildfire ever, the Soberanes Fire, which was started in July by an illegal campfire in a state park near Big Sur.

This summer's Soberanes Fire in Central California cost a record-breaking estimated \$260 million to suppress – most of that paid for by the U.S. Forest Service. Suppressing fires, and paying for things like firefighting crews, aircraft and evacuations now uses up over half of the agency's budget. Many of the most expensive fires have occurred in California, and with climate change, extended drought and development in wildfire-prone zones, the price of fighting fire will only continue to climb. LYNDSEY GILPIN
MORE: hcne.ws/costly-fires

Coal is loaded by giant shovelsful into a haul truck at the North Antelope Rochelle coal mine in Wyoming, where 235 employees were laid off earlier this year.

PEABODY ENERGY INC. DATA: BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, COMPILED FROM ANNUAL EMPLOYMENT REPORTS



Wyoming approves a new coal mine

Defying broader trends, Wyoming approved its first new coal mine in decades. While the proposed operation doesn't mean coal is back, the Brook Mine's approach may provide a road map for how coal could survive amid industry contraction. The operation is starting off small, producing only 8 million tons of coal each year, which pales in comparison to the state's larger operators. It will

employ fewer people than other Wyoming coal mines, relying instead on automation and making it unlikely the mine would make up for the gaps in employment in the state. The mine would operate on private property, saving money on royalty payments. Still, it will have to reckon with dwindling demand for coal power, in the U.S. and overseas. PAIGE BLANKENBUEHLER

MORE: hcne.ws/WY-coalmine

Sea otters on the rise

For the first time since being listed in 1977, threatened California sea otter populations have increased just above the delisting threshold. But a closer look shows the traces of an ecological cascade. At both ends of their range, the otters are dying from the bites of great white sharks, whose populations researchers suspect are surging as their food of choice – seals and sea lions – rebounds.

ANNA V. SMITH
MORE: hcne.ws/SeaOtter-science



Sea otters control sea urchin numbers, keeping them from forming what one biologist describes as "roving hordes" on the seafloor.

RON WOLF

1 Number of full-time employees with the title of Burning Man Project Manager. Some of the other 13 Black Rock District BLM employees chip in during the weeklong festival and its aftermath. KRISTA LANGLOIS
MORE: hcne.ws/Burner-LM

LETTERS

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BALLOT OBSTRUCTION

Citizens' ballot initiatives are much in the news right now, and we have used them to good effect in Arizona despite opposition from the governor and state Legislature ("Taking initiative," *HCN*, 10/3/16). Unable to prevent initiatives, they have taken to making them more difficult to present. Each voter signature sheet is now limited to only 15 signatures, must have a complete copy of the initiative stapled to it at all times, and can include only the signatures of registered voters in a single county. The last petition we circulated required some 50 pages of the proposed initiative to be attached to each signature form, and the cost of printing must be borne by the persons or group circulating it.

So far, this is all the Legislature has been able to come up with to make the will of its citizens more difficult to express, but surely its members will think of more ways.

Nicholas J. Bleser
Tumacacori, Arizona

SAVE THE WEST, BUILD TRUMP'S WALL

Shame on you, *HCN*! You claim to "care about the West," yet you've just devoted an entire issue, "Purple Rain: How Donald Trump's Divisive Campaign Is Repainting the Political Map" (*HCN*, 10/3/16), to smearing the one candidate who might actually do something about the root cause of the destruction of the West's wide-open spaces — U.S. overpopulation, which is driven almost exclusively by mass immigration. Overpopulation causes both the loss of open space and the overuse of what's left. We have to choose — we can have wide-open spaces or wide-open borders, but we can't have both. In 2016, we still have a choice. In 2020, it may be too late.

Maggie Willson
Shoreline, Washington

LONGS PEAK EXPOSED

Thank you for publishing the John Herick photo of "The Narrows" on Longs Peak ("Photo contest winners," *HCN*,



10/3/16). During my dozen-year tenure on the Colorado Front Range, I often considered trekking to the summit of Longs, but never actually did. One of the reasons was that I'd read vague mentions of a stretch that featured significant exposure. John's photo shows me that I'd never be able to force myself across "The Narrows." Now I can rest easier, knowing that I'd never have made it to the summit anyway.

Ray Schoch
Minneapolis, Minnesota

AS GOES GERMANY

Your special issue "Frontera Incognita" was great, but I have a bit of a bone to pick on your editorial note ("In search of a borderless West," *HCN*, 9/19/16). Very properly, you take Donald Trump to task for his misguided proposals on walls and immigration. But you offer no real counter to it. I have been a left-looking Democrat all my life, but I have no sympathy for our current do-nothing policies on immigration. The planet and this U.S. portion of the planet are overpopulated. This country, no more than Germany, cannot afford to look the other way on legal and illegal immigration. It will eventually, as in Germany and the rest of Europe, bring a massive political swing to the right. The number and mindset of Trump supporters are an indication that this is already happening right before our eyes. Your call to "look beyond borders" has a beautiful, but a tad hollow, ring to it. I see no nation advertising that its borders are no longer sacrosanct and that all comers are welcome.

Marcel Rodriguez
Springdale, Utah

CELEBRATING COMPLEXITY

Thank you for this rich issue on the Borderlands and the idea of borders ("Frontera Incognita," *HCN*, 9/19/16). Complex ideas and beautiful writing in every article! Thanks also for taking a stand on the election. I imagine that it is always a difficult editorial decision (although perhaps not so difficult this year), but I appreciate

your willingness to do it. I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to think past divisive rhetoric and explore some more complexity. Keep it coming!

Anna Wilde
Vancouver, Washington

THE PRESENCE OF PRAIRIE DOGS

As a rangeland ecologist, I was somewhat disturbed by this article and the point being made ("Slaughter of the Innocents," *HCN*, 9/5/16). Prairie dogs are on the author's property because conditions are conducive for them, especially the depth and type of soils. The odds are that the "juniper forest" referred to was not the original vegetation prior to Anglo settlement on this site, but rather grasslands occurred there. Grassland soils support woodlands quite well when the grassland ground cover and underground grass root mass has been reduced or removed through such practices as livestock grazing. This also, in turn, results in the loss of natural and reoccurring fires once common in healthy grasslands, which benefitted the ecosystem through nutrient recycling and helped to remove juniper seedlings that might get started in grasslands. Grassland conversion to woodland has occurred across millions and millions of acres in the West.

Secondly, yes, prairie dog colonies result in denuded vegetation around their burrows, but their ecological and biological benefits to soils, vegetation and wildlife, including insects and birds, are well documented through research and the literature.

Mitchel R. White
Silver City, New Mexico



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Trade-off on the Tongass

The largest national forest plans to phase out old-growth logging

BY ELIZABETH SHOGREN

Twenty years ago on a beautiful November day, Robert Bonnie and Dominick DellaSala got an unexpected and unforgettable opportunity to play hooky. Both were working for environmental groups, Bonnie for the Environmental Defense Fund and DellaSala for the World Wildlife Fund. But when they arrived at Yellowstone National Park for a meeting about large carnivores, they learned that the park was closed and their meeting had been cancelled: The federal government had just shut down over a budget battle between President Bill Clinton and Congress. Somehow, they talked their way into the park anyway and hiked through Lamar Valley, peering through binoculars at newly reintroduced gray wolves and distant grizzlies and watching a peregrine falcon circle overhead.

Many years later, Bonnie recalled that adventure when he and DellaSala met at the Agriculture Department's Washington, D.C., headquarters to discuss the fate of the Tongass National Forest in southeast Alaska, the nation's largest national forest and the last where large-scale clear-cutting of old-growth trees is permitted. Bonnie, now the undersecretary of Agriculture who oversees the Forest Service, said that day had been one of the best of his life. DellaSala challenged Bonnie to top it by saving the Tongass. "That would be a conservation legacy," DellaSala, 59, recalls.

Now, however, three years later, Bonnie and DellaSala are on opposite sides of a battle over climate change and the Tongass.

By the end of the year, the Forest Service expects to finalize an amendment to the 2008 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan that would phase out large old-growth clear-cuts over 16 years. "We are being very forward-leaning here," Bonnie, 48, says. DellaSala vehemently disagrees. He's now the chief scientist of Geos Institute, a small Oregon-based group of scientists and policy wonks who work with land and water managers and communities on climate change. DellaSala



believes the Forest Service and Bonnie in particular should end old-growth logging across the 17 million-acre forest much faster — not just for the sake of the ancient sitka spruce, cedar and hemlock, but for the planet.

The Tongass' rainforests cover an archipelago of islands replete with waterfalls and glaciers, and DellaSala fell in love with the area while doing field research in the 1990s on the impacts of logging on wolves, Sitka black-tailed deer and songbirds. DellaSala now is promoting a plan — supported by many environmental groups and former Forest Service leaders — to phase out clear-cutting in five years. "It's disappointing that we have a president who is so engaged on climate change and an agency that is so unsavvy," DellaSala says. "It's not in step with the rest of the administration's global leadership on climate change." A quicker end to clear-cutting old growth would also protect vital habitat for wildlife, including five species of salmon that are key to the region's economy.

Logging in the Tongass is already down to about one-tenth of what it was when Bonnie and DellaSala played hooky in the mid-1990s. And climate change may prove to be the force that ends wide-scale old-growth logging there permanently. "Although the transition timeframe is too

long, when you look at the long and twisting timeline of Tongass management, the fact we are now talking openly and clearly about the end of old-growth logging and roadbuilding is a significant, positive event," says Tim Bristol, a longtime environmental advocate in southeastern Alaska.

The turning point came in November 2009, when world leaders gathered in Copenhagen to negotiate a new international climate treaty. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack highlighted the "vital role" forests must play in combating climate change, singling out the Tongass, which may hold as much as 8 percent of all the carbon contained in America's forests. Bonnie, as Vilsack's climate change advisor, was listening just off-stage and felt tremendous pride: His work had long focused on the ability of forests to store immense quantities of carbon and blunt the impact of greenhouse gas emissions. (Wood products store only a fraction of the carbon of live trees.)

Four years later, Vilsack directed agency staff to speed the transition away from old-growth logging in the Tongass while sustaining timber industry jobs. The Forest Service convened an advisory committee of representatives from industry, local tribes and regional environmental groups to come up with a consensus plan, no easy task given that logging there has been

Recent clear-cuts and clear-cut regrowth stand beside swaths of older trees in the Tongass National Forest. The Forest Service plans to gradually stop clear-cutting old growth in the forest over the next 16 years, but some scientists and conservationists say the phase-out is too slow.

ALAN WU/CC FLICKR



The cliff left by the landslide in Oso, Washington, over two years ago. KING COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

THE LATEST

Backstory

On March 22, 2014, a major mudslide killed 43 people in Oso, Washington.

Clear-cut logging above the slide exacerbated it; the hill – which is in one of the state's most active slide zones – had slumped before in 1995 and 2006. Many of the West's riskiest locations are also its most desirable, encouraging would-be residents to gamble with geology (“Why we risk life and property,” *HCN*, 4/28/14).

Followup

On Oct. 10, the day before a months-long trial was to begin, Washington state and a local timber company settled with survivors and victims' families. Grandy Lake Forest Associates LLC agreed to pay \$10 million, and the state – which plaintiffs accused of building a wall that made the slide worse – will pay \$50 million. Last year, a University of Washington study showed that slopes in the Oso area collapse every 140 to 500 years, revealing that one of the deadliest slides in history was no anomaly.

LYNDESEY GILPIN

roiled for decades in court battles and high-stakes politics. Alaskan politicians led by Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski, head of the Senate Natural Resources Committee and the Appropriations Subcommittee, which provides the Forest Service's budget, constantly pressure the agency to increase the availability of massive old-growth logs, most of which are shipped to China, South Korea and Japan. But environmentalists regularly challenge such timber sales.

The agency believed that a plan produced with strong local input could survive political attacks and changes in leadership in Washington. DellaSala's quicker phase-out was rejected as too risky for industry. Bonnie says it also would be risky politically; it assumes that a possible future Republican administration wouldn't reject it and that the formidable Murkowski wouldn't block it.

Last year, the committee voted unanimously to support a transition from logging old-growth to second-growth timber over 10 to 15 years. Second-growth areas support less wildlife, and since they already have been cut, logging them again doesn't require building new roads. Despite the vote, the timber industry, state government and the tribal timber organization attacked the plan, saying it wouldn't allow enough old-growth logging to keep them in business. The market for second-growth trees is uncertain, too. The proposal “will result in the bankruptcy and the closing of all major timber operators on the Tongass,” Eric Nichols, a partner of Evergreen Timber and Alcan Forest Products, wrote to the Forest Service.

Meanwhile, DellaSala and other scientists, environmentalists and former Forest Service leaders harshly criticized the plan, saying the agency failed to consider a more rapid transition from old-growth clear-cuts or to calculate the emissions from the logging and their impact on the warming planet. They charge that continuing clear-cutting in the Tongass runs counter to the objective the U.S. embraced in the Paris

Agreement on climate change last year. Using federal methods, DellaSala calculated that the greenhouse gas emissions would be equivalent to adding at least 2 million vehicles to Alaska's roads annually. (Currently, there are only a half-million vehicles registered in the state.)

