

High Country News



HCN
Wyoming Sharpshooter Kills Two Coyotes With Friday, July 19, 1974

HCN: The next chapter
Conservation vs. climate change
Undoing Manifest Destiny

Vol. 52 / September 2020
50th Anniversary Edition
No. 9 • hcn.org

THE NEXT WEST

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/PUBLISHER

Greg Hanscom

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Brian Calvert

ART DIRECTOR

Cindy Wehling

FEATURES DIRECTOR

McKenna Stayner

DIGITAL EDITOR

Gretchen King

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Emily Benson, Paige Blankenbuehler,
Graham Lee Brewer, Maya L. Kapoor

PHOTO EDITOR

Roberto (Bear) Guerra

ASSOCIATE PHOTO EDITOR

Luna Anna Archey

ASSISTANT EDITORS

Jessica Kutz, Carl Segerstrom, Anna V. Smith

EDITOR AT LARGE

Betsy Marston

COPY EDITOR

Diane Sylvain

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Nick Bowlin, Elena Saavedra Buckley,
Kalen Goodluck, Ruxandra Guidi, Jane C. Hu,
Michelle Nijhuis, Jonathan Thompson

CORRESPONDENTS

Leah Sottile, Sarah Tory

EDITORIAL INTERNS

Jessica Douglas, Victoria Petersen,
Eric Siegel

DIRECTOR OF PHILANTHROPY

Alyssa Pinkerton

SENIOR DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

Paul Larmer

DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATES

Hannah Stevens, Carol Newman

SENIOR MARKETER

JoAnn Kalenak

**EVENTS & BUSINESS PARTNER
COORDINATOR**

Laura Dixon

IT MANAGER

Alan Wells

**DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS
ADMINISTRATION**

Erica Howard

ACCOUNTS ASSISTANT

Mary Zachman

CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGER

Kathy Martinez

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Karen Howe, Mark Nydell, Tammy York

GRANT WRITER

Janet Reasoner

FOUNDER

Tom Bell

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Brian Beitner (Colo.), John Belkin (Colo.),
Seth Cothrun (Calif.), Jay Dean (Calif.),
Bob Fulkerson (Nev.), Wayne Hare (Colo.),
Laura Helmuth (Md.), Samaria Jaffe (Calif.),
Nicole Lampe (Ore.), Marla Painter (N.M.),
Bryan Pollard (Ark.), Raynelle Rino (Calif.),
Estee Rivera Murdock (Colo.), Andy Wiessner
(Colo.), Florence Williams (D.C.)

DIRECTOR EMERITUS

Luis Torres (N.M.)



50 Spread the News, Take Us Higher

High Country News' 50th Anniversary campaign begins. Page 32.

The *High Country News* staff c. 1983, in the composing room in Lander, Wyoming (above).
Mike McClure / HCN

Know the West.

High Country News is an independent, reader-supported nonprofit 501(c)(3) independent media organization that covers the important issues and stories that define the Western U.S. Our mission is to inform and inspire people – through in-depth journalism – to act on behalf of the West's diverse natural and human communities. Beginning April 1, 2020, High Country News (ISSN/0191/5657) publishes monthly, 12 issues per year, from 119 Grand Ave., Paonia, CO 81428. Periodicals, postage paid at Paonia, CO, and other post offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to High Country News, Box 1090, Paonia, CO 81428. All rights to publication of articles in this issue are reserved. See hcn.org for submission guidelines. Subscriptions to HCN are \$37 a year, \$47 for institutions: 800-905-1155, hcn.org. For editorial comments or questions, write High Country News, P.O. Box 1090, Paonia, CO 81428 or editor@hcn.org, or call 970-527-4898.



EDITOR'S NOTE



Here's to another 50 years

FIFTY YEARS AGO, the founder of *High Country News*, Tom Bell, decided the world needed a better kind of ecological thinking. With the Intermountain West as a backdrop, he began to outline this thinking, in writing that stood in defense of the natural world. In subsequent decades, *High Country News* has expanded on Bell's vision, offering readers in-depth journalism that features incisive analysis and investigations, poignant essays and narratives, sharp critiques, and a sense of wonder and humor — all in service of a better West.

In this issue, we celebrate the legacy of Tom Bell and the 50-year history of *High Country News*, even as we chart a path forward. In recent years, we have broadened the scope of the magazine to better live up to our mission: to inform and inspire our readers to act on behalf of the West. This means providing journalism for all of the West: those states and tribal nations west of the 100th meridian — mountains and plains, basin and range, the desert Southwest, the Pacific Northwest, the cities, suburbs and coast — every conceivable landscape, inhabited by all manner of creatures, including humans. Even as we have expanded the magazine's geographic scope, we have sought to preserve its deeper vision. We know that the West is a better place when it has good journalists keeping an eye on it, verifying facts, informing debate and exploring new ideas.

We also know our readers want to see the West at its best: a West that is just, as well as beautiful, where the powerful are held to account, where everyone receives fair treatment, where the land, water and wildlife are protected from exploitation — a West that is prepared for the calamities ahead, especially the dangerously changing climate and a political system of increasing injustice. This is a tall order, but every day our editors and writers are out there working to fill it. And so, in this issue, alongside some deep history, you'll get a glimpse of the next West, a West where myriad communities have a stake and a voice. These stories are more than mere information; they seek a deeper understanding of the region as a whole — as intricate tiles of an endless mosaic.

High Country News came into being alongside the environmental movement, which itself followed the civil rights era. The magazine rose in stature amid the growing inequalities of the 1980s and 1990s and through the upheavals of the post-9/11 world. Most recently, it has withstood a pandemic, a financial crisis, and ongoing attacks on the free press and the democratic ideals that a free press upholds. We are still here because of you, our readers. Now we are turning 50. Let this issue celebrate those decades, and let it be the point of embarkation for the decades to come. Most of all, let it be a note of thanks to you, without whom a better West would not be possible.

Brian Calvert, editor-in-chief

FEATURED CONTRIBUTORS



Gustavo Arellano
Los Angeles
@GustavoArellano



Nick Bowlin
Gunnison, Colorado
@npbowlin



Alex Carr Johnson
Anchorage, Alaska
@alexcarrjohnson



Elijah Hurwitz
Los Angeles
@ElijahRook



Barb Lachenbruch
Corvallis, Oregon
@barblachenbruch



Jessica Kutz
Tucson, Arizona
@jkutzie



Sara Porterfield
Boulder, Colorado



Carl Segerstrom
Spokane, Washington
@carlschirps



Anna V. Smith
Portland, Oregon
@annavtoriasmith



FEATURES

Overheated

24

Across the country, extreme heat causes more deaths annually than any other natural disaster. Why aren't we taking it more seriously?

BY JESSICA KUTZ | PHOTOS BY ROBERTO (BEAR) GUERRA

'Somebody has to keep people on their toes'

36

How *High Country News* came to be.

BY SARA PORTERFIELD | ILLUSTRATIONS BY SARAH GILMAN

ON THE COVER

Photo collage by Peter Horvath / HCN. Source photos: HCN photo archive, Roberto (Bear) Guerra, Mark Harvey, Mike McClure, David McNew/Getty Images, Mike McMillan/ U.S. Forest Service, Josue Rivas, Terray Sylvester.

A man rests in the shade of one of the few trees in Edison Park, in Phoenix. On this day in late May, the temperature reached 109 degrees Fahrenheit (above).

Roberto (Bear) Guerra / HCN

Marlon, an undocumented Guatemalan immigrant who lost his job at a Los Angeles barbershop due to the COVID-19 pandemic, now makes house calls to cut hair, and also sells masks on the street to make ends meet. (right). Elijah Hurwitz



Access to subscriber-only content:

hcn.org

hcne.ws/digi-5209

Follow us @highcountrynews

No safety net

14

The pandemic is making life even harder for undocumented workers.

PHOTO ESSAY BY ELIJAH HURWITZ



Old-school organizers 7

How the country's oldest organizing group won COVID-19 relief for undocumented immigrants in California.

WHAT WORKS BY NICK BOWLIN

Conservation isn't always climate action 8

The Great American Outdoors Act has a hydrocarbon problem.

ANALYSIS BY CARL SEGERSTROM

A wildlife refuge under siege 10

Trump's border wall is draining water from the desert.

BY JESSICA KUTZ

A West in flux 12

Eddies, whorls and other patterns of regional migration.

FACTS & FIGURES

BY JONATHAN THOMPSON

A little paper with clout 42

How *High Country News* evolved.

Q&A BY CARL SEGERSTROM

For tribes, by tribes 50

A 'third way' for Indian Law could mean a new era of cultural protection.

Q&A BY ANNA V. SMITH

Undeniable truths 52

Four Colorado writers on empathy, systems of oppression and 'the moment.'

Q&A BY BRIAN CALVERT

Thank you, Rudolfo Anaya 55

Remembering a writer whose West was magical and mysterious.

ESSAY BY GUSTAVO ARELLANO

Where does U.S. migration policy go from here? 56

Three books that challenge the way we imagine the U.S.-Mexico border.

REVIEW BY SARAH TORY

The physics of connection 58

In the middle of a pandemic, a lifetime of lessons from a parent.

ESSAY BY BARB LACHENBRUCH

Now that you've gone West, young man 60

Toward unlearning Manifest Destiny.

ESSAY BY ALEX CARR JOHNSON

#iamthewest 64

Denae Shanidiin, Diné and Korean artist and activist in Utah.

BY RUSSEL ALBERT DANIELS

DEPARTMENTS

3 EDITOR'S NOTE

6 LETTERS

9 THE LATEST

34 DONORS

35 READER PROFILES

62 HEARD AROUND THE WEST

LETTERS

High Country News is dedicated to independent journalism, informed debate and discourse in the public interest. We welcome letters through digital media and the post. Send us a letter, find us on social media, or email us at editor@hcn.org.

THE ACOMA SHIELD

The saga of the disappearance and return of one of the Pueblo of Acoma's six stolen shields was as intriguing as it was inspirational, but it also leaves troubling questions ("The Return," August 2020). The article's lack of any picture of this recovered shield struck me as particularly odd. The article also revealed that the shield's last "owner" had, at the request of an auction house in France, added a fake element to it, admitting that "he had turkey feathers dyed to look like eagles' and wove them into the shield himself." I'm puzzled why these feathers, added simply to make it look more like an "authentic Indian artifact," are still shown in all of the current images of the shield. Shouldn't the addition of these fake feathers be regarded as an act of defilement?

**Jack Kirkley
Dillon, Montana**

AUTHOR'S RESPONSE:

The process of repatriating the Acoma shield was also one of reestablishing its intended privacy within the tribe; in consultation with tribal leadership, we elected to not republish the publicly available photograph of the shield — taken by EVE auction house, when the feathers were still present — to maintain this privacy.

Elena Saavedra Buckley

"The Return" was so well researched and written; it examined the issue from every angle. This may be the best story I've read in my years with *High Country News*. It is also an issue near and dear to my heart and soul. Wonderful! And a happy ending!

**Bill Lundeen
Lee Vining, California**

ALBUQUERQUE MILITIA

Concerning "The thin blurred line" (August 2020), I'd like to suggest an alternate response to violence on any side. Keep the damn statue! But make it tell both sides of the story. Add a plaque that describes the genocide of Indigenous peoples. Bring school groups and others to teach people of the racist history. Meanwhile, keep up with police reform and social programs for marginalized people. Any violence on either side of an issue begets more violence. It also foments a military response from the federal authorities, at least right now. Please, just tell the story — the whole story — and work for reform. Also: Vote!

**Emily Matyas
Dolores, Colorado**

EXTREMISTS AS OPPORTUNISTS

There are conservative, religious, gun-toting, Trump-backing people throughout the American West who are generous, hard-working and kind, and in no way affiliated with violent militias or

racism ("Extremists as opportunists," August 2020). While I do not share their worldview, I count on these people every day. Their absence from the pages of *HCN* is conspicuous.

**Owen Segerstrom
Cedarville, California**

INVASIVE SPECIES

Loved "Am I an invasive species" by Jenny Liou (August 2020). My partner and I often refer to the homogenization of skin tones in our discussions of world events. At the same time, I love to learn about other cultures. The stories and experiences of my Northern European ancestry along with my remarkably white suburban childhood seem to pale as I absorb the history and customs from other parts of the world. I would miss not having these additional layers of my worldview. Will future generations care? Will it really hurt the ecology of this planet if the Idaho prairie becomes a wild field of chrysanthemums? How are we doing without bull trout in our lives? When I dream of living elsewhere, I have a choice of anywhere in the world. Can we embrace instead of fearing, as Ms. Liou is showing us? We must do what is healthy for the future of all, not assuming that the past or status quo is the only way.

**Barbara Spencer
Grants Pass, Oregon**

"Am I an invasive species?" went beyond a discussion of the social power of words and language and implied that organisms which arrive by some means from one ecosystem to occupy another might be better thought of as "immigrants," "refugees" or part of a "diaspora." Opinions have been floating around for a while about whether the phrase "invasive species," when used in an ecological context, should be considered hurtful. I would guess that some offensive person has surely used the term offensively, and they should be called out for it. But does that limited misuse

make it the wrong term for referring to buffelgrass (*Pennisetum ciliare*), which was purposefully imported from Eurasia and is now spreading through the Sonoran Desert, causing areas to become extremely fire-prone to the detriment of all of the native plants?

The example of buffelgrass, along with other varieties of *Pennisetum* and *Brassica*, which one might say have invaded ecosystems, sometimes establishing monocultures across thousands of acres, demonstrates that bringing species from distant places to "scatter them" around is a very poor idea. Conflating opposition to the inappropriate use of words when referring to human migration with efforts to stop or limit the damage caused by non-native plants and insects is counter-productive. One never knows if a given plant or insect will naturalize in or harm another ecosystem until it is too late, and any encouragement to "scatter" the seeds of some alien plant into another ecosystem is wrong.

**David Wilson
Irvine, California**

YAQUI CATFISH

I want to commend *High Country News* — and author Maya Kapoor specifically — for the feature "Fish Out of Water" (July 2020). The story is a masterful look into so many of the touchstones that define life in the Southwest — the border, Indigenous rights, water scarcity — all connected by an unlikely and obscure fish. As a former resident and lifetime devotee of the Sonoran Desert, I've been sharing this article with friends to try and explain my love and attachment to the area. I really can't think of the last time I read a news piece that illustrates the complexities of a region so well through such an unexpected lens. Keep up the good work!

**Andrew Primo
Boulder, Colorado**

Old-school organizers

How the country's oldest organizing group won COVID-19 relief for undocumented immigrants in California.

BY NICK BOWLIN



ON MAY 5, the California affiliates of the Industrial Areas Foundation — the nation's largest and oldest community organizing group — gathered for a Zoom call. Artwork and bookshelves were visible behind the faces on the grid-patterned screen, and an unmuted microphone created confusing cross-talk. It was a Zoom call like any other — except this one had 1,200 participants, including 10 bishops and several lawmakers.

The IAF organizes in about 30 cities across the Western U.S. These affiliates — which are composed of religious congregations, unions, community groups, schools and nonprofits — aim to help working people build political power and social capital. Organizers teach people — many of them Latino in the California groups — how to demand accountability and responsiveness from the institutions that govern their lives. This Zoom call was about expanding the California Earned Income Tax Credit (Cal-EITC) to include those who file their taxes using an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number, or ITIN, rather than a Social Security number — in other words, the undocumented residents who make up about one-tenth of California's workforce. Many of them work on the pandemic's frontlines in agriculture and in service industries such as restaurants, health- and child-care, yet cannot access most forms of COVID-19 financial support.

Cristina Garcia of Marin County, for example, lost her housecleaning and child-care income because of the pandemic. She has paid taxes for 18 years and never benefitted from the Cal-EITC. "I don't understand why they can give us an ITIN number to pay taxes, but in this situation, we

don't get any kind of help," she said on the call.

"The action is in the reaction, we say in organizing," said Robert Hoo, lead organizer with One LA, Los Angeles' IAF affiliate. "If you hold an event and nothing happens after, that was just an activity."

WHEN POLITICS, like most other activities, was forced to migrate online, the IAF didn't seem an obvious winner. For 80 years, the group has embraced one-on-one conversations and "house meetings" to create organized communities whose strong bonds endure beyond a single campaign. These relationships, forged in person, smoothed the transition to digital organizing.

After the virus hit, a flurry of texts, calls and social media outreach followed as California's IAF groups scrambled to get their people on Zoom calls. The news was grim: Budgets were tight and layoffs widespread. Undocumented people, often the hardest-hit population, were excluded from most forms of aid. The Cal-EITC push emerged from these digital house meetings. "It came from the lament of the people," said the Rev. Arturo Corral of Our Lady Queen of Angels / La Placita Catholic Church in Los Angeles, a One LA leader.

In late April, local leaders began gathering Zoom participants from their local networks. Meanwhile, organizers sought out influential lawmakers, focusing on three Budget Committee members: State Assembly Members David Chiu and Eloise Gómez Reyes and State Sen. Maria Elena Durazo. All three pledged to work to expand the tax credit.

The IAF groups were "not at all" confident that the tax credit expansion would end up in

Undocumented residents make up one-tenth of California's workforce. Many are on the pandemic frontlines, like agriculture employees, yet cannot access most forms of COVID-19 financial support.
Brent Stirton / Getty Images

the governor's budget. "Most people told us this was not going to happen," Hoo said. But after weeks of further organizing, it was included in Gov. Gavin Newsom's June 30 budget. With so much money lost to COVID-19, the budget depends on future tax revenues to prevent major spending cuts, as well as another federal COVID-19 relief bill, which, as of this writing, was still being hammered out in Congress. With no end in sight to the federal aid delay, Newsom and the Legislature will have to find other sources of revenue or consider spending cuts — including, potentially, to the Cal-EITC.

California IAF groups are prepared to fight for it, but not in a vacuum. Income loss, housing and schools have dominated recent digital house meetings. Many people will struggle to pay back rent once eviction and rent freezes end, while working families, especially Spanish-speaking ones, often lack support in the transition to distance learning. Organizing around these topics will happen, by necessity, over Zoom, which Meredith Parnell of the Marin Organizing Committee called "accessible" yet "flattening."

"You're talking into a void," Parnell said. "All that stuff that we rely on in developing our people skills and our judgment — that's all gone."

"May 5th was really fabulous, but we will see how this works in the long run," she added. "Maybe we'll get really good at this." ☀



Oil burns during a controlled oil fire in the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Venice, Louisiana, following the April 20, 2010, explosion of the *Deepwater Horizon* drilling rig. The Great American Outdoors Act and the Land and Water Conservation Fund depend on funds generated by the oil and gas industry. **Derick E. Hingle / Bloomberg via Getty Images**

ANALYSIS

Conservation isn't always climate action

The Great American Outdoors Act has a hydrocarbon problem.

BY CARL SEGERSTROM

ON JULY 22, CONGRESS PASSED the biggest public-lands spending bill in half a century. The bipartisan bill, called the Great American Outdoors Act, puts nearly \$10 billion toward repairing public-lands infrastructure, such as

outdated buildings and dysfunctional water systems in national parks. It also guarantees that Congress will spend the \$900 million it collects each year through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, or LWCF. The legislation boosts access to nature, funds city parks and will pay for a significant chunk of the massive maintenance backlog on public lands in the U.S.

But it all comes at a cost to the climate. To pay the bill's hefty price tag, Congress is tapping revenue from the fossil fuel industry. Though the new law has been cheered by conservation groups, it fails to address either the modern crisis of climate change or the impacts of the West's growing recreation and tourism economy on wildlife. In this way, the Outdoors Act exposes the gaps between conservation and climate activism, while providing a grim reminder of the complicated entanglements of energy, economics, climate — and now, a pandemic.

The biggest windfall from the Great American Outdoors Act — up to \$6.5 billion over five years — will go to the National Park Service. National parks are the public lands' top tourist attraction, receiving more than 327 million visits in 2019 alone, but dwindling annual funding has left the agency with about \$12 billion in overdue projects. These projects include everything

from a \$100 million pipeline to bring water to visitors and communities on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon to routine campground and trail maintenance.

The money will also benefit gateway communities in the West. A National Park Service analysis projects that the new legislation will create an additional 100,000 jobs over the next five years, on top of the 340,500 jobs the parks already support in nearby towns. For many places reeling from the pandemic's economic toll on tourism, such as Whitefish, Montana, a gateway community to Glacier National Park, the bill will be a shot in the arm. Glacier has more than \$100 million in overdue projects, and the infusion of money will bring new jobs after a dismal tourist season.

The impacts also stretch beyond immediate job gains because of the way access to recreation drives economic growth in the rural West. Communities that have more protected lands nearby generally grow faster and have higher income levels, said Mark Haggerty, who researches rural economies for Headwaters Economics, a nonprofit think tank in Montana. That growth is driven by both tourism and new arrivals looking to live closer to the outdoors. "Residents and businesses want to be close to

public lands,” Haggerty said. “Recreational amenities can attract high-wage jobs.”

Federal public lands aren't the only places that will benefit from the bill. Since 1964, the Land and Water Conservation Fund has paid for a variety of outdoor projects around the country with taxes and royalty payments from oil and gas drilling in the Gulf of Mexico. The Outdoors Act obliges the LWCF to spend the entire \$900 million it collects each year, something that's happened only twice in the past 50-plus years.

With full LWCF funding, more money will be flowing from federal coffers to local projects. In urban areas, such as the South Park neighborhood in Seattle, the fund recently paid for new playground equipment and a spray zone at a local park. Out in the country, the program typically finances projects to protect habitat and improve public access, as at Tenderfoot Creek in Montana, where the fund paid for more than 8,000 acres to be transferred from private to public ownership by 2015.

BUT RISING RECREATION comes at a cost for critters. Recent studies have shown that it poses a serious threat to the very wildlife that draws people to backcountry trails. In Vail, Colorado, a town built around access to nature and outdoor sports, local elk herds have been in precipitous decline, a phenomenon biologists attribute to more people tromping through the woods. In Idaho, snowmobilers and federal land managers are battling over whether to reroute the machines to save wolverines. And a recent review by the California Department of Fish and Game found that vulnerable species can be pushed to extinction by expanding human activity on public lands.

Supporters of the Outdoors Act see securing LWCF funding as vital for conservation. “It's the best and virtually only tool for protecting land for

wildlife,” said Tracy Stone-Manning, the leader of the National Wildlife Federation's public-lands program. But that doesn't mean that recreation's impacts are being ignored, Stone-Manning said. “We need to protect open spaces, then we need to get smart about managing the impact of recreation on wildlife.”

Even as many rural Western communities grapple with an economic future tied to recreation, the Outdoors Act underlines the enduring legacy of American dependence on fossil fuels. The \$9.5 billion set aside for the public-lands maintenance backlog will come from revenue paid by private companies that produce energy — from both fossil and renewable sources — on federal lands and waters. At first glance, this appears to be a shift away from the LWCF's funding model, which depends solely on offshore oil and gas income. But for now at least, most of the money will still come from fossil fuel production: In 2019, for example, federal offshore wind energy generated just over \$410 million in revenue, a drop in the bucket compared to the nearly \$9 billion from fossil fuels on federal land and waters.

Reliance on oil production to pay for parks ignores the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to preserve a livable climate. “You have to give kudos to the Republicans for shifting the conversation so far to the right that the premise has been agreed to that we should fund conservation with the destruction of the earth,” said Brett Hartl, government affairs director for the Center for Biological Diversity.

Because they depend on the oil and gas industry, the LWCF and park maintenance are vulnerable should the U.S. transition away from fossil fuels, or if production drops for another reason, like the current pandemic. (Compared to the same time period in 2019, onshore oil and gas royalty receipts dropped 53% and offshore

royalties plummeted by 84% in April 2020.) The arrangement also provides rhetorical cover for energy executives. “These programs underscore the need to continue safe development of domestic offshore energy reserves,” said American Petroleum Institute Vice President Lem Smith in a press release cheering the Senate passage of the bill. “Policies that end or limit production in federal waters would put these essential conservation funds in doubt.”

Even as Congress relies on the fossil fuel industry to pay for conservation projects, legislative frameworks that recognize the climate and extinction crises are intertwined are emerging. Recently proposed initiatives like the “roadmap for climate action” put forward by the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis and the Thirty by Thirty Resolution, a Senate push to protect 30% of U.S. land and oceans by 2030, tie climate action to land and wildlife conservation. And proposals for different funding models for conservation, including a “backpack tax” on outdoor apparel and equipment that would shift some conservation costs to recreationists, have been proposed for decades.

