

High Country

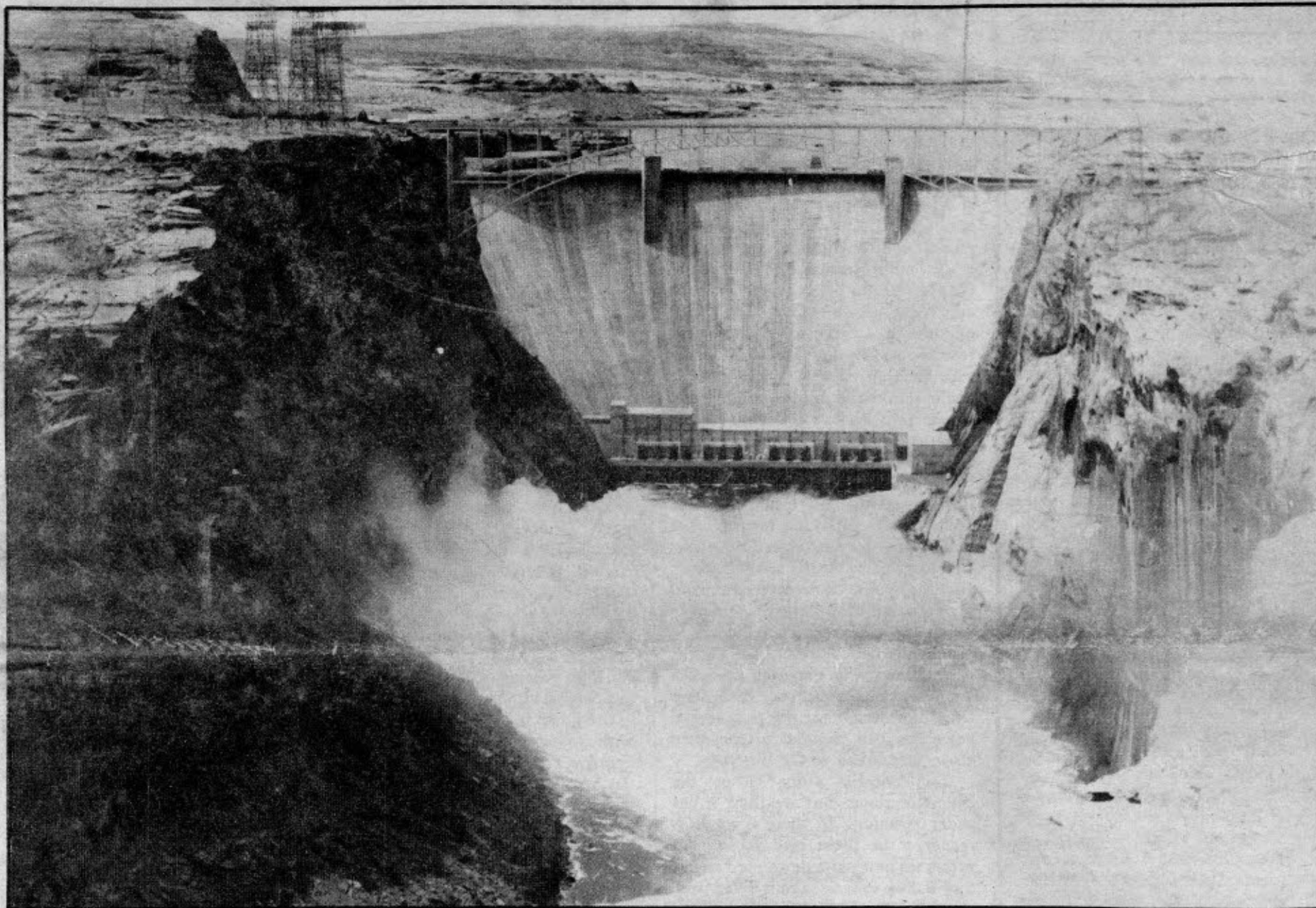
news

October 3, 1983

Vol. 15, No. 18

\$1.00

Floods reveal water policy chaos



Patricia Gubrie

Glen Canyon Dam at full flow this summer

An Analysis - The Colorado in Flood - Was the Bureau To Blame?

by James R. Udall

The controversy continues. Was this year's high water a "controlled flood" as the Bureau of Reclamation contends? Or was it, as residents along the Lower Colorado maintain, a "manmade disaster," a "monumental mistake?"

It depends who you ask.

In July, jaunty Jim Watt said, "I'm thrilled. The system worked beautifully. The dams are in good shape. The Bureau's done an excellent job."

In early September, Bureau Commissioner Robert Broadbent was more subdued. He acknowledged that damage to private property and Bureau dams exceeded \$50 million and that the flood "raised serious questions, not only with the general public but within the agency as well. Nevertheless, we must remember that this was a record runoff, a 100-year flood. We did what we could, but there comes a point where nothing more could have been done."

Grand Canyon River Ranger Kim Crumbo disagrees. "The Bureau knew damn well they had too much water in Lake Powell on May 1. Why did they sit on so much water until it was too late?"

One perceptive politician, Arizona Governor Bruce Babbitt, believes that this has been, literally and figuratively, a watershed year. "We have come upon a different era on the river. This is the first year in history that all the reservoirs were full. As a result the system does not have the flexibility it had in the past. It is time to reassess how we manage the flow of the river; how we balance the tradeoffs between flood control and water storage."

Despite Babbitt's suggestion, it is doubtful any reassessment will take place. The fabric of compacts, institutions, and "operating criteria" -- collectively known as the "law of the river" -- that govern the watershed is fragile. Aware that all of the Colorado's water has been allotted, the seven states that share in that division fear there is more to lose than gain by reevaluating existing arrangements.

Thus, it's not surprising to see a willingness among Bureau officials and such powerful men as Steve Reynolds, New Mexico's State Water Engineer, to let bygones be bygones.

Recently, Reynolds went so far as to say that the Bureau's handling of the record runoff "showed masterful manipulation of the unforeseen."

But an analysis of the Bureau's operation of the watershed during the past year shows that this judgment is nonsense.

Governor Babbitt is right -- it is relevant that last fall all the major reservoirs were close to capacity. Most significantly, Lake Powell was full, for only the second time since its completion in 1963. During the past two decades high spring runoff was simply captured by this immense reservoir, which holds 25 million acre-feet. (The annual virgin flow of the Colorado is 15 maf.)

But after Powell filled last summer, the Upper Colorado River Commission and the Bureau jointly agreed upon a new operating strategy that would leave the lake with only 2.4 maf of "flood control" capacity on April 1. This was a pivotal yet private decision, made in accordance with the "law of the river," which allows no public participation.

This past spring the Bureau adhered religiously to this agreement even, in the opinion of some, after it became obvious that it was a millstone. For good reason -- at least twice the Bureau suggested to the Upper Colorado River Commission that keeping Lake Powell at 91% of capacity was unnecessary. In each

(Continued on page 10)

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Dear friends,



High Country News

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Tom Bell
Editor Emeritus

Ed Marston
Publisher

Betsy Marston
Editor

Judy Moffatt
Promotion

Don Snow
Montana Bureau
Route 2, Box 170 B
Stevensville, Montana 59870
406/777-5169

Carol Jones
Wyoming Bureau
Box 975
Dubois, Wyoming 82513
307/455-2206

Marjane Ambler
Glenn Oakley
Geoffrey O'Gara
C.L. Rawlins
Peter Wild
Dan Whipple
Contributing Editors

Nancy Barbee
Circulation

Laura Christopher Yarrington
Darkroom

Karen Bennett
Illustrator

Judy Heideman
Debbi Neill
Typesetting

Jody Gentzler
Production

Booke & Cooper
Steven Gerdes
Mark and Sally Gordon
Jake Kittle
Anne Model
Louise Murie-McLeod
David Palmerlee
Elise Untermeyer
Anonymous donors

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This issue of High Country News may appear to you as a newspaper. But it feels to us like an ocean liner we are trying to guide along a narrow channel.

We could let custom and inertia do the guiding -- if something isn't broke, it's generally a good idea to not fix it. And the HCN that moved to Paonia was not broken. But the necessity for a bit of fixing came with the new territory. As we mentioned two issues ago, printing at the paper's long-time press in Jackson, Wyoming, was no longer possible.

So our first two issues were printed at Intermountain Color in Denver, which is closer (slightly) to Paonia than Jackson. This week we're trying out a new printer -- the Country Times in Gunnison -- a mere 100-mile trip over Black Mesa. We hope to be able to stay in Gunnison -- it would save us at least a day and a fair amount of money. But that will depend on the product and scheduling.