The Forest Service didn't do its own calculations, despite guidance from the White House Council on Environmental Quality that agencies should do so. In its environmental impact statement on the proposed plan, the agency downplays the impact of logging in the Tongass. “Emissions from harvests in the Tongass are very, very small relative to other sources,” Bonnie says, such as deforestation in the Lower 48 and emissions from automobiles and power plants.

Jim Furnish, a former Forest Service deputy chief, knows that transitioning away from old-growth logging is hard but doable. He oversaw the end of large-scale clear-cutting in the Pacific Northwest after the courts ordered the agency to save habitat for the northern spotted owl. He and DellaSala have told Bonnie and others at the Forest Service that the reasons for saving the Tongass could not be more compelling or more consistent with the Obama administration's principles. Furnish keeps telling them it's “a huge carbon treasure chest. But we're not getting any traction with that.”

Bonnie deflected repeated questions from *HCN* about why his agency failed to assess its Tongass plan's emissions or the projected costs of that carbon pollution for current and future societies from fiercer storms, rising seas, more destructive forest fires and the other negative effects of climate change. The White House's guidelines, first released as a draft in 2010 and finalized in August, don't require agencies to quantify the greenhouse gas impacts of their actions, but recommend that they do. Bonnie stresses that while the Forest Service has prioritized climate change in this and many other decisions, by law it also has to consider impacts on rural com-

munities and jobs.

The agency's push for the industry to switch to second-growth timber comes after two decades of forest policy from Washington that dramatically shrank the local timber economy. Companies now cut about 40 million board-feet, down from a peak of nearly 600 million, and timber jobs are down 80 percent. Under the Forest Service's proposal, the Tongass would support about 200 direct timber jobs, an increase from current levels.

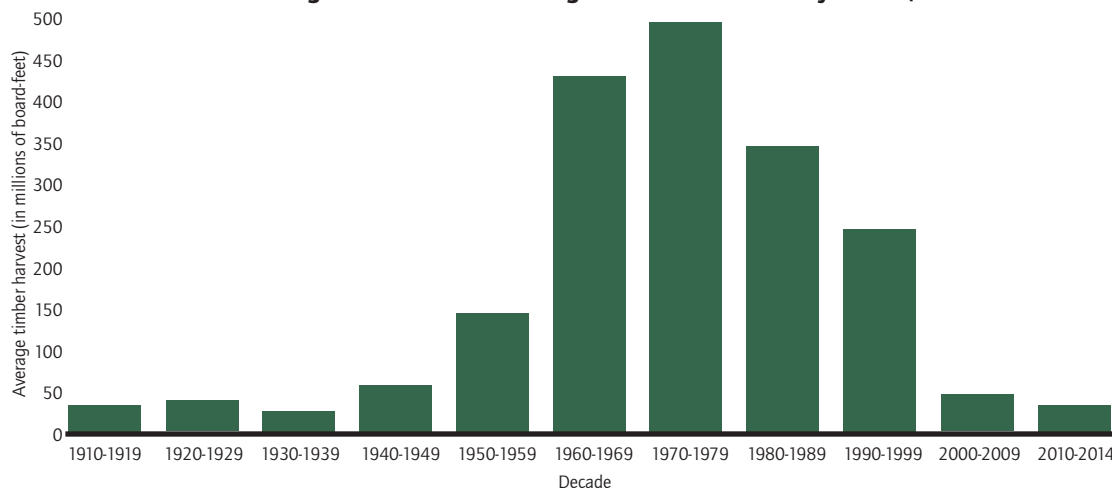
During a tense hearing on Capitol Hill in March, Murkowski asked the agency to delay the transition from old growth to save jobs. But Forest Service Chief Tidwell believes the phase-out will ultimately reduce opposition to logging and help the beleaguered industry sustain itself. There's already been, he said, “two decades of controversy and litigation around old-growth harvest and roadless (rules), and that's gotten us nowhere.” He promised new markets for the smaller second-growth trees that would be logged instead.

Murkowski shot back: “New markets are good, chief, but you still have to have trees that are mature enough to harvest.” Now, Murkowski is pushing a bill to derail the proposed transition from old growth.

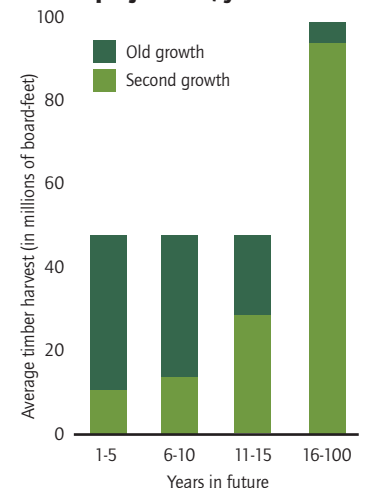
The Forest Service held meetings in Ketchikan and Juneau in October to consider objections from all sides. Bonnie says he feels confident that the agency's blueprint will weather the criticism because the phase-out makes sense for the ancient trees, the community and the climate. □



Volume of Tongass National Forest old-growth timber harvest by decade, 1910-2014



Harvest projections, years 1-100





From bears to berries

A wildlife biologist turns her sights on climate science and the elusive huckleberry

BY ANTONIA MALCHIK

The current debate over removing certain grizzly bear populations from endangered species protection often strays into arguments over hunting, but grizzlies might have less to fear from hunters than they do from the possible demise of an unobtrusive berry. Studies of grizzly and black bear scat show that huckleberries, at times, can make up to 15 to 50 percent of their diet. Given that female grizzlies can't reproduce without sufficient body fat — about 20 percent of their total weight — the barely knee-high huckleberry gains ecological significance far beyond its size.

Crouched amid deep green alpine shrubbery and grass, a beige U.S. Geological Survey cap shading her face, Tabitha Graves leans through berry bushes, painstakingly counting huckleberries 6,000 feet up in the mountains of Glacier National Park on a cold August day. Graves is a wildlife biologist with the USGS in northwest Montana who has devoted most of her professional life to grizzlies. She thinks that understanding how climate change will affect huckleberries, one of their main food sources, is crucial to understanding how it will affect the threatened bears themselves.

Graves places a grid, roughly eight inches by eight inches and open in the middle like a picture frame, over a huckleberry bush and calls numbers off to her assistant: three ripe berries, five white, two green. "That's a lot of white berries," she comments before moving onto the next set of bushes.

Antonia Malchik writes from northwest Montana.
@amalchik

The whiteness is caused by a fungal infection called monilinia, but it's not the main reason she's here. In 2014, Graves launched a pilot project to compile a comprehensive record of this beguiling berry in order to figure out how changes in climate might affect its growth and production. She's seeking to answer essential questions: Where and under what conditions do huckleberries grow best? Her careful counting and documentation of the health of huckleberry patches is intended to help forest and park managers make the best management decisions they can for an uncertain future.

While much is known about huckleberries, she says, "very little of what's out there is in scientific journals or peer-reviewed studies." Most of it is in the heads of a wide variety of people: tribal elders, commercial and recreational huckleberry pickers, bear managers, professional silviculturalists and botanists. Early research was done without modern tools or much knowledge of the effects of climate change, and most modern research is buried in obscure U.S. Forest Service technical reports. The previous baseline for Graves' own work was set by Katherine Kendall, her predecessor at West Glacier's USGS office, in the 1980s. Kendall's work focused on berry productivity, and Graves is monitoring many of the same sites to understand how sunlight exposure, slope aspect, snowpack and other factors affect the plants' timing and growth.

With no birds singing, no insects humming, no tourist helicopters droning overhead, the silence makes the day seem colder. For company, Graves and her assistant

have only the occasional appearance of a group of hikers tramping downhill from a night at Granite Park Chalet, asking how far it is to the bottom. Counting berries in the woods is quite a change from Graves' previous work analyzing samples of bears' hair, but both approaches can help researchers better understand how grizzlies survive and reproduce.

While grizzly bears are generally seen as highly adaptable, climate change still poses a threat. Shifts in temperature and snowfall are likely to impact food sources, from huckleberries and serviceberries to salmon and whitebark pine nuts. And these changes, along with temperature fluctuations that have altered the times bears enter and exit their dens, intensify the possibility of conflict with humans, grizzlies' greatest survival challenge.

Graves leads the way to another site farther up the trail, where she keeps track not just of berry production, but also the effect of seasonal climatic variations, pests and pollinators throughout the growing season. The lower study sites were covered in bushes full of plump ripe berries. Here, the berries have not yet ripened. Graves and her assistant step carefully through the short, sparse foliage, dotted with tiny yellow St. Johnswort flowers and the husks of Glacier lilies, to find her discreetly tagged study subjects. Their voices calling out counts and percentages penetrate the high alpine silence.

The pilot project is scheduled to run for three more years, depending on funding, and even then the information will likely be incomplete. As Graves points out, her observation sites are located only in spots humans find easily accessible, which aren't necessarily the same as those preferred by grizzlies. She envisions a study that relies instead on tracking grizzly bears, following their natural ranges to get a fine-grained idea of food sources and uses.

For now, she turns and heads back down the trail, pausing to pick handfuls of berries — free, for the moment, to eat and simply delight in their tart flavor. □

Ripe huckleberries, which provide about 15 percent of bears' diets in Glacier National Park, Montana, above. Researcher Tabitha Graves counts huckleberries, noting production, climate variations, pests and pollinators, to establish a set of data that can measure the effects of climate change on the species, below.

COURTESY TABITHA GRAVES;
MICHAEL GALLACHER/
MISSOULIAN



THE LATEST

Backstory

Wildlife Services has long rankled wildlife advocates; **in 2014, the federal agency killed 2.7 million animals** — golden eagles, barn owls, black-tailed prairie dogs, mountain lions and wolves as well as invasive species. The agency researches but rarely uses nonlethal alternatives, and reform has been stalled in part because half of its budget, under the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is funded by contracts with state and county municipalities, ranchers and businesses (“The Forever War,” *HCN*, 1/25/16).

Followup

In October, a federal court approved a settlement between the Santa Fe-based nonprofit WildEarth Guardians and Wildlife Services in Nevada, stating that **the agency can no longer rely on its 22-year-old, nationwide baseline assessment and must perform a new analysis of how native wildlife removal cumulatively impacts the environment in Nevada.** Wildlife Services agreed to update other state analyses that rely on the old assessment, and will halt work in Nevada’s wilderness and wilderness study areas until the new one is finished.

ANNA V. SMITH

A Wildlife Services trapper holds a wolf shot in Idaho. USDA



Female caribou from the North Columbia herd north of Revelstoke, British Columbia, in the Selkirk Mountains. This herd has been the focus of a number of conservation measures to try to stop their population decline, yet logging continues in some parts of their home range. DAVID MOSKOWITZ

Caribou recovery falters in Canada

A decade of conservation efforts has done little to stop the decline of the endangered ungulates or their rainforest home

BY DAVID MOSKOWITZ

The western hemlock towered nearly 200 feet into the cloudy British Columbia sky. The tree, about four feet in diameter and several centuries old, had sprouted in a forest that formed around 10,000 years ago, at the end of the last ice age. It took David Walker, a nimble man with 30 years’ experience logging here in the Selkirk Mountains, about two minutes to drop the huge conifer. The ground shook.

After Walker turned off his saw, I asked what would become of the old giant. It’s going to a pulp mill, he said matter-of-factly.

This is one of the planet’s rarest forest ecosystems: interior temperate rainforest. The largest of its type left on earth, this rainforest stretches hundreds of miles from the Idaho Panhandle into central British Columbia, spanning multiple mountain ranges and the headwaters of two of the West Coast’s largest rivers, the Columbia and Fraser. It’s also home to endangered mountain caribou, which evolved to use these vast forests to evade predators. To survive here, mountain caribou adopted a diet of arboreal lichens that only grow in abundance in forests close to a century old or older.

Decades of industrial logging operations have destroyed and fragmented mountain caribou habitat, and their num-

bers have dwindled to perilous levels, with about 1,000 remaining. In some ways, the mountain caribou is like a Canadian version of the spotted owl. Much as the owl’s threatened status was exploited to help save swaths of old-growth forest in the Northwestern United States, over the logging industry’s strong objections, attempts have been made to use mountain caribou to help preserve the inland rainforest in British Columbia.

Despite a decade of protective measures, however, mountain caribou numbers keep declining as logging continues across their range. Even as British Columbia pours money into caribou conservation, it continues to exacerbate the situation through logging activities. This behavior highlights a larger societal collision: a progressive shift towards a broad view of the value of nature versus the entrenched power of a resource-extraction economy. Meanwhile, mountain caribou conservation is becoming a case study in the failure of single-species focused efforts to address ecosystem-wide challenges. When the dust settles, neither the animal nor the rainforest may survive.

Log trucks stacked high with ancient cedar regularly rumble down Victoria Road, passing European-style coffee shops and inns, headed for Downie Timber’s sprawling mill on the edge of Revelstoke. This national park gateway

community is “a resource extraction town with an outdoor recreation veneer,” says Michael Copperthwaite of the Revelstoke Community Forest Corporation. Despite burgeoning tourism and a huge amount of previously logged lands fallowed for decades until they regenerate, the province has managed to keep cut rates steady.

