

HCN

Impact Report



2025

Luna Anna Archey



Dear Friends,

Last year marked the culmination of an ambitious three-year plan created by *High Country News* board and staff to “future proof” *HCN* by developing the tools, skills and strategies that will enable us to thrive and grow in a rapidly changing West and amid an ever-evolving media landscape.

Our sophisticated new tools have enabled us to get our journalism into the hands of the people who need it, and our stories are having real, on-the-ground impact. Here are a few highlights from the year:

- We produced 12 issues of our print magazine and hundreds more stories that appeared on our website, reaching millions of people via our partnerships with other news organizations. And true to our mission, many of those stories inspired action, including three separate lawsuits filed by advocacy organizations and citizens in defense of Western communities, landscapes, and public media.
- We further expanded *HCN*'s far-flung community by offering free subscriptions to all federal employees

when we learned that the White House had ordered federal agencies to cancel news subscriptions amid a tsunami of firings and forced retirements. More than 750 people have signed up so far, sparking what we hope will be new and lasting relationships with *HCN*.

- We brought readers together in person and online to have tough, respectful conversations over topics ranging from how young people are shaping the battle against climate change, to the work of diverse communities in the outdoor space, to Indigenous people fighting to protect their sacred lands.

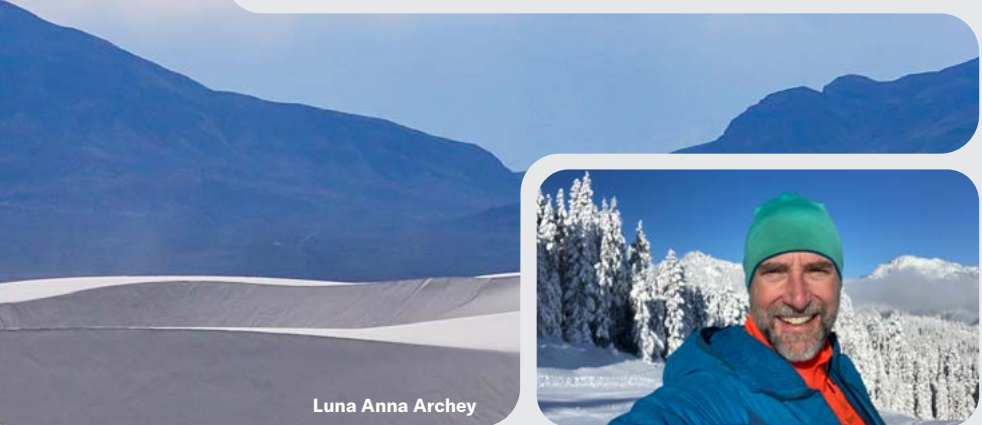
We do not do this work alone. Our reporters and editors regularly partner with other publications, an arrangement that enhances the quality of our journalism and empowers communities West-wide to tell their own stories. Some recent examples of our collaborative efforts include:

- A collaboration with *Capital B News* resulted in a story about how Black communities in Phoenix are being impacted by climate change. Our partnership with *Type Investigations*

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“I look forward to each issue. Even though the West is vast there is always an article that is related to where I live in the Eastern Sierra. We need more hard-hitting journalism like yours to keep us informed and to open our minds. Thank you for your courage to cover things that most will not.”

—Marc Bir | Bishop, California



Luna Anna Archey



revealed how the Border Patrol’s Missing Migrant Program may be causing deaths rather than saving lives. And a story we published with the investigative reporting outlet *Public Domain* put a spotlight on a Trump administration official’s involvement with a proposed lithium mine.

- Our September 2025 issue, “Food and Power in the West,” was a collaboration between *HCN* and the *Food & Environment Reporting Network*. In this special issue, we worked to untangle the web of food production in the West, tracing it from the people who raise it to the ones who ship it, market it, sell it and profit from it.
- Our December issue featured an ambitious partnership with *ProPublica* covering a topic that has been an *HCN* mainstay since our earliest days as a black-and-white tabloid — livestock grazing on the nation’s public lands.

We’ve won awards and received plenty of love notes (and some hate mail), but what we truly care about is having a positive and lasting impact on Western landscapes and communities.