The other shifts in the direction of the HCN ocean liner have to do with editorial direction. Our hope is to explore the environmental and resource issues that are HCN's beat with the help of more 'real' people, and fewer official spokesmen types.

There's nothing revolutionary about this approach -- it's just that we hope to do a lot of it as a way of bringing the paper's far-flung stories down to earth. An example of the approach was provided for this issue by Montana bureau chief Don Snow. His story of the Bitterroot River covers all of the issues -- a dewatered stream, farmers needing more irrigation water, and a western state's desire to peddle water. But rather than a series of interviews with experts, the issues are developed through one man, Dave Odell, whose life for the past several years has run parallel to the often empty streambed of the Bitterroot.

Don Snow's story is on the Bitterroot alone, but we think it has wider meaning. If there's an HCN reader in the West who doesn't live within ten miles of a dewatered stream they'd like to see again filled with water, we'll eat a soft-boiled egg -- something we haven't done since we got old enough to run away from home.

The Bitterroot is in the Columbia River Basin (HCN is blessed with three river basins in its region). For the sake of balance, we also have two stories about the Colorado River basin. The Colorado stories go at this summer's flooding in Arizona and California from complementary directions.

Our interest isn't so much in the flooding as in understanding how the multi-billion dollar network of dams built to control the river failed so miserably. As the stories show, it wasn't the dams that failed -- it was our multi-billion-dollar political process. It turns out that the sum total of everyone's thirst for water doesn't make for wisdom in running a river.

The Roundups -- HCN's shorter news stories -- this week deal with a dispute over a Colorado small hydroproject, the continuing battle over the creation of additional Idaho wilderness, an attempt to divine the West's energy future by tracking Denver's natural resource attorneys, and Interior's recent coal sale.

The Roundups are an area of the paper we see as slightly broken. They're too short to provide enough context so that distant readers come to care about an issue. And yet they're

long enough so that collectively they take up a fair amount of room. As a start toward bringing those stories home to everyone, we had planned to reintroduce a regional map HCN formerly ran. On the map would be the locations of each story in the issue as a way of helping to create a regional awareness. But that's for the future.

Further back in the paper is a review of a TV documentary -- *Is Anyone Home on the Range?* by Tom Wolf, who uses his review to make some points about the boomed-busted West. Also in the back of the issue is an editorial about James Watt, who was still Secretary of the Interior as of our publication day.

Finally, on the very back page is the 'Off the Wall' column -- meant to be humorous -- a reward of sorts for reading the factual, serious stories on the first fifteen pages.

Also on the back page is a Thank You to the individuals and businesses that assisted with the September 17 Welcome HCN part in Denver. As the people who were there will testify, there was plenty of food, plenty of wine, plenty of beer, and plenty of good conversation. There was also one person there we never met -- we think he was a Cheesman Park jogger who used us as a pit stop.

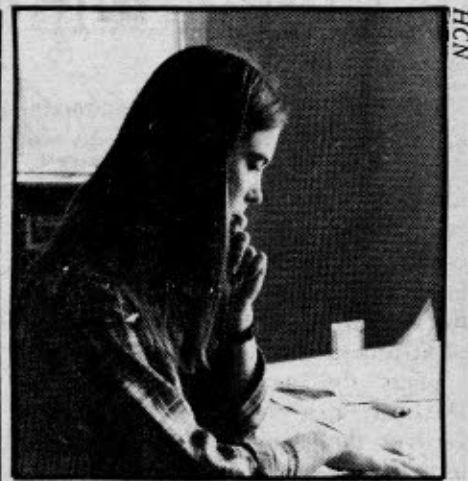
That's by way of reminding you that HCN holds its second Welcome party October 15 at 5:45 P.M. at Windstar in Old Snowmass near Aspen. Everyone is invited, but we ask that you write or call Judy Moffatt by October 10 so we can plan ahead. (She's at 901 Blake, Glenwood Springs, CO 81601, or 303/945-2202.)

The evening will feature a chili supper, salad, wine, and a dance band -- the group is "High Country Music" with Aspen veterans Dan Forde, Frankie Thrower, and others.

Among the guests we know will be there are Amory and Hunter Lovins -- the couple is building a home-research center-greenhouse nearby. Bob Child, who is a Pitkin County Commissioner, and his wife T are helping to organize the party and will also be there.

Parking is limited at Windstar. So we are asked to carpool about 5:45 P.M. at the Conoco Station at the intersection of Highway 82 and Old Snowmass Road for the final two-mile ride to the party. We'll make arrangements for those who arrive late. A ticket, by the way, is \$4 per person.

With this issue we welcome illustrator Karen Bennett to the masthead of HCN. Karen is 26, a former member for four years of the Black Canyon Firefighters -- one of those intrepid bands who douse fires for public lands managers -- and a Paonia resident for eight years. She



Karen Bennett

learned her craft at her father's ad agency in Ohio. "He put me to work doing odd jobs when I was 15."

Now she is one of those persons who says, "I can draw it in two hours unless you need it sooner." We always need it sooner and she always delivers. Karen also finds time to work at her own commercial art studio called Visual Imagery, based in Paonia. Talent, we're discovering, can be conveniently close to home.

In the weeks ahead you'll meet more HCN staffers. All are part-time but they come through as if they lived at our cluttered, backroom office. We're grateful to all of them.

Last week we sent out at least a few incorrect renewal notices. Some subscribers with personal subscriptions were billed \$25. And some institutional/business subscribers may have been billed \$18.

We don't expect angry letters from the institutions. But we've already heard from one person with a personal subscription, and a \$25 bill. We plan to rebill -- correctly this time -- within a day or so. But in the meantime:

If you have a personal subscription, your renewal rate is \$18, no matter what last week's card said.

If you have an institutional or business subscription, your renewal rate is \$25, no matter what your card says.

We apologize for the confusion.

Thanks to all readers who let us know they are: a. receiving two copies of HCN at the same address, b. aren't receiving a copy but should, and c. who write brief but encouraging notes on their renewal notices.

And to the subscriber who sent us a change of address card September 19 we have a request: could you send us another? You forgot to fill it out. We offer these clues. The stamp featured a Bighorn sheep, and there seem to be two post-marks -- one from Ouray, Colorado and the other from Billings, Montana.

-The Staff

Come to the HCN Party

Dancing to the High Country Music Band

Chili supper with all the fixings:

Corn bread, salad, beer/wine

Saturday, Oct. 15 6 P.M.

At Windstar \$4/per person

*Because parking at Windstar is limited, plan to park at the Conoco Station at the junction of Highway 82 and the Old Snowmass Creek Road. We'll shuttle you the two miles up to Windstar or arrange for carpooling. See you there at about 5:45 P.M.

RSVP to Judy Moffatt, 995-2202, or write her at 901 Blake Ave, Glenwood Springs, CO 81601.

WESTERN ROUNDUP

A Philadelphia law firm U-Hauls it home

The closing of the Rocky Mountain office of a national law firm isn't a dramatic act. It's not like the shut down of a power plant or oil shale project -- you don't have 1,000 construction workers going on a last long party before they U-haul it out of the region. At most, you get a bunch of attorneys drinking in a fern bar.

But the quiet closing of the Dechert Price and Rhoads office in Denver this September 30 may be important because of what it says about natural resource activity in the West. At the least, the closing shows how Eastern firms and money are reacting to the West's latest bust.

The century-old Philadelphia firm came to Denver in 1979 at the height of the boom with visions of sugar plums dancing in its head. With exquisite timing, it leased an entire floor in a planned Denver high rise as future home for the 40 attorneys it expected to employ.

As it turned out, the Dechert Price and Rhoads branch office peaked at ten attorneys, and the firm shut the Denver office before those attorneys got a chance to rattle around in a full floor of the new United Bank building.

Denver legal activity is interesting because the 17th Street firms serve the region. Houston lawyers take care of Texas, and Salt Lake City firms serve Utah, the southwest corner of Wyoming, and northwest Colorado. But Denver serves the rest of Colorado, the rest of Wyoming, the Dakotas, southeast Montana, Nebraska, Kansas, and parts of Oklahoma and New Mexico.

Legal and consulting activity tends to lead drilling or mining. The lawyers come first because they have to check titles and secure permits, or litigate against those trying to stop a resource venture.