All of these plans are a far cry from the bill currently being celebrated as a major win for conservation and public lands. “We need to be sure we're not pretending our work is done; this money is not a panacea for reaching conservation goals,” said Kate Kelly, the director of public lands for the Center for American Progress and an Obama-era Interior Department senior adviser, who supports the bill. “The funding model needs to be re-examined and reimaged.” Moving forward, addressing climate change and biodiversity loss requires acknowledging that the crises are inextricable. “The climate and conservation communities haven't always coordinated, and that needs to change,” Kelly said. “They're two sides of the same coin.” ☀

THE LATEST

Narrow NEPA

Backstory

In January, President Donald Trump announced plans to overhaul the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA — the Nixon-era law that safeguards air, water and land by requiring federal agencies to conduct detailed environmental assessments of major projects. NEPA has delayed infrastructure projects and hampered economic growth, Trump said. “It takes many, many years to get something built. The builders are not happy. Nobody is happy.” (“Trump targets a bedrock environmental law,” March 1, 2020.)

Followup

In late July, the administration finalized a “top-to-bottom overhaul” of NEPA to fast-track infrastructure, creating a faster review process and a narrower, limited public comment process. So far, 17 environmental groups have sued. “(NEPA) is a tool of democracy, a tool for the people,” said Kym Hunter, a senior attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center, which represents the groups in the suit. “We're not going to stand idly by while the Trump administration eviscerates it.” —Paige Blankenbuehler

A wildlife refuge under siege

Trump's border wall is draining water from the desert.

BY JESSICA KUTZ

DURING THE FALL OF 2019, the Department of Homeland Security began pumping large amounts of water from a southern Arizona aquifer to mix concrete for the Trump administration's border wall. The aquifer is an essential water source for the San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge, so when the pumping escalated, U.S. Fish and Wildlife officials watched helplessly as the water levels at several ponds — the main habitat for the endangered fish at this Sonoran Desert refuge — dropped “precipitously.”

In what Bill Radke, who has managed the refuge for two decades, called “life support” actions, staff was forced to shut off water to three of the ponds to minimize broader damage. As a result, biologists had to salvage endangered fish from the emptying ponds. It was “like cutting off individual fingers in an attempt to save the hand,” Radke wrote in an email to staff.

Since its creation in 1982, the 2,300-acre refuge's sole mission has been to protect the rare species of the Río Yaqui, including endangered fishes like the Yaqui chub and Yaqui topminnow, and other species, such as the tiny San Bernardino springsnail and the endangered Huachuca water umbel, a plant that resembles clumps of tubular grass. Through a series of artesian wells connected to an aquifer, the refuge has kept ponds filled in this fragile valley for nearly 40 years.

Under normal circumstances, a significant construction project like a border wall would be required to go through an extensive environmental review process as dictated by the National Environmental Policy Act. The Department of Homeland Security says it operates under the spirit of NEPA and solicits public comment. But with environmental laws — including NEPA, the Endangered Species Act and the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act — waived for the

border wall, the refuge lacks any legal protection, either for itself or the endangered species in its care. So wildlife officials have tried to work with the department, sending hydrological studies and providing recommendations about how to reduce water use near the refuge — information that the Department of Homeland Security has repeatedly claimed it takes into consideration.

But as emails recently obtained by *High Country News* through a Freedom of Information Act request show, Homeland Security consistently ignored the expertise of Radke and his team. The emails, which were sent from August 2019 to January 2020, chronicle months of upheaval at the refuge and dysfunctional communication between Fish and Wildlife and Homeland Security. During crucial moments, Homeland Security kept wildlife agency staff in the dark as land managers and hydrologists worked to anticipate damages.

“What we are seeing in these FOIA documents confirms a pattern with CBP and DHS that goes back 15 years,” said Randy Serraglio, Southwest conservation advocate with the Center for Biological Diversity.

Matthew Dyman, a U.S. Customs and Border Protection spokesman, stated that “DHS and CBP have and continue to coordinate weekly, and more frequently on an as needed basis, to answer questions concerning new border wall construction projects and to address environmental concerns from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.” Nevertheless, documents confirm that border wall construction has caused groundwater levels to plummet and harmed endangered fish at the refuge.

IN OCTOBER 2019, RADKE wrote to Fish and Wildlife staff that “the threat of groundwater

depletion” at the San Bernardino Refuge had gone from “concerning” to a “dire emergency.” Subsequent emails detail the refuge's difficulty in obtaining water usage estimates from DHS contractors for an accurate risk assessment. Fish and Wildlife officials sent the department a hydrology report to raise an alarm and requested a five-mile buffer around the refuge for well drilling.

According to the emails, though, the Department of Homeland Security did little in response. “I was disappointed today to see first hand that DHS and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers did not abide by the (most recent) October 16, 2019 Fish and Wildlife Service request to minimize water withdrawal from the aquifer that supports all wetlands on San Bernardino NWR,” Radke wrote. “Instead contractors made plans to drill even closer to the refuge, drilling their second new well 480 feet east of (the refuge).”

CBP spokesman Dyman maintains that construction contractors honored the buffer request. But emails show otherwise: At least one well was drilled less than 500 feet from the refuge boundary; it was abandoned only after it didn't produce water. And Fish and Wildlife soon learned that even more well locations were being considered near the refuge, according to emails. Homeland Security also continued to pump large volumes of water from a private landowner whose well is just 1.5 miles from the refuge.

Around the same time, pond levels in the refuge dropped. In a series of emails in late November, Radke grew increasingly frustrated. On Nov. 22, he wrote to agency employees, “Our refuge water monitoring is already showing harm to our aquifer during months when the refuge has always demonstrated an increase in groundwater levels. We have ponds dropping precipitously (as much as a foot already) that have never gone low during the winter months — not ever.” Fish and Wildlife had warned Homeland Security that this would happen, but no apparent action was ever taken. “I do not know what reaction to expect from DHS or (the Army Corps of Engineers) to our continuing requests for them to minimize or mitigate impacts to the refuge,” Radke wrote, “but so far our requests have been consistently met with indifference.”

ON DEC. 12, RADKE CALLED the water withdrawals for the border wall “the current greatest threat to endangered species in the southwest region.” By that point, refuge staff had begun to track the impact themselves; there was little else they could do. The monitoring became “an overwhelming priority that diminishes our ability to adequately meet other important objectives, obligations and due dates,” Radke wrote.

By January, the impact on the ponds was



A spring-fed pond at the San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge. When groundwater was pumped just outside the refuge's boundaries, the water levels of the ponds dropped (top). **Ariana Brocious / Arizona Public Media**

A well 1.5 miles from the San Bernardino Wildlife Refuge border. Despite the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's request that all wells be outside a five-mile buffer around the refuge, one well was drilled just 480 feet from the refuge (above). **Russ McSpadden / Center for Biological Diversity**

obvious. According to a Fish and Wildlife memo, swings in water pressure and depth were clearly documented. The report noted that these changes "began to occur as water was used off refuge for border wall construction." Earlier emails speculated that the situation would only grow more dire at the refuge during the sweltering summer months, when evaporation both from the ponds and the water being pumped would use even more of the precious desert resource.

In an email, Dyman told *High Country*

News that Customs and Border Protection and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers "are working closely with the construction contractor on estimated water usage requirements for barrier construction in Arizona as well as working with San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge to mitigate the impacts of groundwater use for the project." Beth Ullenberg, a spokeswoman for the Fish and Wildlife Service, confirmed that the refuge is working with Homeland Security. The agency "has identified that larger capacity pumps are now needed in order to maintain pond levels and appropriate pond outflows," Ullenberg wrote. She said the contractor is purchasing and will install the new pumps at the refuge.

Those pumps came too late for at least three ponds, and, according to a document obtained by Defenders of Wildlife, as recently as May, water pumping near the refuge was still having a direct and detrimental impact on it. Environmental groups say a pattern of secrecy, lack of communication and failure to coordinate with land managers at the border continues to endanger other biodiverse regions, such as Quitobaquito Springs in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, where they intersect with border wall construction.

"(The Department of Homeland Security and Customs and Border Patrol) have consistently ignored the input of land managers and landowners and other stakeholders along the border with regard to these construction projects," Serraglio said, "and it has resulted in serious damage time and time again." ☀

FACTS & FIGURES

A West in flux

Eddies, whorls and other patterns of regional migration.

BY JONATHAN THOMPSON

EVER SINCE EURO-AMERICANS first came to North America, the Western U.S. has been a top destination for migrants. In the late 1800s, colonizers were lured west, seeking what historian Frederick Jackson Turner called “the richest free gift that was ever spread out before civilized man.” Erasing the Indigenous peoples who had lived on the land for millennia, he described the West as “vacant” — an irresistible “opportunity for a new order of things.” Later, during the Dust Bowl and Great Depression, hundreds of thousands of people flocked from the lower Midwest to California, seeking refuge from drought and economic distress. The trend continued after World War II, transforming once-small cities like Los Angeles, Phoenix and Las Vegas into booming metropolitan areas.

Americans are still geographically mobile, and the Western U.S. remains among the top destinations for migrants. Over time, however, the trajectory of the human flow has shifted from predominantly east to west, to something far more complex, with swirling and shifting patterns that sometimes double back unexpectedly. Over the last few years, more people have abandoned the West for other regions than have moved in, with the exception of people from abroad. California still draws migrants from all over, but many Californians are now leaving, often heading to Oregon, Arizona or Colorado.

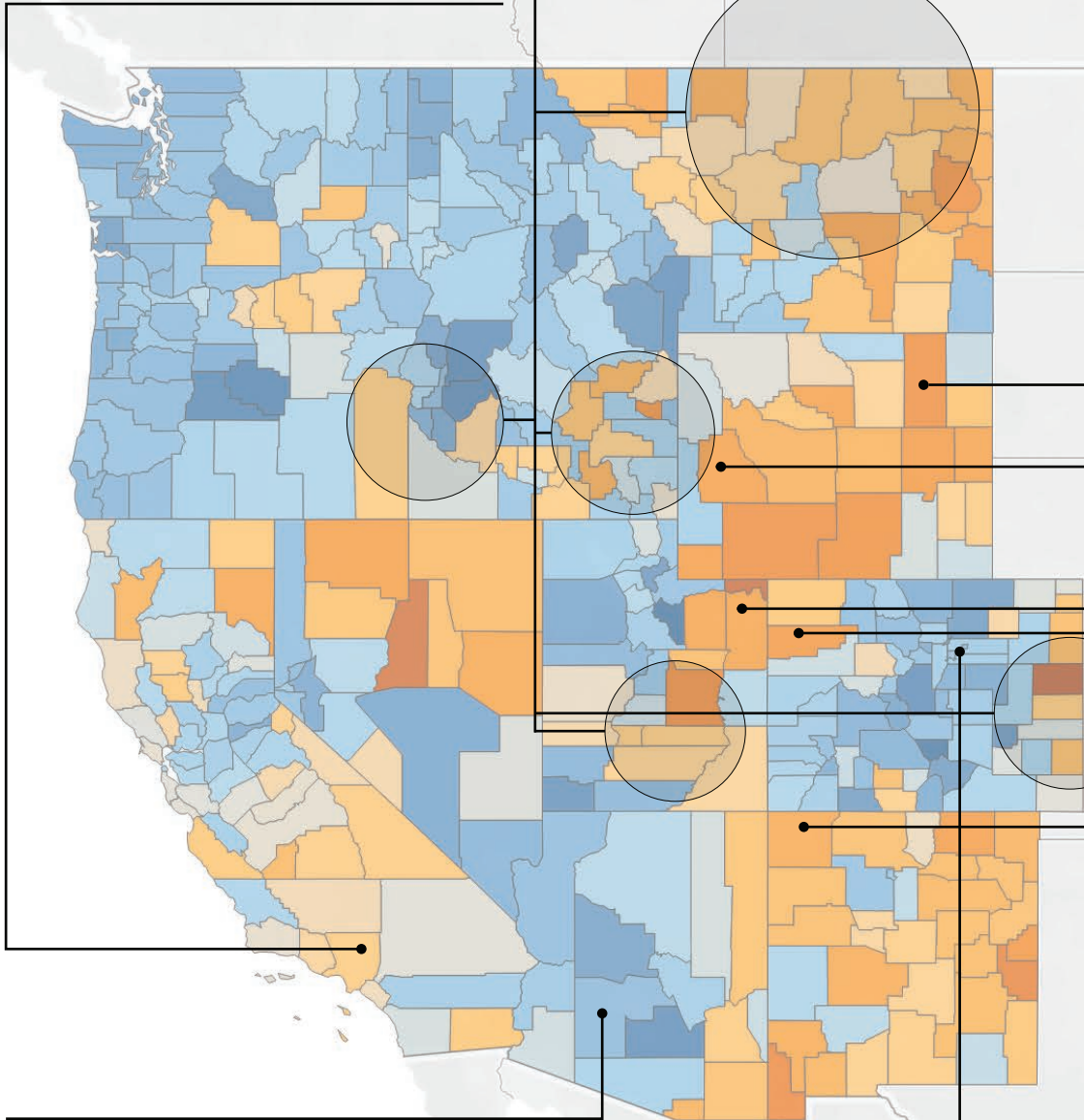
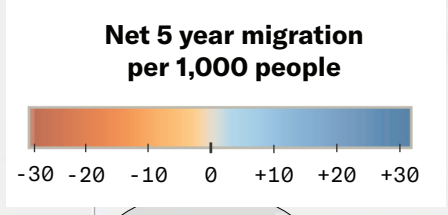
COVID-19’s effect on migration has yet to appear in the data, but media reports indicate an uptick in interest in the rural West, as urbanites flee from the pandemic or social unrest. If this interest blossoms into a full-blown urban exodus, the migration patterns of the West may well shift once again. ✨

FLEEING THE FARM

Rural agricultural counties with little in the way of recreation or tourism are losing young people who seek greater opportunities. Even aesthetically appealing counties seldom draw retirees because they lack amenities and medical establishments.

ESCAPE FROM L.A.

It wasn’t so long ago that Los Angeles and Southern California were migrant magnets, with car-centric suburbs sprawling up and down the coast and into the desert. Now, people are more likely to migrate outward than inward. Between 2007 and 2017, nearly 300,000 more people left Los Angeles County — many of them headed elsewhere in the West — than moved in.



397,031

Number of people who moved to Maricopa County, Arizona, in the last 10 years — the largest county-population gain in the Western U.S.

CLIMATE REFUGEES?

As the global climate warms, Phoenix burns: This July’s average temperature was 98.5 degrees Fahrenheit, making it the city’s hottest month since record-keeping began in 1895 (see page 24). So far, though, people don’t seem to be fleeing; Maricopa County is one of the nation’s fastest-growing counties, thanks to high in-migration. Decent jobs, relatively reasonable housing costs and a revitalized downtown remain a draw, and energy-intensive air conditioning, for those who can afford it, helps offset the brutal temperatures — even as it helps trigger them.

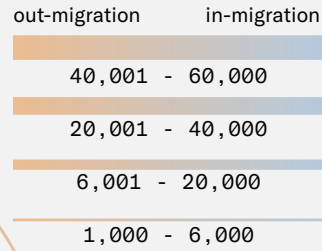
ENERGY BOOM-BUST

The population of San Juan County, New Mexico, first exploded back in the 1950s as migrants flooded in from Texas, Oklahoma and beyond to work in the booming oil and gas fields, uranium mines and coal power plants. But natural gas prices crashed in 2009, and with the coal power plants set to close in coming years, people are now leaving and the population is shrinking, a situation echoed in other former Western energy hotspots.

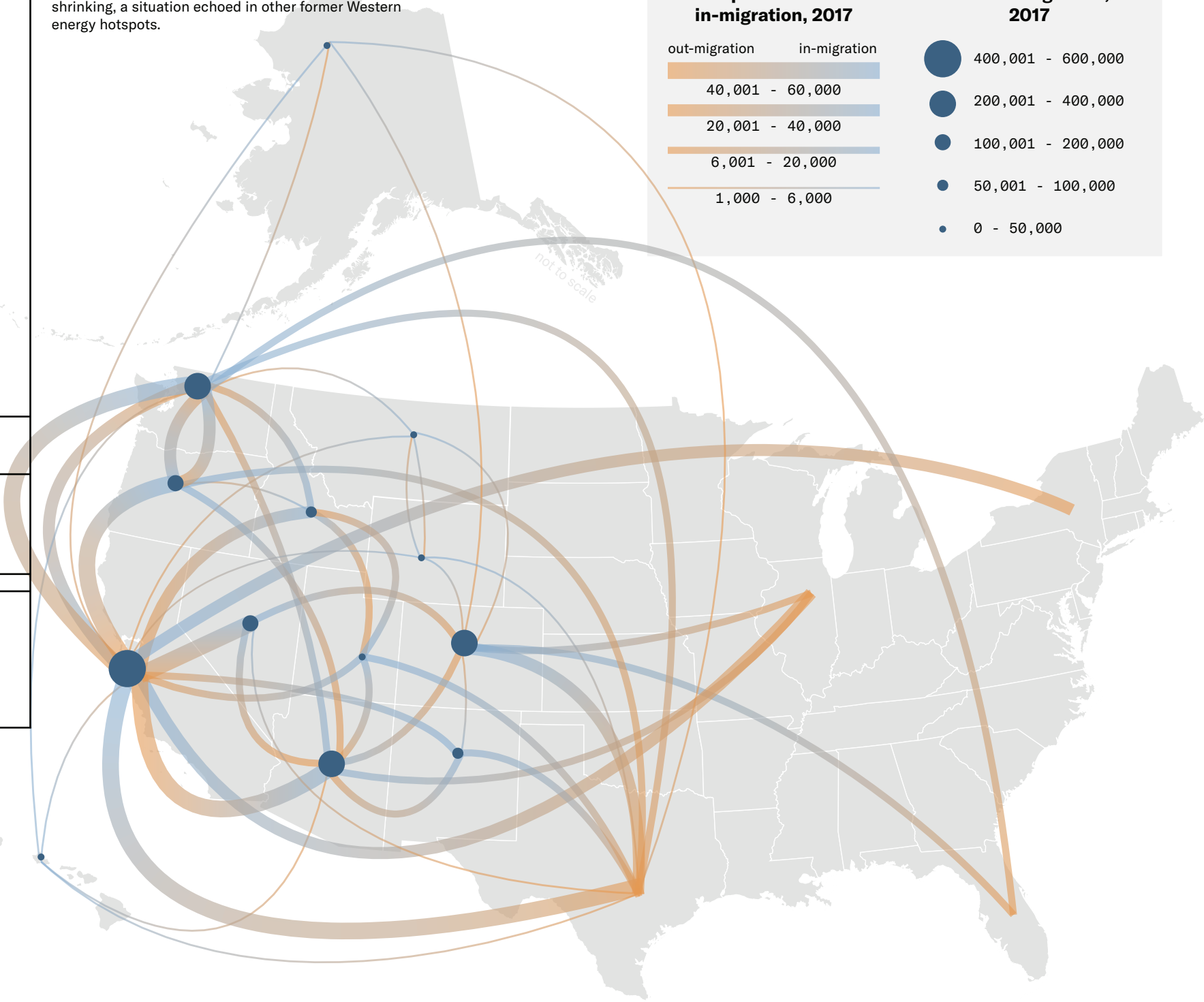
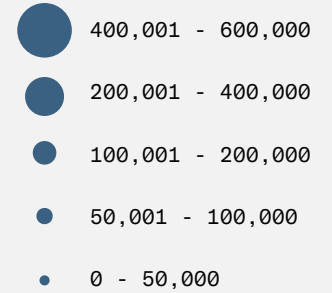
9,402

Net migration (in-migration minus out-migration) for the energy state of Wyoming, 2010-2018.

Top sources of in-migration, 2017



Total in-migration, 2017



MILLENNIAL INFLUX

More than half of all migrants coming into Colorado are between the ages of 25 and 34, most with a bachelor's degree or higher. The majority head to the bustling Denver metro area to take advantage of high-wage jobs, amenities and a vibrant social and cultural scene.

14%

Percent of migrants moving back to Colorado in 2016 who were born in the state.

Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce; Census Bureau, Population Division; Colorado Department of Local Affairs, State Demography Office
Data compilation: Megan Lawson / Headwaters Institute
Infographic design: Luna Anna Archey / HCN



Marlon wears a custom mask in a park in Los Angeles in April. An undocumented immigrant from Guatemala, and an Indigenous K'ich'e, he came to the U.S. in search of a better life. "Ten years ago, they killed one of my sisters in Guatemala. That is the hardest thing in my life. You have an option: You are going to stay there, and you know in two or three years maybe you don't survive — or leave your family, and risk your life to cross the border. But then you confront another struggle."



No safety net

The pandemic is making life even harder for undocumented workers.

PHOTOS AND TEXT BY ELIJAH HURWITZ

UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS COMPRISE 10% of California's workforce. Though an expansion of COVID-19 relief cleared Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom's budget, these vulnerable people are still working at risk of exposure while waiting in limbo for assistance. The pandemic adds a burden to everyone's life, but it disproportionately impacts Latino and Indigenous communities. Elijah Hurwitz, a Los Angeles-based photographer, reveals how one young man on the margins is adapting to the weight of his heavier load.

Marlon (last name withheld to protect his identity) is an Indigenous K'ich'e man who fled the violence in Guatemala many years ago, traveling to the United States atop the dangerous freight train from Southern Mexico known as "La Bestia" ("The Beast"). Marlon came seeking a better life and the opportunity to support his family at home. A spiritual man who rises at 5 a.m. several times a week to train for marathons, Marlon was laid off from his job at a barbershop this spring soon after Los Angeles went into lockdown. With rent and bills to pay and his family in Guatemala counting on his remittances, he began making house calls to cut hair and selling masks on a busy street corner.

"I only want to work," he says. "I want to give my best. I'm not stealing. I'm not doing things to hurt other people."

Hurwitz's photos offer an intimate look at someone without a safety net or the luxury of social distancing or working from home while trying to survive in a largely unforgiving economy. This is Marlon's story, but it is also the story of many other undocumented men and women in America. ☀



Marlon gives a haircut during a house call in the Central Alameda neighborhood of Los Angeles. "That job (cutting hair) is really good, but you can't support your family. You can have a little bit here and send a little bit to your family in another country, but it's not enough. That's why I have two jobs" (above).



Marlon sells masks inside a nearly empty LA Metro train and on a street corner using a mannequin head to display them. "I feel healthy. I go to the street, God covers me," he said. "I feel healthy physically, but mentally, not so much, because a lot of things changed in my life: paying my rent, sending my family money, worrying about bills, my son, everything. But I know we can win; we just have to fight. But it's not easy working on the streets" (above left and right).





Marlon lifts a rock while exercising in Bronson Canyon near the Los Feliz neighborhood where he runs 10 miles from downtown (above left).

Marlon accepts payment during a house call for a longtime customer of the barbershop where he used to work (above right).

Marlon cuts hair as night falls in the South Los Angeles neighborhood of Central Alameda, where many Central American immigrants live. "Most barbers charge \$20, but I'm only charging \$10," he says (left).



Marlon on an early morning run en route to Bronson Canyon, where he often exercises. He likes to spend time outdoors and ran his first marathon last year. "One of my points is to show them (people who are anti-immigrant) that even though there's a lot of bad things, I still give my best. I want to try to change my life. I didn't go to school. Because my father passed away when I was 10 months old, I didn't know my father. I saw my mom struggle to support us, and I promised myself that I have to live, to do something. I want to show other people we can do good things, even though you struggle with a lot here" (below).





The Casa Grande Community

EXPLORING A MONUMENTAL CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The iconic Great House at Casa Grande Ruins National Monument tells a story of cooperation and community in the ancient Southwest. Nearby sites are also a part of this significant story, so a bipartisan (yes, bipartisan) group of Arizona lawmakers has proposed to protect them by expanding the monument's boundaries. Learn how and why this important place continues to bring people together—on the landscape and in our laws.

SUBSCRIPTION *special offer*

Enjoy "The Casa Grande Community" as your first of four issues in your yearlong subscription to *Archaeology Southwest Magazine*. Save \$10 when you subscribe before **October 15, 2020**.

The Casa Grande Community

Archaeology Southwest Magazine
(Volume 33, No. 4)

Edited by William H. Doelle

40 pages, full color

Published by Archaeology Southwest
August, 2020



Archaeology Southwest

(520) 882-6946 | www.archaeologysouthwest.org

YES! I'D LIKE TO SUBSCRIBE TO ARCHAEOLOGY SOUTHWEST *magazine*

~~\$35~~ **\$25**

Your subscription includes a number of great benefits, including free PDF downloads of all Archaeology Southwest Magazine back issues.

YOUR INFORMATION

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____ (optional)
Email _____ (optional)

PAYMENT INFORMATION

My check is enclosed *or* Charge my: Visa MasterCard
payable to Archaeology Southwest Card # _____ Exp. _____ CVV _____

Mail to: Archaeology Southwest, HCN Special, 300 N. Ash Alley, Tucson AZ, 85701

Subscribe online at www.archaeologysouthwest.org/hcn-special

KNOW *why*
this place matters

KNOW *who*
lived here before

KNOW *how*
we learn its story

KNOW *what*
should be protected

When? NOW.