I like to sum up *HCN*’s impact like this:

1. There is strength in community.

HCN exists to foster a sense of community and belonging, and to share authentic insights into the region with people everywhere who care about the West.

2. Stories can spark change.

Our in-depth, public-interest journalism is intended to inspire action and spark on-the-ground change.

3. Stories + community = change that can endure.

We believe that this powerful combination of community bonds and shared stories has the power to create lasting solutions to the region’s most pressing challenges.

None of this work would be possible without you, of course. Take heart in reading our 2025 Impact Report, knowing that all of this was made possible thanks to your continued investment in *High Country News*. Thank you!

Greg Hanscom
Executive Director & Publisher

Dear Readers,



Roberto 'Bear' Guerra



High Country News is essential for people who care about the West. In 2025, with the nation's public lands under assault, public services being defunded and the residents of our communities being picked off the streets, the magazine's multiplatform reporting helped our readers stay informed and engaged.

High Country News goes where other magazines don't think to go, digging deep into issues that matter to the West, and faithfully representing its diverse human and ecological communities. Our editors and writers have a deep understanding of the region and its history.

We fill the gaps between reporting done by local outlets and national reporting on the West — most of which is produced by reporters and publications that are based outside the region. We're a vital source of coverage for the growing number of communities that no longer have a local news outlet. We also give the West's diverse and far-flung places a voice in the national conversation.

In an era of creeping AI and the dumbing down of public discourse, *HCN* gives our readers reliable reporting to inform and enrich their daily lives. We will never rely on AI for any part of the editorial process that requires judgment. Our journalism is produced by journalists — writers and editors and artists and fact checkers whose goal is to deliver stories that open your eyes and make you think. Stories prepared by humans and full of humanity.

This publication has a long legacy of watchdogging federal agencies and communicating what is happening on the ground across the West. It's why we're here.

And our stories continue to have impact:

- A story from our Food and Power in the West issue, produced in collaboration with *The Food & Environment Reporting Network*, was cited in a class-action lawsuit brought by Haitian workers over their treatment in the Greeley, Colorado, JBS meatpacking plant that was featured in the investigation.
- An online exclusive *HCN* story about the work of the Institute for Applied Ecology was cited in a lawsuit brought by the Institute and a handful of conservation nonprofits against multiple federal agencies over the Trump administration's decision to halt funding for critical ecological research programs in the state.
- Our story about the impacts of defunding public media on rural communities was cited by *NPR* in an amicus brief filed in a lawsuit over the executive order to strip funding from what the administration calls "left-wing propaganda." We then produced a story about the impacts on Indigenous communities that *The New York Times* followed a week later.
- A story we published along with the investigative news organization *Public Domain* spotlighted the financial ties of Karen Budd-Falen, a top official at the Department of the Interior, to the controversial Thacker Pass lithium mine in northern Nevada. Soon after, House Democrats called for an investigation into Falen's ties to the mine.

The work of our little team is helping the arc of the moral universe bend toward justice here in the West.

Jennifer Sahn
Editor-in-Chief



Samaria Jaffe
President
San Rafael, CA



Estee Rivera Murdock
Vice President
Estes Park, CO



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Albuquerque, NM



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Secretary
Tucson, AZ



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Chair, SEPWG
Oakland, CA



Jim Spencer
Chair, Fundraising
Committee
Portland, OR



Rich Stolz
Chair, Governance
Washington, D.C.



Andy Wiessner
Snowmass, CO



Chris Winter
Boulder, CO



Bryan Pollard
San Francisco, CA

Board of Directors

1



Why the West needs prairie dogs
Christine Peterson

They're among the region's most despised species, but some tribes, researchers and landowners are racing to save them.

January

2



A veteran transforms a legacy of violence into a campaign for restoration
Alexander Lemons

How a former Marine found a road to repair.

February

3

The true cost of the huckleberry industry
Josephine Woolington

The Kamŭlpa Band of the Yakama Nation has wanted an end to commercial picking of a critical cultural resource for years. Finally, the Forest Service is expected to make a decision.