Superficially, then, the closing of the Denver office of a top U.S. law firm could be a sign that resource activity in the West is going to be flat or worse for a long time. But Gretchen VanderWerf, a partner with the Dechert Price and Rhoads firm in Denver, said last week:

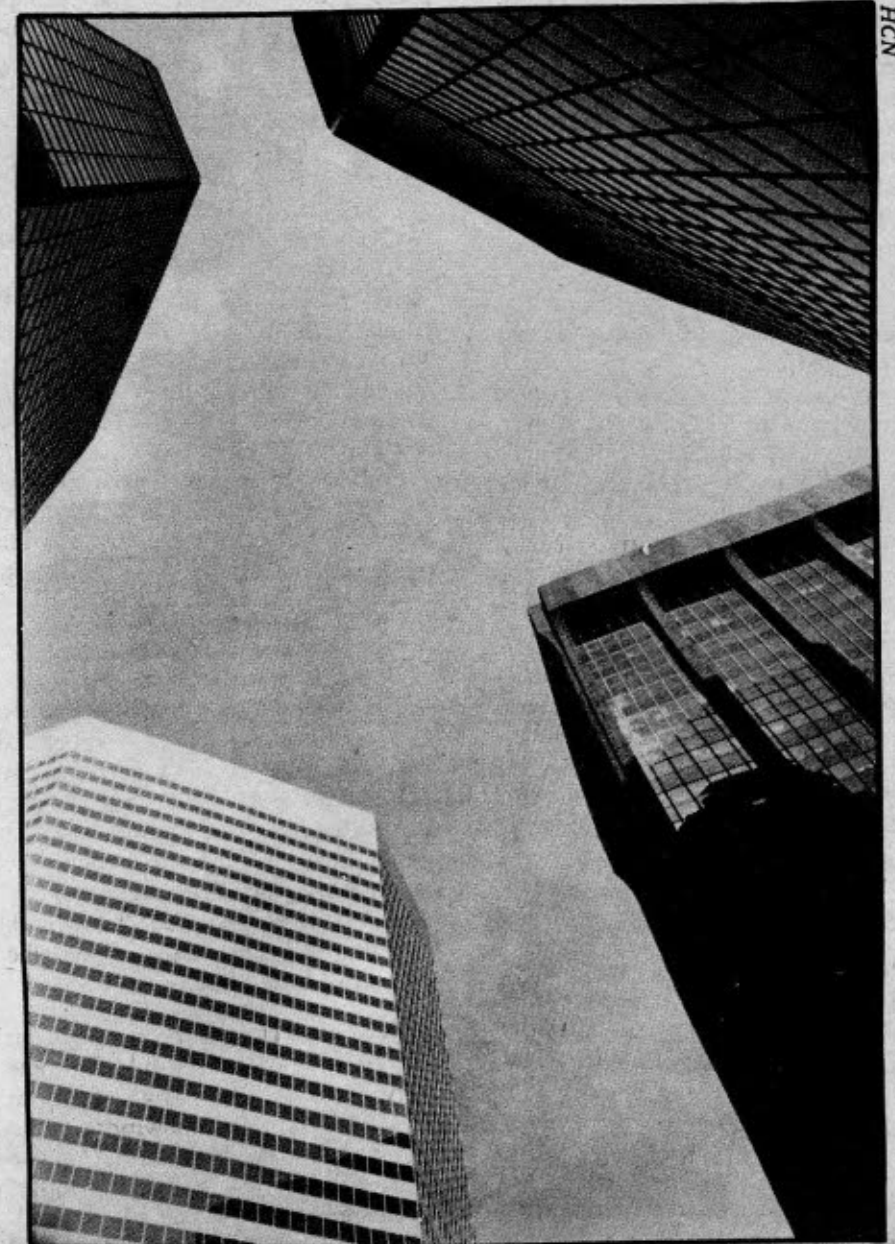
"I wouldn't attach too much importance to what one Philadelphia law firm does. There are a lot of reasons for the closing. (Only) one of those factors is that their expectation for the future didn't work out."

The firm's thirst to practice law in the West may have been slaked by the way the bust has affected resource law. A partner with another firm says: "Our business has changed. As recently as nine months ago, we were doing a lot of title opinions."

Title opinions are done just before a firm drills for oil or gas. The drilling company wants to insure that the landowner who signed the lease had a right to sign the lease. The searches are lucrative and quick. "We get paid fast for that work."

Those days are gone. "A good portion of our work now is litigation. Firms are going back two years and filing lawsuits to collect \$10,000 they weren't going to bother with. The attorney's fees would have been \$8,000." Plus, attorneys weren't interested in suing for the \$10,000 and then waiting months for their \$8,000 fee. They'd rather do title searches.

Today the attorneys are interested, even though the work may be harder and the wait for the money long. "It's



still the same area of law, but we're suing rather than searching."

The slowdown and the wait for money have reverberated through the Denver economy. The same attorney says, "We'll move into new office space soon. By signing a five-year lease, we got 14 months free rent. Shopping for office space was a zoo. We had two buildings competing over who would give us the most free rent."

This attorney sees his firm getting through the next two years with the help of free rent, litigation, bankruptcy cases, and the like. It's the kind of hanging on that Dechert Price and Rhoads may not have been interested in.

At the end of the two years, the Denver attorney, who asked not to be quoted by name, expects natural gas to come back, with drilling, and title searches, starting again. The lease trading and buying going on now, as solvent firms buy bargains from

companies in trouble, doesn't provide work for attorneys.

"Right now, strong companies are accumulating big gas reserves and waiting for the market to return." They are also accumulating drilling prospects at bargain rates. Leases that would have cost \$100 an acre two years ago are going for only \$15 an acre.

The return of drilling doesn't mean Denver's office glut will disappear. Resource activity is cyclic, but the peaks are not necessarily identical to each other. "A lot of companies are using this downturn to computerize their lease and land records. Things are slow. So that gives them time and manpower to input all their records into the computer."

When things start up, the attorney speculates, the firms may get by with smaller office staffs, and therefore with less office space. "The market for lower echelon white collar workers may not come back strong."

BARBED WIRE

Staying low in Las Vegas.

The Department of Energy had a succinct warning for high rise building managers in Las Vegas last month: Keep workers on lower levels September 22. That was the day of Tachado, code-name for an underground test of a nuclear bomb somewhere in the neighborhood of 150 kilotons - one of Nevada's larger nuclear explosives. Tachado's shock wave might not be healthy for high-rise workers "in precarious positions at the time of detonation," advised the DOE.

It's not our code, but it's a code. Former EPA regional administrator Steve Durham of Colorado is now going to do his special interest work from the outside. The Ann Gorsuch Burford appointee is setting up as a private lobbyist. The formal legislative session hasn't started, but he's already enraged his lobbyist colleagues by approaching their clients. The *Denver Post* says his approaches "have violated an unwritten state Capitol rule against one lobbyist" going after another's business.

HOTLINE

Senator is a gambler

Senator Clifford Hansen (R-WY) has lined up with park users and citizen groups in opposition to an eight-year-long rebuilding of Jackson Lake dam in Teton National Park. Hansen argues that the federal government can't afford the \$82 million cost of strengthening the dam against earthquakes.

Citizen groups and the National Park Service have argued that the lake level be lowered as a 'non-structural' way to protect against dam failure. Hansen says fill the reservoir to the top so that Idaho irrigators get their water. If the dam fails, he says, the flood losses will still be less than the cost of strengthening it.

Another moly producer

A new \$250 million underground molybdenum mine was dedicated at Questa, New Mexico September 24. Located about 100 miles north of Santa Fe, the mine is owned by MolyCorp, a subsidiary of Union Oil of California which is developing Western Colorado's remaining oil shale project near Parachute. The moly mine at Questa employs 900 workers, and production is slated at 10,000 tons of ore a day by the end of 1983. Mine officials say there are enough proven moly reserves to keep the mine going for at least twenty years.

Towns threatened

The Wildlife Management Institute, based in Washington, D.C., says the recent transfer of 93,803 acres of federal land to the state of Utah contained a problem no one had thought about. The problem centers on one tract which has 1,450 acres of towns harboring the endangered prairie dog. The tract contains 17 percent of the prairie dog population on public lands in Utah. Although the Endangered Species Act required that the BLM consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service if actions were contemplated that might affect an endangered species, the transfer went ahead without this happening. The Institute notes that the Utah Division of Wildlife has been working for over ten years to protect the prairie dogs by relocating them from private to public land. The question, says the Institute, is whether the state will make special provisions to continue that protection on state land.



Endangered Utah prairie dog

Dick Randall, Defenders of Wildlife

HOTLINE

Pena plunges
into water

Charlie Jordan

Denver Mayor Federico Pena has made two appointments which could affect all of Colorado.

After a three-month search, Pena appointed water attorney Monte Pascoe and newspaper publisher Charlie Jordan to the five-person Denver Water Board. They replace two men -- lawyer Charles Brannan and builder Jim Kenney -- who were an important part of the aggressive expansion of the Denver water system.