For millennia, mountain caribou depended on the forests now rolling through the province by the truckload. Eating arboreal lichens allowed them to prosper in a place that both their competitors and predators avoided. But once caribou habitat is logged, deer, elk and moose move in. Wolves and mountain lions, which depend on these other ungulates in this part of the world, soon follow. These predators can then make quick work of mountain caribou, whose defense strategy of avoidance has been shattered.

In 2007, pushed by a coalition of conservation groups, British Columbia adopted the Mountain Caribou Recovery Implementation Plan (MCRIP), which calls for the use of various “management levers” such as habitat protection and winter recreation restrictions. (About a dozen mountain caribou remain south of the border, in Idaho and Washington, and snowmobiling has been minimally curtailed to protect the endangered species.) Predator management — specifically the wolf cull, which has seen the demise of hundreds of wolves and fractured the coalition of conservation groups that pushed for caribou protections to begin with — has garnered the lion’s share of media interest.

While the MCRIP set aside thousands of square miles of forest as caribou habitat, it did not reduce the amount of logging occurring in the region. Kerry Rouck, corporate forestry manager for the Gorman

David Moskowitz is a biologist and photographer in Winthrop, Washington. @moskowitz_david

Group of Companies, which owns Downie Timber and several other operations in the region, confirms that caribou protections have not reduced their logging on public lands. According to Rouck, all of the timber being harvested by Downie still comes from previously uncut forest, about half of which is classified as old growth. The rest is composed of mature stands of trees that burned about a century ago.

With almost no second growth ready to be harvested yet, that means that everyone logging in the heart of mountain caribou country is cutting old growth. A recent audit of logging in mountain caribou habitat by the Forest Practices Board (FPB), British Columbia's independent forestry investigation agency, found that none of the cutblocks it reviewed had ever been logged before. According to estimates from two timber companies and the FPB, the province will be cutting virgin timber for the next 30 to 40 years before a significant number of stands here are ready for a second cut.

Ironically, cutting old growth can be a mixed bag for the timber industry. Hemlock trees are often worthless economically and are typically pulped to make paper products. It often costs more to cut and ship the hemlock logs to the mill than companies are paid for them. The logs are hauled away in part because it's "socially unpopular" to leave them on the ground, says Rouck.

Since many accessible stands are now officially protected caribou habitat, timber companies have to go deeper into the mountains to fulfill their quotas, further fragmenting the landscape. "It's pushing us into tougher ground, the back ends of drainages and steeper, more difficult access," says Rouck.

But the losses from cutting hemlock and the expense of accessing hard-to-reach trees are largely offset by a de facto government subsidy. Companies pay "stumpage fees" to the province for trees they cut on public land. These fees are reduced for operations that require building new roads,

are expensive to harvest because of steep terrain, or contain lots of low-value wood, like hemlock. This incentivizes otherwise uneconomical operations.

The province does its best to accommodate the industry. According to a 2013 FPB report, timber representatives in the Revelstoke area were invited to comment on and influence amendments to biodiversity management plans, which affected caribou habitat and old-growth forest reserves, a full year and a half before conservation groups were informed of the process. A government project reviewing old-growth timber swaps in another part of the interior rainforest lists a representative of the forestry trade group, the Interior Lumber Manufacturers Association, as the contact person for the project. (The association would not comment on anything involving caribou, however.) British Columbia's so-called "professional reliance" system essentially allows logging companies to police themselves while operating on public lands.

Corporate profits are not the only driver, however. To keep stumpage revenue — more than \$1 billion annually — flowing, the province actually encourages companies to log in mountain caribou habitat. If a company doesn't fulfill its quota, the province will give logging rights to that particular swath of forest to another firm.

Chris Ritchie is responsible for overseeing mountain caribou recovery efforts for British Columbia's Ministry of Forest, Lands, and Natural Resources. Over the phone from his office in Victoria, Ritchie admits that the province is failing to meet its own goals for caribou recovery. Since the recovery plan was initiated in 2007, numerous herds have continued to decline, at least two are gone altogether, and four others are down to fewer than 10 animals each, making their recovery highly unlikely. Not a single herd's population is increasing, according to recent census numbers.

With no plans to curtail logging and

habitat fragmentation, Ritchie says the province will focus instead on "really heavy, expensive long-term management," such as killing wolves and reducing moose and deer populations through hunting and other methods, in order to maintain a predator-prey dynamic that caribou can survive.

As various herds disappear, the forest protections that currently exist for their home range will, in at least some instances, be removed or applied elsewhere. This was done when the George Mountain caribou herd died out in the 2000s and the province decided that it was impossible to re-establish it.

There may still be hope for the caribou, however. In 2011, British Columbia ruled that resource extraction in the West Moberly First Nation violated Canadian treaty obligations, which allow that nation to hunt caribou on these lands. British Columbia altered local plans to settle the lawsuit. Meanwhile, Canada's federal government is revising its mountain caribou conservation strategy, which is likely to end up stronger than British Columbia's. If that happens, the Canadian government could force British Columbia to comply with federal guidelines through a "protection order" under the Species At Risk Act. There is no precedent for this being done in Canada, though.

After David Walker felled that hemlock tree in the Northern Selkirks, it was trucked to a reservoir on the Columbia River. It was then floated to the Celgar pulp mill in Castlegar, British Columbia, about 200 miles from where it was cut. Curious about what would become of it, I perused Celgar's promotional materials. I learned that Mercer International, a U.S. company, owns Celgar and boasts of using only wood from internationally certified "sustainable" forestry operations. As for the pulp it produces? It is sold in North America and Asia to make, among other things, "hygiene products," another name for toilet paper. □

David Walker fells a western red cedar in the Selkirk Mountains of British Columbia, below left. Cedars are highly valued for use in lumber and musical instruments, but logging companies pay reduced fees for operating in areas with many low-value trees such as hemlock. Large swaths of clear-cuts connected by logging roads high in the Hart Range of British Columbia fragment caribou habitat and invite competing species and predators into what has traditionally been a refuge for caribou, below.

DAVID MOSKOWITZ



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PROCESSED VIEWS: SURVEYING THE INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPE

Photography Exhibition at Colorado Photographic Arts Center in Denver through Nov. 26

Artists Barbara Ciurej and Lindsay Lochman draw on old photographs of the American West for their new exhibit, *Processed Views: Surveying the Industrial Landscape*. They recreate classic landscapes using industrialized food: lakes of soggy Froot Loops, marshmallow chasms, monoliths of ground beef. Melting popsicles even serve as surrogate saguaro cacti.

Ciurej and Lochman say their work reimagines Carleton Watkins' famed landscape photos, which served as "both documentation and advertisement" for the Old West. Watkins helped draw would-be settlers to the region with his photographs of its thriving railroad, lumber and mining industries, as well as some of the first images of what would become our national parks. *Processed Views* turns his approach on its head, using the landscape photography of the 19th century to make a powerful point about American consumption habits and the march of progress in the 21st century. ANNA V. SMITH

Fruit Loop Landscape, modeled after a 1863 Carleton Watkins photo of the Albion River in California. BARBARA CIUREJ & LINDSAY LOCHMAN

WEB EXTRA See more from the exhibit at hcn.org

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Staffing, and a trip outside Paonia

At the end of September, *High Country News* staff and board traveled to Berkeley, California, for one of our annual meetings. We love these trips afield, where we get to connect with members of the broader *HCN* community. One highlight was a talk by **Dave Rolloff**, professor of recreation, parks and tourism administration at California State University, Sacramento, who spoke at a fundraiser about the value of HCNU — a fast-growing program that provides free copies of the magazine to college and high school classrooms. Two of Dave's students, **Taylor Rucker** and **Christopher Gregory**, discussed the impact the magazine has had on their education and career paths. A big thanks to all three.

While in Berkeley, we also hosted a public forum on the "Fate of Our Public Lands." Managing Editor **Brian Calvert** moderated a panel of three staff members — D.C. Correspondent **Elizabeth Shogren**, Associate Editor **Tay Wiles** and Executive Director **Paul Larmer** — who discussed some of the major threats to our public lands: climate change, extremism and a lack of diversity both on the public lands and in the agencies that manage them. More than 100 people from around the Bay Area showed up, asking many terrific questions that show how engaged our community remains in public-lands issues. We are grateful to everyone who came out.

We've had a busy few weeks in Paonia, starting with some staffing adjustments. We're excited to announce that our former development director,

Alyssa Pinkerton, has been promoted to become our new major gift officer. Our new development director is **Laurie Milford**, who served previously as the executive director for the Wyoming Outdoor Council. And **Paige Blankenbuehler** has been promoted to assistant editor. Paige has been an integral part of the magazine for nearly a year and a half now, first as an intern and then as a fellow. We are thrilled to have these great folks on our team.

Quite a few visitors swung through town while autumn leaf-peeping on Colorado's Western Slope. **Paul and Shaun Schlafly** from Farmington, New Mexico, who have subscribed to the magazine for 30 years, stopped by, along with **Bob Vocke**, from Fort Collins, and **Bob and Pam Jacobel** from Northfield, Minnesota. The Jacobels have subscribed since 1976. As always, thanks for your dedication to the magazine, and for paying us a visit.

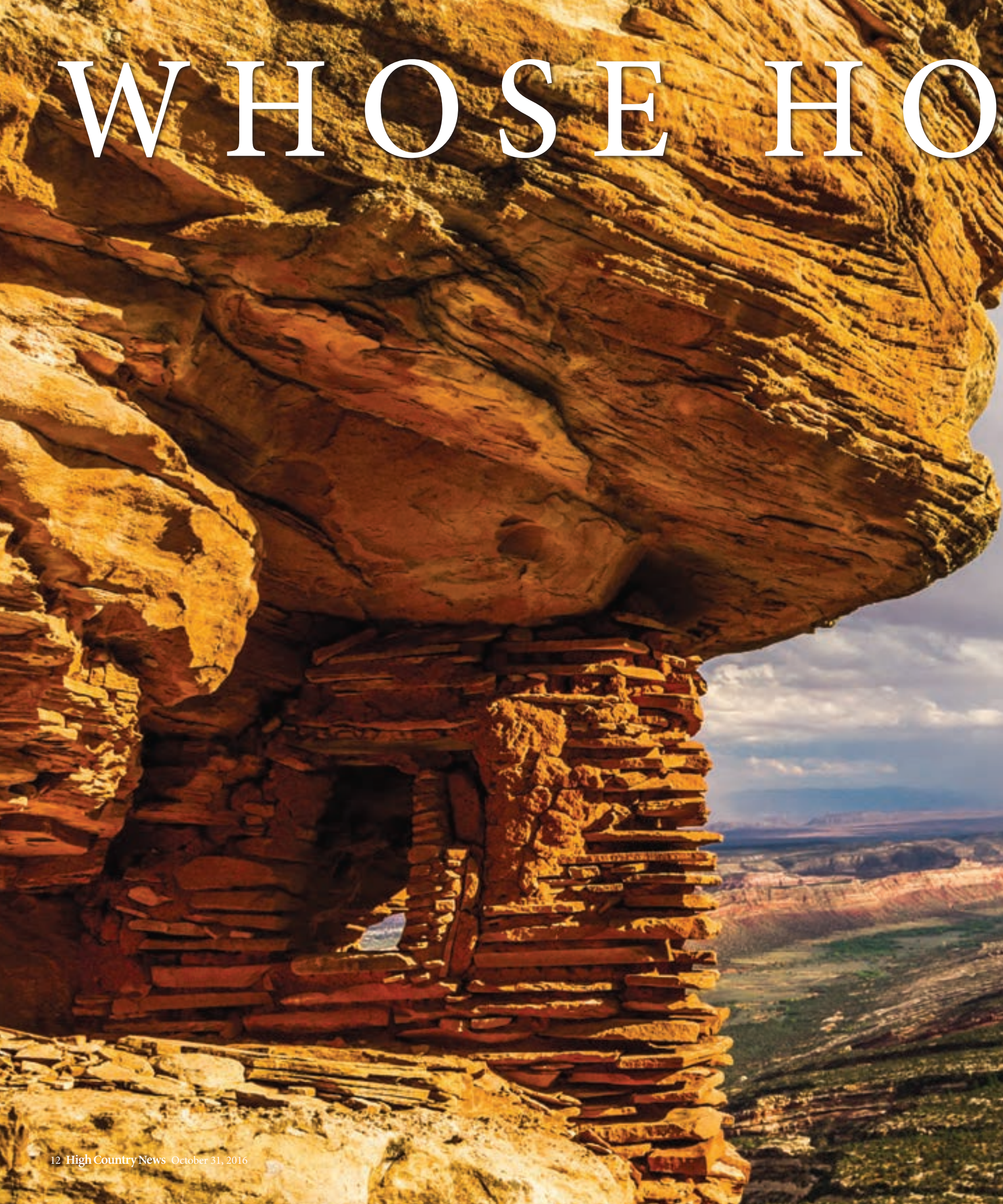
A few corrections: "Taking initiative" (*HCN*, 10/3/16) stated that Washington state Democrats oppose a state carbon-tax measure. While the state party and many party leaders have taken that position, other members and candidates support it. In the same issue, a caption for the photo of Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument incorrectly identified its management agency. It is managed by the U.S. Forest Service. On the back page (*HCN*, 9/19/16), we misidentified the location of a photo near the U.S.-Mexico border. The photo was taken near Tijuana. We regret the errors.