March

4

The horses and mules that moved mountains and hearts
Shi En Kim

Forest Service stock animals are indispensable to trail work on public lands in the West. Trump's radical upheaval is accelerating the death of a dying art.



April

5

The toll of Bozeman's housing crisis
Nick Bowlin

At the small city's only emergency shelter, demand is higher and the work is harder than ever.



May

6

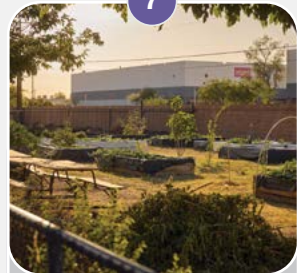


Inside Utah's PR campaign to seize public lands
produced in partnership with Public Domain | Jimmy Tobias

Utah used actors, AI, stagecraft and NDAs as it sought to sway public opinion and take control of 18.5 million acres of federal public land.

June

7



Beneath the blazing sun, Black Phoenix sows community
produced in partnership with Capital B News | Adam Mahoney

Climate change is creating a mental health crisis in Phoenix. A budding movement in the desert might solve it.

July

“

I've loved having access to independent media focused on environmental issues in the American West as well as seeing the range of writing styles included in each issue. Prior to my MFA most of my nonfiction writing was academic essays, so it's invaluable to see different approaches being taken to explore the current landscape and how to present fact-based writing for a non-academic audience.

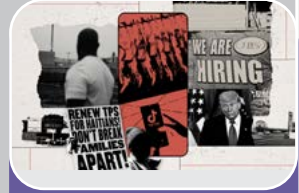
A recent standout for me was Oaster's piece on heavy metal culture's impact on teens on the Blackfeet Nation. From the creative opening to the on-the-ground reportage, it was a fantastic example of style, research, cultural analysis, and immersion working together.”

— **Bailey Loveless**, *Western Colorado University, MFA in nature writing student*

9

How an immigration raid reshaped meatpacking — and America | published in partnership with the Food & Environment Reporting Network | Ted Genoways, Esther Honig and Bryan Chou

In 2006, large-scale ICE raids in Greeley, Colorado, and elsewhere, triggered massive changes to the meatpacking workplace that continue reshaping the center of the country.



September

Stories with Impact

8

Native languages need radio, which is at risk of being lost | Chad Bradley

As public media is threatened after cuts from Trump administration, Indigenous radio also faces threats to how they preserve and grow language.



August

12 stories from the year that resounded across the West (and beyond).

12

How ranchers accused of breaking the rules dodge oversight

published in partnership with ProPublica | Mark Olalde and Jimmy Tobias

Elected officials interfere with agency efforts to protect the land.



December

10

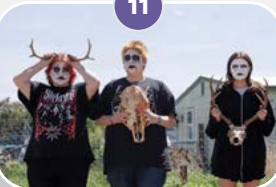
The dried-out subdivisions of Phoenix
Tony Davis

A groundwater crisis halted the construction of thousands of homes and pitted affordability against environmental concerns.



October

11



Heavy metal is healing teens on the Blackfeet Nation | B. 'Toastie' Oaster

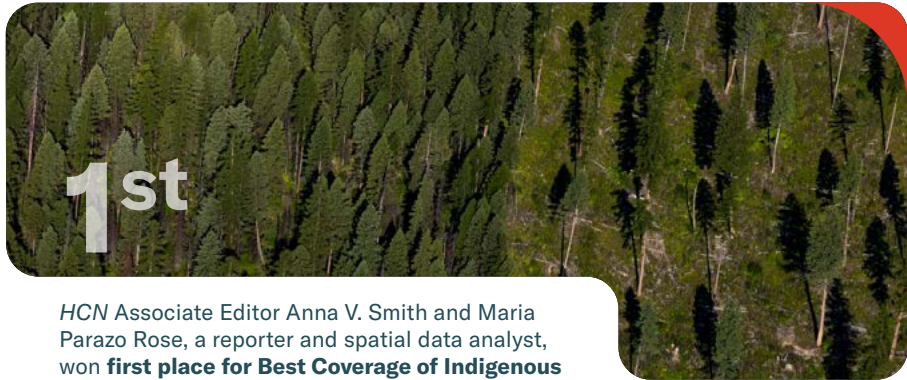
In response to youth suicides, teachers show students the power of headbanging at Fire in the Mountains festival.