That expansion is of state-wide concern because the new water comes under the Continental Divide from Western Colorado. Several planned Denver diversions will affect wilderness areas. Denver is also the key actor in a recently-formed coalition of 50 water entities, formed to supply the rapidly-growing Front Range with water.

Because of the key role played by the Denver Water Board, Jordan and Pascoe have the two most influential appointments Pena has to give. The question now is: In which of several directions will the Pena Administration steer Colorado.

Little Granite a big case

Getty Oil, Secretary of Interior James Watt, and several other defendants have another month to ponder their defense in the \$40 million Little Granite Creek lawsuit. The highly emotional Wyoming case was postponed from early September to an October preliminary hearing in Cheyenne.

The fight centers around a road and well Getty Oil wishes to drill in the Little Granite area in the Yellowstone-Teton region. The Jackson Hole Alliance for Responsible Planning and several individuals have challenged the federal government's grant of permission to drill. They charge fraud, a deliberate intent on the part of Watt to destroy natural beauty, and have claimed legal standing for natural values. Several of the claims were thrown out by the judge as irrelevant to the case. Getty Oil has described them as "absurd," "name calling," and "a little irresponsible."

The plaintiffs intend to put nationally-known experts on the stand in Cheyenne to attempt to prove their allegations of damage. Whether or not the judge will allow all of the prospective witnesses will be decided in October. The attorney for the plaintiffs is Bob Schuster, who is a partner of Jackson attorney Jerry Spence.

Groups struggle for 8 million roadless acres

The State of Idaho, its conservation organizations, and industry all have their Wilderness acreage recommendations on the table. At stake in the battle which will be fought out in the U.S. Congress is the fate of 8.1 million acres of roadless Idaho National Forest.

Idaho governor John Evans, a Democrat, is proposing that one million out of the 8 million acres be made Wilderness. Most of his recommendations are in the northern part of the state.

Idaho's conservation organizations are asking that 2.9 million acres of roadless land be designated Wilderness. The proposal -- announced in a series of press conferences throughout the state on September 29 -- is endorsed by the Idaho Conservation League, Idaho Environmental Council, Idaho Alpine Club, Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs, Committee for Idaho's High Desert, and the Upper Snake River Valley and Portneuf Audubon Society Chapters.

The Idaho Forest Industry Council has proposed designating 591,628 acres as Wilderness, all of which the council says lack commercial timber.

Idaho currently has 3.8 million acres of Wilderness, most of which is concentrated in the central part of the state in the 2.3 million-acre River of No Return Wilderness. That area's designation was one of Senator Frank Church's last acts before his 1980 defeat.

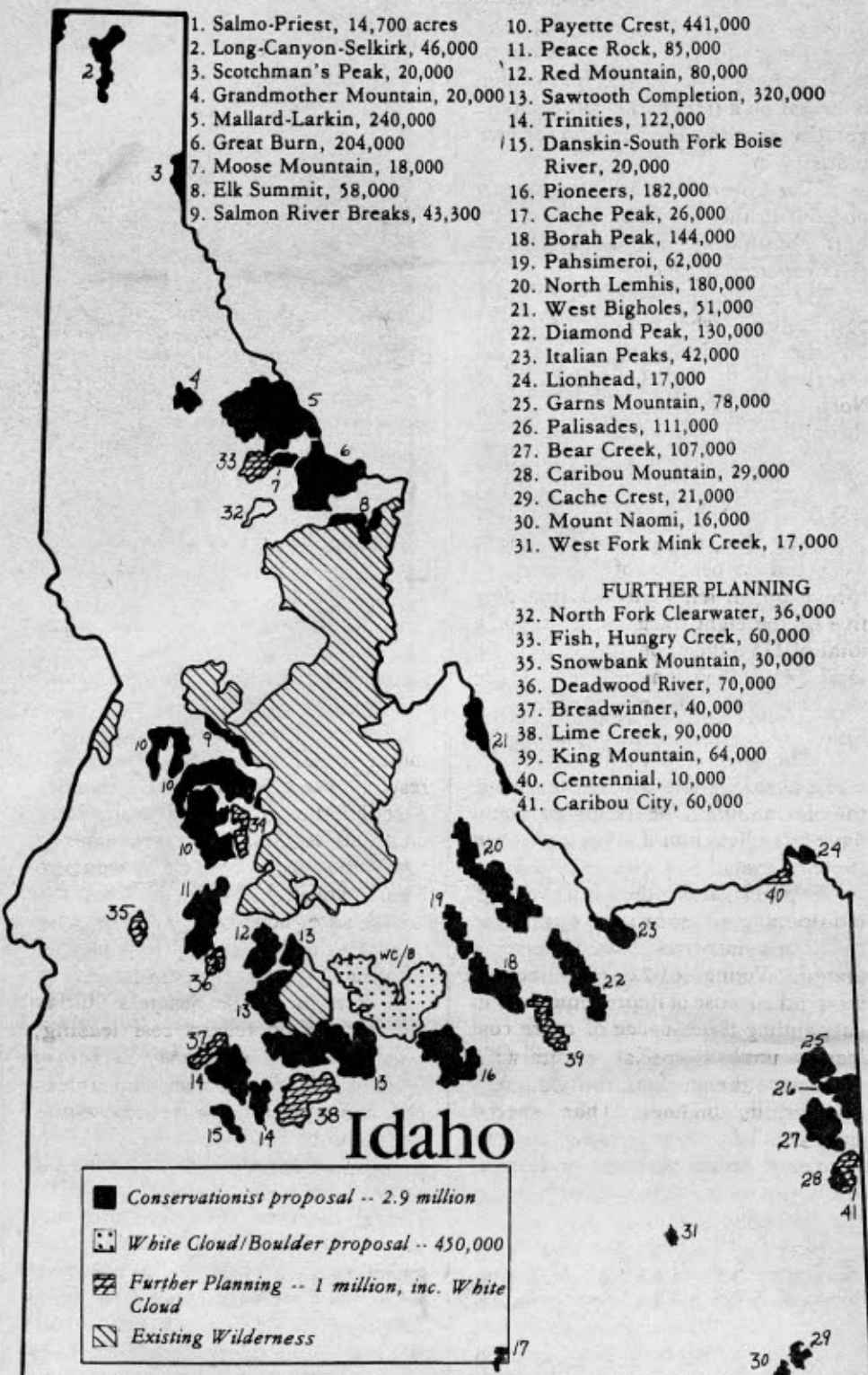
Idaho Senator James McClure -- who will introduce the present Idaho Wilderness bill -- is no Frank Church when it comes to Wilderness. He is unlikely to come near the conservationists' 2.9 million-acre proposal. The major question is: will he be close to industry's 591,628-acre figure or to the Governor's 1,046,000-acre figure.

McClure is presently seeking to diminish the impact of the heavy pro-Wilderness sentiment expressed at the hearings he held in August throughout Idaho. To bolster his position, he points to the strong anti-Wilderness sentiment he found in his own questionnaire. McClure said 63 percent of his 13,667 respondents opposed adding any more Wilderness, while only 21 percent favored designating an additional 4.5 million acres as Wilderness. McClure presented the 4.5 million acre figure as the conservationist proposal.

McClure, who had said his August hearings were "stacked" by Wilderness proponents, has had his own questionnaire attacked as both stacked and bogus. Pat Ford, director of the Idaho Conservation League, said a 4.5 million acre proposal does not exist. It is 50 percent larger than the acreage the coalition came up with. McClure said the 4.5 million acres was from a 1979 Idaho Wildlife Federation proposal. The group was not available for comment.

Ford also said the McClure questionnaire drew distinctions between multiple use and Wilderness -- distinctions Ford said do not legally exist. Wilderness is considered a multiple use -- land so designated can be used for grazing, hunting, fishing and mining, in addition to such "passive" uses as watershed and wildlife. Logging, however, is banned, and there is no motorized access.

McClure's questionnaire said of Wilderness: "There are no roads; access is highly restrictive -- by foot, on horseback, or by raft." It also said:

WILDERNESS AREAS PROPOSED
BY CONSERVATIONISTS:

"Forest lands that are not preserved as Wilderness offer many other valuable goods and services as well. These are provided through multiple use management and include developed campgrounds, timber production, fishing, boating, etc."

The conservationist proposal includes 31 separate Wilderness additions. Ten areas would go into further planning and 190 study areas would be released for what McClure terms "multiple use" and conservationists call logging.

The prominent Boulder-White Cloud mountains of central Idaho would stay in further planning category under the proposal. Ultimately, the conservation groups want the 450,000-acre Boulder-White Clouds area made Wilderness, with language prohibiting mining. However, they want to address this area separately from the other roadless areas. It has been very controversial because of ASARCO's repeated attempts to establish a molybdenum mine at the base of Castel peak, the highest mountain in the chain.