JOIN THE FRONTLINE OF FIGHTING ADDICTION

Earn your Joint MSW/CASAC

Become a Credentialed Alcoholism
& Substance Abuse Counselor

Two outstanding credentials.
One program. No additional cost.

Virtual Classroom format.
Generous scholarships.

Learn More at: yu.edu/casac



Wurzweiler
Wurzweiler School
of Social Work

BUILDING TOMORROW, **TODAY**

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

natural
areas
ASSOCIATION

The information land managers need, without the carbon footprint.

10.13-16.2020
2020 natural areas^v conference

Sierra to Sagebrush: integrating management and stewardship across landscapes

USE CODE HCN20 FOR \$20 OFF REGISTRATION AT naturalareas.org

**LEARN.
EXPLORE.
GROW.
PROTECT!**



HAVE FUN DOING SERIOUS WORK.



Join the fight to protect
America's public
lands and waters for
future generations.

WWW.GREATOLDBROADS.ORG/JOIN-US

**SHOW US YOUR
NEARBY
WEST**



Vote in our photo contest at
hcn.org/photocontest

SPONSORED BY:
ROGUE INDUSTRIES

HCN

LUNA ANNA ARCHEY / HCN

Million Acre Classroom

Environmental Studies at Feather River College



Hybrid and field-based learning with
UNLIMITED access to the Sierra Nevada



Quincy, CA - Heart of the Lost Sierra

www.frc.edu/envr



ZION

is our classroom

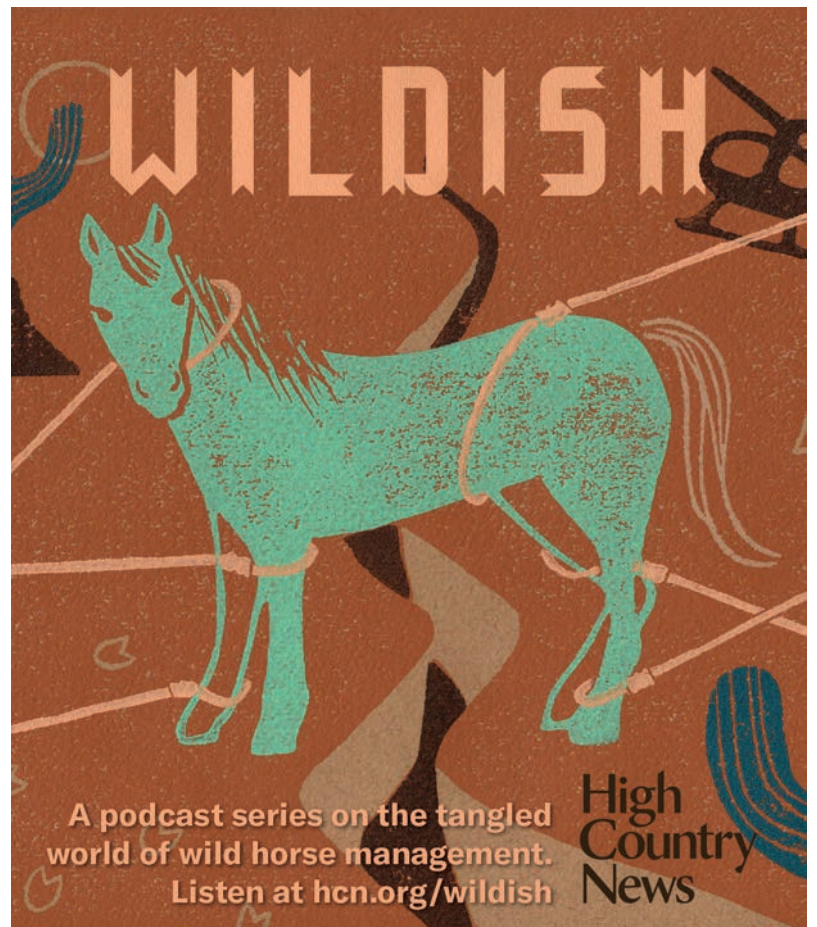
Take a closer look at the
Greater Zion Landscape.

Deepen your Zion experience
with one-to-three day courses
in geology, archaeology,
photography and more, or
call to customize your own
learning adventure.

Start exploring now at
ZIONPARK.ORG

Visit online or call today!
435-772-3264

The Forever Project
is the official
nonprofit partner of
Zion National Park



A podcast series on the tangled
world of wild horse management.
Listen at hcn.org/wildish

High
Country
News

TITANSTRAPS®

STRAP INTO ACTION — FAST, EASY, SECURE TIE-DOWNS



TITANSTRAPS.com

PHONE: 406-556-7234 | EMAIL: INFO@TITANSTRAPS.COM | ESTABLISHED IN 2010 BOZEMAN, MT



Consider Us –
Be a Partner in Justice

Toghoyaqh

Celebrating 25 years
of service

www.nativedisabilitylaw.org
a not for profit 501c3

HighCountryNews

Books & Authors Marketplace

Promote your book, blog,
podcast or publication in
this reader/listener-
focused advertising
marketplace.

October 2020 Issue
Publishes on September 28, 2020
Reserve before September 3, 2020
Art due by September 10, 2020

To reserve, email laurad@hcn.org or call 207-317-0426

Organic
ANCIENT GRAINS.
freshly milled flour
& dry product blends.
Farm direct

Bluebird
Grain Farms

visit us at bluebirdgrainfarms.com

HUGE WIN FOR GRIZZLIES

In an historic victory, our legal team ensured grizzlies in the Yellowstone region will remain protected by the Endangered Species Act.

The court rejected the Trump administration's attempt to put politics before science in determining the fate of these vulnerable bears.

This win for the Yellowstone bears is important for the recovery and survival of grizzly bears across the American West.



**Western
Environmental
Law Center**

We are a nonprofit organization that uses the power of the law to safeguard the public lands, wildlife, and communities of the American West in the face of a changing climate.

JOIN US AT [WESTERNLAW.ORG](https://www.westernlaw.org)



Phoenix's primarily Latino, lower-income Edison-Eastlake neighborhood has a disproportionately high rate of heat-related illness and death compared to the rest of the city.



OVER HEATED

Across the country, extreme heat causes more deaths annually than any other natural disaster. Why aren't we taking it more seriously?

By Jessica Kutz | Photos by Roberto (Bear) Guerra



A parking lot shade structure with a roof composed of solar panels is one example of a forward-thinking heat mitigation strategy that also harnesses the power of the sun (above).

N MARICOPA COUNTY, ARIZONA, where a high school student named Gabe Arroyo lives, all the houses have roofs covered in solar panels and walls with built-in battery storage. Large metal energy collectors, shaped like satellites, sprout amid cacti in the yards. They follow the sun like flowers throughout the day, gathering as much energy as possible before they close up at night.

Arroyo's mother, Elena, is the deputy chief environmental marshal in Arizona. One morning in autumn, she took her son and one of his classmates to a power plant on the western outskirts of Phoenix, so they could record a video for a school project on energy and sustainability while she worked. When they left the house, it was already 101 degrees Fahrenheit; temperatures here can often reach up to 130. Everything Gabe wore was a bright cherry-red: jacket and long pants, topped with a fedora. When his classmate commented, Gabe explained that his clothing was solar-reflective, designed to protect him from the heat. Elena wore a solar-reflective green dress and a wide-brimmed hat.

That summer, two fires at the power plant caused blackouts that left millions of people in the area without air conditioning. "Even with all our storage capacity, if the energy-supply system fails, things shut off, especially climate-control systems in buildings," Gabe told his classmate. "The toll taken by these failures is no joke."

The plant was a graveyard of sustainable-energy technology, all set against the desert's red-rock formations. According to Elena, county officials did not always prioritize sustainability over politics when choosing energy sources. Gabe recounted the history of the Palo Verde nuclear plant, built in 1976, for his video. Despite being out of use for years, it has never been fully decommissioned and still stored radioactive waste. "It's not alive anymore," he said, "but it's not completely dead, either." There were other kinds of infrastructure still in use, including parabolic troughs and a series of cylindrical solar

towers several stories high. Like nuclear power, solar comes with its own trade-offs; the towers regularly incinerated birds that flew too close, and their deaths could have a large ripple effect in the ecosystem.

It was Elena's job to uncover the cause of the fires, and she determined, with Gabe's help, that the solar tower's operating system was to blame. The technology was designed to be self-combusting in order to minimize its ecological damage. "But this, this will kill a lot of people," Gabe said, thinking about the power outages. That day, Gabe made a pledge to work toward better energy solutions, ones that did not pit people against the environment.

If Gabe's promise sounds unusually aspirational, it's because he's a character in a comic book created to teach climate literacy and the future of solar energy to Arizona fifth through eighth graders. *Drawn Futures: Arizona 2045* was written by Gary Cohn and C. Edward Sellner and drawn by Mauro Mandalari; it is one of several projects by the Center for Science and the Imagination, a multidisciplinary hub at Arizona State University in Tempe that fosters collaboration between scientists, engineers, science fiction writers and others. One of the center's main goals is to use fiction to devise solutions to not-so-fictional problems. "For us, that means embracing the idea that there's a variety of possible futures and seeing that as a place for critical thinking," Joey Eschrich, editor and program manager for the center, told me. "It's kind of an empowering idea, that we can still steer the future in some way, that our decisions matter. We're not running down a prescribed path that's preordained."

THE WORLD OF GABE ARROYO and *Arizona 2045* isn't here yet, but it's quickly approaching. This summer, a heat dome — one of the technical climate terms that has filtered into our vernacular — descended onto the U.S., subject-

ing most of the Lower 48 states to temperatures over 90 degrees Fahrenheit for weeks. In cities without robust strategies for alerting residents to the risks of heat illnesses or easy access to air conditioning, such heat waves can be particularly deadly. In 1995, more than 700 people died in a heat wave in Chicago, when temperatures hit 106 degrees.

Even in historically hot places like Phoenix, in Maricopa County, where deaths caused by heat have climbed, cities are being overwhelmed by the heat. This year, the county issued an “excessive heat warning,” which is reserved for dangerously high temperatures, on April 26 — six weeks earlier than last year. The heat directly contributed to the severity of summer wildfires, too. In Tucson, Arizona, one fire devoured 119,000 acres of the Santa Catalina Mountains, north of the city, and blocked access to one of the few recreation outlets Tucson residents have to escape the oppressive temperatures.

The record-breaking temperatures and massive wildfires were a backdrop to the other tensions of this particularly stressful summer. Arizona was one of the epicenters of the coronavirus pandemic; by August, there had been more than 4,000 COVID-19-related deaths. On May 25, the same day that George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis, a young Black man named Dion Johnson was shot in his car by a police officer in Phoenix. Protesters in Arizona subsequently took over roadways and clashed with the police. At an event hosted by Black Lives Matter in Tucson, the temperature reached 103, and volunteers in face masks carried backpacks filled with water, misting the attendees.

These epidemics are all connected: In Arizona and across the country, the communities that experience disproportionate police brutality also face the highest rates of COVID-19, the highest levels of unemployment — and the most exposure to heat-related harm. For many, the present is already feeling

pretty dystopian.

The U.S. government has chosen short-term economic recovery over the health of its citizens during a pandemic; giant corporations have received billions from an aid bill designed for small businesses; and Congress has had trouble agreeing to extend unemployment benefits for tens of millions of Americans. According to the Institute for Policy Studies, a progressive think tank, between March and June, U.S. billionaires saw their wealth increase by more than \$584 billion, even as Americans saw \$6.5 trillion in household wealth disappear.

But while there are federal agencies tasked with keeping track of deaths related to COVID-19, police violence and unemployment, the U.S. lacks widespread heat-surveillance systems. Nor is any federal agency keeping track of deaths caused by heat. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which defines extreme heat simply as summer temperatures that are much hotter than average, estimates that heat is responsible for more than 700 deaths every year, but it relies on data from death certificates, and many counties don't investigate heat as a cause of death. A study published in April by *GeoHealth*, a transdisciplinary journal focused on the environment, estimates that the annual number of heat-related deaths is actually closer to 12,000. Even by the CDC's more conservative count, extreme heat causes more deaths each year than any other weather hazard, including hurricanes, tornados, floods and wildfires.

In many ways, the climate future is already here. It will require an expansion of our imagination, and perhaps a serious look at the past, to figure out what to do next. And as in all good science fiction stories, in the race for climate resilience, a robot is leading the way.

IN LATE MAY, I went for a walk with a robot named MaRTy on the campus of Arizona State University in Tempe. There was an excessive

heat warning for the day, and with COVID-19 lurking, we both wore face masks. MaRTy's fit snugly over a GPS device in the approximate location of his face, while mine pressed down on my nose and made it difficult to breathe. As we rolled along a wide cement sidewalk, MaRTy measured the Mean Radiant Temperature (MRT), which calculates the accumulated

heat of any location as experienced by pedestrians. The difference between the two temperatures was startling: The weather app on my phone said it was 109 degrees Fahrenheit, but MaRTy determined that, with the sun beating down on us, strengthened by its reflection off a nearby glass building, and with heat radiating from the sidewalk, the actual temperature we experienced was a shocking 165 degrees.

In many ways, MaRTy feels like something from a science fiction future, a robot humans can use to find the path of least heat resistance. Yet he is real enough, built in 2016 by Ariane Middel, an urban climate scientist from a small town in the lush German countryside, who is a professor at ASU. Middel made MaRTy from a series of meteorological sensors that record the MRT, humidity, and the air and surface temperatures. His body, which is pulled around in a red garden cart, is a tripod from which three arms, made from metal pipes, hold sets of heat sensors that resemble eyeballs. Like every other social robot (or human being, for that matter), MaRTy has his own Twitter account, @ASUMaRTy, which chronicles his journeys around the country. His bio describes him as a “Shade Hunter, Tree Hugger, Heat Walker, and Thermal Comfort Expert,” and his followers are mostly urban planners and climatologists.

MaRTy had planned to spend this spring and summer visiting Kuwait and Qatar to study new tools being used to mitigate the urban heat island effect, the phenomenon by which cities trap heat during the day and release it at night. But, like many of us, he was forced to cancel his trip because of the virus. For now, MaRTy's staying close to home and measuring microclimates around Phoenix, one of the fastest-warming cities in the U.S. The data he collects is key for establishing a baseline for a warming world, in which different parts of the same city can experience heat in dramatically different ways.



Ariane Middel is a climate scientist at Arizona State University whose research is offering a deeper understanding of the impacts of heat on the urban environment (top). MaRTy is a heat-sensing robot that helps Middel measure the Mean Radiant Temperature (MRT), or how humans experience heat in a specific urban location (above).

According to Climate Central, the Southwest and Alaska are the nation's fastest-warming regions, but the entire world is speeding to a global temperature increase of 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit (1.5 degrees Celsius), a number that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says we need to stay under if we hope to prevent the worst impacts of climate change. If we don't, scientists predict that the impacts will scale up dramatically: Heat waves will become more frequent and intense, 61 million more people will be exposed to drought, biodiversity loss will accelerate, and coastal cities will experience more severe flooding. Even if we prevent that temperature increase — and experts say it's unlikely — it will still take decades to undo the warming that we've already caused.

Some cities have already begun using technology to mitigate rising heat, and MaRTy and Middel are working to determine its effectiveness. Last year, Middel took MaRTy to the San Fernando Valley in Los Angeles, where, in a pilot program, miles of streets were painted with a light gray reflective material called CoolSeal. Officials found that the coating might lower the surface temperature by up to 10 degrees, and Middel was curious whether this approach was working.

Over the course of a summer's day, Middel and a researcher from UCLA took MaRTy on strolls to measure the temperature of the coated pavement, the sidewalk next to it, and the unpainted asphalt streets. Middel found that even though the surface temperature on the coated pavement was 6 degrees cooler, the change in air temperature was negligible, and a small amount of heat reflected back on to pedestrians. Plus, within weeks of being painted, the coating was soiled and spotted by cars with dirty tires and trees that dropped dark-colored berries, diminishing its reflective quality.

Overall, painting streets with CoolSeal did reduce the urban heat island effect, which, Middel



said, is an important benefit. But, much like the technologies in Gabe Arroyo's fictional world, there are still trade-offs. Middel wondered whether painting the roads was worth the effort and cost, since it was so easily undermined by the other realities of city living. Middel co-published her findings in the journal *Environmental Research Letters*, writing that cool pavements were one of many "policy panaceas" that are seen as simple solutions for a complex environmental problem. "You need to have a combination of different strategies," Middel told me. "You can't just say, 'Oh, cool pavement is going to save everything.'"

Another such policy panacea is planting trees — one of the most popular efforts cities are making to lower the effects of urban heat islands. And, to some extent, it's a good choice, since trees have been shown to reduce heat where canopies are thick and provide extensive shade. But trees aren't always feasible in the parts of cities where shade is most desperately needed. In a project Middel gleefully titled "50 Grades of Shade,"

MaRTy measured the effectiveness of trees, solar panels, umbrellas and other measures urban planners might use to provide some relief from the sun. Middel hasn't published her results yet, but one of her research assistants told me that there were already some pretty clear conclusions when it came to trees. The trees that provide the best shade are non-native varieties, such as ficus, which provides a thick canopy of wide, waxy leaves. But those trees also need much more water, which makes them a bad choice for a desert city. Native trees, like mesquite, are better for the Phoenix environment, but they take many years to reach a height where they provide any shade at all, and they need room for root growth, which is not always possible in a hot parking lot or along the side of the road. As a result, cities are constantly losing trees to heat stress, making it hard to grow the urban canopy significantly.

INITIATIVES LIKE TREE PLANTING or coating roads are aimed at making cities more livable and preventing the deaths

and illness caused by heat. But attending to the urban landscape requires addressing the underlying systemic causes of inequality.

According to a study published this year in the journal *Climate*, the neighborhoods formed through segregation and redlining are often the poorest and hottest, with the least amount of shade and green spaces. Edison-Eastlake in central Phoenix, for example, is 79% Latino and has a median household income of around \$10,000 — a fourth of the citywide average. Many residents cannot afford the high electricity bills that come with air conditioning, and heat-associated deaths are 20 times higher in Edison-Eastlake than in other parts of Maricopa County.

Two years ago, in an effort to map the hottest parts of the neighborhood, Middel and MaRTy participated in a heat walk organized by ASU researchers, The Nature Conservancy and area residents. On a typical September day — about 100 degrees — dozens of locals turned out to walk three miles around Edison Park and some common pedestrian routes

with MaRTy and Middel. They stopped at seven stations along the way to fill out forms describing how they felt. Researchers compared their experience to data MaRTy collected at the same spots.

Eva Olivas, a native Phoenician who lives a few minutes outside of Edison-Eastlake, attended the event, but, daunted by the heat, decided to watch the walkers from under a ramada. Olivas is the executive director of the Phoenix Revitalization Corporation, a local nonprofit that focuses on community beautification and affordable housing. For over a decade, she has worked to educate Phoenix residents in low-income neighborhoods about the dangers of heat and how some experience it more directly than others. Since 2009, after a spate of heat-caused deaths hit the neighborhoods Olivas works in, PRC has partnered with the City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department to host free pool parties and informational sessions on extreme heat. People in these neighborhoods rarely realize that they face disproportionate levels of heat compared to wealthier neighborhoods, and they also underestimate the danger such heat poses. “People were taking the heat for granted,” Olivas told me. “It kind of became our summer mission to make sure that people were safe and informed. The heat in Arizona is not like it was 40 years ago when we were kids. It’s different nowadays. It feels different, and it’s much more intense.”

The walk in Edison-Eastlake resulted in a heat action plan developed in workshops with community residents. Their suggestions included an increase in shade and trees along walking routes, as well as the need for a certified heat responders course to train people in heat-related first aid. When the pavement can cause third-degree burns, for example, where do you lay someone down? The residents have also worked with city developers on a new heat-resilient, mixed-income housing project that is being built to replace the crum-

bling Section 8 housing, some of which dates to 1942.

EVEN PEOPLE WHO HAVE SPENT their entire lives in hot climates can miss the signs of heatstroke. What starts with heavy sweating, nausea and muscle cramps can quickly escalate to slurred speech, confusion and seizures — even death.

Human bodies regulate heat in ways that are very similar to the swamp coolers and air conditioners we’ve created to cool us down. On a basic level, air conditioners function by drawing the hot air out of a room and expelling it outside the home. Then they recirculate the cooled air until our thermostats are happy. Our bodies utilize a similar principle. When we get too hot and our blood heats up, our circulatory system expels the heat by pushing the blood to the surface of the skin. The closer the blood gets to the surface, the more it cools. Then we recirculate that cooled blood throughout our bodies, thereby keeping our internal organs from getting too hot. We also sweat — the body’s natural evaporative cooling system. Much like a swamp cooler that blows air over cold water, using the evaporation to make our homes cool and humid, our bodies cool our skin by releasing water through sweat glands, which cools us when it meets movement in the air.

But our bodies can only do these two things for so long. Pumping blood to the surface takes a lot of energy and requires our hearts to work twice as hard as usual. Sweating too much leads to dehydration and a loss of electrolytes. Dehydration causes a drop in blood pressure, which is why, on a hot day, you might feel dizzy when you stand up too quickly. If both of these options go into overdrive, the situation can turn deadly: At some point, we run out of water to sweat, and our blood won’t cool down by rising to the surface of our skin. It’s simply too hot outside, and the air cannot carry the heat away from our skin quickly enough. Like anything else that expends energy — computers,

phones, cars — we’ll eventually overheat. Our internal temperatures will soar too high, and if not dealt with immediately, this can lead to heart, brain and other organ failure.

This is heatstroke, and the elderly are particularly susceptible to it. Seniors have a harder time regulating heat or knowing when they are overheating; many who die from heat live alone, where there is no one to notice the symptoms. Similarly, people who are homeless are at high risk. A study in 2016 by ASU researchers found that the severity of the summer heat didn’t necessarily correlate to more deaths, but an increase in the homeless population might have. As the number of unhoused people in Maricopa County has grown — from 5,700 in 2016 to 7,400 in 2020 — this represents a growing danger. Even so, these groups don’t account for all of the heat-related deaths in Maricopa County, and researchers have struggled to figure out who else has been overlooked.

Last year, Patricia Solís, a geographer and researcher at ASU, was working on a map to help public health officials and area nonprofits determine whether money from utility-assistance programs, like the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), was reaching those most in need. Using data from the Maricopa County Public Health Department, Solís mapped out all the indoor heat-associated deaths and overlaid it with a map of residents who had been receiving

assistance. At the bottom right, she noticed a cluster of deaths where few residents were using utility assistance to pay their energy bills.

One day, Solís, a devoted mapper who keeps the satellite view of Google Earth pulled up on her phone whenever she goes out, noticed a large white spot on her map as she drove past Mesa, which is part of Maricopa County. Curious, she pulled over and zoomed in on her phone to find an area full of mobile homes. With surprise, she realized that it was also the location of the mysterious cluster. “It was literally just concrete and roofs,” she told me. Solís began to explore and discovered that much of the city was filled with mobile home parks.

In Mesa, palm trees speckle the skyline, giving the town a vacation-y feel, but little functional shade. In one of the mobile home parks I visited, hundreds of rectangular homes were densely packed on asphalt with very few trees. The parks vary widely in condition, as do the homes, which range from elderly trailers to modern manufactured houses. Newer models have amenities like air conditioning and can be well insulated, but mobile homes built before 1974, when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development set federal standards, tend to be poorly insulated and made from materials that are entirely inappropriate for a desert, like metal. Still, mobile homes provide affordable housing for lower-income residents and

“It’s kind of an empowering idea, that we can still steer the future in some way, that our decisions matter.”

A woman seeks shelter from the sun at a bus stop in downtown Phoenix in late July. With a proliferation of concrete and glass buildings and very little shade-producing vegetation, downtown areas are often some of the hottest parts of cities, contributing to what’s known as the urban heat island effect (*facing page*).

retirees, who often live on fixed incomes, and they make up a high percentage of the housing stock in Mesa.

Solís decided to study how heat impacted the residents of mobile parks across the city. Throughout last summer, she worked with 60 mobile home residents in East Mesa to understand how they were affected by the heat. Over videochat, she described the range in homes to me. “You might see a snowbird coming from Minnesota, you know, in a pretty nice modern home that’s parked there that they just bought, next to an old unit from 1970 and the window AC unit is out, next to a guy living in an RV paying for his own chemotherapy and dreaming of living on a boat,” Solís said. “True story. I’m thinking of actual people when I say that.”

Solís monitored each home’s daily temperatures and interviewed the residents about how they stayed cool. One person reported spending \$400 a month on electricity, whereas the state’s average electricity bill is \$133. Other residents chose to play a sort of heat dance in their homes, moving from room to room as the sun moved through the sky, rationing the air conditioning for the day’s worst hours.

Solís’ map showed that many of the people who died in mobile homes weren’t receiving any kind of utility assistance — which was surprising, because heat deaths are over-represented in these communities. In Maricopa County, people who live in mobile homes make up just 4.9% of the county population, but in 2019 they accounted for 40% of indoor heat-associated deaths. Solís discovered that a trailer on wheels does not qualify for LIHEAP, because the government doesn’t consider it a house. In parks where the mobile home manager, not the individual residents, pays the bills, the residents have difficulty qualifying for aid.