November

Awards & Recognition

HCN picked up **10 awards from the Indigenous Journalists Association**, including:

HCN's investigation on PG&E "For rural Californians, unreliable power has become the norm," done in collaboration with *Type Investigations*, was named in the **Global Investigative Journalism Network's Best Data Journalism of 2025 list**.



HCN Associate Editor Anna V. Smith and Maria Parazo Rose, a reporter and spatial data analyst, won **first place for Best Coverage of Indigenous Communities** for an investigation into state trust lands on reservations. It was part of a larger collaboration with *Grist* that also won **this year's Richard La Course Award**.



Staff Writer B. "Toastie" Oster won **second place for Best Editorial** for a thoughtful piece about the challenges of describing a sacred site without sharing sensitive information, and **third place in the Best Environmental Coverage** category for their reporting on climate and environmental obstacles faced by Indigenous communities in the Northwest.



Best News Photo



Paul Robert Wolf Wilson's images of tree sitters in Oregon earned him the **Best News Photo prize**. Other photography awards included an Indigenous celebration of Hanford, fish camps on the Yukon River, a Native-led native plants movement, and a group that is creating a gathering place for Alaska.

“Toastie” Oaster’s feature on “Who’s protecting Badger Mountain?,” one in collaboration with *ProPublica*, won a **Covering Climate Now 2025** award in the justice category.



HCN contributors won **top honors for longform magazine writing** — one for a piece about a new DNA technique that could bring closure for families of missing and murdered Indigenous people, and the other for a story about tribes’ role in decommissioning dams on the Klamath River.



How Our Stories are Shared

HCN broadens our impact by offering much of our content for re-publishing in other media outlets for no cost. **Here are just a few of the newsrooms that shared our reporting in 2025:**

Buckrail, Truthout, Grist, Undark Magazine, Canary Media, Native News Online, Environmental Health News, Alaska Beacon, Cascade PBS, Mother Jones, Colorado Times Recorder, Sierra Magazine, Vox, National Parks Coalition, WyoFile, Arizona Mirror, Navajo-Hopi Observer and many, many more.



Top Honors

94

Unique sources that have syndicated our stories

232

Number of stories shared

More Than Stories

Subscriptions for Federal Workers

When we learned that the White House had ordered agencies to cancel news subscriptions, and saw mass firings and forced retirements, **we decided to offer free access to our reporting for all federal employees** – including those who have recently lost jobs. **More than 750 people have signed up so far!**

Legislator Subscriptions

Our elected officials need trustworthy information about the West so that they can pass laws that benefit and protect our communities and natural spaces. **Each year, HCN sends free subscriptions to federal and state lawmakers, giving them access to our detailed analysis of the West's unique landscapes and how our natural and human communities are affected by and adapting to impacts of climate change and population growth.** It's an unparalleled resource for our nation's lawmakers as they consider laws and policies that shape the future and fate of the West.

Cost to serve U.S. Congress and key White House staff:

\$15,000

Cost to serve Western state legislators:

\$35,970



HCNU: Classroom Subscriptions

Readers from across the country have told us that they first picked up an issue of HCN as a college student, or that an impassioned professor insisted that they read it. **These stories inspired us to start HCNU, a program that provides free print and digital classroom subscriptions to high school and college students nationwide.** We continue to ramp up this program, which reached approximately 8,000 students in 2025. Our goal is to reach 15,000 students this year.

Cost to fund access for 15,000 students: (\$5.49 per student)

\$82,350

“

Being an Indigenous Affairs fellow helped further ground my understanding and place within the stories, issues and successes of Indigenous people here in the West. I engaged with so many community members, advocates and experts who preserve and protect the cultures and histories of Native people. It was such a privilege to highlight them and their stories. This was my first professional experience after completing graduate school and I'm so appreciative of my editors and colleagues, who all supported and encouraged me this year — which is so crucial and important as an early-career journalist.”