The differences between McClure and the conservation groups go beyond acreage. Ford said the coalition's proposal seeks "soft" release language -- meaning areas not included in Wilderness or further planning would be open for logging

and other development, but would also be open for Wilderness consideration later on.

Ford said he expects McClure to press for "hard" release language in his bill -- meaning areas rejected for Wilderness could never again be considered for such classification.

McClure aide H.D. Palmer said the Senator sees the hard-release versus soft-release debate as "semantic confusion." He also said: "It's tough to say now" what release language McClure will write into his bill.

The conservationists are not optimistic about their chances for a generous bill. Compounding the anti-Wilderness sentiment in the Idaho congressional delegation is Governor Evans' one-million-acre proposal, most of which lies in the northern part of the state.

Sportsmen groups, pitted against the timber industry, could make the northern roadless areas the major battleground in the fight. The less publicized areas in the south of the state are likely to lose out.

In the short run, Idaho is unlikely to get a large Wilderness designation out of this Congress. In the long run, Ford said, "We're looking ahead" to making people aware of the roadless areas in the hope of keeping them roadless for future Wilderness designation.

-Glenn Oakley

The free market sends Interior a message

If Interior Secretary James Watt is anything, it's obstinate.

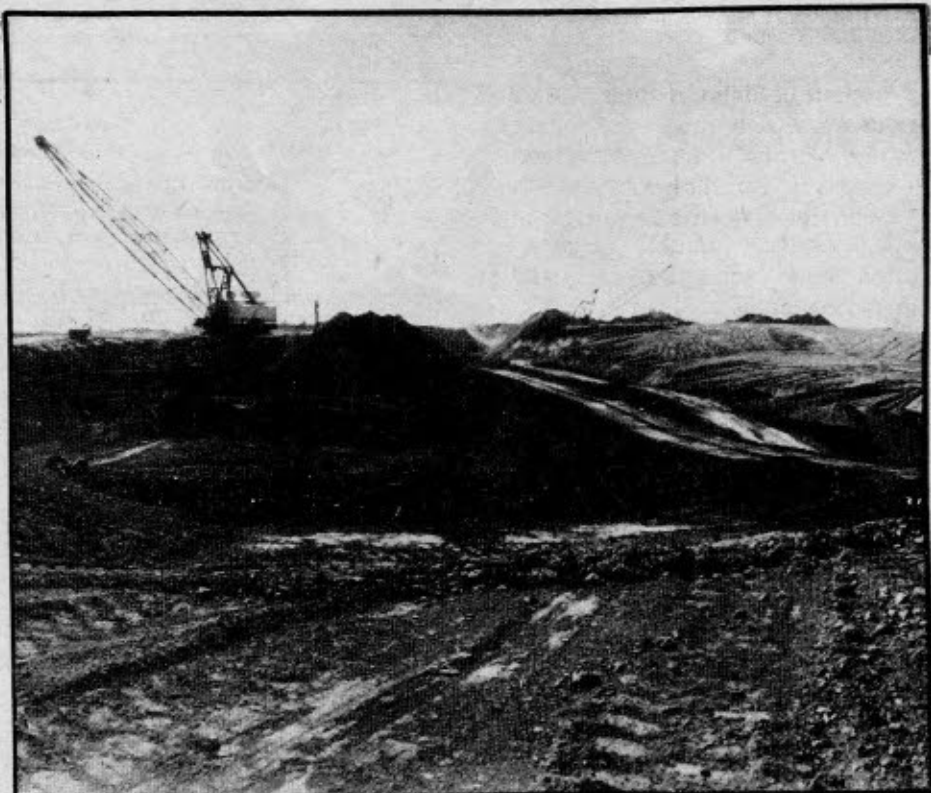
He continues to insist that there is a market for 17 billion tons of federal coal in the western states and that it makes economic sense for the government to sell leases -- even at bargain basement prices. His position is based on a free market philosophy: get the government out and private industry in.

"The government has a monopoly on coal in the west, and monopolies hurt consumers," he told a Denver Post reporter last month.

But coal companies let Watt down September 14 when bids were opened for the second major sale of coal reserves in the Fort Union region of North Dakota and Montana. Speaking through the 'Free Market,' companies said they didn't need more coal; they were awash in coal. Bids amounted to less than one cent per ton for a total of \$911,800. No new production tracts were bid on because of the need to 'prove up' in ten years, so that only five of the eight tracts were let for a total of 115 million tons instead of the total 545 million tons offered. There was only one bidder per maintenance tract.

"The government lost money on the coal sale," says Brooks Yeager of the Sierra Club. "The taxpayers would have been better off if Watt had given the coal away."

A week after the Fort Union bid-opening, Congressional opposition to Watt's fast-track leasing consolidated. Voting 63-22, the Senate joined the House of Representatives in suspending the issuance of more coal leases until a special commission reports on the program and Congress reviews its findings. That special commission is the one the Interior Secretary described last week as



Colstrip, Montana

loaded with talent: "I have a black, two women..."

Earlier, the House Interior Committee had passed an emergency resolution to block the Fort Union sale. A federal judge's 10-day restraining order on issuing the leases expired September 29, after HCN went to press. Additional pressure from the Senate vote, however, may force Watt to back down on issuing the leases.

Senator Dale Bumpers (D-Ark.), who introduced the Senate's 90-day moratorium on federal coal leasing, said, "We all know that Secretary Watt is an arrogant man, and unless he is brought to bay, he is like a rogue elephant."

Senator James McClure (R-Idaho)

and Senator Malcolm Wallop (R-Wyo.) Voted against the Bumpers amendment.

Wallop said of Watt's coal leasing program, "It is orderly and it is progressing responsibly and accountably."

Controversy over Watt's coal leasing policy was predictable. His coal lease sale last year in the Wyoming and Montana Powder River Basin prompted two federal investigations. Their conclusion was that lukewarm industry interest led to bidding below the coal's market value and a loss to the public of as much as \$100 million.

-Betsy Marston

Hydroelectric project goes down the tubes

In a strongly-worded order, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has accused one of the nation's oldest irrigation companies and a leading hydroelectric power developer of bending the Commission's rules to the breaking point.

As a result, a \$25-million small hydropower development at five sites on the Uncompaghe Valley canal near Montrose, Colorado, won't go forward this spring. Also, the hydropower developer, Mitex Corporation of Cambridge, Massachusetts, could lose \$2 million it has spent preparing for construction.

The project is one of the most promising in Colorado. It would provide power 11 months of the year, generating 28 megawatts and 87 million kilowatt-hours -- enough to meet the energy needs of a large percentage of the 40,000 residents of Montrose and Delta counties. Colorado-Ute REA, which supplies 14 Colorado REAs, was to have been a 40% equity partner in the project.

At the center of the action is Mitex and the Uncompaghe Valley Water Users -- a private farmer-owned irrigation company that irrigates 86,000 acres with water taken out of the Gunnison River and Taylor Reservoir via the Gunnison Tunnel.

In an April 1981 meeting, the Water Users convinced Montrose to

file on several hydro sites on its canal. That filing, under FERC's municipal preference rule, resulted in the bumping of applications from two private developers: Energenics Systems of Washington, D.C. and Gregory Wilcox of California.

With them bumped, the Uncompaghe Water Users later dropped Montrose from the filing and filed on behalf of itself and Mitex. Judging by a transcript of the key April Montrose city council meeting, the city was a passive, unknowing body in this maneuvering, simply lending its name as a favor to the farmer-owner Water Users. The FERC order does not criticize the city, or ban it from applying for a hydropower license.

Mitex and the Water Users are outraged over the FERC order, which would bar them from reapplying for sites for one year. Water User manager Jim Hokit told the Associated Press two weeks ago that Montrose dropped its license application because it realized the project was too expensive; not because of any plot.

However, records show that Hokit was appointed Montrose's agent at the April 1981 meeting, and that he unilaterally dropped the city from the FERC permit without any publicly-recorded contact with the Council. The

record indicates Montrose was a puppet in the matter, but there may have been off-the-record conversations with city officials.

Mitchel Dong, president of Mitex, said the fact that FERC was knocking out an application at the last moment, after \$2 million had been spent, would have a "chilling" effect on hydropower development.

Pete Smith, president of Energenics, a hydropower firm knocked out by Montrose's April 1981 application, said from Washington, D.C., "Our interest isn't chilled."