—Lyndsey Gilpin
for the staff



Alyssa Pinkerton, our new major gifts officer, left, and Laurie Milford, our new development director.
HCN PHOTO

WHOSE HO



MELAND?

In the tribal bid for Bears Ears, deep questions and deep divisions

FEATURE BY JONATHAN THOMPSON

Spider Grandmother spoke. She said, "Remember the sipapuni, for you will not see it again. You will go on long migrations. Wherever you stop to rest, leave your marks on the rocks and cliffs so that others will know who was there before them. ... The stars, the sun, the clouds and fires in the night will show you which directions to take. In time you will find the land that is meant for you."

—From *The Fourth World of the Hopis*
by Harold Courlander

It's already hot on a mid-July morning as I tuck into a plate of "Eggs Manuelito" and sip coffee at the Twin Rocks Cafe on the edge of the little town of Bluff, an untidy smattering of stately stone homes, gnarled old cottonwood trees and dust alongside the San Juan River in southeastern Utah. Normally, canyon country in July feels a bit like Babel, overrun by hordes of European tourists enamored of red rock, sage and big skies, but the depressed euro has thinned the herds significantly.

Bluff, population 400, is anything but quiet, however. Cars, including a silver sedan with #RuralLivesMatter soaped on the window, haphazardly line the dirt streets around the town's little community center. Alongside a dusty, weed-choked ballpark is a row of shiny black SUVs with government plates. On the other side, hand-drawn signs jut from a chain-link fence like corn from a dryland field: "National Monument, Dooda, Dooda," reads a yellow one, repeating the Navajo word for "no." "PROTECT," proclaims another, above a drawing of a bear's head.

Over the next few hours, more than 1,000 folks trickle into the center's grounds to give Interior Secretary Sally Jewell a piece of their minds. She's here to gauge sentiment regarding five regional tribes' proposal for a Bears Ears National Monument on 1.9 million acres of nearby federal land. As participants arrive, they're offered color-coded T-shirts: Baby-blue for monument supporters, brown for opponents. It's a visual cue that demonstrates how the "Native Americans and environmentalists vs. white Mormon land-use militants" trope falls apart here. Local Utes and Navajos, as often as not, wear brown shirts, and many are also devout members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In the hours before the hearing starts, folks

congregate in whatever shade they can find and converse, sometimes spiritedly. A brown-shirted young Navajo woman, with a baby on her hip, confronts a group of baffled teen-aged blue-shirts, and outlines the reasons she believes that so-called traditional, on-reservation Navajos are unfit to manage any more land. One Navajo man says that a monument is the best way to keep the oil companies from ravaging the mesas and canyons that the tribe holds sacred; another warns that a monument will lock Navajos out of those same areas.

It is difficult to untangle all the threads of the debate, which has been raging in various forms for years here, and is reaching its climax now, during President Barack Obama's final months in office. But listen for a while, and an underlying, constant theme is revealed: The notion of home, and who should have control over it when it happens to overlap public land.

"This is my home," Brooke Lyman tells Jewell. "We aren't vacationing here. San Juan County is America to me. For you to come in and make a monument and take our freedoms, it's like taking America from me." Brooke is the daughter of Phil Lyman, the local county commissioner best known for protesting "federal overreach" by leading ATV-riding protesters into the archaeologically rich Recapture Canyon a couple of years back. They, along with most other monument opponents, hold to the Sagebrush Rebel ideology of local autonomy, the belief that San Juan County residents — not environmentalists from Salt Lake City, not bureaucrats in Washington, D.C., not backpackers who trek through the canyons once a year — are the best stewards of this place. "Outsiders," including Native Americans, shouldn't be allowed to determine the land's fate, which is why, when Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye, wearing a suit in spite of the heat, tells Jewell that his people relate to the Bears Ears the way an Anglo does to a family member, monument opponents respond with boos, and chant, "Go home!"

The proposed monument does not include any tribal lands, yet if anyone is home here, it's Begaye, whose ancestors sought refuge near the Bears Ears during the 1860s, when U.S. troops killed, brutalized and enslaved Navajos before exiling them from their homeland. The Zuni, Hopi and other Pueblo leaders here to lend support to the monument are also home. Their ancestors built the Bluff Great House, just a stone's throw from the hearing venue, back in the 11th century, and their religions and cultures were shaped by this ground.

And just like the Sagebrush Rebels, they want

A prehistoric granary overlooks Cedar Mesa in Utah, part of the proposed Bears Ears National Monument.

JOSH EWING PHOTO COURTESY BEARS EARS INTER-TRIBAL COALITION

the freedom to be stewards of their homeland, and to have some say over how that land is administered, protected and interpreted to the public. A Bears Ears monument, as proposed, would give them that freedom, by giving tribal representatives a majority voice on a management committee, which also includes federal land managers but notably not any county or state officials. And so the Bears Ears battle at its core comes down to one type of local control versus another, of the Sagebrush Rebellion against an Indigenous uprising to gain sovereignty over ancestral homelands.

“It’s been far too long that us Natives have not been at the table,” says Malcolm Lehi, a Ute Mountain Ute council representative from the White Mesa communi-

ty in San Juan County, at the Bluff hearing. “Here we are today inviting ourselves to the table. We’re making history.”

A COUPLE OF WEEKS AFTER THE BLUFF HEARING, I’m going as fast as my 27-year-old car will take me along Highway 264 east of Tuba City, Arizona. The alternately soft and staccato Navajo language emanates from my speakers — a DJ reading the morning rodeo report for KTNN, “The Voice of the Navajo Nation.” An old country ballad comes on next — maybe Tammy or Loretta — crooning in that scratchy and sad and distant AM tone, the perfect soundtrack for the landscape floating by: A treeless plateau and endless sky, the San Francisco Peaks in the distance.

► Suzette Morris, a White Mesa Ute who is opposed to the Bears Ears National Monument, outside the hearing last July in Bluff, Utah. “We’re Native Americans. We’re supposed to be one with the land. Protection should come from within ourselves.”

▼ Inside the hearing, where Interior Secretary Sally Jewell heard comments on both sides of the issue from both Anglos and Native Americans.

JONATHAN THOMPSON PHOTOS



I’m in the middle of a weeks-long exploration of the notion of home, which has taken me from Hovenweep to Cedar Mesa to Tsegi Canyon and now to the mesa-top villages of Hopi to try to understand what it means to be truly *of* a place. I know I’m getting close to my next stop when I see the first shock of emerald green rising from the scrub, a corn tassel blowing in the soft breeze in a Hopi field, thriving despite the lack of rain or irrigation.

Tribal offices are all closed for Pueblo Revolt Day — which commemorates the August 1680 uprising of the Indigenous Pueblo people against Spanish colonizers — so I meet Leigh Kuwanwisiwma, Hopi’s cultural preservation officer for the last 27 years, at his small home in Hotevilla. When I tell him that I camped the previous night at Navajo National Monument, he bristles. “You mean Hopi National Monument,” he scolds, a reminder of the lingering tension that exists between the two tribes. The dwellings at the monument, Kawestima to the Hopi, were built not by Navajos, but by ancestors of the Hopi, as is true of many of the thousands of pueblos that lie in and around the proposed Bears Ears National Monument.

When Kuwanwisiwma visits these sites, the first thing he looks for is rock art, where, he says, “I can see contemporary lifeways and see connections, I can see the stories of the clan ceremonies.” Take a particular concentric circle design on the rock, with lines of figures seeming to emerge from it, carved into the vast stone wave now known as Comb Ridge. It’s a map, says Kuwanwisiwma, of clan migrations that unfolded over hundreds of years.

The people emerged from the *sipapuni*, represented by the circle’s center, from the Third World into the current one, or the Fourth World. The deities then commanded the people to “place their footprints,” or migrate, in the four cardinal directions, each circle symbolizing a stopping point along the way. After settling in a place — the Bears Ears, Mesa Verde, Hovenweep — for decades or even centuries, the clan would move on to the next circle on its chosen path. All of the Southwestern pueblos have similar migration traditions. Though they vary, they all include specific references to the San Juan River Basin in what is now Utah and Colorado. “When you learn about history and clan migration, you see how vibrant that area (Bears Ears) was with Hopi clans,” Kuwanwisiwma says.

One thousand years ago, clusters of pueblos teeming with activity dotted what are now the piñon, juniper and sage forests atop Cedar Mesa. Men tended to hundreds of acres of electric-green fronds of corn, beans and squash. Women ground corn and shelled beans on rooftops, while turkeys gobbled in nearby pens and domesticated dogs roamed village plazas. Groups of runners followed wide, carefully constructed “roads” from here to Chaco, perhaps the political and cultural center



▲ The Bears Ears, at the heart of the proposed Bears Ears National Monument in southern Utah, a sacred place for tribes.

TIM PETERSON PHOTO
COURTESY BEARS EARS INTER-TRIBAL COALITION

◀ City center of Montezuma Creek, Utah, a Navajo town near the edge of the proposed Bears Ears National Monument.

JT THOMAS

In a deeply polarized world, Blanding, Utah, archaeologist Winston Hurst has found himself “in a kind of quiet place in the middle” when it comes to the monument proposal. “Whatever needs to be done to preserve that needs to be done. We can win battle after battle, but in this county it needs to be done organically, or we’ve lost the war.”

JT THOMAS



“Our proposal is not about exclusion, it’s about education and partnership.”

—Zuni Tribal Councilman Carleton Bowekaty

of the Pueblo world. Near the solstice, Kachinas emerged from canyons, danced slowly across plazas and descended into great kivas to summon the sun or the rain.

“They (the Zuni) lived there for a very long time. We don’t know how long ... but our oral history is very clear that our people were there. And our oral history can be affirmed,” says Jim Enote, director of the Colorado Plateau Foundation and a Zuni tribal member, whom I meet with in his office at the A:shiwí A:wán Museum in Zuni the day after my Hopi visit. “When we visit museums at Mesa Verde or Chaco and see the artifacts, we can clearly identify which are Zuni because we still make them that way today. It’s affirmed when we visit places like the Bears Ears. We see things that are familiar, that help us connect the dots.”

Near the end of the 12th century, after the Ancestral Puebloans had built and lived in villages in the region for more than 800 years, shaping religion, culture and societies, trouble arrived. Someone or something threatened the people, pushing them to cluster into bigger, more easily defended pueblos. And by the middle of the 13th century, the Puebloan communities of the Bears Ears region were empty. After a journey every bit as epic as that of the Israelites, the people had moved on to place their footprints elsewhere, ultimately fulfilling the covenant and settling in their respective homelands, today’s Hopi, Zuni and Eastern pueblos. “We have earned the right to be earth stewards,” says Kuwanwisiwma.

“That’s why emotions run deep on these issues, and why we’re trying to get the Bears Ears monument enacted.”

Enote, a warm man who smiles often and measures his words carefully, is especially emphatic about one point: The ancestral homelands were never abandoned. “Many of these places were consecrated as homes, or as shrines, just as we consecrate our homes and shrines today,” says Enote, his voice intense. “They are not ruins. They are not abandoned. Once consecrated, they are consecrated in perpetuity. ... They are holy forever.”

ON CHRISTMAS DAY OF 1879, four scouts from the Hole-in-the-Rock expedition climbed to the top of a pyramid-shaped toe of Elk Ridge, saw the Abajo Mountains and realized they and their 250 companions would not die out in the frigid desert after all. Their journey had been an arduous one, so much so that they simply stopped and gave up 18 miles short of their goal, Montezuma Creek, and established Bluff City at the verdant confluence of Cottonwood Wash and the San Juan River, instead.

This ragtag crew had been sent, many of them unwillingly, by the Mormon Church to plant themselves here — not to make the desert bloom, but to buffer the prosperous settlements of “Dixie” to the west from the potentially hostile Utes and Navajos, who had migrated into the region hundreds of years earlier and had made it their home. And they were to hold at bay the hardrock miners

who were flocking to the mountains of southwestern Colorado, bringing greed and whiskey and Gentile ways. The intrepid pioneers often felt as if they’d been forsaken: Ravaged at times by drought and floods, they tangled with Native Americans, competed with Colorado and Texas cattlemen for sparse cattle range, and absorbed an influx of prospectors looking for “flour gold” in the San Juan. They even fended off a bid by the Indian Rights Association in the 1890s to turn the entire county into a reservation.

It’s no wonder, then, that, having scraped a home out of what one explorer, in 1859, deemed the most “worthless and impractical” country around, they became convinced that they were entitled to the federal lands that blanket much of their county. It was their birthright to graze tens of thousands of cattle there, to blade hundreds of miles of roads, drill for oil, burrow into mesas in search of federally subsidized uranium and, perhaps most of all, collect the remains of the Puebloan civilization by the truckload to decorate their mantels or sell to collectors or merchants.