—Chad Bradley



Shi En Kim

Fellows Program

Our 2025 Fellows Program helped three up-and-coming reporters develop their skills alongside our seasoned editors as they took a deep dive into critical Western issues and produced bodies of work that will serve as essential stepping stones in their careers. **In 2026, we will expand our educational programs and our impact through an exciting new program that will place early-career reporters in newsrooms across the West.** We're calling it the Western Environmental Reporting Collaborative, or WERC. It's a partnership with the national nonprofit Report for America and you'll hear more about it in the coming months.



Chad Bradley
2025 Indigenous
Affairs Fellow



Shi En Kim
2025 Editorial
Fellow



Annie Rosenthal
2025 Virginia
Spencer Davis Fellow

“

The work of your magazine and all who contribute are providing a vital service to the transformation that is ongoing in today's world. No other magazine could replace the work you all do, and the unique niche that you are providing to serve the evolutionary shift to a new, more balanced, enlightened culture.”

—Scott Chausse | Paonia, Colorado



HCN's Audience

We pay attention to who's reading *HCN* and how they're accessing our stories so that we can meet our readers where they are and continue to grow our audience.

Where are they from?

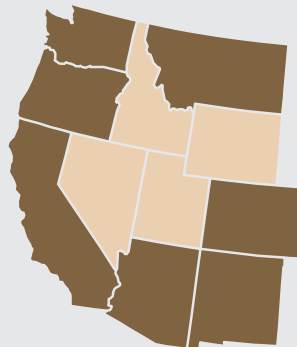
HCN has subscribers in all 50 states and a handful of international readers as well. Most of our paid readers reside in Colorado, California, Washington, Oregon, Arizona, New Mexico, and Montana.

How many subscribe to *HCN*?

Print + digital subscribers: **19,987**

Digital-only subscribers: **3,985**

Newsletter subscribers*: **38,092**



*These folks receive our online newsletters. You can sign up here: hcn.org/newsletters

Collaborations

 PROPUBLICA

 typeinvestigations

 CAPITAL B

 FOOD & ENVIRONMENT
REPORTING NETWORK

 SEARCHLIGHT
NEW MEXICO

 puente
news collaborative

 KUNR
Public Radio | 88.7 FM



Roberto 'Bear' Guerra

How do people use our website each month?*

Sessions

121,109

Unique page views

327,238

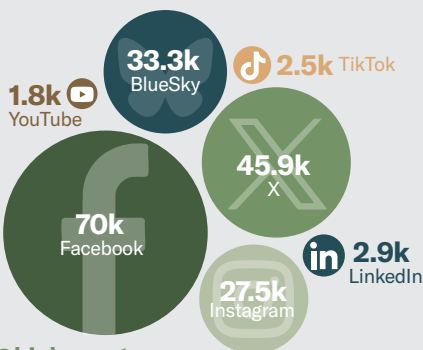
Avg. time on page

1.65 mins.

*Monthly averages for website traffic
December 2024-November 2025

Social Engagement

Partnerships with social media “influencers” have dramatically increased our reach. Thanks to these collaborations, our social media impressions continue to surge, reaching over 3.5 million viewers in 2025.



@highcountrynews

Reader-Supported Journalism

Journalism informs society, and is an essential pillar of our increasingly fragile democracy. But when newsrooms are owned or controlled by a powerful few, it's easy to doubt the information they share.

We are proud that HCN is reader-supported and independent of corporate influence.

75% of HCN's operation is funded by you — our readers. Thank you!

Our **Subscription** revenue includes more than 1,000 gift subscriptions. You find *HCN* so valuable, you want to share it — without giving away your own copy!

The **Donations** line includes monthly gifts, \$3 and \$5 “round up” contributions on top of subscription purchases, annual contributions, IRA distributions, bequests and more.