The FERC order justifies action taken a year ago by two Montrose citizens -- Tom Griepentrog and Norm Auerheide -- and Telluride attorney Mark Silversher. The three, believing that Montrose residents were being cheated out of revenues that should go to them, tried to convince Montrose to contest its dropping from the application. The city refused.

So the three went to Montrose County, convincing the County Commissioners to intervene in the FERC case. However, Montrose's county attorney, John Brooks, told the county that Silversher was misrepresenting the case, and the county withdrew its objections. It is possible, however, that that momentary Montrose County action brought the case to FERC's attention.

BARBS

Why not issue a standing apology?

Secretary of Interior James Watt is said to be in big trouble with the Reagan inner circle because of his remark about his coal advisory commission: "I have a black, I have a woman, two Jews and a cripple." Reagan's political advisors are outraged that Watt didn't mention the Hispanics -- a group the White House has been courting.



As Senator Warren Rudman (R-NH) put it: *It seems to me this is the last straw.*

With Rudman and five other Republican Senators calling for Watt's resignation, could it be that the Interior Secretary has at last gone too far? If you think the "last straw" has been grabbed, send us the date of Watt's termination. Whoever comes closest wins a year's subscription to *High Country News*.

It's too bad people with lung diseases can't cure themselves by declaring bankruptcy. Manville Corporation hoped to cure itself of asbestos liability by passing through bankruptcy, much as a steer is cleansed of ticks by passing through a dip. Now it appears Manville is stuck in its dip, with creditor groups balking at proposed settlements and some even calling for the replacement of the top managers who conceived the bankruptcy ploy with a bankruptcy trustee.

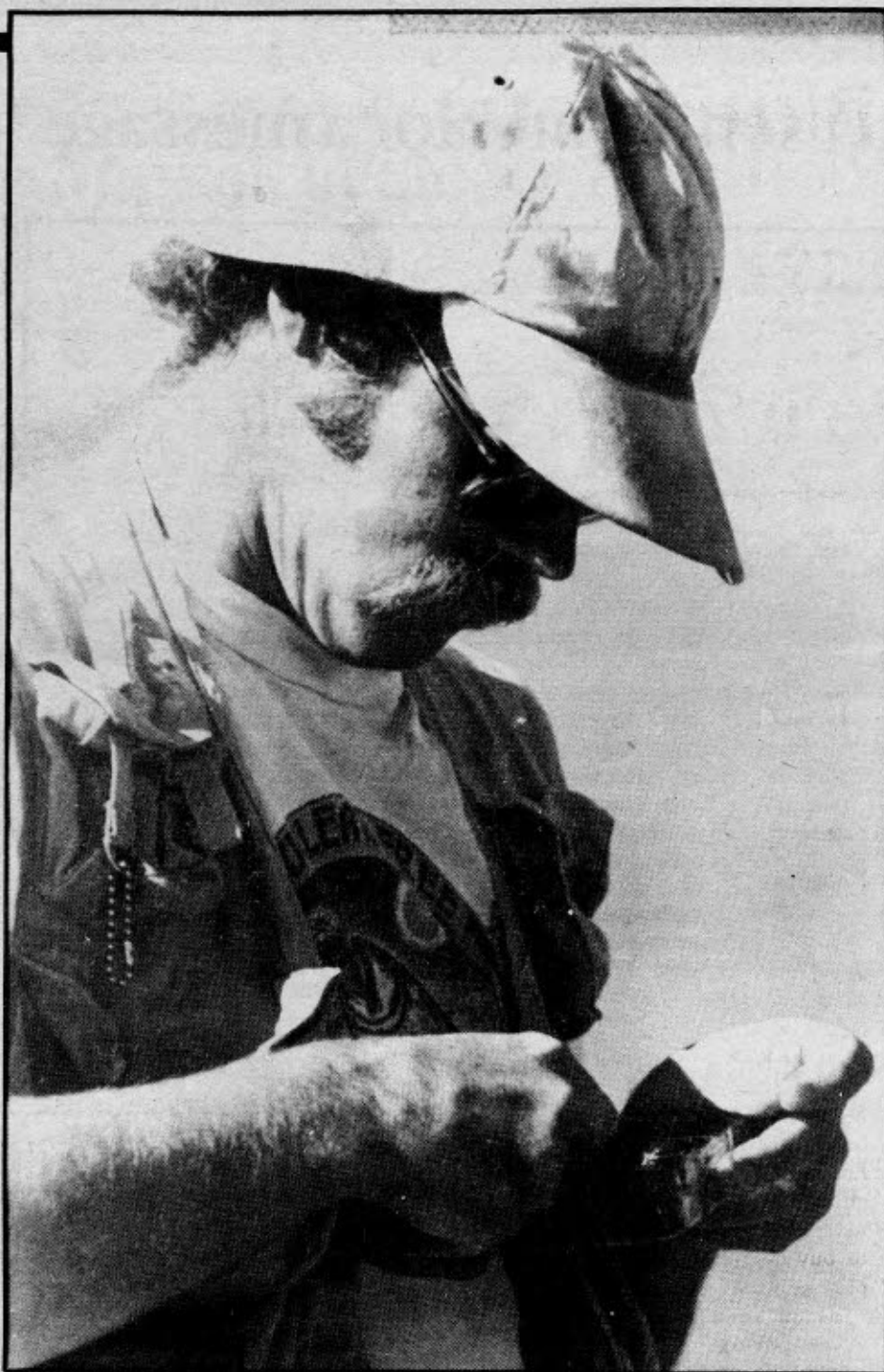
Every once in a while something happens that makes you think there is justice in the world.

Living better electrically in hot and muggy Houston means sealing yourself in air-conditioned apartments, homes and cars. The *Wall Street Journal* speculates that the isolation leads to a prone-to-violence attitude. The city's high mayhem rate is accompanied by high household electric use -- 1,125 kilowatt-hours per month. That's double Chicago's 526 kw-hrs and almost quadruple New York's 267 kw-hrs. The latter must be living in the dark.

What happens when you cross bureaucrats with purple prose? You get the "Magic of Hydropower" -- a blurb attached to an artist's rendering of Glen Canyon dam: "Distant snowbanks of the Rockies feed water to the rock-lined gorge ... Then in darkness it drops swiftly through the wide tubes, pressured by its own great weight. To the Turbines. To the Turbines."

To the Wall! To the Wall!





Dave Odell

An empty ditch becomes a river

by Don Snow

It's a sparkling, wide-open Montana river, cobbled with granite and lined by towering cottonwoods. Along its broad floodplain, miles across in places, are friendly groves of ponderosa pine where whitetails have bedded in crushed grass. Lewis woodpeckers flap overhead, and ospreys seem to nest every two miles along a Saturday float.

Fishing it is a world of pleasure. None of the willow-and-brush battles of the Beaverhead, nor the overwhelming size and power of the upper Missouri, nor the opportunity to be shot by an irate rancher on the Smith. The Bitterroot is a friendly, easy river. It's accessible, secretive, and until this year, utterly tragic. People have taken advantage of its bright good nature.

A river's pleasure is instantly evident. But you have to live a few years with a river to know its pain. The pain of the Bitterroot, like so many great Western rivers, comes from a mixture of dewatering and channelization -- the practice of changing the way a river flows. Parched crops in August push farmers to milk the river; they hire bulldozers to move its gravel around until the last of the water flows correctly into irrigation canals.

No one argues with the farmers' rights to the river. But if experienced anglers in Missoula or Helena were asked five years ago about the Bitterroot, they'd shake their heads

with pity and proclaim the once-great spawning river a lost cause for trout. "Too little water and way too warm," was the verdict.

Now, thanks largely to the efforts of one man, they've stopped shaking their heads.

For the past three years, Dave Odell has dedicated himself to the resurrection of the Bitterroot River. For his efforts the one-hundred-year-old American Fisheries Society has awarded him special recognition "for his diligent effort in the improvement of aquatic habitat of the Bitterroot River." A small plaque hangs on a wall of his handmade log house near Victor, Montana. The plaque commemorates a hopeful tale of political awakening, shrewd diplomacy, and rare success.

A native of Moline, Illinois, Odell came west for college. He took a degree in environmental biology from the University of Colorado; then, in 1969, set out with a friend for Fairbanks, Alaska. On the way, Montana's Bitterroot Valley, in the western part of the state, knocked him out.

"I'd never seen any of this country up here," Odell said. "Never seen Wyoming, never been to Montana. When I saw the Bitterroot, I thought it was the most beautiful place in the world."

On his way through Missoula, he stopped at the University of Montana to talk with Clancy Gordon about entering the school's unique graduate program in environmental studies. A

pollution biologist and founder of the program, Gordon attracted young biologists from all over the country with his political courage, his professional reputation, and ultimately his charm. Gordon told Odell to forget about the program.