IT’S NOT SURPRISING that most people’s homes demonstrate a way of thinking about construction that doesn’t match a desert lifestyle;



for at least a century, housing and other aspects of Southwestern urban geography have reflected tastes developed for the East. Up until the late 1800s, homes in cities like Tucson were built with the desert environment in mind. Sonoran-style row houses were made from locally sourced saguaro ribs with thick adobe walls of mud and straw. Homes had high ceilings, sometimes with transom windows to let the heat escape. Doors on either end of a shotgun-style layout allowed for natural cross-ventilation. These houses retained heat in the winter and stayed cool during the hot summer.

A few remnants of this more climate-adapted building style can still be found in parts of the Southwest, mostly in areas that have gained historic preservation status. Barrio Viejo, a protected neighborhood near downtown Tucson, has one of the largest concentrations of original urban adobe architecture in the U.S. The streets are lined with row houses, whose front doors open onto the street. Some have fallen into disrepair, with exposed adobe bricks and sunken roofs, while others have been restored as the neighborhood has become gentrified, and are now painted in vibrant colors like turquoise, lime-green and coral.

Lydia Otero, a historian who grew up in Tucson, quoted an architect in her book *La Calle* who described Barrio Viejo as an example of “man’s resourcefulness in

solving the problem of survival in the hostile climates of the Southwest.” But by the 1900s, more and more Anglos had moved to Arizona, and this style of architecture, which was associated with Mexican-Americans, became undesirable. “Transplanted ethnocentric ideas eventually transformed the physical landscape in ways that expressed the newcomers’ desire to expunge Tucson’s ‘foreign’ characteristics — its Mexican past and people,” Otero wrote. The newcomers wanted something more “American”: brick houses with pitched metal roofs and green lawns. Even though buildings like these were quick to heat up, slow to cool down, and required massive reserves of water, they began to spread throughout the city. By the late 1960s, many of the desert-adapted houses that kept the Southwest sustainable were paved over for an urban renewal project that systematically displaced the city’s Mexican-, Chinese- and African-American residents.

Around the same time, air conditioning became increasingly affordable, leading to a population boom in hot-weather states like Arizona and Florida. Currently, 87% of all homes in the U.S. are equipped with some form of air conditioning, access to which is one of the greatest defenses against extreme heat. But as *Arizona 2045* makes clear, air conditioning comes with expensive ecological trade-offs. In urban areas,

it creates an inescapable feedback loop, contributing to the urban heat island effect by discharging waste heat into the city and raising air temperatures at night, increasing the need for even more air conditioning. More and more people living in hotter and hotter cities will further strain power grids.

There are alternatives, however, most of which require a return to place-based architecture. Sonoran-style housing was preceded by Indigenous architecture, which was developed to be in tune with the environment. “If you were to look historically at Chaco Canyon or Mesa Verde, the ways in which you’re kind of designing for the various times of years, understanding sun paths, that’s just inherent in Indigenous architecture,” Joseph Kunkel, a Northern Cheyenne citizen and executive director of the Sustainable Native Communities Design Lab of the MASS design group, told me. “Understanding your place, your context — that was designing for climate resiliency.”

Kunkel has worked on several housing projects that incorporate both cultural and environmental characteristics. Housing, like many other programs in Indian Country, is plagued by federal underfunding and a lack of consideration for Native culture or tradition. And much of the affordable housing in places like the Navajo Nation exists in the form of mobile homes. According to the CDC, in addition to poor housing —

and perhaps because of it — extreme heat impacts Native Americans more than any other ethnic group in the United States.

In 2006, Kunkel's partner started a project called the Elder Hogan Homes Initiative, which collaborated with Navajo elders to create low-impact and "super-insulated" housing that functioned off-grid with the help of a solar panel. "Not because it is something cool to be doing," Kunkel pointed out, "but because of the lack of access to the grid as a whole."

Kunkel thinks a hybrid between Indigenous and Western architecture styles could lead to more sustainable designs, ones that incorporate modern technology to achieve the same qualities found in the place-based architecture perfected by Indigenous people over thousands of years. "It's not rocket science," Kunkel told me. "It's just things you should be doing when designing a building." In some instances, it is as simple as using a high-quality insulation that, though more expensive to install, lowers cooling and heating costs, working much the way natural adobe has for millennia. In order to have affordable housing, you need architecture that makes energy bills affordable, too. "I look at air conditioning and these cooling systems as a Band-Aid," Kunkel said. "I mean, we're trying to cool a building that was improperly designed for its climate. How do we start to really think about ways of super insulating and creating passive-solar housing, so we can actually prevent the need to have to cool a home unit for a family that cannot afford it?" If we can't do that, he said, then we've failed.

WESTERN HOMES, whether located in the rapidly warming desert, on coastlines with rising sea levels or amid the fire-prone wildland-urban interface, are increasingly susceptible to climate change. Every summer, federal and state agencies deploy thousands of firefighters to protect residents and their property, while the Federal Emergency Management

Agency (FEMA) responds to floods, hurricanes and other disasters. Extreme heat, however, is entirely unlike these. Where most weather catastrophes can be neatly tied to specific events that cause severe destruction, heat is invisible, ever-present and slow-moving, silently stealing lives as summers intensify.

Ladd Keith, a researcher at the University of Arizona who works at the intersection of urban planning, governance and climate change, told me that while those other climate disasters will surely get worse, we at least have some governance structures to deal with them. "When those risks start to increase, you already have professionals in place and legal frameworks in place to kind of tweak them and respond to them," Keith said. "Heat is a little bit different. Heat requires a new set of departments and disciplines to come together in a way that they haven't before." Keith wants the federal government to form a heat agency that would coordinate resources on a national scale, deploy heat responders to rural communities and cities during heat waves, and be part of a long-term plan for heat. Urban planners and public health officials need a nexus of collaboration with other stakeholders, he said. While some of this work is happening locally in historically hot cities like Phoenix, much of the country is completely unprepared.

In addition to the persistent risks of summer heat, there are also disaster scenarios to worry about. Imagine Phoenix in the middle of a heat wave when a blackout occurs, as in *Arizona 2045*. Perhaps a cyber attack causes a grid failure, or the power is shut down to prevent wildfires, as happened last year in Northern California. David Hondula, a researcher at ASU, recently interviewed Phoenix residents about their possible response to a blackout. He discovered that most people planned to stay in their homes, leaving only if the outage lasted unusually long and their homes became dangerously hot. At that point, the resulting mass exodus would cause gridlock that



Eva Olivas, executive director of the Phoenix Revitalization Corp., which focuses on making low-income communities more livable (top). Xavier Fajardo tries to stay cool in the excessive heat outside his family's apartment near Edison Park (center). A traditional adobe building in the historic Barrio Viejo neighborhood in Tucson, Arizona (above). Composite view of a mobile home park in Mesa, Arizona (facing page).

could trap thousands of people on the interstate in the middle of the desert. And gas pumps need electricity, so once cars ran out of fuel and their air conditioners shut off, the situation could become deadly.

A disaster of that nature is certainly important to plan for. Should it occur, it might be possible to activate FEMA, much the way that it has been used for the coronavirus. But that doesn't help the thousands of people who are already dying from extreme heat every year.

There are indications, however, that political interest is growing around the issue. In July, Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass., introduced a bill titled the Preventing Health Emergencies And Temperature-related Illness and Deaths Act, or HEAT Act. It proposes establishing a committee drawn from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Defense, Department of Health and Human Services, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of Agriculture, among others, to strengthen interagency efforts to address the hazards caused by heat. The committee would be run under the National Integrated Heat Health Information System, which was created under the Obama administration to distribute information and fund heat research. The bill would establish a \$100 million grant program for community projects to reduce the impact of extreme heat, and authorize the committee to study heat-related gaps and improve warning systems. The legislation is unlikely to pass, but its existence implies that people outside of historically hot states are starting to take note.

TO ADDRESS EXTREME HEAT and the other daunting problems of climate change, we need to think in ways we haven't before. As it is, the people doing the planning, whether in imaginary worlds or real ones, tend to be the most powerful. If the coronavirus pandemic is any indicator, the wealthy will insulate them-
(continued on page 46)

Spread the News, Take Us Higher

Dear Friends,

SINCE 1970, HIGH COUNTRY NEWS has sought to capture a region that holds a special place in the hearts and minds of people like us — a place that humbles me.

Back when I was an *HCN* intern in 1996, before I became the editor, I learned to appreciate this organization's important role in leading the conversation about the ever-evolving West. Now, as publisher, I know that we must continue to do so in these new and very different times.

Today, as local and regional news organizations struggle to survive, we find ourselves in a unique position, thriving and even expanding our work thanks to the wholehearted support of readers like you. Did you know that you provide \$3 out of every \$4 that fund this independent, nonprofit organization?

You are what makes *HCN* different from most other media, and you are the reason we are strong and growing.

This year, *HCN* turns a remarkable 50 years old. Now, to gear up for the next 50, we've set out to raise \$10 million.

Those dollars will allow us to rebuild our website, turning it into an engine that draws in new subscribers. They will help us make better use of social media and discussion platforms to draw people into the conversation about where the West is headed. And they will endow an intern program that has already nurtured more than 250 people who have gone on to be leaders in government, business, academia and journalism.

I know this goal sounds daunting. The good news is, we've already raised \$5 million, thanks to the commitment of several major donors and members of our board of directors. We're relying on you and hundreds of others like you to help with the rest.

Read on to learn more about the work that we're doing, and please consider a gift to help us on our way. You can use the envelope in this issue, or visit hcn.org/50-years

Thank you, dear readers, for being the heart and soul of this Western institution for the past 50 years. Here's to 50 more.

Greg Hanscom, executive director and publisher



High Country News editorial staff and colleagues at a 2018 editorial retreat. HCN photo

Invest in HCN's Vision for the Future

Our fundraising priorities:

- 1. DEEPEN AND GROW OUR COVERAGE OF THE WEST**
 - ▶ Expand our team and diversify our staff of writers and editors
 - ▶ Fund more of the deep-dive reporting projects that have been our hallmark for 50 years
- 2. ENGAGE A LARGER, MORE DIVERSE AUDIENCE**
 - ▶ New marketing initiatives to reach 50,000 print subscribers and millions online
 - ▶ Double our free student subscription program (HCNU)
 - ▶ Put HCN in the hands of regional and national lawmakers
- 3. ADVANCE TECHNOLOGY THAT SUPPORTS OUR READERS**
 - ▶ Improve customer service with new database technologies
 - ▶ Upgrade website and digital archives to improve reader experience
 - ▶ Enhance cyber-security to ensure the integrity of our journalism
- 4. STABILIZE AND SUSTAIN HCN'S BUSINESS MODEL**
 - ▶ Bolster our fundraising capacity
 - ▶ Increase our financial reserves to help us weather the changing economic environment
- 5. ENDOW OUR INTERN AND FELLOW PROGRAM**
 - ▶ Train and inspire the next generation of media professionals
 - ▶ Employ twice the number of interns to work with our team



Krystal Quiles / HCN

WE'D LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

In the next 10 issues of the magazine, we'll be revisiting some of the most poignant, pivotal moments HCN has brought you over the last five decades — and we'd love you to join us on this stroll down memory lane. Send us your pictures and tell us your stories, and some of them will be shared here on these pages: What were the defining issues for the West in the 1980s? Let us know: hcne.ws/my-west

You Take Us Higher

Thank you donors, readers and friends, for investing in independent journalism for the West with your contribution and commitment to our 50th anniversary campaign! Your vote of confidence and your demand for quality reporting have kept this homegrown operation alive and thriving. Now – with your help - HCN is launching into the next 50 years.

CHAMPION OF THE WEST (\$50,000>)

Anonymous
In memory of David & Mary Ann Elwood
Brian Beitner | Boulder, CO
BF Foundation | Snowmass, CO
David Bomderman | Fort Worth, TX
Katherine Sharp Borgen | Denver, CO
Tom & Sonya Campion Fund, Seattle Foundation | Seattle, WA
EMA Foundation | Albuquerque, NM
Jay Kenney & Emily Sinclair | Golden, CO
Kingfisher Fund, Community Foundation of Utah | Salt Lake City, UT
Carl & Judy Ferenbach | Boston, MA
Ford Foundation | New York, NY
Gates Family Foundation | Denver, CO
Dick & Marianne Kipper | Woody Creek, CO
Rick Tallman & Lisa Flores | Denver, CO

INDEPENDENT NEWS GUARDIAN (\$25,000 - \$49,999)

Audrey Benedict | Ward, CO
Mark Harvey | Basalt, CO
William & Flora Hewlett Foundation
Peter Kirsch & Pat Reynolds | Denver, CO
Peter & Dawn Larmer | Fort Collins, CO
Margaret LeMone | Boulder, CO
Turnip Top Foundation | Boulder, CO
Maria Fernandez-Gimenez & Devin Odell | Fort Collins, CO
Dennis & Trudy O'Toole | Santa Fe, NM
Nancy Stephens & Rick Rosenthal and the Rosenthal Family Foundation | Stamford, CT
Susan Tweit | Santa Fe, NM

MEDIA LEADER (\$10,000 - \$24,999)

Anonymous (3)
Tamia Marg & Tom Anderson | Berkeley, CA
Jay Dean & Stefani Bittner | Lafayette, CA
The Engel Fund, San Diego Foundation | Del Mar, CA
Marla Painter & Mark Rudd | Albuquerque, NM
Charley & Lanora Rosenberry | Vashon, WA
John & Charlotte Wunderlich | Bethesda, MD

PUBLISHER'S CIRCLE (\$5,000-\$9,999)

In memory of Patsy Batchelder
In memory of Peggy Rosenberry
Peter Gilman | Boulder, CO
John Heyneman Jr. & Arin Waddell | Sheridan, WY
Samaria Jaffe | San Rafael, CA
Peter Wiley | San Francisco, CA

PHILANTHROPIST (\$2,500 - \$4,999)

In memory of Ted Smith & Emily Jackson
John P. & Laurie McBride | Aspen, CO
John Belkin | Aspen, CO
Tracy Ehlers, Boulder, CO
Bubba Fund, Rhode Island Foundation | Providence, RI
Judy Donald | Wallingford, CT

Karl Flessa | Tucson, AZ
Harper Hall & Seth Cothrun | San Luis Obispo, CA
Nicole Lampe | Portland, OR
Daniel Stonington | Olympia, WA
Florence Williams | Washington, DC

STEWARD (\$1,000 - \$2,499)

Anonymous
In memory of Dennis Coffman
In memory of Ed Marston
In memory of Nancy Jean Ring
Warren Cornwall | Bellingham, WA
Virginia Darvill | Mount Vernon, WA
Garfield & Hecht PC | Aspen, CO
Thomas Gougeon & Donna Middlebrooks | Denver, CO
Greg Hanscom & Tara Thomas | Seattle, WA
Laura Helmuth | Rockville, MD
Mari N. Jensen | Tucson, AZ
Peter McBride | Basalt, CO
Stephen Miller & Mary Rook | Bend, OR
John V. Molenar | Fort Collins, CO
Estee Rivera & Eric Murdock | Estes Park, CO
David Nimkin | Salt Lake City, UT
Roy O'Connor | Missoula, MT
Raynelle Rino-Southon | Oakland, CA
Wayne Roth & Kathleen Alcalá | Bainbridge Island, WA
Tutti & Gary Skaar | Bozeman, MT
Phil & Mary Stern | Allenspark, CO
David & Louise Stonington | Seattle, WA
Nancy Hamill Winter | Woodstock, VT

GUARANTOR (\$500-\$999)

Anonymous
In memory of Eric Hare
Heather Abel & Adam Zucker | Northampton, MA
Prentice & Heidi Bloedel | Port Townsend, WA
Gary Eastman & Katherine Reid | Fort Collins, CO
Liz Ickes | Asheville, NC
Sarah Layer | Carson City, NV
Sydney Shafroth Macy | Boulder, CO
Nick Neely | Hailey, ID
Marcus Sani | Santa Fe, NM
JT Thomas | Ridgway, CO

BENEFACTOR (\$250-\$499)

Anonymous (2)
In memory of Eric Dissel, Mountain Man
In memory of Ed Marston
In memory of J.A. Merchant, born in Paonia, CO, 1898
Dinah Bear | Tucson, AZ
Bob Bolin | Mancos, CO
Jeannie Clinkenbeard | Denver, CO
Gay Dillingham | Santa Fe, NM
Michelle Drake | Denver, CO
Dan J. Egan | Milwaukie, WI
Bob Fulkerson | Reno, NV
Josh Garrett-Davis | Los Angeles, CA
Sarah Gilman | Winthrop, WA
Emily Guerin | Santa Monica, CA

Samuel & Wendy Hitt | Santa Fe, NM
Richard & Linda Howe | San Antonio, TX
Lucy Moore | Santa Fe, NM
Ann Mullins | Aspen, CO
Emilene Ostlind | Laramie, WY
Mark Winne | Santa Fe, NM
MaryAnn Wright | Salt Lake City, UT

SPONSOR (\$150-\$249)

In honor of Jacqueline Wolber
In memory of Kurt Kumli
Mason Adams | Check, VA
Steve & Ellen Adelson | Tulsa, OK
Larry Beaver | Westminster, CO
Sandy Buffett | Albuquerque, NM
Scott & Jill Eckberg | Clarkston, WA
Don & Roberta Hall | Corvallis, OR
Linda Hamilton | Fort Collins, CO
Marjorie B. Kay | Royal Oaks, CA
Judith & Edward Kinzie | Salida, CO
Steve MacDonald | Wheat Ridge, CO
Robyn Morrison | Casper, WY
Bryan Pollard | Farmington, AR
Peter & Marita Prandoni | Santa Fe, NM
Leon Shaul & Kathleen Jensen | Douglas, AK
Alice & Michael R. Smith | Elk Grove, CA
Farwell Smith & Linda McMullen | Big Timber, MT
Strategic by Nature | Littleton, CO
Tim Westby | Tucson, AZ
Marian Woessner | Carson City, NV
Danielle Venton | Petaluma, CA

PATRON (\$75-\$149)

Anonymous (4)
James F. Adams | Highlands, NC
Stuart Ambler | Berkeley, CA
Brendon Bosworth | Capetown, South Africa
Dana Coffield | Lafayette, CO
Sarah Dry | Philadelphia, PA
Jenny & Mark Davison | Hailey, ID
Brian Erwin | Santa Rosa, CA
Benjamin & Cynthia Everitt | Ivins, UT
Clay Fong | Boulder, CO
Marshal Hamilton | Media, PA
Laura Hubbard | Hailey, ID
Janet Killeen | Kalispell, MT
A. Koh | Alhambra, CA
Kenneth Luttrell | Sacramento, CA
Scott McKay | Nephi, UT
Lisa McKhann | Duluth, MN
Adam & Nancy McLane | Helena, MT
Donica Harrington Mensing, a grateful intern | Reno, NV
Melinda H. Reed | Wheat Ridge, CO
John & Diane Reich | Sedona, AZ
Charles Simenstad & Stephanie Martin | Seattle, WA
Colleen Truly | Crested Butte, CO
Robert Wigington | Boulder, CO
Larry & Becky Williams | Columbia Falls, MT
David Williamson | Alexandria, VA

FRIEND (\$35-\$74)

Anonymous (8)
In memory of Jennifer Brandt
In honor of John Howard Flint
In memory of Paul D. Hess Sr.
In memory of Tia Pullen
Arthur Alfreds | Albuquerque, NM
Marjane Ambler | Lander, WY
Andrea Appleton | Baltimore, MD
Tammy Beckwith | Stamford, VT
Norris Boothe | Plummer, ID
Bert & Cathie Brumbaugh | Camas, WA
Andrew Buffmire | Salt Lake City, UT
Eve Byron | Missoula, MT
Jeff Chen | Anchorage, AK
Bill & Sarah Dakin | Bigfork, MT
Laura De Vos | Seattle, WA
Gloria Dickie | Victoria, BC
Frank Emmerson | Williamsburg, VA
Jeff Fereday & Kay Hummel | Boise, ID
Tim Fischer | Firestone, CO
Gregory Forest | Kingman, AZ
David Futey | Colorado Springs, CO
Lois Anne Gaul | Denver, CO
Ben Goldfarb | Hastings On Hudson, NY
Bryce Gray | St. Louis, MO
Dave Havlick & Marion Hourdequin | Colorado Springs, CO
Chrystal Helton | Klamath, CA
Conner Henry | Claremont, CA
Mary & Greg Holm | Denver, CO
Karen Howe | Crawford, CO
Dorothy Hudson | Tacoma, WA
Walter Hunner | Electric City, WA
Robina E. Ingram Rich | Lake Oswego, OR
Meredith Jacob | Washington, DC
Jack Judkins | Fairfax, CA
Sarah Keller | Bozeman, MT
Molly Kelly | Helena, MT
Tracy Korb & Christopher Ross | Durango, CO
Keely Kriho | LaGrange Park, IL
John Krist | Ojai, CA
Frances Schneider Liau | Pasadena, CA
Anna Mahorski | Boulder, CO
Molly McDevitt | Jackson, WY
Kristy McFarland | Crested Butte, CO
Anne Nelson | Watkins, MN
Soren Nicholson | Fort Collins, CO
Daniel O'Connell | Eureka, CA
Stephanie Paige Ogburn | Fort Collins, CO
John H. & Barbara Ormiston | Hamilton, MT
Julia Page | Boise, ID
George Prudent | Woodruff, WI
Penelope J. Quintana | Solana Beach, CA
Randall P. Rains | Crane, MO
Jerry Ricciotti | Salt Lake City, UT
Rodolfo Rosales | San Antonio, TX
Francis Sandoval | Denver, CO
Kate Schimel | Boulder, CO

"I've been reading *High Country News* for a long time. I wrote some articles and had photos published, too. The first article I wrote for *HCN* was in 1976. My late husband, David, and I got to know Ed and Betsy Marston well over the years. And I've enjoyed watching the publication grow and change — even as our world is changing, and we're really seeing effects of things like climate change.

"Of course, *High Country News* is on top of it. Reporting.

"What I appreciate most is how they report the facts, and journalists who can write well about them. And I think the people who write for *High Country News* are excellent."

**—Jan Robertson, Boulder, Colorado,
reader and contributor since 1975**



Inspired by the women's movement and its use of the term "male chauvinist pig" to mock men who saw themselves as superior, a friend of Jan and David Robertson's affectionately dubbed Jan's all-women crew of intrepid hikers and skiers the "Female Chauvinist Pigs." In this 1974 photo, Jan's husband, David, smiles as he displays the flag he sewed to honor the adventures of her group. **Courtesy of Jan Robertson**

Susan Schlosser | Ashland, OR
Alan Schussman | Flagstaff, AZ
Joel Shechter | Missoula, MT
Arla Shephard | Allyn, WA
Leila Shepherd | Twin Falls, ID
Judy Showers | Sparks, NV
Emily Steinmetz | Chestertown, MD
Deborah Stewart | Bellingham, WA
Meera Subramanian | West Barnstable, MA
Marshall Swearingen | Livingston, MT
Terray Sylvester | Hood River, OR
Thomas R. Thompson | Santa Fe, NM
Luis Torres | Santa Cruz, NM
Sarah Tory | Carbondale, CO
Regina Wandler | Albuquerque, NM
Luann Waters | Wynnewood, OK
Jim & Teresa Weedon | Aurora, CO
Jim Wilkinson | Boulder, CO
Brett Wilkison | Santa Rosa, CA
Joshua Zaffos | Fort Collins, CO

Want to add your name to this list of dedicated readers in support of our 50th anniversary campaign? Visit hcn.org/launch-HCN or use the enclosed envelope to send in your donation. Thank you.



"*High Country News* has always been about making the world a better place. Now, we see that journalism is under attack — a major attack on an institution that is so central to our democracy. And it's an amazing fact that *HCN* hasn't bent at all. They continue doing their important work as journalists. And so that's what I admire, and ... I hope we can get better-paid journalists and more of them, you know?"

**—Luis Torres, Santa Cruz, New Mexico,
reader and board member since 1995**

"*High Country News* interests me as a source of the kind of information and commentary that I don't usually see in the news that I normally look at on the web. *HCN* covers the day-to-day issues that affect people who live in the West, as well as environmental and energy policy. You can read about the direct impacts and implications for people who live in the West.

"I really appreciate information on overlooked regions or overlooked groups of people — hearing different perspectives on what's happening and what's meaningful.

"I'm also interested in history, and I feel that *HCN* provides an important lens into the history of the West from the perspective of Indigenous people."

—Leslie Kautz, Los Angeles, California, reader since 2018





By Sara Porterfield | Illustrations by Sarah Gilman

‘Somebody has to keep people on their toes’

How *High Country News* came to be.