Winston Hurst was born in Blanding just as that mentality was approaching its zenith. Like other local kids, he loved to roam the wild lands around town, scratching around in old sites and gathering the potsherds and arrowheads that seemed to litter the ground everywhere he looked. But he went off to Brigham Young University, where he studied archaeology, and had his eyes opened to the difference between looting a site and ethi-



Josh Ewing, executive director of Friends of Cedar Mesa, inspects a petroglyph panel that was damaged when a looter attempted to saw and chisel it off last winter. “For a long time, the strategy of protection was to keep it a secret,” Ewing says. But with technology making it easy to find sacred sites, new strategies are needed. JT THOMAS

cally surveying or excavating it. When he came back, he joined a growing nationwide movement to preserve the natural and cultural wonders of the land.

“We worked our butts off, in the ’60s, ’70s and ’80s, to achieve balance in the way the land was managed,” says Hurst, who has become one of the foremost experts on southeastern Utah archaeology, as well as an ardent advocate of archaeological preservation. Congress passed the Wilderness Act in 1964, and it was closely followed by a string of landmark environmental laws. But the one that hit home hardest here in San Juan County, perhaps, was the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. It altered the mission of the Bureau of Land Management, which administers 41 percent of this New Jersey-sized county’s land, from one of maximizing extraction to encouraging multiple use. It also rescinded the 1866 statute that allowed rampant roadbuilding across federal lands, and included a mandate for the BLM to inventory all wilderness-quality lands under its purview.

It was, in other words, a direct challenge to the wring-the-earth-out mindset. San Juan County lashed back, led by Cal Black, a local uranium miner, businessman, politician, lover of roads — and the model for the character of Bishop Love, who pursues the motley crew in Edward Abbey’s *Monkey Wrench Gang* as they sabotage bulldozers, incinerate bridges and otherwise attempt to stifle development in San Juan County. In reaction

to what he called federal colonialism, Black helped launch the first Sagebrush Rebellion of the modern era, joining Republicans Sens. Orrin Hatch and Barry Goldwater to create the League for the Advancement of States Equal Rights to pass bills transferring federal land to states and counties, the predecessor of today’s American Lands Council. He threatened to blow up ruins and vandalize BLM property, and aggressively tried to lure a nuclear waste dump to his county.

After Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980, the Westwide rebellion subsided. But to Black and those who shared his views, the battle was just getting started. The (Southern) Utah Wilderness Alliance was formed in 1985, and in 1989 it put out a citizen’s proposal that would ultimately become the Red Rock Wilderness Act, a far-reaching bill that, if ever passed, would put the highest level of protection on millions of acres of BLM land in Utah, including much of the now-proposed Bears Ears National Monument. Utah’s Sagebrush Rebels saw it as the ultimate threat — a sort of environmentalists’ nuclear bomb.

At the time, the uranium and oil industries were being battered by global markets, and the feds were cracking down on San Juan County for grossly violating the voting rights of Native Americans, who make up about half the population. In 1986, dozens of federal agents descended on Blanding, raiding the homes of suspected pothunters. Black denounced their tactics as “gestapo-like.”

Black died in 1990, but others — county commissioners and sheriffs — took hold of the Sagebrush baton and ran with it. Meanwhile, SUWA and its allies, while never giving up on wholesale wilderness designation, continued their surgical strikes. In 2007, the BLM closed part of Recapture Canyon to motorized vehicles after a trail was constructed without a permit there. In 2009, federal agents reprised the 1986 pot-hunting raid.

A few months later, the Red Rock Wilderness Act got its first-ever hearing in Congress, showing that it might have some legs after all. And a “secret” list of places under consideration for national monument designation surfaced, with Cedar Mesa included — an apparent redux of the surreptitious 1996 designation by then-President Bill Clinton of the vast Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument just west of here. That it was Obama potentially wielding the Antiquities Act elicited an especially rabid response from conservatives.

To many locals, all of these hits tangled together archaeological preservation, environmentalism and federal encroachment into their homeland. They tended to take their resentment out on the most vulnerable target: archaeological sites. Looting as a political act and anti-federal protest intensified during the 1980s, and has flared up whenever the environmentalists score some incremental victory.

The result, says Hurst, is that short-term successes tend to become long-term setbacks, each one deepening the

polarization and lessening the chances of winning over the “hearts and minds” of locals. “We were in such a panic to save this stuff that we took a short-cut approach to these victories,” says Hurst, who wears the long, wispy goatee and dark-framed glasses of a revolutionary from another age. “Victories were always top-down. It fed right into the gut conservatism of the rural folks, not just in Utah, but across the West. These guys see themselves as the John Waynes of the American Frontier.”

IN 2010, SEN. BOB BENNETT, a Utah Republican, stepped into the fray, hoping to broker a wilderness deal for the entire state that would have local support. The county-by-county-level effort would establish wilderness on the most pristine lands in exchange for various concessions — maybe land swaps that would allow for more development in urban areas or facilitate energy development for extraction-

reliant counties. The ambitious goal? End the Utah land wars once and for all.

Bennett’s conciliatory tone didn’t fly so well in the venomous political climate that followed Obama’s election, however, and he lost his 2010 primary to Tea Partier Mike Lee, now one of Utah’s senators, pushing his deal-making into dormancy. But in 2013, Republican Rep. Rob Bishop brought it back to life, aiming to broker a “Grand Bargain” with what he called the Public Lands Initiative, or PLI, a congressional bill that would be forged county-by-county.

While the PLI covered all of Utah, San Juan County’s process promised to be the most contentious and complex. At stake is a vast landscape, ecologically rich, home to tens of thousands of archaeological sites. One area, White Canyon, was designated as a “special tar sands area” by the Department of Energy several years ago, exploratory drill rigs have popped up here and there, and loot-

ing and vandalism continue. But the most pressing threat may be steadily increasing visitation without a corresponding uptick in management resources.

“For a long time, the strategy of protection was to keep it a secret,” says Josh Ewing, executive director of the Bluff-based Friends of Cedar Mesa, but detailed descriptions of slot canyons and GPS coordinates of once-little-known sites have proliferated on the internet recently, forcing advocates to come up with a new tactic. It’s a paradox that plagues every preservation effort: In order to protect the place, the advocates need to get public support. And to do that, they need to let the public know why the place is so special, to let the masses in on their secrets. The Pueblos, whose traditions demand secrecy regarding ceremonies and sacred places, are in an especially tight bind. To reveal too much is to increase visitation and open the door to pilgrimages to out-of-the-way holy sites

Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk goes to Washington

Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk, whose grandmother grew up in the Bears Ears area, has faced disrespect and outright hostility, as she’s taken the message of tribal support for the Bears Ears on the road.

COURTESY JUSTIN CLIFTON

Standing at a lectern at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk gently strokes a clump of sage she picked a few days earlier during an outing near Bears Ears, the southern Utah landscape she’s fighting to preserve as a national monument. Her voice brims with emotion as she tells a small group of reporters that

she brought it to help her convey how important the region is to her people, the Ute Mountain Utes, and to the four other tribes in the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition, which she co-chairs.

“You can’t separate a Native American from the land,” she says. “We’re so strongly tied. It’s our history. It’s our teacher.” The artifacts left by the ancestors of to-

day’s tribes — cliff dwellings, kivas, petroglyphs — need to be preserved, she adds. “Our legacy is on the walls of the canyon. I can’t afford for anybody to destroy what is there for my grandchildren.”

The scene is both ordinary and extraordinary. People frequently stand and speak to reporters at the National Press Club. But this city of suits and sound bites has rarely seen anyone like Lopez-Whiteskunk.

She is dressed in traditional garments decorated with cerulean, red, yellow, green and black-beaded designs. Her late sister made the moccasins she wears, and her brightly colored necklace, pin and earrings were crafted by other loved ones. They keep her connected to her people even when she’s far away, she says.

The travel required by her work as a tribal council member and coalition co-chair is challenging, though it’s much easier than it was for her ancestors, tribal leaders who traveled for months to visit the “Great Father” in Washington. “But I do realize and understand how lonely it can be when you’re out here,” she says. “I’m out of my element.” Although she was recently voted off her own tribe’s council, she took five trips to Washington over the last year for Bears Ears alone.

On one of these trips, she had an epiphany: She realized she had fulfilled a decades-old prediction by Hawaii’s then-senator, the late Daniel Inouye. When she visited Washington in 1987 with a group of young Native Americans, he told them that they would one day be tribal leaders. That meant they should be serious students of Washington, because of that city’s importance to their tribes’ future. Lopez-Whiteskunk was then 18, and he commended her for wearing a calico wing



by culture-appropriating, crystal-waving New Agers.

Ewing hoped that something better than the status quo would emerge from the PLI, despite the fact that the local lands council was chaired by a Sagebrush Rebel, Lyman. Ideally, it was the sort of “hearts and mind” and “organic” approach that Hurst strongly favors over top-down decision-making. Getting local buy-in would certainly make Ewing’s job easier than, say, a presidential monument designation, even if it included deep compromises. “We’re down here,” Ewing told me, only half-joking. “We’re the most likely to get shot if shooting begins.”

Mark Maryboy — Utah’s first Native American county commissioner and a longtime local politician and activist — represented Utah Diné Bikéyah, a conservation-minded group of local Navajos, on the lands council. Ewing went to bat for the rest of the local conservation community, providing a counterpoint to

the local autonomist hardliners, the San Juan Alliance, which hoped to transfer all federal land — including national parks — over to the county and the state. (Canyonlands State Park, anyone?)

Yet after a handful of meetings, Utah Diné Bikéyah’s members became disillusioned. Their concerns were being ignored, and when other tribes tried to participate, they were rebuffed for not being “local.” The bad feelings deepened in 2014, when Lyman led an ATV protest ride down the closed section of Recapture Canyon, which is rich in ancient sites. “I was very offended,” Maryboy says. “I wonder how he’d feel if I went to the Blanding Cemetery and led a posse over their graves?”

So Bikéyah abandoned the PLI process and struck out on its own, quietly garnering endorsements from all seven of the Utah chapters of the Navajo Nation as well as the tribal government. The Ute Mountain Utes, based in Colorado but with reservation land in San Juan

County, threw their weight behind the project. And in July 2015, the tribal coalition, with representatives from the Ute Mountain Ute and Uintah-Ouray Ute tribes, the Navajo Nation, Hopi and Zuni, was officially formed.

Their effort had evolved from simple environmental protection to a push for tribal sovereignty. It echoes the Indian natural resource self-determination battles of the 1970s, and is the next step in a more recent Sagebrush-type Rebellion in Indian Country that first flared up about a decade ago: A fight to have more say over what happens on ancestral homelands that were not included in the reservation.

Under federal law, tribes must be consulted with over actions on federal lands, but the consultations rarely significantly alter or stop development. So tribes have increasingly banded together to wage more potent protests: At Oak Flats, in Arizona, to support an Apache effort to stop a proposed copper mine;

“Whether we’re involved or not, it’s going to happen. It just makes sense to be involved and have a say.”

*—Mark Maryboy,
Utah’s first Native
American county
commissioner*

dress and beaded jewelry, saying it showed her strong connection to her tribe. “That had a profound impact on me,” she recalls.

This September, dressed in traditional garments, Lopez-Whiteskunk was the sole person testifying on behalf of protecting the Bears Ears at a hearing at the House Natural Resources Committee, whose chairman, Rep. Rob Bishop, R-Utah, opposes the monument. When Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Calif., implied that she had no authority to speak about Bears Ears because she’s not from Utah, she calmly responded that though her home is across the state line in Towaoc, Colorado, headquarters of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, her tribe’s land stretches into Utah and her own ancestors were forced out of the area around Bears Ears.

Lopez-Whiteskunk wins over audiences because she speaks not in a political way but in a spiritual and emotional one, says Gavin Noyes, the executive director of Utah Diné Bikéyah, the small nonprofit that planted the seeds of the Bears Ears monument proposal. When a high-level delegation visited the area in the summer of 2015, Lopez-Whiteskunk asked the officials to reach through the ponderosa pine needles and pick up a handful of earth. “I don’t think anyone could help but feel that direct connection,” Noyes says. “She’s very good about trying to help people understand in small ways the connection that Native people have to the earth.”

Not everyone listens, though. At the state Commission for Stewardship of Public Lands in Salt Lake City, the Utah politicians, nearly all older white men, cut her off and were downright hostile.

“I was floored by the amount of disrespect I received,” Lopez-Whiteskunk writes in *Red Rock Testimony*, a collection of essays and poems in support of the monument. On what she calls that “oh so scary morning,” she says, “All I could do



was to be silent, as my grandmother had taught me. You give them grace even if they don’t deserve it.”