"He was blunt," Odell said. "He told me the program was broke, there was no support at all for new students, and they probably weren't accepting anybody that year." But Odell dug in anyway, latching onto a geographer as faculty advisor and creating a self-directed curriculum in land use planning. Four years later he received a master's degree in environmental studies.

"But the reason I came to Montana in the first place was the fishing," Odell admitted. "I'm just a plain dyed-in-the-wool flyfisherman."

In 1976 he moved from Missoula south to the Bitterroot Valley, where he worked as a private land use consultant and began roughing out his log house. For relaxation, he fished the Bitterroot and began watching the radical ebb and flow of its fishing quality.

"There was a day on that river in 1977 when you could literally jump across the main stem," Odell said. "It was pathetic."

Low midsummer flows had begun to degrade the river. And an influx of new residents hastened the river's decline. Tributary water rights that in many instances hadn't been totally used were suddenly in demand from thousands of new homeowners who

purchased land and a little water for lawn and garden irrigation. But the biggest users by far were the large irrigators who sucked water directly from the river and from the spawning creeks that feed it.

A series of relatively wet years sustained it through the mid-70s, but then the Bitterroot fell on hard times. The drought of 1977 pushed the river to about half its average annual flow. Water temperatures soared, spawning habitat dried up, and fishermen began pulling out lunker trout by the basketful. Two years later the flows again dropped to serious drought levels, and the 'dozers appeared in force to make the many-channelled river obey the laws of irrigation.

"Four out of five years there were horrendous for the river," Odell said. "In August there are 17 times more water rights than water in the Bitterroot. In years like those, that's a disaster for the river."

So Odell began to speculate on how to get more water down the Bitterroot. Early on he turned to Painted Rocks Reservoir on the river's West Fork as a source. And early on he met resistance.

"The state owns Painted Rocks, but they wouldn't let water out when the river needed it most," Odell said. "I saw what they were doing, or weren't doing, and got mad."

What the state was doing was keeping the reservoir full while the river was empty. Montana insisted on selling the reservoir water at \$2 per acre-foot. But Bitterroot irrigators

Montana's Bitterroot could be saved by its last two inches

couldn't pay the price, and they didn't organize an irrigation district to tax agricultural land to buy the reservoir water. They may have felt it was cheaper to move gravel around to drain off the last bit of the river than to put more water in the river. Odell appealed to the irrigators, and discovered that politics moves slowly in the valley.

He next took his cause to the local chapter of Trout Unlimited, and found that organization lethargic about the fate of the home town river. So Odell stopped depending on other people's organizations, and volunteered to become the group's president. Then, with a small task force of new chapter officers, Trout Unlimited began oiling some rusty political machinery.

"We had no money, and almost no members." But they had a strong consensus; there was no quarreling about need and goals. "The number one problem we identified was dewatering and lack of minimum flows."

Using the Trout chapter as a base, Odell founded a new organization -- the Bitterroot River Water Users Association. He then went looking for funds to pay for flow studies and other river research.

In two years, fundraising netted \$4000. And the research uncovered why the state had allowed most of the Painted Rocks water to sit on the Bitterroot while the stream went dry.

Painted Rocks was built as a federal project in 1938 and turned over to the state to run. The reservoir is small -- it catches 32,000 acre-feet of water off the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness area. A bit of that water does go to keep the Bitterroot wet. Back in 1958, the Montana Department of Fish and Game, along with two local sportsmen's groups, bought 5,000 acre-feet of Painted Rocks water to support in-stream flow.

That helps. But in dry years it's not enough to keep 200 cubic feet per second flowing. That's the 'minimum stream flow' biologists say is necessary to keep the river alive. The most discouraging finding was that the state legislature won't allow

"free" water to escape from state reservoirs.

State policy requires that Painted Rocks water sit in the reservoir, no matter what the needs of the river. And fishermen, rafters and other recreationists have no way to pool their money to buy water from the state to put in the stream.

Odell's research showed the river needed an additional 10,000 acre-feet yearly from the reservoir to sustain minimum flows. Given state policy, that meant \$20,000 had to be found somewhere to buy the 10,000 acre-feet.

With the bottom line in hand, Odell teamed his Water Users Association with the State Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Together, they began applying for state water development funds to buy Painted Rocks water. Last year the effort paid off: the state legislature granted the funds. It agreed to appropriate money to buy its own water, keeping the principle of no free water intact.

Odell recalls: "The key to this whole thing was getting local politicians involved. Plus, the timing was right. The irrigators always want more water, and the local representatives are sympathetic to irrigators."

Odell and his allies won because the state legislators recognized the Bitterroot proposal as a win-win one. Using Painted Rocks water to maintain minimum stream flows made irrigating easier. No longer did farmers have to go into the river with bulldozers to route the last trickle of water into a ditch. Instead, the farmers' irrigation water was riding high, thanks to the minimum flow provided for fishing and rafting.

It took more than just logic and mutual interest to get the funds. The election of Democrat Fritz Tossberg of Hamilton to the county commission was critical. "Fritz is what you might call an avid flyfisherman," Odell said. "He helped a lot."

People helped, but Odell gives most credit to the river itself. In August, prior to the opening of the state legislature, the river enthusiasts organized two-day-long floats for state



The Bitterroot River flows north towards Missoula, Montana. Painted Rocks reservoir is at the south end of the Bitterroot, near the Idaho border. It is not shown on the map.

The Bitterroot is a small tributary to the mighty Columbia River, which eventually empties into the Pacific.

This map shows only a fraction of the dams and rivers which make up the Columbia River basin.

and local officials. Among them was Bitterroot legislator Bob Thoft (R-Stevensville). His presence proved decisive.

"Bob started out opposing us. Then, when he saw what was at stake, and how we could help the river for all the users, he came around."

From his float, Thoft saw that raising the river's level would help everyone. And he quietly maneuvered the water appropriations measure through both legislative houses. In fact, Odell and the Water Users Association scarcely knew it was happening.

The \$40,000 that came out of the process isn't a permanent cure. It will fund the Painted Rocks diversion for only two years. But it gives Bitterroot supporters time to find permanent funding. And it provides a demonstration of the benefits of a live river.

The fact that the river is alive again does deprive Odell of one of his most dramatic arguments: the impact of the dewatered streambed. Odell remembers one day-long float trip:

"We made sure to float the river on a day when we'd all have to drag the rafts from channel to channel. The water was warm as bathtub water." Odell says people don't forget what it's like to drag a raft down the middle of a wide streambed carrying nothing more than a trickle of lukewarm water.

This summer was a different story; the river ran over 400 cubic feet per second -- far above the 200 cfs minimum the biologists set. The water runs straightforwardly, but it's funded by some intricate mechanisms.

"The money is granted from one bureau inside DNRC, through Fish and Game, and into another bureau of DNRC. We did a little bureaucratic fumble-mumble and now there's water in the river."

The Bitterroot flows downstream into the giant Columbia River basin, and that's where the Water Users

have also gone on their hunt for allies. Just possibly, they have found one in the Northwest Regional Power Planning Council. Part of that body's job is to protect and improve fisheries in the Columbia drainage.

Odell was set on the trail of the Council by Fish and Game official Jim Posewitz. He told Odell millions of dollars have been spent unsuccessfully trying to restore fisheries in several of the Clark Fork River dams in the Upper Columbia system. He suggested money might be better spent on so-called off-stem enhancement projects, where good fishing and environmental quality could be restored cheaply.

Odell says it will only take \$20,000 per year to save the million-dollar Bitterroot fishery. That, he says, is a real bargain, and he carried that economic argument to the Council. He may have prevailed. The Bitterroot plan is now part of the Power Planning Council's final proposal to improve Columbia drainage fisheries.

Odell, sitting in his home, opens the Council's planning document with pride. There, among the back pages, is a two-inch-long paragraph that outlines the plight of the Bitterroot River and commits the Council to maintain minimum flows. If funded, it will become the last and most important two inches of the Bitterroot.

How does Odell plan to get that paragraph funded? Perhaps by floating the river and letting it speak for itself once again. In mid-October, Odell and associates will float Bonneville Power Administration officials down the river. Under the Council's plan, it is the BPA that would fund many of the off-stem improvement projects. So the officials must be convinced.

Given the teamwork thus far between Odell and the Bitterroot, there's a good chance they will be.



Hank Fischer of Missoula, representative of Defenders of Wildlife, fishes a dry Bitterroot in August. A month earlier, the logjam held fish.