THE SUMMER OF 1969 was a momentous one: The Stonewall riots publicly asserted the rights of the LGBTQ community; Apollo 11 landed on the moon; a music festival in Woodstock, New York, became shorthand for the counterculture movement. But in Lander, Wyoming, a very different kind of drama played out in the classified section of *Camping News Weekly*. “GIRL CAMPER would like to enlist the aid of boy camper,” the first ad read. “Please bring double sleeping bag and rare Yeti (sic) stomach. Camp location: two miles above Townsend Creek.” Boy Camper — confused — replied in the next week’s issue: “Filled with what and where the heck is Townsend Creek.” Girl Camper responded the following week that she might blaze a trail for Boy Camper to find her tent, though either she didn’t or he couldn’t follow it. By the end of August, Girl Camper had grown impatient: “the world has been beating a path to my tent flap,” she wrote. “If you don’t find Townsend Creek this week, you’re out of luck.” After this, their budding romance disappeared from the paper’s pages.

This seemingly small, personal drama provides a window into the origins of the magazine you hold in your hands — and a place to begin telling the story of this rather unlikely and remarkable publication. *Camping*

News Weekly, where our star-crossed campers traded flirtations, would become *High Country News* just five months later, signaling a shift from a focus on outdoor recreation to a decision to take on the mantle of environmental activism through the conviction of its founder, a Lander native named Tom Bell. From its inception, it was the kind of publication that published material both local and somehow universal, like the (perhaps) unrequited yearnings of two young people, and it slowly became a voice for the Western United States. It examined the effects of the mining industry in Wyoming, but also served as a platform for the burgeoning national environmental movement: on overpopulation, pollution, energy production, ecology and the preservation of wilderness areas. Over the five decades *High Country News* has been in print, it has maintained that wide-ranging curiosity about the region, seeking to create a community “for people who care about the West.”

On its 10th anniversary, Bell called *High Country News* “a freakish, oddball curiosity in the eyes of most traditional journalists.” To established publications, Bell wrote, it was at its founding and remained, a decade in, “like a bumblebee to an aerodynamicist — the darn thing isn’t supposed to fly, but it does.” So how did this bumblebee get off the ground in the first place, and how has it stayed aloft for 50 years now? Like the environmental movement itself, *HCN* was a product of the 1960s, a decade that convinced Americans that activism could create real political and cultural change.

Bell founded the publication believing that people could make a difference, as long as they were educated and informed about the issues. *High Country News* evolved alongside the modern environmental movement. Guided by Bell's experience as a Westerner and his dedication to environmental activism, the paper both emerged and succeeded because of the American public's increasing concern about the impacts of human activity on public and environmental health.

Perhaps most importantly, *High Country News* became a much-needed resource. The publication brought together national, regional and local environmental issues and causes, providing not only the information its readers needed to become informed activists, but also a sense of collective effort and a shared cause. In doing so, it helped create, shape and sustain the environmental movement and its effects in the West.

Girl Camper and Boy Camper's personal drama played out on the Bridger-Teton National Forest south of Lander, against the backdrop of national political and cultural unrest. Throughout the 1960s, the United States witnessed protest and activism from diverse groups, including the African American civil rights movement, the American Indian Movement

(AIM) and the Chicano United Farm Workers. White college students joined the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and feminists mobilized in the National Organization for Women (NOW). These grassroots movements put pressure on American cultural and governmental institutions to reform from the ground up, while John F. Kennedy's New Frontier and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society promised reform and equality from the top down. There were groundbreaking legislative victories, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the end of tribal relocation and termination, and legislative protection against discrimination in the workplace.

But other events helped define the decade as one of violence, anxiety and increasing disillusionment. Kennedy's assassination in Dallas in November of 1963 dashed the hopes of his New Frontier program, and Martin Luther King's assassination outside his motel room in Memphis, Tennessee, five years later made activists question the efficacy of nonviolent protest. And while legislative victories promised a brighter future for minority groups, tangible progress in alleviating poverty, attaining social equity and extending government aid remained unrealized despite more than a decade of struggle for equal rights.

The events that marked the 1960s and continued into the 1970s track with *High Country News*' early years: advocacy and activism fueled by optimism and followed by defeat, or, occasionally, victory. The successes provided just enough optimism to continue the fight. By the end of this tumultuous decade, (predominantly white) America had tired of the cycle. But a new movement was emerging to help unify many Americans in the face of their disillusionment: the environmental movement, with *High Country News* poised to provide an outlet for those hungry for news about the West and in-depth reporting on environmental threats in the region.

CAMPING NEWS WEEKLY'S founding year saw a series of human-caused environmental disasters that captured Americans' attention in a new way. First, in January 1969, an oil platform blowout off the coast of Santa Barbara, California, coated the idyllic town's beaches in crude oil. Then, in June, the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, Ohio, polluted by oil refineries and industrial waste, caught fire. By the end of the 1960s, Americans were primed to view these disasters through the lens of that decade's advocacy and activism. Lakes and rivers were no longer safe for drinking, fishing or swimming. Pesticides, including DDT, threatened the extinction of entire species, most famously the bald eagle, America's national symbol. These concerns were prompted, in large part, by the 1962 publication of *Silent Spring*, biologist Rachel Carson's landmark exposé of the danger of industrial chemicals. Carson warned that the by-products of the post-World War II military-industrial complex and new kinds of manufacturing processes and consumer products were wreaking havoc on the nation's ecosystems, causing not only environmental chaos but also public health impacts. Her book illuminated the idea of ecology, which she described as "interrelationships" and "interdependence," and the events of 1969 awakened Americans to this "web of life" in which they and all living creatures were bound.

This marked a shift in how Americans thought about the environment. Until the late 1960s, the mainstream and mostly white conservation movement had focused on preserving natural landscapes for recreational and aesthetic purposes. This cause dates back to the second half of the 19th century with the foundation of the first national parks and the formation of organizations like the Sierra Club. Preservationists like John Muir believed in protecting "nature for nature's sake," while conservationists like Gifford Pinchot believed in managing natural resources to provide "the greatest good for the greatest number." In the mid-20th century, conservation became the standard label for what we would today call "environmental"



activism, coinciding with an increasingly popular movement to preserve wild places in the post-World War II U.S.

High Country News evolved in tandem with this movement. Over the course of its first year in print — and through its transition from *Camping News Weekly* to *High Country News* — the publication shifted from disseminating “the latest information on places to camp and things to do and see all over the country,” as the May 2, 1969, inaugural issue did, to covering environmental causes in the West and nationally. To Bell, who wrote for *Camping News Weekly* from the first issue and became increasingly involved until he assumed control in late 1969, it was only natural for hunters, anglers, hikers and those concerned with causes like wilderness preservation to join the burgeoning environmental movement. “We who call ourselves conservationists,” Bell wrote in his regular “High Country” column on May 23, 1969, “would like to think we are trying to preserve a world which is clean, healthful, and fit to live in.” To Bell, it was obvious and logical that Westerners who recreated on and worked to protect public lands would take on national-level issues and causes as well as threats to their own backyards, which were becoming more and more alarming in the aftermath of events like the Santa Barbara oil spill.

Bell’s increasing influence on the content of *Camping News Weekly* and its transition to *High Country News* grew out of his own experiences and conviction that Westerners needed to be informed environmental activists. Bell was born April 12, 1924, in Winton, Wyoming, a small coal-mining camp near Rock Springs. He spent his childhood near Lander, the town where he would later found *High Country News*. A biography written for his reception of the Society of American Travel Writers’ 1973 Connie Award describes Bell as “a native Wyomingite, of pioneer stock, who grew up on a small ranch in the high country where he often dreamed of himself as a mountain man when the West was young.”

Growing up close to the land shaped Bell’s environmental sensibilities and gave him a deep sense of the interconnectedness of the natural world, a view that shaped his life, career and *High Country News*. He described his walks to school as a young boy as

pretty tough at times. But they were confidence builders for that little boy, and the beginning of my real education. From that time on I walked the ditches and creeks, the hills, the ridges and valleys. And eventually I walked the mountains. When I wasn’t walking, I was riding a horse. Through it all, I was wide-eyed and curious. Who knows how a boy’s eyes become trained to detect the webs of life all about him — and the nuances of life? How do the subtle sights and sounds and smells, and the even subtler changes on the landscape become a part of his nature? Whatever the process, it was the forge in which my life was cast.

Bell also had a voracious appetite for books, and he consumed all he could — “mostly of horses, dogs, and wild animals, of outdoorsmen, mountain men and Indians who knew the woods and the wilds like the backs of their hands, and who lived by their wits.” On his outdoor excursions, Bell did his “best to emulate them.”

A self-described loner, Bell spent his free time as a child and then a young man exploring the landscape around Lander. This time proved formative for him; in 2004, he wrote that “those walks and horseback rides along the ditches and creeks, and across miles of hills and mountains were the training grounds for my natural bent in life.” But before Bell could set off for a career that would take him through wildlife conservation, journalism and teaching to *High Country News*, World War II began, and Bell enlisted in the Air Force in May of 1942. He deployed to Europe in December of 1943, where he flew combat missions in a B-24 bomber. He

did not serve long: In May 1944, in the skies over Vienna, Austria, there came “a blinding light, a thunderous crash, and a searing blow” when German flak hit Bell in the nose of his bomber. Bell lost his right eye and nearly his sight. But what seemed to be a terrible setback only deepened his desire to defend the natural world he loved.

After the war, Bell returned to Wyoming and his determination to understand and eventually advocate for the natural world. He received both his undergraduate and graduate degrees at the University of Wyoming, obtaining a B.A. in wildlife conservation and game management in 1948 and an M.S. in zoology and ecology in 1957. Following each of his degrees, Bell worked for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, though both times he resigned over what he saw as a lack of concern for the health of wildlife and the environment, something he cited as the origins

Lakes and rivers were no longer safe for drinking, fishing or swimming. Pesticides, including DDT, threatened the extinction of entire species, most famously the bald eagle, America’s national symbol.

of his environmental sensibilities. After leaving the agency permanently in late 1959, Bell taught junior high school science and wrote for a now-defunct local Lander paper, the *Wyoming State Journal*. Bell found an outlet for his thoughts on the malpractice he had observed at the Game and Fish Department, as well as his opinions on public lands, recreation and the environment, in his regular column, “High Country.”

Bell left teaching when he was elected president of the Wyoming Wildlife Federation in 1965. In this position, he was able to advocate for the growing concerns of conservation groups about the effects of human actions — including ranching, road construction and pesticide use — on wildlife habitat, health and mobility. Later the same year, Wyoming Gov. Clifford Hansen appointed Bell to the National Public Land Law Review Commission as a representative for outdoor recreation interests. These experiences — writing for the *Journal*, teaching biology, working on behalf of conservation groups and advocating for outdoor recreation — inspired Bell to found the Wyoming Outdoor Coordinating Council (WOCC) in 1967. This coalition grew out of what Bell saw as “the need for cooperation between outdoor interests and other public interest groups” to further conservation causes. In a letter to his Aunt Lillian in December 1966, Bell described the WOCC’s purpose — and what would become his mission for *High Country News*:

Some of us here in the Rocky Mountain region believe that our open spaces, our mountain wilderness areas, our majestic natural

scenery, and our other natural resources are a national treasure. What happens to them is not only our concern but that of the American public. But the battles to preserve them are here, and it is we who live here that stand in the forefront of the battle ranks. We are more effective because we do live here.

In 1969, Bell found an opportunity to pursue what he felt was his true calling: writing about environmental issues that threatened the Western landscapes he loved and thereby educate readers about how they could take action. *Wyoming State Journal* editor Ray Savage opened *Camping News Weekly* in Lander as a side project and invited Bell to contribute his weekly “High Country” column. The first few columns discussed the joy of living so close to outdoor recreation opportunities and spirit-lifting scenery, entreated campers to behave well and clean up after themselves, and pondered the perceived emptiness of the rural West and the sense of wonder derived from learning about its wildflowers, birds and other living things. But by the fourth issue of *Camping News Weekly*, Bell revived his activist stance, warning about the major concerns of the growing environmental movement, sounding the drumbeat not just for public-lands protection, but also pollution, overpopulation and unrestricted natural resource development.

In the publication’s third month, July 1969, *Camping News Weekly* announced that the Wyoming Outdoor Coordinating Council — run by

Tom Bell was exactly what the regional environmental movement needed: a Westerner to lead a Western movement.

Bell and described as “a nonprofit Wyoming corporation interested in conservation and environmental matters” — had chosen it as the “official publication of that conservation-minded group.” Bell’s commitment to conservation, his belief in the protection of public lands, and his penchant for connecting national environmental concerns to local and regional issues shows not only the origin of *High Country News* within the context of the evolving modern environmental movement, but also its unique recognition of the importance of providing information about issues, resources for activism, and a sense of community for Westerners and people across the country who cared about the region.

Bell’s growing influence over the content of *Camping News Weekly* and his use of the publication as his bully pulpit for education and activism culminated in 1970. In *Camping News Weekly*, as the 20th anniversary edition of *High Country News* noted, “Bell saw a chance to present the kinds of stories the mainstream media were ignoring,” and so he assumed both ownership and editorship and renamed the paper after his longstanding weekly column. The first issue of *High Country News* premiered on Jan. 30, 1970. Bell explained the name change on the front page:

High Country News reflects a broadened view of the outdoor activities we cover and a growing concern for our environment. No, we have not forgotten or dismissed the many thousands of recre-

ationists and vacationers who go afield in their campers and tents. There will still be news of places to visit, things to do, interesting things to see, and adventurous activities in the Rocky Mountain West. We like to think we have an outdoor news coverage matched by no other newspaper. And we carry a digest of outdoor and environmental news second to none. We hope you will continue to like our product and will spread the news.

But not much about the publication had changed, other than the name. Bell continued to run outdoor recreation content — a featured “Camper of the Week,” notice of the Wyoming State Winter Fair — alongside articles about proposed dams in Hells Canyon on the Snake River and a reflection on growing national concern over pollution on the first anniversary of the Santa Barbara oil spill. The newly christened *High Country News* reflected where the environmental movement stood at the beginning of 1970 as it was expanding to include both the causes of the older conservation movement, which were deeply tied to outdoor recreation and land preservation, and the growing national concerns about public and ecological health. And as both the environmental movement and Bell’s publication expanded in 1970 and beyond, *High Country News* filled a necessary role in the environmental movement in the West, providing not only information about environmental issues to its readers, but also a sense of community and collective action.

JUST AS CAMPING NEWS WEEKLY was becoming *High Country News*, the environmental movement was gaining ground throughout the United States — a shift in public opinion that was not lost on Bell. In the second *HCN* issue, published in the first week of February 1970, he predicted that the next 10 years would be “the decade of more awareness of what goes on in the world around us. It should also be a decade of more personal involvement in the events who shape and affected our environment.” This was a prescient observation; as Bell wrote these words, planning had been underway for seven months for the first Earth Day, an event that historian Adam Rome contends is best understood as a starting point for the modern environmental movement rather than a culmination of activism. While major demonstrations of the 1960s resulted from years — in some cases decades — of work by activists, Earth Day jumpstarted environmentalism as a unified, national movement by giving seemingly disparate activists and causes a name and a shared community.

That such power could be exercised by an informed community of activists was hardly news to Bell. It was, in fact, the very force he sought to channel by founding *High Country News*, and it became the publication’s defining mission. In reflecting on the magazine’s origins in a 2012 essay, Bell noted that “even people power cannot be successful without taking the cause to the public,” and so he used first *Camping News Weekly* and then *High Country News* to do just that. By the first Earth Day, *High Country News*, as Bell pointed out in a special issue dedicated to the event, had “been carrying environmental news for many months. The issue is nothing new to us.” The West faced many pressing environmental issues, and Bell argued that “the public has a right to know” in order to take action “to preserve a quality environment in which all can live healthfully, peacefully, and with good will to all.”

Earth Day built on and provided an outlet for Bell’s personal belief that “an informed people is a more intelligent people,” as he advocated in a video produced for the publication’s 40th anniversary. And this, he continued, “was the whole point of *High Country News*. Somebody has to keep people on their toes, and aware of what’s going on out there in the world.” These educated activists fighting on behalf of the West responded not only to the in-depth coverage on environmental issues *High Country*

News provided, but also to Bell as a Westerner himself. Reflecting on Bell's ability to appeal to a wide range of readers — from middle-class city dwellers outside the region to ranchers whose families had homesteaded the land they worked a century prior — on the paper's 20th anniversary, former *High Country News* Editor Geoffrey O'Gara wrote of Bell's effectiveness as a voice for the region:

If the Rocky Mountain environmental movement of the 1960s had been given the power to construct from scratch a leader to represent its cause before the world, certain attributes would surely have been included. That leader would be a native, not a newcomer to the region but someone familiar from childhood with the ways of the plains and mountains; he would be a rancher, someone who had put up hay as a child and knew how to move cattle from pasture to pasture; he would have family who suffered the grunt work of mining and homesteading in the early settlements of the West; he would be a scientist, who could approach ecological problems with a scientist's eye; and he would be lovingly intimate with the rocks and wildlife and landscapes of the high country. Extraordinarily, the movement got all that in Tom Bell.

Bell was exactly what the regional environmental movement needed: a Westerner to lead a Western movement.

With this mission, its commitment to educating those who lived in and cared about the West, and Bell's unique ability to speak on and for the region, *High Country News* filled an important role. By 1970, national-level conservation organizations like the National Wildlife Federation, the National Audubon Society and the Sierra Club were producing their own books and magazines advocating for environmental causes. Environmental journalism made its way into mainstream papers, radio and television in the aftermath of Earth Day. Other publications grew out of the outdoor recreation industry's concern about pollution, overpopulation and public lands. *Backpacker* magazine, founded in 1973, educated readers about techniques and gear along with ethical camping and hiking practices to minimize their impacts on the environment and other visitors. Similarly, another Lander institution, the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), used its *Alumnus* magazine to promote good conservation practices while on the trail, while REI included an educational and advocacy section called Viewpoint in its catalogs beginning in the 1970s. But *High Country News* offered coverage and a sense of identity these other publications did not. The publications of environmental organizations covered issues from across the country, while outdoor recreation publications focused on how the individual interacted with the landscape. In contrast, *High Country News* offered education about a region readers cared about deeply — whether they lived there or not — and through this it formed a community dedicated to collective action.



The value of this community and the importance of the role it played in educating readers became apparent through a series of financial crises in the 1970s. For the first two years, Bell kept the paper financially afloat by contributing money he made selling uranium claims, then, when that ran out, selling his family's ranch, and finally converting *HCN* to a nonprofit, able to accept donations rather than rely on advertisements and subscribers. This kept the little paper going for a couple of years, but in 1973, the coffers finally ran dry. On March 2, Bell announced in his "High Country" column that "we have done our best. It was not good enough." The paper, he said, would cease production with the March 30 issue. He and his wife had poured an additional \$30,000 of their own money into the publication and taken out a \$7,500 loan from the local bank, and he could see no way out of the financial straits in which the paper found itself. In closing, he acknowledged that "miracles can happen," but if one didn't materialize before the 30th, "we will quietly leave the scene."

A miracle did, in fact, happen. In the next issue, Bell announced that donations had rolled in in response to his announcement and appeared to be coming with enough regularity to keep the doors open and the printing presses running, at least for now. Bell attributed this outpouring of support as "something of a barometer of how people really feel about the environment. What has happened is almost unbelievable to me. It is a most convincing testimonial to and a vindication of the strength and

(continued on page 45)



Betsy Marston and Paul Larmer. Luna Anna Archey / HCN

Q&A

THE LEGACY OF TOM BELL, the founder of *High Country News*, looms large over the magazine's history. And yet, he only ran *HCN* for about five of the 13 years that it was published in Lander, Wyoming. When Bell stepped back from managing its day-to-day operations, "the newspaper evolved into a more objective, less strident publication that focused on the environment," Marjane Ambler, a former editor, said, writing for the Wyoming State Historical Society. Once Ambler, Joan Nice and Bruce Hamilton took over the magazine in 1974, its circulation increased and its scope broadened. Recognition from Western icons like Robert Redford and Edward Abbey introduced *HCN* to a wider audience.

A series of setbacks and schisms beset the editorial staff in the late 1970s, however, culminating in the tragic car accident in 1978 that killed news editor Justas Bavarskis

and seriously injured three staffers. By 1983, *HCN's* board of directors sought new leadership and agreed to hire Ed and Betsy Marston, who relocated the newspaper to Paonia, Colorado, where much of the staff remains today. Under the Marstons, the newspaper continued to expand its coverage, readership and influence. By 2002, when Ed Marston stepped down as publisher, the paper's circulation had grown from 3,000 to 20,000 readers.

Paul Larmer, one of the Marstons' first editorial interns,

became publisher in 2003. Larmer brought a fresh vision to the organization, and the black-and-white tabloid evolved into a magazine, gradually becoming a full-color publication. The coverage expanded even further, taking a broader look at the West's unique cultures and how growth and migration was changing the face of the region. Larmer stepped down in March 2020, and Greg Hanscom took his place. Like Larmer, Hanscom had worked as an intern and editor. As *HCN* celebrates

its 50th anniversary, we checked in with Betsy Marston and Paul Larmer to chat about the magazine's more recent history and future prospects. Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

What was it like when you and your husband, Ed Marston, brought *High Country News* to Paonia, Colorado, in 1983?

Betsy Marston: The paper came to Paonia in a truck. The paper — and it was called a newspaper then, not a magazine — was black-and-white. The prized possession of the paper was its photo collection.

We quickly found out that folding in *Western Colorado Report*, our paper, into *High Country News* was a disaster. We were alienating everybody. Wyoming people thought Colorado was too full of itself, and Wyoming was the real

A little paper with clout

How *High Country News* evolved.

BY CARL SEGERSTROM

West. And then the 1,000 Colorado readers we had weren't interested in the rest of the West, so we started to lose them.

We had a big learning curve. Neither one of us was an environmentalist: Ed was a physicist; I was a TV producer. We weren't members of a cause. But it didn't take long to feel pretty passionate about the about the West and about the delusions so many people — including us — had when we first came to the West.

It's like that Matthew Arnold poem, "Dover Beach": "So various, so beautiful, so new." So perfect. Then you realize: Under that is destructive forces — exploiters, from the hardrock miners to the dam builders to rapacious ranchers, who had it all their own way in the high country. So, pretty soon, you realize everybody's here to make a buck on this gorgeous place — and wildlife suffers, water suffers, the air suffers. So you begin to get angry and indignant, and you want to expose this to the world. It was a pretty exciting beat.

As you settled into running the magazine and weathering the initial financial challenges, how did HCN evolve, and what role did you see for it in covering the Western U.S.?

Marston: We're "a little paper with clout" was what people said about us. We were getting at stories that nobody else was covering, like the dam-building era and the way fish were ignored and how Native Americans were removed to make way for some dams. I think what we were doing — and that's what the heritage from Wyoming was: We tell stories about a region of America that you may not know about because you don't live there, but you visit. And if you do live there, you want to know more.

I got the idea early on that we had a lot of smart readers. These are not normal people. These are people who are experts in their fields, whether they're professors or

people who work for the BLM or the Forest Service or worked for their county. A lot of them were rural-based. They know their world, but they don't know the wider world of the region. So we were able to tell them stories that they were interested in, but they didn't really know that much about. Our readership was pretty high-level in terms of smarts, so you couldn't write down to them; you could only write up and be inclusive.

You were the second intern after HCN moved to Paonia in 1983. What was your experience coming to HCN, Paul?

Paul Larmer: Betsy and Ed had such an incredible curiosity. And they asked the right questions — questions that weren't necessarily asked — about the Forest Service and how it does its plans and getting beneath the surface.

I remember my first two assignments from Ed and Betsy. One was to go cover one of the local coal mines that closed in Paonia here in 1984. The county was hurting, so Ed sent me down to the county hospital to see what's going on with patients and how many people are there and is there a mental health problem. It was looking beyond the environment to actually the socio-economics of it.

Ed and Betsy would sound naive in their questioning, but they were just really getting people to talk. It was amazing.

Can you talk about the different phases and evolution of HCN's coverage?

Marston: "Cattle-free by '93" was a whole movement, where the Sierra Club and other environmental groups wanted to get the cows off the high country and create more collaboration or more multiple use. There was "dams are destructive and need to come down," and we got to knock back every dam proposal that comes up. Part of that



was really discovering the Northwest; the spotted owl and all of that was intense. The tree-sitters: Those young people who tried to save old growth because there's so little left — that was a whole phase.

And at a certain point, I remember a 2000 story that was really about recreation wrecking the West. We humans had become destructive to what we loved. Like Wallace Stegner said, you can love a place, and you can be dangerous to it.

Another big one was wildfire and the whole change in the approach to fighting fire and living with fire. And also the understanding that a lot of people were moving into the woods and being really cozy with trees, like in Paradise (California).