\$2,103,624

came from over 5,000 donors

835

donors gave more than once in 2025

\$736

was the average donation

\$50

median gift



Your Impact

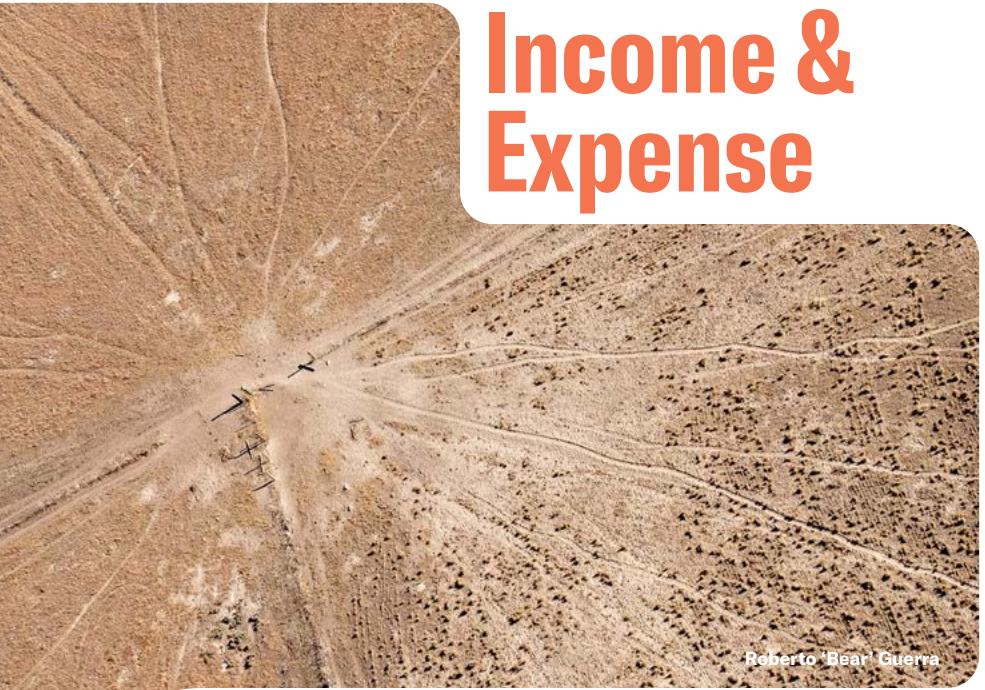
Thank you for being an integral part of our community.

When you donate to *HCN*, you are sharing insightful and fair-minded stories about the West with your neighbors, your region and your country. You are supporting journalism with impact.

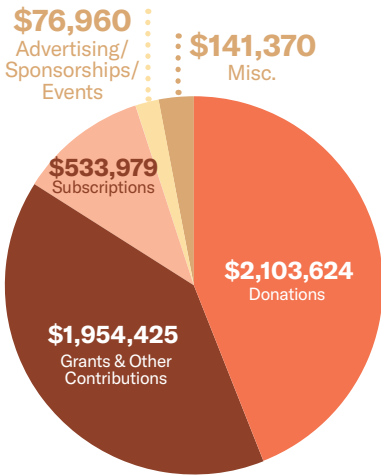
Our deepest gratitude to:

- Everyone who has ever **purchased a subscription** for yourself or a loved one
- All who gave a **one-time gift** during a campaign or when you were inspired by a story
- Our **Sustainers' Club members** for your monthly contributions
- Each of our **Tom Bell Legacy Circle** members for naming *HCN* in your will
- All who gave via a **donor advised fund, IRA distribution or appreciated stock**
- The growing list of **foundations** who are invested in *HCN's* work and mission

Income & Expense

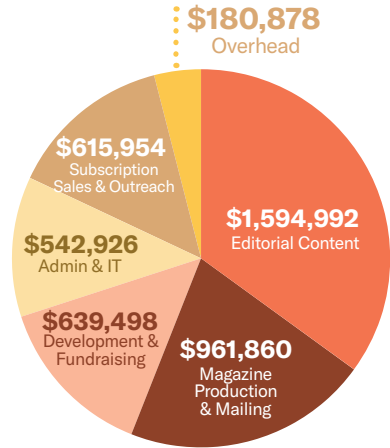


Roberto 'Bear' Guerra



Income

Total.....\$4,810,358



Expense

Total.....\$4,536,108
 Net income/(Expense)....\$274,250

2024-25

High Country News

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“

Worth its weight in platinum, HCN has provided me with a vital and vibrant connection for important issues, developments, and people in my homeland. I'd have been well and truly lost without it. Keep up the great work, and thanks!

— L.V. Giddings | Silver Spring,
Maryland