Her grandmother, Stella, grew up in the Bears Ears area, but was forced to leave and sent to boarding school, where she was punished for speaking her

Native tongue. “Like all of us, I feel this historical trauma,” Lopez-Whiteskunk writes. That trauma, she says, can be soothed by the land’s yellow flowers and sage and juniper-covered hillsides. “This is why healing is at the inner core of our Bears Ears movement.” ELIZABETH SHOGREN

on the sacred San Francisco Peaks in northern Arizona, in opposition to the use of effluent for snowmaking; and on the greater Chaco landscape in northwestern New Mexico, where oil and gas development runs roughshod over cultural sites. This summer, in the most visible and contentious uprising to date, hundreds of tribes joined the Standing Rock Sioux in a determined effort to stop an oil pipeline from burrowing through ancestral lands in North Dakota.

The Bears Ears proposal — formally unveiled in Washington, D.C., last October — takes the concept a step further by proactively putting tribes in control of land their ancestors called home. A monument manager would be overseen by a commission, made up of one representative from each of the five tribes, and one each from the U.S. Forest Service, BLM and National Park Service. The tribes, collectively, would have the loudest voice in decision-making. Neither the state of Utah nor San Juan County, in the mean-

time, would have anyone at the table.

More than 700 archaeologists, 25 tribal governments and the National Congress of American Indians, along with several local and national environmental and faith-based groups, have endorsed the proposal. “It’s a big healing process for Native Americans,” Maryboy told me last October in Bluff, as morning light illuminated Twin Rocks — a symbol of the Navajo monster-slaying brothers. “The colonization has been ugly. Protection of this land begins a healing process.”

Here in San Juan County, though, the healing has yet to begin. Instead, this fight has torn open old scars, and inflicted a few of its own.

BACK AT THE BLUFF HEARING, those wounds fester in the stifling heat. Earlier in the year, fliers announcing “open season” on Colorado backpackers appeared nearby. And local Facebook posts about the monument have become infested with extremist rhetoric about the “BLM and

FBI SS troops,” calling Obama a “despot” and comparing the use of the Antiquities Act to Hitler’s atrocities.

While I don’t hear such language here, and the Bundy brothers and their Gadsden flag-waving, gun-toting acolytes are conspicuously absent, the tension is palpable. In the hearing, several pro-monument speakers are booed. Outside, anti-monument folks confront blue shirts, sometimes civilly, sometimes with hostility.

That Utes and Navajos are among those doing the confronting clearly catches some of the blue shirts — naively expecting all Native Americans to be their allies — off-guard. When it was still trying to work within the PLI framework, Utah Diné Bikéyah had almost unanimous support from local Navajos, getting endorsements from all seven Utah chapters. But once the inter-tribal coalition was formed and it became clear that it would seek a presidential order, some local Navajos and Utes rebelled, with current San Juan County Commissioner Rebecca Benally leading the charge.

This resistance serves as a potent PR tool for the opposition, particularly the Sutherland Institute, a conservative Salt Lake City think tank with clear religious leanings (its board chairman runs the GFC — God, Family, Country — Foundation). It produced a couple of slick videos, starring mostly local Navajos, claiming that a monument would rob locals of “lives and livelihoods.” Sutherland’s efforts have helped give the impression that all local Native Americans are opposed to the monument. In fact, only one chapter, Aneth, has officially rescinded its earlier support.

Still, those who do oppose the monument are passionate about it. Notah Tahy, wearing a wide-brimmed straw cowboy hat and a formidable turquoise bolo tie, tells me a monument would make life harder for the already beleaguered Navajos living on the reservation. “A lot of our medicine men get their herbs from there. And others pick piñon nuts,” he says. “Some pick enough to make a little bit of a living.” Turn it into a monument and next thing you know, he says, they’re charging everyone \$30 to get in, “like the Grand Canyon.” Others worry that a monument would bring paved roads and RV-jammed parking lots to the backcountry and turn Blanding into another Moab, overrun by industrial recreation, housing crunches, crappy-paying service jobs and Saturday afternoon traffic jams.

But the primary driver of opposition, among Navajos and Utes as among whites, is the ideology of local autonomy — they don’t want “outsiders” meddling in their backyards, threatening their freedom to access or to build an economy off public lands. Benally, elected in 2014, has allied herself with fellow commissioners Lyman and Bruce Adams, particularly on this issue. In April, she told state legislators that local monument supporters are mere pawns of “deep-pocketed groups outside of San Juan County who don’t

▼ **Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, joins San Juan County Commissioner Rebecca Benally and Gov. Gary Herbert at the Natural Bridges National Monument visitors center in southeast Utah in June to discuss the proposed Bears Ears Monument.** SCOTT G. WINTERTON/DESERET NEWS



► Shirley Clarke (far left), Notah Tahy and Maryleen Tahy, with Clarke’s granddaughter (second from left), at the Bluff hearing. They oppose the national monument proposal for a variety of reasons.

JONATHAN THOMPSON





Mark Maryboy, Utah's first Native American county commissioner and a longtime local politician and activist, helped build the coalition that proposed the Bears Ears National Monument. "The colonization has been ugly. Protection of this land begins a healing process," he says.

JT THOMAS

even know where Bears Ears butte is.”

Maryleen Tahy, Notah's wife and a member of the LDS Church, tells me that about 30 percent of the local Navajos are also Mormons. Many of them are married to descendants of the Hole-in-the-Rock pioneers, and the local-control creed is embedded in their psyches. That they'd favor the ideology of their church, social or family "tribe" over that of their federal or tribal government is hardly surprising.

For the most part, adherents of this ideology prefer the PLI over a monument designation because, as one commenter pointed out at Bluff, "We prefer to have things done with us, not to us." But the bill that Bishop and Rep. Jason Chaffetz had unveiled just a couple of days earlier didn't much resemble the proposals hammered out by the counties. Instead, it was a "step backward," says Ewing, and utterly untenable. (Even Lyman has come out against the PLI, though for different reasons.) It would reopen fragile lands to motorized vehicles and grazing. It would create a Bears Ears National Conservation Area, but the 10-member advisory committee would include just one tribal representative. And the bill would give the state permitting authority for energy development on several tracts of federal land across Utah, a gift to oil and gas drillers. "Instead of resolving conflict, which it was intended to do, it sets up more," says Ewing. "I guess they (Bishop and Chaffetz) figured it would be better to throw out the political red meat and get re-elected than to do the hard work of compromise."

Hurst, the local archaeologist, seems at a bit of a loss. He remains convinced that the only way to save what's left of the archaeology here has to come from

the locals, rather than a presidential decree. Yet the best hope for this sort of organic process to succeed, the PLI, has been tainted by still more top-down political machinations. National parks and monuments "feel like theme parks that have an artificial stasis imposed upon them," he says. "They feel dead. But then, the alternative is to loose the dogs of war on their ATVs and let them have at it. That's just as distasteful."

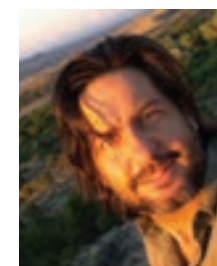
AS I CHAT AMIABLY WITH THE TAHYS in the shade of a big tree in Bluff, a big white motor coach, coming from Durango or maybe even Las Cruces, pulls into a nearby parking lot, and a group of blue-shirted folks pile out. Soon after, a slim woman in a brown shirt approaches our shady spot with her fists and face bunched up. "I just asked them if they know where the Bears Ears are," she says with a bit of disgust, motioning toward the bus. "Most of them didn't."

She looks toward me. I can tell she's carefully considering asking me the same question. If she does, my reply won't have anything to do with geography; it will involve place and the way it shapes people. I will tell her that, according to one bawdy, bloody version of the Navajo Creation Story, the Bears Ears are the top of the dismembered head of Changing Bear Woman, whom Coyote gave magical powers by seducing her, and how it remains a place to send the mentally ill for healing. I'll tell her about the time my father came tumbling off the top of the east Bears Ear at 3 a.m., narrowly escaping the lightning bombarding his camping spot. I'll tell her that I got married in that alfalfa field over yonder in the

luminous aftermath of a September dust storm. And about the time two buddies and I drove down the Hole-in-the-Rock trail in December, backpacked into a canyon, and woke up three mornings later under a foot of snow, forcing us to walk miles through thigh-deep drifts. And how I'll always be grateful to the folks at the Blanding hotel who revived us with enchiladas, despite the fact that we looked like Hayduke-loving hippies, because that's just how people are around here.

Stories like these make this place home. It's home to Zunis and Hopis, even the ones who have never seen or heard of the Bears Ears, because stories written upon this landscape over centuries course through their veins. Indeed, it's home to all of us, because just as Brooke Lyman pointed out, the public lands in San Juan County *are* America, inasmuch as they are a critical part of America's story.

Hurst may be right about national monuments. Maybe they do fall short of their preservation goals, maybe they even suck the life from the places they're meant to protect. But maybe this particular monument isn't about preservation so much as it is about justice and freedom, about giving the most deeply rooted Americans some say over the landscapes that shaped them. More importantly, it gives them the freedom to tell their own stories of that landscape in their own ways, given just as much weight as conventional science and archaeology. "The world is full of multiple knowledges, and Bears Ears is another opportunity to celebrate that," Enote says. "We should have a national monument, not just because it's the ethical thing, but because it makes sense." □



High Country News contributing editor Jonathan Thompson is a longtime resident of the Four Corners. [@jonnypeace](#)

This coverage is supported by contributors to the *High Country News* Enterprise Journalism Fund.



The Bears Ears, far out on the horizon, as seen looking southward from near Canyonlands National Park. JT THOMAS

Leviathan in the desert



NEWS
COMMENTARY
BY NATHAN
NIELSON

There's a whale about to be dropped on the desert of Utah. Not a live animal, but a system, a mindset. Since Thomas Hobbes wrote his famous book in 1651, "leviathan"—the word means "sea monster" in Hebrew—has come to signify anything large, unwieldy and dominant. The beast in question here combines government regulation, mass tourism and modern disenchantment. It is a proposed national monument, bigger than the state of Delaware, and once it plops onto this fragile terrain, people in the surrounding communities fear what the splash may bring.

I grew up ranching this land. We liked to think southeastern Utah was just God showing off. From atop my horse I could tell this place had won the geological lottery. Water, sandstone and a thousand other elements joined to form canyons, arches, hoodoos, monoliths and

towers. Pink and red and orange and white. Sharp, round, soft. Cliff dwellings hang in the sky and haunt the imagination. Voices from other worlds, other times, breathe through every crack and cave. Two capped buttes overlook this sweep, giving the proposed monument its name: "Bears Ears."

According to Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, the Obama administration wishes to protect the 1.9-million-acre expanse around Bears Ears, one way or another, before the president leaves office. If necessary, the administration may forego a congressional vote and declare a monument, resorting to the Antiquities Act. It is supported in this initiative by environmental groups, philanthropic foundations, outdoor retailers and a coalition of Native American tribes from Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado.

Others are inclined to resist federal

absorption on this scale. After all, much of San Juan County is already owned by the federal government. As an alternative, Utah congressmen have proposed the Public Lands Initiative, which would set aside 1.4 million acres as a national conservation area. The conservation area is a locally driven process designed to balance the interests of ranchers, energy developers, environmentalists, hikers and tribes. It would loosen and narrow the control of the federal government, whereas a monument would tighten and broaden it.

Both sides clearly love this land. The intentions of the monument proposal are noble, but the reality is complex. Though it aims to protect sacred space and preserve archaeological sites, a monument would actually tame the wild, overrun the spiritual, enforce webs of rules and fees, bring busloads of tourists, trivialize

landmarks through ad campaigns, cater to those with the means to recreate, and fine people for straying from a trail. To maintain this regime, management has to partition, cordon and monetize what was once mysterious.

Are we overrunning the land in the name of saving it?

Never underestimate irony. In 1996, President Bill Clinton designated nearly 2 million acres in nearby Garfield County, Utah. During the last 20 years, vandalism has increased at the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. In 2015 alone, 1,400 cases of rock defacement were documented. In comparison, 25 cases of vandalism were documented in the Bears Ears area between 2011 and 2016. Increased visitation has led to greater deterioration of archaeological and geological resources in Utah's national parks.

The problem is one of scale. As ranchers, we understood the connection between scale and stewardship. The size of a herd, the use of a pasture, the distribution of water had to bend to the limits of the environment. But the sheer size of this monument complicates stewardship, for everyone. Instead of a land that is parceled among many groups of stewards, the area becomes a single space governed by a single entity. And what it lacks in manpower it will make up for in regulations.

Not even minimal improvements to the land, such as planting grass, clearing small areas of brush and trees, grading roads, or cleaning ponds and springs, will be allowed. A monument designation will implement a new travel-management planning process to decide which roads and sites may be accessed. Native Americans will be able to gather wood, nuts and ceremonial herbs only from approved roads.

Though existing grazing and mineral rights will be preserved, the logic of regulation tends toward its own growth. Again, the experience of Garfield County is instructive. Since the designation of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, grazing has decreased by 31 percent, mineral extraction has been restricted, and the county recently had to declare an economic state of emergency. Regulated out of viability. Tourists come for a season, but residents are relocating for good.