Then there was oil and gas. There are these phases that come up. And now climate change underlies almost every story. You can never escape the impact of climate change.

It did feel like waves. And I remember at one point saying: "No story is ever done." And it's going to come back, the wave will come back, because like with dams we will never escape the danger of the legacy of dams. And we can bring down a few, but there are still plans to build more. So no story is ever finished or accomplished.

Larmer: Another piece to add to that is we follow the political and social currents in the West, too. We had this big phase when (President Bill) Clinton and (Interior Secretary Bruce) Babbitt were trying to protect all the rest of the public lands through administrative fiat instead of Congress, because Congress was no longer able to act.

Also, the fight between the rural West and conservative county commissioners versus all these newcomers, and would the West actually change and become a more liberal bastion. We're still covering that, as elections come up.

I think those kind of currents we were very aware of. Natural resources often course through them, but they were also just kind of broader questions about society

that we covered as well. The West is such a fascinating, broad place, and there are communities that we didn't know anything about. There was a story about the heroin trade in northern New Mexico and how it transformed communities throughout that corridor from Mexico up to Colorado. And the "Gangs of Zion," about the huge Pacific Islander influence in Salt Lake City drawn by the Mormon Church — that was a culture within a culture, and those kinds of stories became intriguing to us. We always look for a great story that reveals some aspect of the West.

We always kind of held ourselves to this standard that we're not necessarily going to break all these stories, but how can we provide deeper interpretation of them? How can we write stories that are going to last, and that help people really understand and not just get caught up in the headlines that go back-and-forth?

HCN has long covered and depended on environmentalists as sources. How do you see the interplay between journalism and advocacy at the magazine?

Marston: I think at one point we decided we would cover the environmental movement as a story. Because there were tensions between environmentalists and there were vastly different approaches, like suing and collaboration. We never thought of ourselves as advocates; we thought that we could tell a story and tell it with a point of view, but it would be backed up by fact. I don't think we were propagandists.

We had a beat, and maybe that's an inherent bias. Right from the beginning, I remember Tom Bell said that wildlife has no voice, the land doesn't speak — you've got to tell that story.

Larmer: We openly criticized the environmental movement or parts of it. When we would do that and people would write nasty letters,



not hateful but very vehemently opposed to us, we saw that as a great sign. If we could get not just the progressive green side of the environmental movement to write letters, either of clarification or forcing them to think a little deeper, we felt like that was a victory, because that was a service to society.

I always felt like if someone could read *High Country News* for a year, it would be like getting an education on the West. You would go, "Wow, I know a lot now," about communities, about public lands, about water and resources and the fact that this is not a pure place. It has a deep history of use and abuse, and it's complicated, and it's also incredibly majestic and beautiful — it's all those things. Each issue of the magazine can't do it all. But as we go through the year, I feel like by the time people have read it, that it's like the chapters of a book that keeps going.

Recently, there's been some tension over the evolution of the magazine and a feeling by some that the magazine isn't covering public lands enough and is too focused on social issues.

What do you think about that sentiment?

Marston: Do you really want to know this? I think it's great that we cover Native American stories with Native American writers, and in a serious, concentrated, consistent way. I think that was a wonderful addition to *High Country News*. At the same time, there doesn't seem to be, for me, enough focus on the public lands where everything happens. I think we've missed so much of Donald Trump's impact on the West, and I'm afraid much of it is lasting.

I hope that we'll get back to it. If you ignore what had been the core of *High Country News*, you're in danger of losing readers. And I think we have lost some of them.

Larmer: *HCN* can't ignore the social and human issues that are happening to the region, or the economic trends and the border issues. We can't ignore those stories. I think some of it is about resources. If you only have a small staff and freelance budget and you're going to disperse that budget covering many more issues, you're going to necessarily spend a lot less time on the traditional stories that *HCN* has done.

It used to be all we did was natural resource stories, everybody on staff. Since we're covering a much broader range of issues now, maybe we actually need some focused attention on those core areas so that we're not missing stories. But you can't do everything.

I want to follow up on this conception of the West as its natural resources and the stories of the West being about its natural resources, as opposed to say cities or people. How do you see that tension between these different parts of the West, and what role do you see for HCN in covering them?

Marston: My approach would always be to start with the public land, because everything flows from that.

Not to start in the city, and then only in the sense of how the city impacts the public land and rural communities, as they suburbanize, as they change.

The national parks are like monoliths of our economy. And yet, the local people are hard put to keep up or to make a living in gateway communities. The suburbanization, too — it's happening here in Paonia. Land values are skyrocketing. We don't have enough water.

Sometimes I don't get why we do a story, because I want it to connect to the land and everything that goes on. That's what makes us unique, as far as I could see. Nobody has the land like we do, or the water or the wildlife, or the air. So, why wouldn't we keep our base, stay with our core and radiate out from the core? My approach would be the heart would be public lands and you go from there, and you don't exclude Native Americans from that.

What is your vision for the future of HCN as the magazine celebrates its 50th anniversary?

Larmer: I hope that 10 years from now, *HCN* is not only around, but that it is producing this incredible, high-quality journalism. Its finger is on the pulse of the issues in the region and bringing those to a national and international context. What happens here is important for the country and for the world and can spur passionate discussions, like the one we just had.

All over the place, in classrooms, in tribal council meetings and county commissioner meetings, the issues that we're putting into context — we're helping inform those debates. We're basically a large bulletin board and we want people to participate, take that information and do something with it to make the world a better place. If we're still around doing that, and doing it more and better than we are now, then we will have really succeeded. I think that would be a fabulous legacy to leave. And I have no doubt that we've got another 50 years in us. ✨

(continued from page 41)

commitment to the environmental cause.”

Five years later, after Bell had left the publication, a tragic car accident killed Associate Editor Justas Bavarskis and injured three other staffers, throwing the staff and the paper itself into financial chaos. Readers again responded, unbidden, by raising more than \$30,000 that ensured the publication’s survival. These “miracles” proved *High Country News’s* value as a necessary tool for the environmental cause and an established and recognized voice for the conservation movement. It had become the mechanism for advocacy and education Bell had dreamed it to be.

Bell had transformed *High Country News* from the regional and recreation-focused *Camping News Weekly* into a source of news, advocacy and community, but the effort it took to keep it running drained him — financially, mentally and emotionally. Despite the outpouring of support shown in the “miracle” of 1973, Bell was in the midst of a “spiritual upheaval” that left him unpredictable and “mercurial,” as an article in the 20th anniversary issue recalled. “One minute thoughtful and attentive, the next minute lost in gloom and upset over a misplaced comma,” Bell only found solace when he became a born-again Christian in 1974 and “turned (his) life over to the Lord.”

Prompted by this conversion (and a belief that the country’s economy would soon collapse), in July of 1974 Bell announced he was moving to rural Oregon with his family and turning the paper’s editorship over to Joan Nice and Bruce Hamilton. In his July 5, 1974, “High Country” column, Bell told his readers of his departure from the publication and admitted that he had “felt my spiritual batteries slowly being drained” over the last several years. He was “discouraged and dismayed with an economic and political system wedded to ever more growth and ever more consumption”

“What has happened is almost unbelievable to me. It is a most convincing testimonial to and a vindication of the strength and commitment to the environmental cause.”

and feared this system would soon disintegrate. Looking back on his decision in a 2003 speech at the Headwaters Conference at Western State Colorado University, he reflected that after more than five years of keeping *High Country News* afloat, “I had poured so much of myself into the paper and what I wanted it to be that I came to a cliff. It was either continue on and destroy myself, or turn completely away and seek solace and recovery.”

Bell continued to write for *High Country News*, contributing his regular “High Country” column from Oregon until 1978, though the paper’s tone shifted once its founder left the editorship. Nice and Hamilton “eked out information; they wrote their stories in a pointillistic style, rather than with broad brush strokes” and “eschewed Bell’s religious convictions and sense of good and evil in favor of economic, social, and political analysis,” Ed Marston, then the publisher, wrote in 1989. From Bell’s departure through the 1970s and into the early 1980s, Nice and others redefined the paper’s identity, though it remained at the same circulation level — 3,000 to 4,000 subscribers — it had for years. It wasn’t until 1983, when Ed and Betsy Marston, newly appointed publisher and editor, took over the publication and relocated it to Paonia, Colorado, that the paper began to gain a stable financial footing and expand its circulation.

Despite these shifts, however, *High Country News* and its staff never lost the passion and fire that had motivated Bell to found the publication. Upon Bell’s death in 2016, *High Country News* Executive Director Paul Larmer reflected on Bell’s innate ability to impart that passion to everyone who came across his path:

I’ll never forget the candid chats we had bunking together at a 2003 HCN board meeting at the Murie Center in Grand Teton National Park. Somewhere in the absolute darkness of that musty cabin, as we talked about the potential brightness of the future, Tom’s fierce, humble spirit latched on to me. I left ready to tackle whatever challenges life might throw my way. I know many others who knew Tom had similar transformative experiences.

Though Bell only ran *High Country News* for its first five years, he remained involved long after stepping down as editor — contributing columns, serving on the board, and acting as a mentor and guiding light to the staff who came after him. Bell provided the nascent modern environmental movement a home in the Western U.S. and set *High Country News* on a course that would inspire people across the country to care deeply about the region.

“That need obviously still exists or the paper would not be alive and well today,” Bell wrote in May 1979. “People are concerned with the world around them. They do have a right to know how their lives may be changed by what happens across the river, or over the hill or even a thousand miles away.” ❁



(continued from page 31)

selves from the warming climate, while millions of others suffer. But what if we sought out those most impacted by climate change and asked them to advance solutions?

Science fiction writer and physics professor Vandana Singh asks herself that question often. She's part of a project called the People's Climate Report, which aims to offer a ground-level perspective on climate change from the people most affected by it. She also works with the Center for Science and the Imagination, which developed *Arizona 2045*, to bring marginalized voices to the fore in climate fiction. Singh, who grew up in New Delhi, India, is working with five Indian authors on climate fiction related to their experiences; three are from Indigenous communities and two are from the Dalit caste, the lowest in the Indian social hierarchal system.

Singh thinks that if we want to achieve justice in any area — whether climate, economic or racial — we need to listen to the people who will be most impacted. And climate-themed science fiction, or cli-fi, is a powerful way to center those experiences.

Over video chat, Singh told me that science fiction often perpetuates the same social ideas that we've grown accustomed to and accept as normal. That might mean it assumes that the future will stay in the hands of global elites, while more and more of the population contend with poverty and extreme heat. A lot of science fiction also has a tendency to imagine technological solutions, while maintain-



ing societal systems that put the privileged in positions to manage catastrophe for everyone else.

"If climate fiction is done the right way," Singh said, "and we have voices of marginalized people representing a completely different paradigm, then (this) might translate into some kind of action or movement." After all, one of the difficulties of communicating the impacts of climate change is our inability to imagine what it means for the future.

Still, Singh is under no illusion that fiction can easily solve the world's inequalities. "The fact is that we live in very unequal societies with very entrenched systems of power," she said. "There are people at the top who benefit from the status quo. And they maintain it like that."

In Phoenix, Chispa Arizona, a Latino organizing arm of the League of Conservation Voters, is one such grassroots effort. In July, they held a bilingual Zoom event called "Is This Heat Normal? ¿Es Este Calor

Normal?" At 6 p.m. on the hottest July 30 on record, a patchwork quilt of individual screens showed participants in their living rooms and offices, one sitting in a comfy leather chair and another outside in her yard. Some bobbed their heads to Lizzo's "Good as Hell," which was playing on the call.

A few speakers talked about the dangers of heat and suggested ways to safeguard against it. One speaker pointed out that many so-called heat refuges — places where the public can access air conditioning during the hottest hours of the day — had been closed due to the coronavirus. There was only one operating in South Phoenix, where many of the city's low-income and Latino residents live.

Most of the conversation revolved around community solutions, and how residents could become involved despite the pandemic. Nicolas de la Fuente spoke from a garden wearing a bandanna and a Dodgers baseball cap. De la Fuente is the co-founder and director of a local initiative called Spaces of Opportunity. On a 19-acre site in South Phoenix that had sat vacant for decades, de la Fuente and a coalition of other organizations, including the Desert Botanical Garden, built an incubator farm and a community garden. Now the lot is filled with shade trees, rows of vegetables and a farmers market that provide food for residents. De la Fuente said

that developing the lot was complicated by the fact that they had to meet expensive city regulations. But plenty of vacant lots are undeveloped in South Phoenix, and de la Fuente thinks that the city should provide incentives for residents to create community gardens and green spaces. That would significantly assist the city's goal of reducing the urban heat island effect.

"The more that we have local-level small wins like this, the more we can push for some of the policy changes that we need," de la Fuente said. "I think that if we multiply these kinds of examples that people can't ignore us anymore in terms of what needs to be done."

Vianey Olivarría, the communications director for Chispa, told me that the organization has successfully led previous grassroots organizing efforts in Arizona, including a pilot program for the Phoenix Union High School District to shift the school bus system to electric. Chispa also advocates for renewable energy and recently spoke out against proposed rate hikes during a pandemic; many are already struggling to pay the bills from Arizona Public Service, the state's largest electricity provider.

Whether they come from community organizers, robot designers or even comic-book characters in red fedoras, the need for solutions is urgent. Shortly after the meeting, Phoenix announced that July had been its hottest month since record-keeping began, averaging 98.9 degrees Fahrenheit. Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Virginia all reported their hottest (or tied for hottest) July on record. Fourteen other states reported a top-10 hottest July. A future of extreme heat has already arrived, and a way forward must not only be envisioned but enacted.

"If we transition our city and our government into more sustainable solutions, I believe that is what is going to be most impactful for Phoenix to thrive," Olivarría told me. "Because in 30 years, we aren't going to be able to live here anymore." ❁

"Understanding your place, your context — that was designing for climate resiliency."

East 16th Street meets Van Buren in the Edison-Eastlake neighborhood of Phoenix. During a 2018 "heat walk," residents noted feeling most uncomfortable near this intersection, where the mean radiant temperature was 148 degrees Fahrenheit (above).

Business Opportunities

Conservationist? Irrigable land?

Stellar seed-saving NGO is available to serious partner. Package must include financial support. Details: <http://seeds.ojaidigital.net>.

Seeking property for bison herd

Seeking additional properties for a herd of 1,000 AUM minimum. Interested in partnering with landowners looking to engage in commercial and/or conservation bison ranching. Location flexible. tess@ranchlands.com. 719-641-4489. <http://ranchlands.com/bison/>.

Employment

Pollinator oasis — Seeking an experienced, hardworking partner to help restore a desert watershed/wetland while also creating a pollinator oasis at the mouth of an upland canyon. Compensation: rustic cabin, an itty-bitty town and joy (if you harbor it). Write to me: C.J Middleton, General delivery, Petaluma, CA 94952.

Membership Manager at WyoFile

For more information, visit www.wyofile.com/careers/. Apply at jobs@wyofile.com.

Development Director at WyoFile

For more information, visit www.wyofile.com/careers/. Apply at jobs@wyofile.com.

Caretaker — Two-acre homestead needing year-round caretaker in northeast Oregon. Contact boyd@eoni.com for details.

Executive Director — Eastern Nevada Landscape Coalition, based in Ely, Nev., is looking for a new executive director to replace the longtime executive director, who is retiring at the end of the year. ENLC is a 501(c)(3). For the full position announcement, go to the website. 775-289-7974. enlc@sbcglobal.net. www.envc.org.

Merchandise

Utah beef — Grass-fed, grass-finished beef. Available in October. Reserve your beef now. Kate's Land & Cattle, Boulder, Utah. katiea@scinternet.net. grassfedbeefbykatie.com.

Western Native Seed — Specializing in native seeds and seed mixes for Western states. 719-942-3935. www.westernnativeseed.com.

Professional Services

Expert Land Steward — Available now for site conservator, property manager. View résumé at <http://skills.ojaidigital.net>.

Conservation Management/Hospitality Services — Seasoned ranch manager of award-winning conservation ranch seeking position as nature reserve/resort or ranch manager. Visit philipmoon-walker.com for résumé and certifications. Contact: philipw1972@gmail.com. 512-964-0655.

Steve Harris, Experienced Public Lands/Environmental Attorney Comment letters, administrative appeals. Federal and state litigation. FOIA. 719-471-7958. tinyurl.com/y5eu2t6q

Lisa Mackey Photography — Fine Art Giclée Printing. Photo papers, fine art papers, canvas. Widths up to 44 inches. Art printing by an artist. 970-247-3004. www.lisamackeyphoto.com.



Publications & Books

Chuck Burr's Culturequake.com Change will happen when we see a new way of living. Thinking to save the world.

Copper Stain — Tales from scores of ex-employees unearth the human

costs of an economy that runs on copper. <https://www.oupress.com/books/15051942/copper-stain>.

Real Estate For Rent

Coming to Tucson? — Popular vacation house, furnished, two-bed, one-bath, yard, dog-friendly. Lee: cloler@cox.net. 520-791-9246.

Real Estate for Sale

Adobe home — Passive solar adobe home in high desert of central New Mexico. Located on 10,000-acre cattle ranch. 575-336-1316. sturney@mossyoakproperties.com. www.NMRanchandHome.com.

Log home in the Gila Wilderness Beautiful hand-built log home in the heart of the Gila Wilderness on five acres. Please email for PDF of pictures and a full description. 815-684-5411. patiamichael@gmail.com.

FSBO property in southeast

Arizona — Located in an area steeped in history, this gentleman's ranch sits at the entrance to the renowned Cave Creek Canyon. Enjoy picturesque views of the Chiricahua Mountains from the deck of this property that sits on 70 acres, includes a main house (three-bedroom, two-bath). There is a guest house (one-bedroom, one-bath with kitchen). Also on the property is a 2.5 vehicle garage and a working corral. Easy access to Cave Creek recreational area with its globally recognized birding and hiking activities — making it a great rental. Call John @ 520-869-6471.



Home near Capitol Reef National Park — Comfortable home at foot of Boulder Mountain, on one

fenced acre. Amazing views! 970-799-4361. canyonrat15@gmail.com.

Secluded Colorado mountain getaway — This passive solar home sits on two lots and offers an abundance of privacy and views while being only 15 minutes to downtown Buena Vista. The community offers convenient access to hiking, biking, the Arkansas River, private lakes for fishing and national forest. Perfect for any outdoor enthusiast. First Colorado Land Office. 719-395-7840. Julie@FirstColorado.com. TheKerstingTeam.com.



New Mexico property, Silver City — 20 acres, \$80,000. Owner financing, well, driveway, fencing possible, very private, sensible covenants, broker owned. Contact 575-534-7955. timdre@comcast.net. <https://www.lapalomarealestate.com>.

Thriving local health food store for sale in Buena Vista, Colo. — Turnkey business opportunity. Successful well-established business with room to grow. Excellent highway visibility. Virtual tour and listing details at www.liveinbuenavistaco.com.

Ojo Caliente commercial venture — Outstanding location near the world-famous Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs Resort, N.M. Classic adobe mercantile, complete with living quarters, separate six-unit B&B, metal building and spacious grounds. 505-470-2892. wimettre@newmexico.com. wimettreality.com.

Tours and Travel

Canyonlands Field Institute — Colorado Plateau natural and human history field seminars. Lodge, river, hiking options. Small groups, guest experts. cfimoab.org. 800-860-5262.



WORKWEAR

Here's to the next 50 years
of giving a darn about an
unbroken West.

Folk artist Nicholas Herrera keeps his ancestral
homestead outside El Rito, New Mexico, up to snuff.
FOREST WOODWARD © 2020 Patagonia, Inc.

patagonia

Proud to Support High Country
News' 50th Anniversary Gala!

Visit with us today!



Serving you with locations in Colorado, Wyoming and Kansas.
303-394-5100 | anbbank.com | Member FDIC

GARFIELD & HECHT, P.C.
ATTORNEYS AT LAW | SINCE 1975
Aspen | Avon | Carbondale | Crested Butte | Denver Tech Center | Glenwood Springs | Rifle



Big-City Legal Services, Small-Town Practice Attorneys in Litigation & Transactional Law

Garfield & Hecht, P.C. is a proud sponsor of High Country News
Now also in Carbondale at 225 Main Street, Suite 306
www.garfieldhecht.com | 970.925.1936 ph | atty@garfieldhecht.com

Fifty!

Thank you High Country News for
shining a light on the places and
people we know and love through
truthful, actionable journalism. Your
work is invaluable. We look forward to
many more years of collaboration.
Congratulations on 50 years!

Minus Plus is proud to support mindful organizations through creative content that sparks advocacy, creativity and innovation.

minusplus.studio —+

HCN

HCN.org



ZIONPARK.org



TREEFORTMUSICFEST.com



RADIOWEST.KUER.org

altitude ▲ lab

ALTITUDELAB.org



BELL PRIZE
FOR ASPIRING ESSAYISTS
HighCountryNews

Honoring the spirit of our founder, Tom Bell, we want to hear from aspiring essayists, ages 18 to 25, who will help tell the ongoing story of the modern American West.

Essays should be no longer than 800 words. Consider topics you're familiar with and tell us why they're important to you: environmental or social justice, climate change, water, energy & industry, wildlife, public lands, sustainability, economics – you decide.

SPONSORED BY:



Visit hcn.org/bellprize for details and rules.

Clear Fork Cider

Small Batch Cider
from Wheat Ridge,
Colorado

A Proud Sponsor of
High Country News



www.clearforkcider.com

Thank you to our
West Illuminated
gala sponsors.

- ANB Bank
- Clear Fork Cider
- Garfield & Hecht
- Minus Plus
- New Belgium Brewing
- Patagonia

Coming June 4, 2021.



**Western Colorado University's
School of Environment & Sustainability**

CONGRATULATES

High Country News

on 50 years of reimagining the West

Here's to the next 50 years of High Country News informing Western's programs and projects in ways that enhance the cultures and environments that inspire us!



Join the conversation at western.edu/schoolenvs



Photo: Jake Burchmore



Q&A

J.D. Reeves / HCN

IN 2016, THE STANDING ROCK

Sioux and flocks of their allies protested the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, which would carry Bakken crude oil from North Dakota to Illinois, crossing underneath Lake Oahe, the reservation's water source. Tribal members opposed the pipeline over fears of water pollution and climate impacts; it also crossed their ancestral lands, and they argued that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had not adequately surveyed the burial grounds in its path. But because the pipeline wasn't on tribal lands or under tribal jurisdiction, there were few legal options. As Indian law attorneys Hillary Hoffmann and Monte Mills write in their new book, *A Third Way: Decolonizing the Laws of Indigenous Cultural Protection*, after almost 200 years of treaties, court cases and federal infringement, "The tribe had lost almost every source of legal authority to regulate or stop it." The pipeline was ultimately constructed, though its legality is still in court

For tribes, by tribes

A 'third way' for Indian Law could mean a new era of cultural protection.

BY ANNA V. SMITH

over potential environmental violations.

The battle over the Dakota Access Pipeline exemplifies how difficult it can be for tribal nations to assert their sovereignty within the existing legal structure to protect culturally important land, water, wildlife and ancestral objects. Over the last decade, however, Hoffmann and Mills argue that a new era of Indian law has emerged that protects Indigenous value systems. This "third way" — neither solely Indigenous nor

European, but rather both — shows tribal nations working within those legal constraints in novel ways, or changing them altogether, to better reflect their values. This could mean different outcomes in future cultural protection conflicts.

Monte Mills, an associate professor and director of the Margery Hunter Brown Indian Law Clinic at the University of Montana in Missoula, has represented tribes, including the Southern Ute Indian Tribe in Colorado, in court. Hillary Hoffmann, a professor of environmental law at Vermont Law School,

studies conflicts between public-lands regulations and tribal rights.

Sharing what they've learned over their combined 31 years of teaching Indian law and working with tribal nations, Hoffmann and Mills explore the myriad ways Indigenous people are decolonizing laws around cultural protection. *High Country News* recently spoke with them about this new era and what it could mean for tribal sovereignty.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What is cultural protection, and why does it matter?

Hillary Hoffmann: Cultural protection as we describe it in the book is a tribe-centered body of laws that protect tribal culture using the tribe's own value system.

Cultural protection law has been a sometimes well-intentioned but often harmful or inadequate way of protecting tribal culture, which includes tribal languages, religions, history, identity and affil-

iation, and more tangible cultural belongings, such as the bodies and belongings of ancestors and tribal art. It also includes traditional tribal practices, such as the tending and gathering of wild rice, or the stewardship of a natural feature like the Black Hills, Mauna Kea or Devils Tower.

One example of this type of law is the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, which was passed (in 1979) to stop the looting of past and current tribal communities. It not only failed to accomplish this, but has allowed a black market in tribal cultural belongings to flourish, in the U.S. and abroad.

How did you both come across this idea, and, why is it particularly relevant right now?