If Bears Ears must be designated a national monument, then a more natural, manageable size for it would be a quarter of what is proposed. The real jewels of the area are the canyons and ruins of Grand Gulch and Cedar Mesa. If this were the extent of the proposal, more locals could stomach it. But the proposed boundaries violate all sense of proportion, swallowing two whole mountain ranges, huge swaths of rangeland, Native land allotments, and watersheds of entire towns. The Park Service already

has a deferred maintenance backlog of \$12 billion. How can it manage still more?

In rural life, there's a human scale, too. People work with people they know. Everyone has a family, a history, and, for better or worse, a reputation. Park rangers are cordial but largely unknown entities, rotating in and out. Relationships break and heal, hearts listen and learn, only when the social scope is small. A bigger land boss from Washington would

Stegner once described the West as the "geography of hope," a place where people could learn to live within the limits of a land that is so easily scarred. But he later despaired at the monstrous scale of Western development. The dry land beyond the 100th meridian, he said, is simply not made for mass living, or mass visiting for that matter. He lamented the excesses of mining, real estate and technology.

But government also facilitates



Both sides clearly love this land. The intentions of the monument proposal are noble, but the reality is complex.

disrupt this exchange by elevating itself as the arbiter. Rural folks see themselves as actors shaping the world around them, not spectators watching things happen.

This small scope is crucial for a place of complex cultural intersection. Despite difficulties and hard feelings, the communities of Navajos, Utes and Anglos have coexisted in this county for over a century. Most oppose the monument designation, preferring the more responsive conservation area or even the status quo. Unilateral designations reinforce an unequal power dynamic between government and people. Regulating from afar breeds mistrust and undermines the promise of democracy.

All of this is the face of the modern leviathan.

Writer and conservationist Wallace

excesses — the overcrowding of commercial tourism and the disenchantment of sacred space.

Tagging along with my father, I saw different people pursuing different courses. Cowboys and land managers negotiated grazing patterns. The Utes' cows got in our pastures, and our cows got in theirs. Tourists from overseas talked with us and took our pictures. Scientists studied the impact of our cattle. Archaeologists guarded their secrets. Hikers waved to us and spooked our herds. Hunters wished us out of their way. Mining and drilling were accepted as long as they stayed away from the beautiful parts.

We all clashed, but everything seemed to work out. Now I wonder how the whale will alter this delicate balance. □

Nathan Nielson is a graduate of the Great Books program of St. John's College, currently resides in Utah, and grew up ranching and exploring the wild lands of the Four Corners region. This essay was first published on firstthings.com.

Chris Lee of Blanding uses a chainsaw, while Tamara Cordasco of Monticello carries away heavy chunks of wood for splitting, during a firewood-collecting day on Elk Ridge in October. The two were part of a group of LDS church members who grew up in the area and camp, hunt and gather wood here. They all oppose a Bears Ears National Monument designation.

JT THOMAS



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The fading promise of Glen Canyon Dam



OPINION BY
STEVE TARLTON

It was 1973, and as I looked over the newly created Lake Powell from the top of Glen Canyon Dam, I wondered what the river had been like before. The narrow gorge spreading out the Colorado River seemed far less interesting than the labyrinth I tried to imagine beneath the placid water.

Our tour guide noted, "Of course, the environmentalists think that saving that empty canyon is more important than providing basic services to millions of people." One of my fellow Indian Health Service engineers chimed in: "Exactly where are the millions of people that will benefit from this project?"

"Well," our guide thought a minute, "Southern California, Phoenix and Tucson, I believe."

"What about the Navajo Reservation? Do they get any water or power?"

"Well," the guide answered, "I guess you could count the recreational benefits." We all groaned.

Our guide tried again: "If it weren't for Glen Canyon, Lake Mead would fill up with silt in about 10 years."

This quickened our interest, so he elaborated. "It's not really official, but nearly two-thirds of the capacity of Lake Mead has been lost due to inordinately

high siltation rates. This upstream dam will intercept the silt and minimize the capacity loss at Lake Mead, prolonging its useful life."

Again the voice from a fellow engineer from the back, "How long before Lake Powell fills up with silt?" Our guide shook his head. "Do you have any idea how big this reservoir is?" he asked us. "It won't be a problem in our lifetime, I'll guarantee."

Six months later, I gazed out across the desolate landscape of the Navajo Reservation where dry washes — rivers of sand — showed where water had flowed after the frequent — and violent — summer rains. Erosion was the predominant surface feature, and the flat ground was only relieved by a low range of buttes to the north.

My Navajo translator and I had come to see a Navajo resident who wanted us to run water to his house from higher up the wash. Years ago, his father had worked for the federal Civilian Conservation Corps on a pipeline that brought the water down to the surrounding flats, where they had cultivated fields. On a sand dune covered with greasewood, he kicked aside a layer of sand to reveal a broken concrete pipe fully 18 inches in

diameter. It was hard to believe that at any time in the last 40 years this arid parcel of desert had been irrigated, but the pipeline could be traced through the sand, mute evidence of some decayed dream to turn the desert green.

The pipe led through the bed of a wash upstream until it reached a spot where the wash was blocked by a large volcanic dike. The volcanic walls were more resistant to erosion, so they protruded above the sandy soil, where the wash formed a V-shaped breach in the dike. The bottom half of the breach had been filled by hand-placed stone, grouted in place.

This dam was a work of art, silent testimony to whatever craftsmen had labored to haul and place each stone in a giant mosaic that soared nearly 60 feet above the floor of the wash. None of us spoke, but we admired the structure in silence for a few moments.

Looking down from the top of that dam, I remembered the view from a similar angle at Glen Canyon Dam. While the Colorado River had coursed as a silver thread through steep canyon walls, the dry wash here meandered through squat hills out to the sheep-dotted desert flats. Sand had replaced the reservoir.

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It shouldn't have been surprising. How could anyone hope to overcome the forces of nature that decreed this vast land a desert?

I pictured Lake Powell, as low now as it has ever been, completely filled with silt, a sandy surface of greasewood and sagebrush. Where Anglos had once come to play in the lake, sheep would once again wander and browse.

No system of dams can capture and hold the Colorado River for long. How could we think that the dams we built a half-century ago were anything but temporary? The Bureau of Reclamation tour guide in 1973 seemed so confident about how long Glen Canyon Dam would endure, but I recall a scrawl of graffiti on a sandstone wall near a Lake Powell turnoff. It read: "Nature bats last." □

Steve Tarlton is an environmental engineer who worked on the Navajo Indian Reservation from 1972 to 1974. He now lives in Golden, Colorado, and blogs at www.writesofnature.com.



A hand-built stone dam that brought water to the Navajo Reservation.

COURTESY STEVE TARLTON

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Photo by Ron Wolf

We need a new Civilian Conservation Corps



OPINION BY
GUNDARS
RUDZITIS

Thirty-three years ago, I co-wrote a story for *Environment Magazine* that highlighted the “irreversible damage” being done to our national parks, according to a growing chorus of concerned park superintendents. As we take a close look at our nation’s parks and monuments during this year, their centennial, it is apparent that the maintenance and upkeep problems have gotten worse, even as the park system has expanded.

Protected federal lands are essential to the West’s economy: They attract innovative companies and workers and are a powerful component of the region’s competitive advantage. Increasingly, entrepreneurs and families who work remotely relocate to places based on their quality of life. So I’d like to propose a solution for the Park Service’s maintenance difficulties. I can’t claim credit for inventing it, because it’s not a new idea: President Franklin D. Roosevelt pioneered the way when he created the Civilian Conservation Corps during the economically desperate 1930s.

In 2011, I was one of over 100 economists who concluded that a new Civilian Conservation Corps was needed, so we wrote a letter to President Obama, urging him to revive the program. His adminis-

tration moved fast, proposing a \$1 billion effort that also aimed at helping veterans returning from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. I naively thought that both Democrats and Republicans would support such a worthwhile program, given the historical fondness for the old Conservation Corps, which helped so many families during the Great Depression. Boy, was I wrong. The presidential election was coming up, and a party-line Republican vote defeated Obama’s proposal.

Now we’re in another election year, but this time, both presidential candidates are eager to promise that they would spend on the order of \$275 billion (Hillary Clinton) to over \$500 billion (Donald Trump) on various public projects to “fix” our national infrastructure. Still, this is a drop in the bucket compared to the estimated \$4 trillion that the American Society of Civil Engineers says the country needs.

Proposals from the candidates to repair our national parks, however, are either inadequate or entirely absent. Earlier, Bernie Sanders was the exception; he co-sponsored the Rebuild America Act of 2015, which would set aside \$3 billion a year to improve both our national parks and other public lands.

As for Clinton, she proposes replacing the Land and Water Conservation Fund with an American Parks Trust Fund and roughly doubling its funding. The average annual appropriation for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which gets its money from offshore oil and gas drilling, has been a paltry annual \$40 million for federal lands, and that money is often diverted by Congress to other uses. In any case, the public-land need is in the billions, with the Park Service alone facing a \$12 billion backlog of deferred maintenance projects.

Neither candidate’s proposal is necessarily benign: Clinton says she wants to increase oil and gas production, as well as renewable energy, on public lands, and Trump’s Republican Party has been at the forefront of proposals to either turn federal land over to the states, or to privatize the public lands.

Both candidates say that they will work hard to put people back to work, especially the “angry” people who say they feel forgotten, or discounted. If so, there’s a ready-made solution for such people, especially our returning war veterans: Put them to work repairing roads, bridges and buildings in our national parks and on our other public lands. This would give veterans a chance to transfer their hard-earned skills from military war zones to peaceful public purposes. The program could also be expanded to help workers displaced by jobs going overseas, something that politicians often promise but seldom achieve.

Our public lands generate ecological, social and economic benefits that last for decades, if not centuries, and they need to be funded by long-term debt. These lands were not set aside to become cash registers, and relying on the free market to monetize them is fruitless. It is long past time that we drop the austerity policies that keep failing our public lands.

What can we do as Election Day draws near? We can put the candidates on the spot by asking if they support a Civilian Conservation Corps along the lines of the one proposed by President Obama. Our national parks, forests and rangelands and our prized fishing, hunting and hiking areas have all been neglected. We say we cherish our wide-open spaces; well, it’s time we made them healthy again. □

*Gundars Rudzitis is professor emeritus of geography at the University of Idaho; his next book is the forthcoming *The Ongoing Transformation of the American West*.*

Writers on the Range is a syndicated service of High Country News, providing three opinion columns each week to more than 200 media outlets around the West. For more information, contact Betsy Marston, betsym@hcn.org, 970-527-4898.

WEB EXTRA

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Civilian Conservation Corps enrollees carry transplants to the fields in California’s Shasta National Forest, c. 1940.

OSU SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVES, GERALD W. WILLIAMS COLLECTION. USFS PHOTO #413770.

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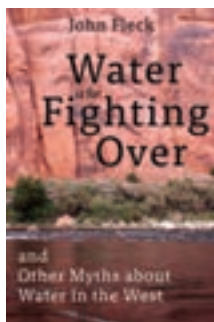
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Peace on the Colorado River

A case for optimism, and the darker side of the coin



Water is for Fighting Over ... and Other Myths about Water in the West
John Fleck
264 pages,
hardcover: \$30.
Island Press, 2016.

It's been 30 years since Marc Reisner's landmark history of Western water, *Cadillac Desert*, was first published. The book's dire tone set the pattern for much subsequent water writing. Longtime *Albuquerque Journal* reporter John Fleck calls it the "narrative of crisis" — an apocalyptic storyline about the West perpetually teetering on the brink of running dry.

When the book's second edition was released in 1993, on the heels of a particularly dry string of years in California, Reisner saw fit to characterize the drought as a "punishment meted out to an impudent culture by an indignant God."

Thanks to books like *Cadillac Desert*, Fleck writes, "I grew up with the expectation of catastrophe." Yet in his own reporting, Fleck, who recently became director of the University of New Mexico's Water Resources Program, discovered a very different story.

"Far from the punishment of an indignant God," he writes, "I found instead a remarkable adaptability."

Fleck's new book, *Water is for Fighting Over ... and Other Myths about Water in the West*, chronicles the remarkable and often-overlooked adaptive capacity of the farmers and millions of urbanites who depend on the Colorado River. He highlights several irrigation districts and cities that have substantially reduced water use while enjoying higher farm incomes and supporting bigger populations, despite more than a decade and a half of serious drought.

The most fascinating parts of the book focus on river politics. One of Fleck's great insights is that the Colorado is essentially a decentralized system where "no one has their hand on the tap." The fundamental challenge is "problem solving in a river basin where water crosses borders, where it must be shared, but where no one is in charge."

The book draws its title from the old saw — often misattributed to Mark Twain and endlessly reiterated — that whiskey is for drinking but water is for fighting over. This is the primary "myth" Fleck takes on. The ferocity of Colorado River politics has been likened to the Middle East conflict, but Fleck notes

that over the last two decades, a surprising spirit of collaboration has arisen on the Colorado.

Rather than fighting, he writes, the river's water bosses have crafted a series of agreements that have increased water-use flexibility and buffered some of the effects of extreme drought. The members of the "network," as Fleck puts it, are able to do that because they have a deeply rooted distrust of the vagaries of court, and have "come to the shared conclusion that arguing over legal interpretation is the wrong path."