Hoffmann: I came to this because of my work in environmental and natural resources law. I started writing about Bears Ears (National Monument in Utah) and the conflicts between tribal values and non-tribal values on public lands, especially in the context of oil and gas development. One of my real interests in this project was to illustrate how laws that everybody thinks of as being good for everyone don't respect and protect adequately the special legal rights of tribes, like treaty rights and sovereignty. A lot of environmentalists, I think, wrongly assume that environmental laws benefit tribes and non-tribal members alike, and that's not actually the case.

Monte Mills: Tribes across the country are asserting their sovereignty in new ways and really bringing their own values and approach to solving critical challenges, whether in the context of a global pandemic like we have now, or the management of natural resources or the protection of cultural resources. We've seen events that have garnered significant national attention that bring these conflicts about tribal presence, tribal treaty rights and tribal roles in these conflicts to light, like

Dakota Access.

It's also a really important turning point for federal Indian policy more broadly. It's been 50 years since the current era of self-determination was announced by President Richard Nixon, which has resulted in a significant growth in tribal government and tribal interests in sovereignty. But there's a movement afoot to expand self-determination further. If there's going to be a new era of policy around federal Indian law, it's going to be the tribes that are going to define that, rather than be limited by federal laws and policies as they have been thus far.

How does your book tie into events of the last few months, such as police brutality protests, the pandemic, the Supreme Court *McGirt* decision or the Mount Rushmore protest?

Mills: There's a whole shift in terms of political norms and standards going on right now. There's a need to reckon with the policies that led to the current state of the law. For the most part, all of those policies were premised on the idea that Indian tribes either were gone or would go away or would be erased or marginalized. That type of reckoning needs to happen if the law is going to progress.

The book focuses on cultural protection. Why focus on that specifically and not something more broad, like tribal sovereignty?

Mills: It's sort of a false distinction, because we are talking about the use of tribal sovereignty to protect Indigenous cultures. A "third way" really refers to a more effective legal framework that incorporates tribal values into cultural protection. And clearly one of the most central and most important tribal values is the exercise of tribal sovereignty.

We particularly focused on cultural protection because maybe

more than any other area, there is an existing legal framework of federal, state and even some international legal standards that just don't serve to actually protect items of Indigenous cultural value at all, or (do so) very minimally. Even though there are purportedly federal cultural protection laws, they don't really reflect the Indigenous cultures that they're expressly meant to protect.

Hoffmann: In some ways, the laws that relate to cultural protection are eroding tribal sovereignty. Some laws that should ideally protect Indigenous cultures and aspects of those cultures, like artwork or photography, currently allow for non-Indigenous people to obtain legal rights to cultural belongings of tribes.

The book is pretty thorough in its examples of flaws in existing law, but you also point out how tribal nations are working to reshape those rigid structures to actually serve their citizens' needs. How are they doing that?

Hoffmann: Bears Ears is an interesting use of an existing law (the Antiquities Act) that has largely failed to protect cultural values. The (Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition) that put together the proposal to create Bears Ears found a way to essentially use that old law that had been used to suppress tribal cultures, to re-inject tribal voices and tribal values into public-lands management.

Mills: A few other examples we talk about are laws that tribes are developing and adopting themselves, even in the form of new constitutions that really weave together tribal cultural values with their systems of government. While those are currently focused on governance within the reservation, I think they provide a model for thinking about what state or even federal cultural protection laws could be like.

What motivated you to write this book?

Mills: We were interested in putting something out there that could be used as a tool, particularly by tribes and tribal advocates, to help contextualize and provide a basis for understanding, for example, a tribal claim to engage in co-management of a national monument like Bears Ears. As much as anything else, (we're interested in) finding ways to ensure that the folks who have the longest connections, particularly with the cultural and natural resources of this continent, are the ones who are also leading efforts to manage or protect those resources.

How do you think that non-Native people can support and center Indigenous people in this third way?

Mills: Understanding more about the context, history and nature of treaty rights and tribal sovereignty is the first step. Then, with that context, working to shift perspectives around the role of tribes in our legal and political systems, so that there are more meaningful opportunities for tribes to take the lead on issues that don't just affect their own reservations, but that can help move things forward for all of us.

Hoffmann: We need to also decolonize our major environmental nonprofits, (which) tend to be the ones who are leading the way in these cases that center around tribal values. It's been a great benefit to the tribes to have those major leaders advocating for them. But even better would be to have tribal lawyers bringing those cases and centering them around the values that the litigation is seeking to protect.

That's why we used ("decolonizing") in the title, because it's so important to not just try to use what's there to advance tribal values, but to try to really dig into those tribal values themselves to build whatever is going to come next. ☀



Lauren Crow / HCN

Q&A

AS DEMONSTRATIONS CONTINUE across the country in support of Black lives and against police brutality, national bestseller lists have seen an increase of titles on anti-racism and white privilege. The Western United States, meanwhile, has no shortage of writers with much to contribute to ongoing conversations on race, inequality and other issues of national concern. Denver, for example, saw some of the earliest Black Lives Matter protests against the killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, underscoring the nationwide problem of police violence and racism. *High Country News* recently caught up with four Front Range writers through the Lighthouse Writers Workshop, a nonprofit that supports Denver's writing community. Each of them contributes to literature from the

Undeniable truths

Four Colorado writers on empathy, systems of oppression and 'the moment.'

BY BRIAN CALVERT

West in distinct, important ways.

Khadijah Queen is a poet and critic who grew up in Los Angeles and now teaches writing at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and Regis University. Her work, which includes *I'm So Fine: A List of Famous Men* and *What I Had On* and *Black Peculiar*, explores issues of power, history, culture, sex and

gender, among many other themes, with sophisticated nuance and detail.

R. Alan Brooks is a Denver-based writer who teaches at Regis University. His graphic novel, *The Burning Metronome*, imagines the moral failings of humans and mythical beings alike, while exploring the conflict between love and

malice. He also writes a weekly comic strip for the *Colorado Sun*, called *What'd I Miss?*, in which an elderly white woman wakes from a coma and must rely on her Black neighbor to explain the changing city and world.

Suzi Q. Smith is an award-winning artist, activist and educator who lives in Denver. Her forthcoming poetry collection, *A Gospel of Bones*, will be published in December. Smith has also worked extensively as an activist with civil rights organizations, victim advocacy groups, arts organizations and more. She was the founding Slammaster of Denver's Slam Nuba and spent 12 years in the poetry slam arena as a coach, organizer and performer.

Steven Dunn moved to Denver after his service in the Navy brought him to Colorado. His debut novel,

Potted Meat, is set in West Virginia, where Dunn grew up, but its deeper themes of violence, poverty, friendship, love and familial duty universally resonate. He teaches at Regis University.

This conversation was edited for length and clarity.

How can we think about the power of story and poetry in terms of creating empathy in this current environment?

Khadijah Queen: Some of my research is around how important feeling is to thinking, and how feeling and thinking aren't necessarily separate. The importance of story to that is that — whether it's fiction or nonfiction or poetry or a play — the feeling is underneath it, giving it the truth that impacts us in the most human ways. If we have that connection with the truth of the feeling, then we are empowered to share it viscerally with someone else and can perhaps begin to understand an experience that we may not know anything about.

R. Alan Brooks: There's this thing that I have been saying, which is whenever you encounter an -ism, like racism, sexism, ableism, whatever it is, it comes from either a failure, or a refusal to see the humanity of the other party. For somebody who's refused, then I don't even worry about them; they made a choice. But for people who have just failed to see the humanity, art is a very powerful way to illustrate, to build a bridge between our understanding. It's a powerful way to be in someone else's shoes, to see things from their perspective.

Suzi Q. Smith: Writing is definitely part of my way of acknowledging how I feel. And that is my usual first exploration of my own emotional body — the writing process. So that's probably the first thing that really drew me to writing poetry. And in that process, being able to invite other people with me through that journey is incredibly

valuable. The pieces that I think are the most isolating to create are often the ones that people connect the most to. And I think the more that we do that, the more we learn that we're actually much more the same than we are different. And that's powerful.

Brooks: Rod Serling, who created *The Twilight Zone*, is a big influence on the way that I write. And one of the things that he said was that when he wrote about Democrats or Republicans, he would get censored, but when he wrote about Martians, he didn't. If I can create a story that illustrates the dynamics of how we are wrong to each other, how we're missing each other, then we are a lot more open to receiving it. I feel like, at its core, often art is taking something that is intangible and making it tangible — like, if you ask any of us what our favorite song is, it's usually something that communicated an emotion or experience that we didn't have the words for. I think that's why art is so powerful when it comes to fueling revolution — when it comes to creating people who are revolutionary thinkers. There's a reason why dictators outlaw art immediately.

Queen: Black poets have been in

a revolution from the beginning. That's why we write, because we have things to say. If something gets distilled into a poem or a book or a piece of art, a piece of music, folks can often connect to that more immediately and more personally than they can with a historical text. Stories, however fictional they are, make the truth undeniable, if they're clear and well-made enough.

Smith: When I think about the work that I offer to people, I do show up in a lot of different spaces that are largely white audiences — frequently people who don't think of themselves as having racist attitudes or racist ideologies — and helping them see themselves as maybe not the hero for the first time. It's very likely that they've never had to listen to a voice like mine, that they've never had to like actually just be in my audience. I have to enter it with a lot of truth. I don't necessarily need you to agree with me. But I do want to make you think about something, I do want to make you feel something, I hope it makes you move different in the world. Maybe you rethink what you say before you say it, or maybe actually have a deeper expression of love for people who are not like you.

There is the work of truth and the undeniability of truth, but you also have to imagine who any given piece of work is for. What's the challenge in that right now?

Smith: I always push back on that, because my first audience is me. Other people might like it. It might serve other people; I hope that it serves other people. But it begins with me. I need to say a thing, or I will explode. And then, hopefully, there's an audience for it; then, whoever rocks with it, it's for them. I know that's the first rule of writing, is know your audience. And I'm just like, well, I'm trying not to die.

Brooks: In general, I come from that same place as Suzi: This is a thing that I want to talk about, so I'm going to talk about it. I feel like art and commerce are separate. And if I'm trying to calculate commerce while I'm making the art, then I do myself and everybody who reads my stuff a disservice.

I'm wanting to create the art that I want to create. And then my secondary job after I create it is to get my hustle together, and figure out how to push it and push it and push it and push it. Because, you know, I am not waiting on these motherfuckers to recognize what

“For people who have just failed to see the humanity, art is a very powerful way to illustrate, to build a bridge between our understanding. It’s a powerful way to be in someone else’s shoes, to see things from their perspective.”

I can do. I just do it. *The Burning Metronome*, for example. That is not a book about police brutality, but the first chapter deals with police brutality. And so when I sent out press releases, that is what everybody wanted to focus on. So that's fine, because that is a true and accurate aspect of the book. It got their interest in it. And it brought people to read all of the rest of the book, you know?

Queen: Do y'all feel like folks pick up on the more sensationalist aspects of your work, and then miss the fuller, complex, human picture of it? Do you feel like you fight against that?

Brooks: Oh, yeah, definitely. I fight against — particularly with journalists — them trying to make me the story, more than my work the story. So if I write about police brutality, then what they want to ask is, "When have you dealt with police brutality?" But that's not what I'm here to talk about. I'm here to talk about the book that I wrote.

Steven Dunn: With *Potted Meat*, people do focus on the abuse and stuff like that, and that's there, but, you know, there's love and all of that, and friendship, which rarely gets talked about. People just miss it.

Queen: It's ridiculous, what we have to do, and it comes from a lot of white people feeling like they have to be the center of the

conversation, and that they have to relate to everything that they read or be present in everything that they read, instead of looking at the human parts and connecting through the feeling, versus the people. You have to go beyond the perceptions and go deeper. People are usually skimming the surface of things, because that's easier. It doesn't challenge the way they think, doesn't challenge the way that they behave and ask them to change their belief system. It means that they can just go about their business and not have to stop and say, "Wait a minute, it's not right that this clerk is telling this Black customer that they have to show their ID and five credit cards in order to prove that they can purchase something."

Dunn: What you were saying about asking and looking at the human parts: That is interesting, because we've been asked to do that for white people all our lives. We get it from elementary (school) on. We're always asked to look at white people's humanity. It's just this one-way thing most of the time.

Smith: It's so important when we consider just the role of literature. It's very easy for us to humanize white people, because we've been receiving white stories in a million different capacities from the time we're born. It's so important to be reading as many stories as you can, teaching as many stories as you can. Check your curriculum, check

who you're teaching, check who you're reading, check who's on your shelves. Check who you're recommending, check your book club, all of that. Because the more different types of stories you're receiving, the broader your perspective is and the more human you become. Save your own life.

What role do established gatekeepers have now, and do you think currently there is more opportunity to publish?

Smith: I probably quote this poem at least once a week — Cornelius Eady, "Gratitude": "And to the bullies who need the musty air of the clubhouse all to themselves: I am a brick in a house that is being built around your house." That's just how I feel about it. At this point, I feel like that's where most of my energy has been invested in — what can we build independently — and then maybe we become relevant to people outside of this, or maybe we don't. I'm focused on primarily meeting our needs, as a collective and as a people first.

Brooks: Suzi, you know, what you said, dope, right? I feel like gatekeeping leads to specific routes, you know, of business and success, and I'm not going to exclude those routes, but I also am not going to wait on these motherfuckers. If I was waiting on people, nobody would know who I was or what I do. I do graphic novels that are a lot of fantasy sci-fi stuff. It has social commentary, it has the experiences of race in it, but it's so outside of the paradigm — they want me to just write an essay about how a cop was mean to me one day.

Dunn: I'm always managing my bitterness around this, and I need to do better. I didn't win some awards in a few places because my book is experimental or whatever the case may be, but then white people with the same type of book win it after that, or whatever. It is so frustrating,

you know, because awards do help you get jobs and money and more opportunities. They affect tangible lives and shit. I need to work; I need money and stuff. I'm always bitter about it, but I try not to be, trying to keep moving and put my energy where it will really matter.

Queen: Gates are absurd. It's absurd, and it serves to keep our thinking from expanding and keep us from being empathetic with one another and keep us from having relationships with one another that are authentic. It's just recycling the same old shit. And you know, the time for that is over.

Smith: People have been asking and talking a lot about "this moment," that we're in this moment, this moment, this moment, and asking me if I have something to say about this moment. I don't have to create anything new for this moment, because I got plenty left from the last moment. And the moment before that, and the moment before that. I got poems on poems on poems for this moment and the next, because this moment has been stretching this whole time, right, this whole time that I've been here. And then before that, for many generations prior, so, yeah, none of this is new, right? It's just a matter of it's new to some folks. Right, more people are seeing it. And I appreciate that light. I appreciate that. There's some exposure. Um, but yeah, been here.

Queen: We're over it, and if it seems like we're mad, it's because we deserve to be mad. We're still being harmed, killed, losing our friends and loved ones and livelihoods. And it's not a scary mad; we're not gonna get like, pitchforks and do-rags and then march up to your house. We just want to live. So, worry about your own shit. That's what I gotta say. I guess I shouldn't be cussing so much. Fix your life. Fix your behavior. Please. Our lives depend on it. To paraphrase June Jordan's "Poem About My Rights" — yours might, too. ✨

*“Black poets
have been in a revolution
from the beginning.”*

Thank you, Rudolfo Anaya

Remembering a writer whose West was magical and mysterious.

BY GUSTAVO ARELLANO

SOPHOMORE YEAR, ANAHEIM

High School, fall of 1994. School administrators had just kicked me out of honor's English for being too lippy to Mrs. Patsel, and kicked me over to Mrs. Lafler. My classmates switched from overachieving nerds to stoners, cholos and other misfits.

Mrs. Lafler was the petite, bespectacled white woman in charge of saving us. She should've stood no chance. We frequently talked back, didn't bother with homework, and basically checked off every box in the underachieving Latino high schooler book.

Then she assigned *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya.

The classic coming-of-age novel about a young Hispano boy in 1940s New Mexico immediately resonated with us, and not just because it included curse words in equal parts English and Spanish. Mrs. Lafler told us about the book's history — how dozens of school boards had banned it in the decades since its 1971 publication for, as she told us, daring to depict Mexicans as humans.

Outlaw literature for kids cast off by administrators as outlaws.

The main protagonist, Antonio "Tony" Juan Marez y Luna, lived and sounded like us: a *chamaco* (young boy) who got in trouble, whose parents fretted for his future, and who lived in a small town rooted in generational conflicts that made little sense except when they inevitably ended in tragedy.

More importantly, though,

there was a pride in Anaya's words that we had never read before, namely because he was the first Mexican-American author any teacher of ours had ever bothered to offer.

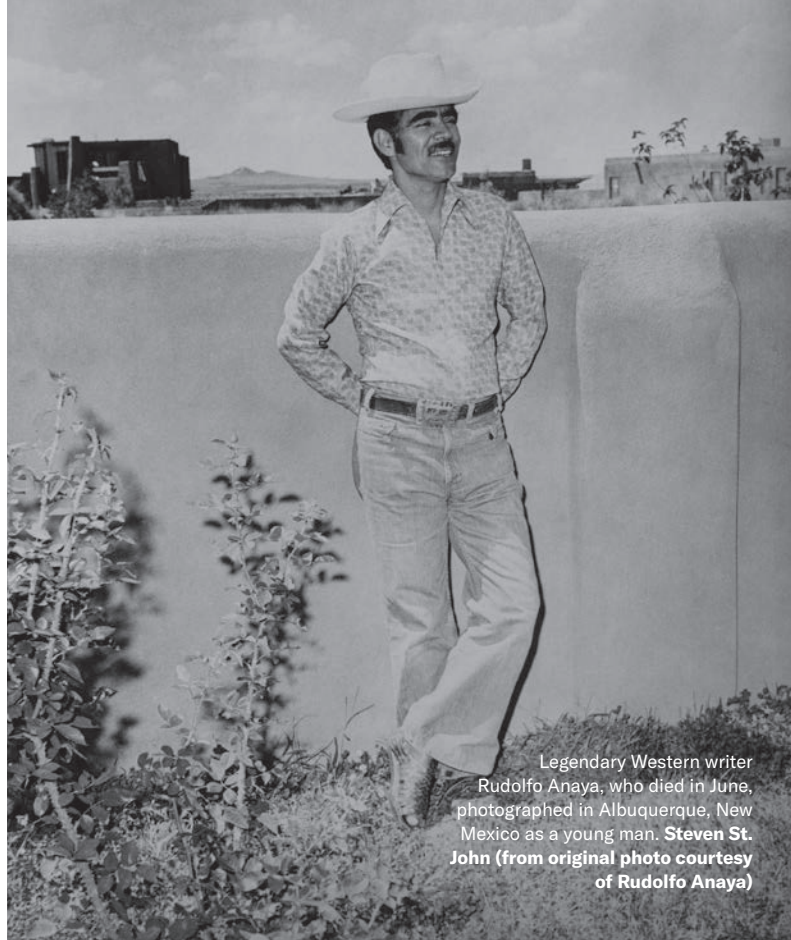
I can't remember any of the term papers or projects we did for *Bless Me, Ultima*, but I do remember the class respected Mrs. Lafler after we were done with it. The book stuck with me in a way few others did from high school ever have. (Sorry, *Wuthering Heights*.)

Part of it was representation, yes. But Anaya and his work, the rest which I ended up devouring years after I graduated college (my university professors didn't teach him) also touches at what I feel is life itself: beautiful, but always in conflict and never guaranteed. Something where joy must always waltz with melancholy, so you might as well have a fiesta for it.

And only upon his passing did I realize that this was the West.

Anaya, who died June 28, at the age of 82, never again reached the mainstream heights of *Bless Me, Ultima*, which is now part of the high school canon and became a movie in 2013. And it's a shame. He was a Chicano Faulkner, except that Anaya didn't have to create a Yoknapatawpha County.

Because his native New Mexico and surrounding Southwest proved mysterious and magical enough to serve as a sketchbook in which he documented and defined the region like no one else.



Legendary Western writer Rudolfo Anaya, who died in June, photographed in Albuquerque, New Mexico as a young man. Steven St. John (from original photo courtesy of Rudolfo Anaya)

His characters, whether *Bless Me, Ultima*'s Tony, the past-his-prime boxer Abrán González in the 1992 epic *Albuquerque*, or hard-boiled detective Sonny Baca (who starred in four of Anaya's books), were proud people with a connection to the land that went back generations and from which they drew their life force. It was a reflection of Anaya's own worldview.

"When people ask me where my roots are," he once told an interviewer in 1979, "I look down at my feet and I see the roots of my soul grasping the earth."

Anaya's West was a Promised Land where Manifest Destiny tried to destroy Chicano and Indigenous people and their traditions — and failed. People of color were centered instead of stereotyped. White people were problematic interlopers, a speck of dust in the region's grand narrative.

Anaya refused to allow the weight of ethnic expectations stop him from experimenting. He was always a proud Chicano, but one who stressed that *el movimiento* didn't have to live and breath revolution all the time.

"This is a danger if we are to develop artists," he told the same

1979 interviewer. "There will be some political works, and there will be some that will be concerned with the smallest, most practical details of day-to-day living, concerned with love, joy, and tragedy. That is the kind of freedom we must have."

This philosophy came out in a prodigious bibliography that included plays, poetry, short stories, children's books, travelogues (*A Chicano in China* remains one of the few Latino-penned entries in this overwhelmingly gringo genre) detective novels, essays and even witty wine reviews for an Albuquerque alt-weekly.

Nevertheless, Anaya knew what his life's work was: Solving the wound of the West. It was, he once wrote in an essay, "the challenge of our generation, to create a consciousness which fosters a flowering of the human spirit, not its exploitation. We need healing in our world community; it can start here."

For those of us who have tried to walk in his footsteps, it's a reminder that our work will never be done — and that's even more reason to continue it. Because that's what Rudy did. ☀

Where does U.S. migration policy go from here?

Three books that challenge the way we imagine the U.S.-Mexico border.

BY SARAH TORY

IN 2018, I MET A 29-YEAR-OLD MAN I'll call Alex (to protect his identity) at a soup kitchen for migrants in Nogales, Sonora, just across the U.S.-Mexico border from Nogales, Arizona. Most of the migrants were families with young children who came from Central America and the state of Guerrero, Mexico, fleeing poverty and violence fueled by a legacy of U.S.-backed military coups and corporate plundering. They had come to seek asylum in America.

Alex was different. His parents brought him to the U.S. from Honduras when he was 7, and he grew up in New York City undocumented. At 21, he got into a fight, and the police were called. Immigration and Customs Enforcement eventually deported Alex, separating him from his infant son. He spent the next eight years in Honduras. Now, knowing he had no chance of asylum and no legal way to return to the U.S., Alex planned to cross the border illegally. "I'm trying get back to my son," he told me.

A month later, Alex called me. He was staying with a friend

in Tennessee, after spending 12 days crossing a deadly stretch of the desert from outside Nogales, Sonora all the way to Phoenix, Arizona, walking more than 150 miles, mostly alone. He survived, he thought, because of his military training; Alex had served briefly in the U.S. military reserves.

Without knowing his story, it would be easy to categorize Alex as either a victim or a criminal. But he was neither. He was a boxing aficionado, a construction worker and above all, a father who desperately wanted to be reunited with his son. But like so many, he was caught in the web of U.S. immigration policies.

Three new nonfiction books examine the failures of those policies, from the flawed, outdated science that shaped them, to the current wall-building fiasco, and, finally, to what it might take to create a more effective, and just, immigration framework.

IN 1994, THE CLINTON administration implemented a new border enforcement strategy called "prevention through deterrence,"



Michelle Urra / HCN

designed to force migrants away from Borderlands cities and toward far more remote and dangerous routes, like the one Alex took. Such policies have not stopped migration, but they have made it far more deadly.

In *The Next Great Migration*, Sonia Shah questions this strategy, challenging the view that migration is a "crisis." As Shah reveals, the science tells a different story: Migration is central to human biology and history.

Draconian immigration policies, Shah argues, are a response to flawed public opinion, not a reflection of the facts. The perception of migrants as a global threat has become lodged in the public mind. Studies show that many Americans vastly overestimate the number of undocumented immigrants and

are convinced they worsen crime. In fact, high rates of immigration (both legal and unauthorized) are associated with lower rates of both violent and property crimes.

"We've constructed a story about our past, our bodies, and the natural world in which migration is the anomaly," Shah writes. But that story is an illusion. Shah explores how three centuries of outdated scientific ideas about the role of migrants, both in the natural world and in human societies, have shaped anti-immigrant viewpoints that persist today.

Shah begins with the 18th century Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus, charting the path from his failed quest for proof that different races were biologically distinct species, to contemporary white nationalist and anti-immigration

crusader John Tanton, a retired Michigan ophthalmologist who warned about a coming “Latin onslaught” in a series of memos revealed in 1988.

Shah skillfully weaves the connections between science, policy and public opinion, demonstrating how, for instance, biologist Paul Ehrlich’s ideas about catastrophic population growth inspired environmentalist support for immigration restriction — though even Ehrlich later admitted that his 1968 book *The Population Bomb* had not been rooted in science at all. Rather, it was a “propaganda piece,” he said, aimed at mobilizing interest in environmental protection.

Shah takes readers to nearly every corner of the world: from human migration hotspots like the Darién Gap, at the Colombia-Panama border, to the San Miguel Mountains in Southern California, one of the last habitats for the endangered checkerspot butterfly, whose survival hinges on its ability to migrate. Though her scientific history is expansive and rigorous, at times she sidesteps research that undermines her argument, overlooking, for example, the damage invasive species can inflict on ecosystems.

Still, Shah helps illuminate why Alex and so many others are choosing to migrate. “The idea that there should be a single explanation for migration is rooted in a sedentarist notion,” Shah writes, referencing the geographer Richard Black. Both human and non-human species respond to devastating environmental changes by moving. When people are threatened by war, rising seas or persistent poverty, fleeing is a matter of survival. Likewise, for someone like Alex, a father facing a future without his son, the decision was only natural.

IF SHAH SHOWS HOW outdated beliefs explain current attitudes towards migration, journalist and author DW Gibson reveals how those attitudes are playing out at the U.S.-Mexico border today. After

the Department of Homeland Security advertised for border wall prototypes in 2017, Gibson began visiting the construction site south of San Diego, where they were erected.

His book, *14 miles: Building the Border Wall*, starts there, chronicling the locals whose lives are affected by the building of the wall. Among others, we meet a member of the Kumeyaay Tribe, whose traditional territory stretches from Southern California to northern Baja California, Border Patrol agents, a Haitian asylum seeker, a former human smuggler, and activists who leave jugs of water in the desert for migrants.

Unfortunately, few of the characters are fully developed, and at times, the interviews and extensive dialogue feel excessive. Gibson divulges little personal information, portraying himself as an out-of-place reporter who swigs bad coffee at a Denny’s restaurant and speaks mediocre Spanish. His strength lies in the way his interviews reveal the absurdities and contradictions of the border and the wall-building endeavor — its crass capitalism and phony politicking.

The most revealing character is the real estate baron and U.S. presidential hopeful Roque De La Fuente, one of several scammy businessmen clamoring to profit from the future wall. De La Fuente owns 2,000 acres of desert abutting the proposed wall expansion, and publicly hopes to sell his land to the federal government. Privately, however, he acknowledges that the wall “is a crazy stupid idea. We need more crossings.” Indirectly, De La Fuente supports Shah’s argument that human societies thrive on connection. What’s unnatural is trying to cut those connections off.

For Gibson, the border is less the frontier than its mirror, reflecting the vision of America people want to see. Such visions leave little room for “hyphenated Americans” — as a San Diego property owner refers to any people whose identities complicate his monolithic idea of America.

IF MIGRATION IS NATURAL and the border wall a boondoggle inspired by racism and greed, then how do we dismantle these narratives and the systems of power and oppression that perpetuate them?

In 2016, former journalist Susan Briante, now a poet and a University of Arizona creative writing professor, began taking her graduate students to the U.S.-Mexico border to research migration issues. Attending the “Operation Streamline” trials, where migrants caught crossing the border illegally are processed en masse, Briante observes how formulaic court documents and judges’ statements erase the lived experience of people like Alex.

Poetry can “extend the document,” Briante writes in *Defacing the Monument*, a book of documentary poetry. For Briante, the border’s failures emerge not only in cruel and inhumane policies like Operation Streamline, but also in how we tell the stories and record the history of those on the margins of our society.

Documentary poetry often resembles a scrapbook, mixing primary source material — photos, court records, letters and maps — with the poet’s own words, conveying her interpretation of the historical record and, crucially, what the documents leave out. “A frame of words can determine what one sees,” Briante writes.

Briante calls documentary poetry the “anti-journalism,” but I see it more as a meditation on the difficult moral and ethical questions facing anyone — whether journalist or poet — writing about the pain of others. “How can we amplify voices without turning other people’s stories into commodities, without re-affirming the faulty myth of ‘giving voice?’ ” Briante wonders.

Perhaps this is why those other voices are mostly absent from *Defacing the Monument*. But Briante is not writing here as a journalist; she is less concerned about the migrants’ stories than the way those stories are obscured or erased.

Like Shah and Gibson, Briante asks us to reimagine the way we see the border and the lives it encompasses — to interrogate the false sense of normalcy that pervades our current immigration regime, and to “reframe and recontextualize every exception and every unexceptional atrocity.”

Briante doesn’t offer concrete suggestions for how to fix our inhumane immigration system. Instead, she urges another kind of transformation. Instead of new walls, Briante suggests, the U.S. needs new narratives, and a more expansive idea of what its borders are for. That requires a more expansive idea of America itself, rooted in connection rather than fear.

“The future unfurls like the sky above the cities of Nogales, Arizona, and Nogales, Sonora, a sky redacted by the bars of a wall. What will we write or imagine between those bars? What will we make from them?” Briante asks.

When Alex called me to say he had survived the crossing, he spoke of his journey — about the blisters on his feet, the hallucinations from the heat. He saw a puma, he said, and the remains of a human body. But he kept walking. He focused on his son, he said, “the only thing I think about.” ✨

**The Next Great Migration:
The Beauty and Terror of Life
on the Move**

Sonia Shah
387 pages, hardcover:
\$25.20
Bloomsbury, 2020.

**14 Miles: Building the Border
Wall**

DW Gibson
352 pages, hardcover:
\$28
Simon & Schuster, 2020.

Defacing the Monument

Susan Briante
168 pages, softcover:
\$21
Noemi Press, 2020.

The physics of connection

In the middle of a pandemic, a lifetime of lessons from a parent.

BY BARB LACHENBRUCH

IF I HELD A HAMMER CORRECTLY, the way my father taught me, and then swung it down on a rock, the rock would break. I would have caused that to happen. I would have transferred kinetic energy from my arm to the hammer's handle and then to the hammer's head and then to the rock. The energy would cleave bonds in the rock, and release sound and heat. My father taught me all that, long ago.

Now he lives in an adult foster home outside Corvallis, Oregon. When I grin at him as he sits in his wheelchair, he grins back. I can cause that to happen, too. But how? There is no law of physics to explain the transfer of emotions, no equation to describe the difference between what I send and what my father receives. I need that equation because that difference, I fear, is increasing.

When I was young, in the hills above Stanford, California, my days were explosions of wonder. There was so much, and then there was even more. My father, a tall and thoughtful man, guided me toward the underlying laws so I could see relationships, not just the individual phenomena. He shielded me from overload, so I could still revel in what was around me. At night, I'd keep him at my bedside, asking question after question.

One night, I asked him, "Why is the man-in-the-moon just a fingernail tonight?" The bed dipped toward where my father sat, as he explained orbits, the sun and the Earth's shadow. The moon made sense. As he bent for a good-night kiss, he said, "The same circling of the moon also causes the tides."

"How does that work?" I asked. He rocked back, the bed dipped again. He raised two fists and described gravity and the tides, how the



moon exerts its pull even when it's below the horizon.

"Sometimes something happens, and you can't see its cause," he said. "But if you scratch your head and think about it, you might get lucky and figure it out."

"That's the fun of it," I said.

"I think so," my father told me. "In fact, that's a big part of the fun of life."

THE MOON CIRCLED THE EARTH, and the oceans were drawn toward it. Many times. I grew older. We kept talking. Over a pot of oatmeal roiling on the stove, my father explained the transfer of convective, conductive and radiative heat. When I learned to drive, he explained friction and momentum. In the garden, trac-

ing fissures in the mud, he taught me that even though cracks are called failures, they can be good things, allowing conflicted parts to go their separate ways.

Kneeling next to a dried-up mud hole, he said, "Mud shrinks when it dries, which makes stresses. When cracks form, they relieve the stresses. A lot of times, what looks random actually isn't. I bet the crack started here," he said, his fingertip on a smooth spot, "where it looks a little siltier. That would make it mechanically different." He pointed out the dried mud, the right angles in the cracks. The mud made sense.

"That's boss," I said.

But some cracks come in at different angles, he explained, showing me one. When I asked why, he said it wasn't 100% figured out. And in a way I could not define, that idea was the most captivating of all.

"Still," my father said, "if you know something's mechanical properties and the forces on it, you can often predict how it will distort," and he pulled his cheeks in opposite directions, leaving mud prints on his face. "This whole network of mud cracks is an example of how a disrupter at one scale — the weak spot in the mud — can cause a pattern we see at a completely different scale!"

I nodded, but did not yet understand how relevant these matters would become.

MUD DRIED AND CRACKED. Many times. We grew older. I worked through different sorts of problems — how to escape the restraints of my orbit, make use of momentum, and control failures so I could pull away. I discovered there was always another stress after a first one was relieved, and that superficial problems could be traced to causes deeper down. And, just as my father had told me, I could usually see a pattern at one scale before I figured out where the weak spot had been at a smaller scale. Those adolescent problems seem trivial now.

In his old age, my father moved near me, to a small care home in the Willamette Valley with beds of floppy perennials, and beyond them, apple trees, chickens and a cow. I visited frequently. Although we'd shared much, there was always more. One afternoon, we came across an inscription he'd written in a book some decades before:

"To Barbara I pass
This curious source.
Tho' I took from it much
It's still there, of course."

We laughed and laughed, our guffaws reigniting each other's merriment, like contagion.

Gradually, my father's senility began to muddle our interactions. After a visit, I would realize how much I had simplified the stories I'd told, how heavily I had guided our conversation. Although we still interacted, I felt a growing solitude. I alone held the details we had once shared. The detail-holding part of my father was dissipating, like radiative heat from oatmeal.

But the logic-holding part remained. We talked at length about the metaphysics of time. The past, we decided, was intangible. Our only pieces of evidence that it existed at all were relics — photos, or cracks in the mud. The future was no more than a course we anticipated based on our assumptions of current trajectories, which themselves were problematic because there was no past. That meant the present perches on the cusp between nonexistent pasts and futures. "So we'd better enjoy the present while it lasts," my father would quip. I felt like I was with him again.

Even as our visits unfolded, a random disrupter occurred — on the coating of a coronavirus on a different continent. A chemical change allowed the virus to alter the physiology of humans. The disrupter jumped scales, affecting individuals, then entire populations.

I shared with my father what I knew about the virus. "It may affect yet another scale," I told him. "Our society." He asked for information, in spite of the stack of newspapers and magazines next to his computer, which sat by his television.

But the details were not transferring.

The next time I visited, I arranged to meet him outside, even though it was 46 degrees Fahrenheit. I was already sitting in a wicker chair on the dormant lawn when he rolled out the door. He smiled broadly, then continued toward me. I backed away, chair and all, explaining that we mustn't get close because one of us could infect the other. He heard me, but didn't follow my explanation. "If you think we should sit at a distance, OK," he said, amiable as always. "I don't understand, but I understand you have reasons."

Then society banned our in-person visits, so we met up via video chats instead. But my father didn't understand why I didn't come by. "You're traveling a lot? You're really busy?" he'd ask.

"No. There's a virus. I don't know if I have it. It would be dangerous to you and the others if I carried that virus."

"Can you get it fixed?" he'd reply. "What is it you need to fix? Is it your phone?"

We repeated that exchange every few days. I would hang up, seething and stressed. If only I were with him, I'd think, I could mold our discussions, seed them with old events, draw up his memories. I could help him connect them back to his past and his future, sewing them all together, whatever that meant. Then he would still be there for himself. And for me.

I wanted to ride my bike to his home.

Wanted to pound kinetic energy from my torso through my legs to the pedals, translating their circular motion to the eccentric path of the chain, to move the cog, to turn my tires along the planar surface that stretched three miles from my garage to his home. I wanted to bang on his window — my kinetic energy converting to a clatter — and pantomime, "Hello," "I love you," and "I'm with you." And I wanted to receive the same messages back.

But the transfer would not have been complete. My father would have puzzled over my appearance at the window. Then, relieved that I had finally come by, he would have transferred kinetic energy from his arms to his hands to the rims of his wheelchair wheels, rolling them in a circle and propelling his chair over the planar surface from his bedroom to the outside door. Where I would not be.

Perplexed, my father would have rolled back to his room, saddened by my incomplete visit.

How could physics let me down? I tell myself that there must be a discernible cause to his no longer understanding. But I can't find the weak spot where my stress will be relieved. I can't find the cause for his failure to understand. I can't even find the place in me where communication comes out or the place where it goes in. I have sketched and I have pondered. But it's not 100% figured out. It's not figured out at all. I have come up empty as a moonless sky. ☼



Barb Lachenbruch, at five years old, with her father, Art Lachenbruch, in Palo Alto, California, in 1962 (opposite).

Edie Lachenbruch

The author and her father maintain their social distance during an August visit at the senior care home where he lives in Corvallis, Oregon (left). **Will Matsuda / HCN**



Jacob Myrick / HCN

ESSAY

Now that you've gone West, young man

Toward unlearning Manifest Destiny.

BY ALEX CARR JOHNSON

I INHERITED THE KEYS to the kingdom on the day I was born into my white and male American body. Every day since then, my success as a man has been determined by how well I've grown into my power. Prowess in sports and recreation, check. Titles and letters, check. Ownership of land and property, possession of another through marriage, accumulation of wealth, check. This process felt like work to me, but never impossible.

Before I was a man, I was a boy learning how to be one in St. Louis, Missouri. One of my earliest sacred places was the Gateway Arch, that glorious neo-futurist national monument to Thomas Jefferson's dream of Westward Expansion. I was drawn to its shining spectacle, its enormity and promise. I begged

my parents to return as often as we could.

I loved everything about our trips to the Arch, including the Mississippi River at its base, where we boarded the moored Mississippi paddlewheels, ships that had brought goods and people here from all over the world on their way to the West. I loved the cavernous underground museum with its herds of stuffed bison and wax figures of stereotypical cowboys and Indians. I learned all about the exciting and beautiful parts of the world that lay to the West, where always the sky was blue, the grass green, the sunsets golden. I learned, too, of the brave (white) people, each with their own romantic story of passage through this gateway into a better, Western future.

Here I was, lucky, ready to walk through that grand gateway, too. The apex of those trips to the Arch, literally and emotionally, was climbing out of the cramped elevator and running to the highest window, trying to make sense of my place in the world from high up, surveying the city below, craning my neck toward the green horizon. I was a prince, and here was my inheritance. I saw in the Arch exactly what I was supposed to see: a monument to conquest and power. The Arch created in me an unquenchable desire to fulfill my destiny — something the “American West” would provide me.

As soon as I could, I went West. I traveled, worked and explored much of this mythical country throughout my 20s. I fished for salmon, ran upon grizzlies, climbed peaks and paddled wild rivers from the high Rockies of Montana to the high desert of New Mexico, the Western Slope of Colorado, the Southern Sierra, Point Reyes, Mount Rainier, all over and then again. Launched westward through the Gateway Arch, I learned how to wear my mantle as a man of the American West.

I’M WRITING THESE words from my current home in Anchorage, Alaska, approaching middle age, at the tattered edge of ongoing American colonization. Maybe with age comes humility. I hope that’s the case, because I am beginning to understand just how much I am going to need. I’m embarrassed by how long it’s taken me to learn other versions of the American story. As an educated, progressive white person, I intellectually understood the violence of America’s creation. But for years, I couldn’t articulate the unfurling personal injustices that the country had enacted. I had failed to understand or care to know who had suffered and who continued to suffer from the great American project. I carried out my role in the project so earnestly that it was impossible for me to see, let alone understand, my own complicity in those injustices.

As I write, I’m looking out at a Western scene from my childhood dreams: snow-capped mountains rising above the sweep of the ocean. It looks like a damned oil painting. I was taught to call the nearest mountain Susitna, and this part of the ocean Cook Inlet. But I am learning to see this place as someone else’s home, even today. The Dena’ina have been here for over 10,000 years, with their names, languages and knowledge still alive on these lands and waters. Beneath the mountains are two of their towns, Beluga and Tyonek. The Dena’ina also call Susitna *Dghelishla*, Little Mountain. The river beneath Dghelishla is *Susitna*, Big Sandy River. The wide sweep of ocean is called *Tikahtnu*, Big Water River.

I am learning, very slowly, to see the people I was taught not to see, to hear stories I was taught not to hear. I first practiced this, I realize, by listening to the thumping of my own heart, a heart that taught me that as a gay man in America, I was born into a nation that seeks to ignore, erase and destroy people like me. Such an understanding comes slowly, but once it comes, it is passage through another kind of gateway. Once I understood my true place here, I could no longer trust the stories I had been told about my nation, my inheritance, or my God, all of these woven into the banner that led me West. The American West is a national myth, part of a collection of myths that actively erase innumerable people and their stories — mine included.

In our mid-20s, my now-husband and I went about canoeing the full 1,800-mile length of the Yukon River. The idea had been romantic, to follow in the footsteps of the Klondike gold rush pioneers. For two months, we paddled down a mud-and-silt-thick river that was at times a mile wide. The river was, indeed, spectacularly beautiful, and the gold rush history fascinating, but day by day, we also learned the stories of a land and its peoples — the Southern and Northern Tutchone, Han, Tanana, Koyukon, Holikachuk, Deg Hit’an and Yupik

“I am learning, very slowly to see the people I was taught not to see, to hear stories I was taught not to learn.”

— who were still healing from the trauma inflicted by the rapacious men who once sought their own kingdoms, or at least their fortunes, along the banks of the Yukon River. Many gold-rushers lost their lives, though a few did become quite rich. But I began to realize that neither the tragedy nor glory of that land were theirs to claim.

Just a dozen miles from the Bering Sea, a big storm rolled in that forced us to end our trip in the Yupik village of Emmonak. When we arrived at the small airfield, the local ticket agent asked us if we had made it to the sea. We told him we hadn’t; he said we’d failed in our journey. I still think about him often. He was right: We had sought to conquer the river, and we had failed. Day by day, mile by mile, the beauty of the Yukon gave way to the truth that I was an interloper, a colonizer, re-enacting the grand lie of the West, just as so many other men had before me.

The American West was never an empty land of solitude and vistas, there for the taking by gold rush heroes and the Marlboro Man. It was only explained as such by settlers who benefited from that story. The names of the land were not lost; colonizers and governments destroyed them. The multitudes of Indigenous societies of the West were not somehow rightfully subdued; people who called themselves Americans erased them, or attempted to. To passively accept the stories of the West as I inherited them is to be complicit with the ongoing erasure of living cultures, languages, ways of knowing — even bodies themselves. As I’ve learned all too well, such erasure is a violent and impassive act.

The West was indeed my inheritance, but it was ill-gotten through war, enslavement, forced labor, genocide and conquest. Every American must learn this, must find their own gateway to collective liberation, if we are to someday exist as part of a peaceful nation: Our inheritance is not great wealth, but a terrible debt. ☀

Heard Around the West

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

BY BETSY MARSTON

MONTANA

An overcast day sent Bill Childrey, 75, out early to the Big Hole River near Notch Bottom in Montana to do some dry-fly fishing. The fish were biting, but Childrey's morning went downhill after a good-sized rattler, "a four-or-five-footer," bit him on the leg, reports the *Montana Standard*. Understandably upset, he started limping home, though he only later learned how serious his predicament was: "I probably had three hours to get to the hospital." Unfortunately, it's hard to limp that fast, so when Childrey saw a neighbor's truck with the keys inside, he jumped in and drove off, not knowing that the owner saw the truck leave and assumed it was being stolen. For several hours, the sheriff investigated the possible truck theft — maybe even a kidnapping. But everything ended well: Only one of the snake's fangs penetrated Childrey's leg, and he received antivenin after being airlifted to a second hospital. Childrey said he's gotten a lot of ribbing from fishing buddies who ask him, with the fishing that good, "Why didn't I stay and fish longer?"

COLORADO

Forget amenities like in-home movie theaters or fancy gyms; what makes this particular house in Aspen extra-special — and among the most expensive ever — is its oxygenated air. The 15,000-square-foot mansion, on the edge of the White River National Forest, costs \$49 million because the master bedroom features pumped-in oxygen. That makes sleepers feel they're back at sea level instead of 8,000 feet above it.



OREGON

Wearing gas masks, they stood behind a sign that read: "I UNDERSTAND that I will never UNDERSTAND, however I STAND: Black Lives Matter." Teressa Raiford, a Black mother and the executive director of Don't Shoot Portland, a local group that works to end police violence, helped organize the early actions of the "wall of moms" in Portland, Oregon. *The New York Times* reported that after participating in the street protests for five weeks, the mostly white mothers decided to wear color-coordinated T-shirts to stand out. Raiford said, "Nobody recognized them until they literally put on white so they could be highlighted as white." That just made the truth more obvious, she added: "Black lives don't matter

here, white moms do." The group's informal organizer and leader, Bev Barnum, said that when she went on Facebook to urge women to join the protest, she told them to look "like they were going to Target," adding, "I wanted us to look like moms. Because who wants to shoot a mom? No one."

COLORADO

The one-column classified ad in western Colorado's *Delta County Independent* was highly unusual. Fifteen inches long and brutally frank, it read like an obituary for the long-suffering vehicle in question, which had survived the teenage years of the owner's three sons. It began: "The 1997 Legacy is a town car because it will leave you stranded some day and if you're still

in town your friends won't mind coming to pick you up." We called to do a little fact-checking with owner Scott Locke, a metal fabricator in Montrose, who reported that the ad was absolutely accurate: He bought one tire at a time because he never knew when the car would quit, and bought only 5 gallons of gas at a time for the same reason. Moreover, "top speed is 60 MPH going downhill." Yet the car (bought used) had its good points: It ran great in the snow "if it's not too deep" and got 22 miles per gallon. On the other hand, after racking up 350,000 miles, it needed (and probably deserved) a quart of oil every month, plus a daily "turkey basting" of coolant. Locke said that the newspaper's publisher, Dennis Robinson, liked the ad so much he kept running it pretty much for free, until a man on his first day out of jail offered him \$200. "He drove it off OK," Locke said, "and if he milks it, I think it would last another couple of years." The sale delighted his wife, who feared that her new Subaru's value might be "leaking due to the near proximity of the beater" in the garage.

IDAHO

Nevada reader Ron Guidott saw two signs recently that left him wondering about Western humor. One, in front of a restaurant in Teton, Wyoming, warned: "Please, no loose dogs or celery phones." Just as well, since celery phones tend to have such crunchy reception. The other sign, in his hometown of Minden, advertised in giant letters: "Blow Out tire sale!" Minden said he can't help wondering just how long those "blow-out" tires will last. ✨

Spread the News, Take Us Higher

High Country News

Twenty years ago, *High Country News* launched a special fundraising campaign we dubbed “Spreading the News” to push the organization to ambitious new heights. The response from readers was overwhelming. This year, we’ve turned 50 and, once again, we have big plans: We want to invest even more substantially in our journalism, our audience and our infrastructure — and we need your help raising an ambitious \$10 million to do it.

Dedicated readers like you have supported our mission to inform and inspire people to work on behalf of the West for 50 years. Now we’re asking you to help us achieve a common vision for the future, and to join us as we celebrate the work of our past.

Sunrise on the Eastern Sierra outside Bishop, California. **Matt Purciel**

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Across the country, newsrooms are either shrinking or disappearing altogether. With your support, we’ve created a bold plan for the future — one that will create ripples of understanding, hope and lasting change for a new generation of Western leaders.

We’re raising \$10 million to achieve these five top priorities:

- 1** Deeper and more comprehensive coverage of the West
- 2** A larger, more engaged audience
- 3** Technology that better supports our readers
- 4** A way to sustain and develop *HCN*’s business model
- 5** A more secure endowment for our intern and fellow program

CELEBRATING OUR PAST AND FUTURE

Look back at *HCN*’s landmark reporting and pivotal stories of the past 50 years.

Join our birthday gala at Denver Botanic Gardens, Denver, Colorado, June 4, 2021.

Visit our traveling exhibition developed by the Autry Museum of the American West and *High Country News*.

Get details at hcn.org/50-years

HCN

119 Grand Avenue
PO Box 1090
Paonia, CO 81428

U.S. \$5 | Canada \$6

#IAM THE WEST

DENAE SHANIDIIN

Artist, future ancestor and narrative
change-maker

Salt Lake City, Utah / Sanders, Arizona

My work brings justice, visibility and healing to the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous relatives and the hateful murders of BIPOC. In environments where settlers take up the majority of space, it is hard to imagine what could have been without imperialism. Some of the core teachings of the Latter-day Saints are inherently white supremacist. These teachings influenced the Utah Territorial Legislature, in 1852, to pass an act allowing of the taking of Indian slaves and captives. Native girls sold for the most money. Decolonization has a lot to do with acknowledging and healing generations of inherited trauma within my own community, family, home and body. It means abolishing systems that keep us bound in oppression and in the dehumanizing worldviews of white supremacy.

Do you know a Westerner with a great story?
Let us know on social.

Follow us [f](#) [@](#) [t](#) @highcountrynews #iamthewest | hcn.org