Indeed, the network's members haven't taken each other to court since 1952. But in arguing that collaboration is the great untold story, Fleck overlooks one of the most fascinating aspects of the Colorado's recent history: the aggressive brinkmanship that also drives its politics.

Far from being averse to fighting, some members of the network — most famously Pat Mulroy, the former head of the Southern Nevada Water Authority — have actively used the threat of litigation to force their counterparts to compromise

and cooperate. That coercive pressure is the antagonistic yang to the cooperative yin. And therein lies the great paradox of the 21st century Colorado River: The credible threat of legal assault, artfully deployed, has provided the anvil against which many of these cooperative agreements have been hammered out.

In fact, it was just such a provocation that ultimately catalyzed the agreements that Fleck lauds. In 2004, as the drought worsened, some water managers began telegraphing meticulously coded threats to each other over disputed interpretations of critical parts of the law of the river. The network effectively stood at the brink of legal war.

Not long ago, John Entsminger, who worked as a lawyer for Mulroy at the time and is a prominent figure in Fleck's story, told me: "It was unclear at that point whether we were going to negotiate, or whether we were headed toward the U.S. Supreme Court."

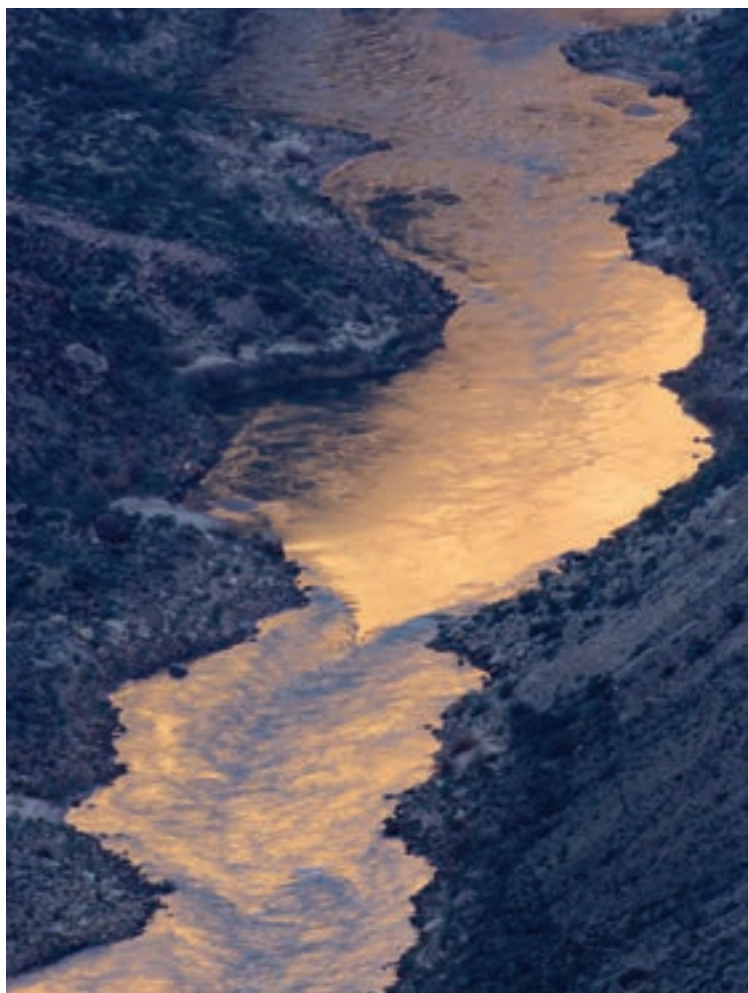
It wasn't a fight, but the plausible prospect of a fight, that forced water managers out of their entrenched positions to begin developing the series of agreements that, they hope, will keep us one step ahead of climate change and the still-deepening drought.

These days, the network's members are loath to talk about this coercive element in river politics. That's largely because after their acrimony in 2004 spilled into public, they made a pact to keep their differences out of the media. But in spite of the apparent outbreak of peace, the water bosses continue to prepare for the possibility of war.

The story that Fleck tells is a hopeful one, and a very important one. But it's not quite the whole story. Two and a half years ago, Entsminger replaced Pat Mulroy as the head of the Southern Nevada Water Authority. Entsminger is far more conciliatory than Mulroy. Yet in a candid moment not long after he took charge, he acknowledged to me that, sometimes, water really is for fighting over. Those who think otherwise do so at their own peril.

"We don't want to fight," Entsminger said. "But if we fight, we want to win."

BY MATT JENKINS



The Colorado River winds down the Grand Canyon. By the end of its journey, the river will have been diverted through aqueducts, tunnels, canals and pipelines to serve more than 30 million people. GERRY REYNOLDS

The satisfaction of shearing

ESSAY BY BRIAN KEARNEY

In a 2000 study, researchers at the University of Southern Australia found that by every measurement taken, from sustained heart rate to oxygen consumption to calories burned, sheep shearing was tougher on the human body than any other work measured. More energy is burned shearing sheep for a day than running a marathon. The study leader called it “the hardest work in the world.”

The second day of a new shearing season is worse than the first. By the end of the first day, I’m at about that stage of tiredness where a child would start to cry, but at least it’s the end of the day. The next morning I’m marginally less tired, but I have a day’s shearing in front of me. My handpiece has raised a blister on my ring finger that’s almost the size of my ring finger, and the parts of me that I know will hurt all day — legs, back, hands — already hurt.

The last time I sheared a sheep, eight months ago, was the last time I did any kind of heavy physical work. Because my muscles have half-forgotten shearing’s intricate pattern of handwork and footwork, and because I’m already sore, I’m getting through fewer sheep than I did the day before and making less money. When I pause to ask myself what I’m doing here, 500 miles from my wife and my bed, up to my neck in sheep shit and grease, I find no ready answer.

My friend Robert says that the problem with shearing is you get addicted to the money. You end up shearing when you’d be better off doing something else. This is true about the money — in the spring in California, good shearers can make \$700, \$800 a day. But it’s not the whole story. Only after you’ve invested a few grand in your gear — which includes but is not limited to the handpiece mentioned above and the cutters and combs it runs, a grinder to sharpen them, and the shearer’s uniform, which looks like a bro tank and skinny jeans but costs more — then suffered like a dog through a season or two, do you start to shear at a lucrative speed. The work is also intensely migratory, so if you want to do it full time, you’ll spend most of that time living in motels or your truck. You’ll also have to reckon with the possibility that your body will be wrecked by the time you’re 50, maybe 40. There are easier ways to make money.

One way to make sense of it is to think of shearing as a sport, a contest of skill and stamina in which shearers compete among themselves. When you finish a sheep, you click your pitch counter to keep score. If you’re not doing it right, shearing can also be a contest between you and the sheep. It says something about the work that a lot of the guys I shear with are former high-school wrestlers, but the better the shearer, the less wrestling goes on. The goal is to keep the sheep balanced like a beetle on its hips, with nothing to leverage against and no choice but to sit still as you drive your handpiece through the wool. A good shearer takes the wool off at the first pass without



breaking the sheep’s skin, quickly, with no fuss or struggle.

When it’s going well, the pleasures of shearing are comparable to the pleasures of surfing. A rhythm moves through you, and the sheep shears itself like the wave rides itself. This doesn’t happen to me often — I’ve been shearing for years, but now and again and never for long enough to get all that good. Still, just like a little surfing sharpens your appreciation for what a good surfer does, watching great shearers work gives me a sense of how good it must feel.

But even that is not what it’s really about.

To stop shearing at the end of the second day, to step out into the sun, bury your arms to the shoulder in a trough of cold water, then sit for a minute with a shook-up can of light beer — the sensory enjoyment of these things borders on the obscene. Emerson said, “Every ship is romantic, except that we sail in.” Shearing sheep is a temporary release from this bind: It makes things like sitting down, putting on clean clothes, even the simple act of not shearing into impossibly romantic activities.

When your wildest dream is to sit on the floor and drink a half-gallon of water, and every day this dream comes true, it creates a habit of satisfaction in your life that you have to experience in order to understand. There are easier ways to make money than shearing, certainly, but that may be the point. □

It usually takes a professional one to five minutes to shear a sheep, yielding anywhere from a heavy, 14-pound fine wool fleece to a lighter coarse wool fleece around 5 pounds.

KRISTIAN BUUS

Brian Kearney was born in Ireland, lives in Oregon, and shears in California.



HEARD AROUND THE WEST | BY BETSY MARSTON

COLORADO

Some 50 years ago, a 60-foot-tall steel water tank was built in rural Rangely, Colorado, as part of a fire suppression plan for a power plant. The tank never held a drop of water, though it did serve as a hangout for bottle-smashing local kids. Then, in 1976, Bruce Odland, a New York “aural artist,” came through seeking weird sounds for an arts festival. Now 64, Odland recalls squirming his way into the pitch-black tank and recording the amazing sounds he heard as buddies outside banged on the tank walls with rocks. Jason Blevins of the *Denver Post* described his own experience: “Someone stamps their foot and a peal of thunder shakes the room.” Sounds swirl, he added, “until they have no source, no beginning or end, just a vibrating, otherworldly resonance.” Over the years, Odland brought musicians and other sound artists to the water tank to record this “cathedral of sound,” as a local fan puts it. Four years ago, when the owner decided to sell the tank, Odland joined a band of tank lovers who called themselves Friends of the Tank. The nonprofit swelled to 1,400 members, Kickstarter campaigns raised more than \$100,000 from people in 20 countries, and recently, a sound studio was built and housed near the tank. Lois Lafond, a Boulder musician and an early enthusiast, admits that it takes time to learn how to use the structure. “It’s an instrument,” she explains, “and it plays you.” Meanwhile, the town, which was once a hub for coal mining, is moving into a new economy, making residents “increasingly receptive” to new businesses, says town manager Peter Brixius. Happily, that includes the undeniably unique Tank Center for Sonic Arts.

THE WEST

Moose are in decline in Yellowstone National Park, as well as elsewhere in the West, perhaps because of an odd consequence of global warming that, paradoxically, causes them to freeze to death, reports the *Jackson Hole News&Guide*. It’s a sad sequence: Shorter, warmer winters allow ticks to flourish, and when they gang up on moose, the animals lose the hair that protects them from the cold. The result is moose that are “heat-stressed all the time,” said Alyson Cour-



CALIFORNIA A chipmunk disguised as a punk, or a punk disguised as a chipmunk?

ROBIN TIERNEY

temanch, a wildlife biologist with the Wyoming Fish and Game Department. This affects the animals’ ability to produce healthy calves or put on weight throughout the year. Earlier springs also mean that when the ticks finally drop off the moose, they land in dirt instead of snow — and dirt is a better place for ticks to reproduce. As if this weren’t enough, the vulnerable but tasty moose are easy prey for wolves and grizzlies.

ARIZONA

Dogs like us; after all, we provide kibble, a home and companionship. Wolf-dogs, however, are usually illegal to own and they rarely find us worthy. They’d rather run with their wild kin. An Arizona man found this out the hard way after he adopted a “free puppy.” The Dodo.com reports. He let it run around in his enclosed backyard, but as it grew, the coarse-haired, long-legged animal insisted on chewing through the fence and hooking up with the neighbors’ German shepherds. Finally, the frustrated neighbors took the animal to the Humane Society of Southern Arizona, which immediately identified it as a “high content wolf dog” that yearned to belong to a pack. The animal has since been moved to a wolf sanctuary in California, where he’s said to be happily joining in the “nightly howl.”

NEVADA

SolarReserve, a California-based company, plans to build the world’s biggest solar power plant in Nye County, Nevada. The numbers associated with the project are equally gargantuan: Construction would create 3,000 jobs over seven years, and its 100,000 mirrored heliostats would cost \$5 billion and produce as much electricity for about 1 million homes as the 2,000-megawatt Hoover Dam. Its “molten salt energy storage system” allows it to run a steam turbine that can power generators 24/7. Not everyone is thrilled, though: Critic Janine Blaeloch told *NPR* it would turn public lands into “permanent industrial zones.”

COLORADO

Who wouldn’t savor a September festival that featured a tomato-themed fashion show, organized by a hardworking rural library with the help of a secondhand store? The Third Annual Tomato Fest summoned up visions of ripe tomatoes in the small western Colorado town of Hotchkiss, with the fashions courtesy of a local consignment store, The Rose. Prizes were bestowed not just on the largest or tastiest tomato, but also on the ugliest and littlest, and the Hotchkiss Library also sponsored a haiku contest. We especially relished the winning entry from library staffer Tracy Ihnot:

*She liked hers on toast
Every time I slice one fat
I remember her*

And here’s one from the youth winner, whom the Delta County Independent identified only as “Meg M”:

*Heirloom tomatoes
A variety of shapes
Deviate from norm*

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

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



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“If you fly to Colorado from the East Coast and head straight to a wilderness area for a backpacking trip, **you may be forgiven for thinking that Colorado is just one big conservation success story.**”

Kyle Boelte, in his essay “Trekking across Colorado’s fragmented wildernesses,” from *Writers on the Range*, hcn.org/wotr