8-High Country News--Oct. 3, 1983

Hay



Carol Chidsey

Loose, stacking hay



Eric Peterson

Hay field from the air

by Carol Chidsey

As late summer approaches, western Wyoming ranches undergo an annual ritual. Cowboys become mechanics, small towns lose their crowds as a migration begins to the vast meadows of the Green River Valley.

It is haying time, the season when clover, timothy and alfalfa are finally cut, baled, cured for a day or two, and then stored for the winter.

The weather makes or breaks a hay crop. Rain during the short curing time can be disastrous, causing mold and a loss of nutrients. Heavy winds can erase careful mowing, blowing the fresh-cut grass across fence lines or burying it in ditches. For ranchers, it's just another gamble.

Loose stacks, square and round bales, broad loaves -- the rancher puts up the hay in a variety of ways. Each system has its strengths and weaknesses. Loose stacks, the often seen mounds of hay, require a huge crew but best preserve the hay.



Allen Messick

Haying -- Large round bales

ying



Carol Chidsey

Raking hay

Square bales are simpler to work with -- until the baler breaks. Round bales and loaves are the newest, easiest thing, but the equipment doesn't come cheap.

Despite the long hours, blistering sun or drenching rain, hay crews come back year after year. There is even an all-woman crew in the Green River Valley. Called the Bod Squad, they were the first to break into the masculine world of haying. A rancher is lost without a dedicated team willing to mow, rake, bale and stack. Haying by definition is a team effort.

Perhaps it's that sense of a team that year after year lures a crew to the meadows. Maybe it's the delicious smell of fresh-cut grass, or the joy of watching a hawk race after an uncovered field mouse. Or it might be the fascination of discovering a tangled maze of ditches and windrows, that by mowing, can be turned into order.

Carol Chidsey is a reporter for the Pinedale Roundup in western Wyoming.



Carol Chidsey

Bardy Bardin stacking loose hay

Haying in Boulder area "Loafer"



Carol Chidsey

Floods...

[Continued from page 1]

case the Upper Basin states threatened to sue if the Bureau released more water than it was legally obligated to.

It now appears Bureau officials knew, as early as February, that a spill from Glen Canyon Dam was a distinct possibility. By late April they knew it was probable -- at that time Bureau engineer John Newman confided to Grand Canyon National Park officials that the chances of a spill were "good."

So, if Lake Powell was unrealistically high this spring (a judgment the Bureau does not publicly concede), it owes more to institutional shortcomings than to Bureau bumbling.

Heading the list of such institutional shortcomings is the absurdity of dividing one watershed into two basins. Ever since the signing of the Colorado River compact in 1922, the states of the Upper Basin -- Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming -- and of the Lower Basin -- Arizona, Nevada, and California -- have behaved like greedy spouses in a messy divorce.

At present, a Bureau employee says, "The system's prevailing philosophy is keep *your* reservoir full." Which means that each state and each dam hoards water as if we all lived on the planet Dune. It is ironic that it took a flood to demonstrate the shortcomings of our dread of drought.

Never mind that the Upper Basin has never been able to use all 'its' water, and won't be able to in the foreseeable future -- paranoia doesn't succumb to reason.

The Upper Basin states, says hydrologist Ben Harding, like to have Lake Powell full. "Not because they can do anything with that water once it gets that far downstream, but just to look at. As an item of religion."

But to the extent the Bureau itself, rather than these institutional factors, contributed to the flooding, its actions during May are most suspect.

An analysis of the Bureau's decisions in May is a numbers game. Let's call it Watergate: When did they (or should they) have known that the runoff would exceed predictions? What did they (should they) have done?

On May 1, Lake Powell had 2.2 million-acre-feet of storage available to capture a then predicted May-July runoff of 7 maf. (The actual figure would turn out to be closer to 14 maf.) Had the runoff been 7 maf the math would have worked, but just barely -- with the reservoir reaching its capacity late in June at the peak of the runoff.

But, May turned out to be a meteorological phenomenon. Precipitation in some areas of Colorado, Wyoming and Utah was five times the normal amount. Odd things began to happen. A massive mudslide occurred at Thistle, Utah; the Great Salt Lake reached an all-time high; ski areas in Colorado reopened after receiving up to 8 feet of new snow.

Ski area operators can turn on a dime, but operation of the dams is controlled by a "24-Month Most Probable Operating Plan" which can only be revised on the basis of new runoff predictions. (The predictions themselves are issued by the National Weather Service on the basis of inputs from the United States Geological Survey, the Soil Conservation Service, and the Bureau of Reclamation.)

Therefore, as snow continued to fall, and as Weather Service forecasters worked feverishly to revise

their predictions upwards, engineers from the Bureau -- most of whom live in Salt Lake City, the epicenter of all these strange meteorological happenings -- sat and waited, faithfully adhering to their "Most Probable Operating Plan." There is no indication that anyone in the Bureau realized the situation was getting out of hand until sometime in early June.

There are three reasons for this nonchalance -- one is perceptual, one is practical, one institutional.

Prior to this summer it was difficult for anyone to perceive that the Colorado could ever again be in flood. So much so that Philip Fradkin wrote in his recent book, *A River No More* (note the title) that "To me the river, in its present state, is primarily a product of the political process... rather than a natural phenomenon."

This is an understandable view of a river which is controlled by 14 major dams, and which, though it drains 12% of the United States, carries less water than the Potomac. But to view the river as plumbing is both vain and dangerous. Dangerous because it allows one to forget that the Colorado is a force -- not a faucet. A force that runs high every spring.

Second, the Bureau is a practical agency. Each of its dams are designed to store water, provide for recreation and reclamation, generate power and control floods. The practical, on-the-ground problem is that the first three mandates are inimical to the fourth -- you can't store both space and water in one spot. "We continually walk the fence between too much storage and too little," says one Bureau official. And on the planet Dune it is pragmatic to err on the side of too much.

Institutionally speaking it helps to remember that hydropower generation now plays the leading role in the operation of the Colorado River Storage Project. Even though all the dams are supposedly "multi-purpose," only megawatts make money. In terms of power production, the most lucrative lake is one which is full-to-overflowing.

Furthermore, Glen Canyon Dam is operated as a peaking power facility -- one that generates most of its power, and revenues, during daytime peak demand. The rub is that if, in May, the Bureau had wanted to lower Lake Powell they needed to release a great deal of water during the day and *at night*.

But the Columbia River comes into flood prior to the Colorado, and the Bonneville Power Authority practically gives its springtime power away, so there is almost no market for Glen Canyon hydropower at night. The idea of releasing water without "putting money in the bank" is anathema to the Bureau so it was 'institutionally' impossible for them to lower the level of Lake Powell this spring.

It is worth noting that California, where the Sierra, too, had an immense snowpack, anticipated and avoided the type of floods seen in the Colorado watershed. California hydrologist Phil Williams says that "rarely does the Bureau review or revise their dams' flood control procedures, even though in many instances these procedures were developed in the 1950's. I would suspect that an impartial inquiry would uncover serious deficiencies in the present operating criteria."

In all the news stories about the flooding, there was a far-fetched possibility that no one considered. During the last week of June and the first two weeks of July every major Colorado dam -- with one exception -- was filled to overflowing. In fact, both Lake Mead and Lake Powell were in

Plywood boards restrained Lake Powell

'surcharge.' That is, by mounting 'splash boards' on top of spillway gates, the Bureau had increased the reservoir's storage capacity. For instance, at the height of the flood, ¾ inch plywood restrained 1 million acre-feet of Lake Powell. "That plywood was the most cost effective reclamation project in the Bureau's history," quipped one agency official.

The sole exception to this necklace of overflowing dams and lakes? A reservoir on the Green River in Wyoming, upstream of all the other dams, called Fontenelle.

Fontenelle, even the Bureau admits, was a poor choice for a damsite. When the lake began storing water in the early '60's, the earth-fill dam partially collapsed in an event that, had there been more water in the reservoir, would have caused another Teton Dam disaster. Fontenelle was patched up, but today it is so riddled with leaks that it has a 'poor' safety rating.

In June, Bureau officials, worried about the dam's integrity, decided that the lake should be kept less than two-thirds full. Sometime in July, however, after the dam had 'settled' one half inch during a twelve day period, a decision was made to lower the lake even further, for fear that the dam might fail.

It is intriguing to speculate on what would have happened in the unlikely event that Fontenelle had collapsed and sent 230,000 acre-feet downstream.

These things most certainly would have occurred: Green River, Wyoming

would have been inundated; the reservoir behind Flaming Gorge Dam would have risen 6 feet and come very close to overtopping the dam; uncontrolled releases from Flaming Gorge would have reached 30,000 cfs, enough to damage the small towns of Jensen, and Green River, Utah.

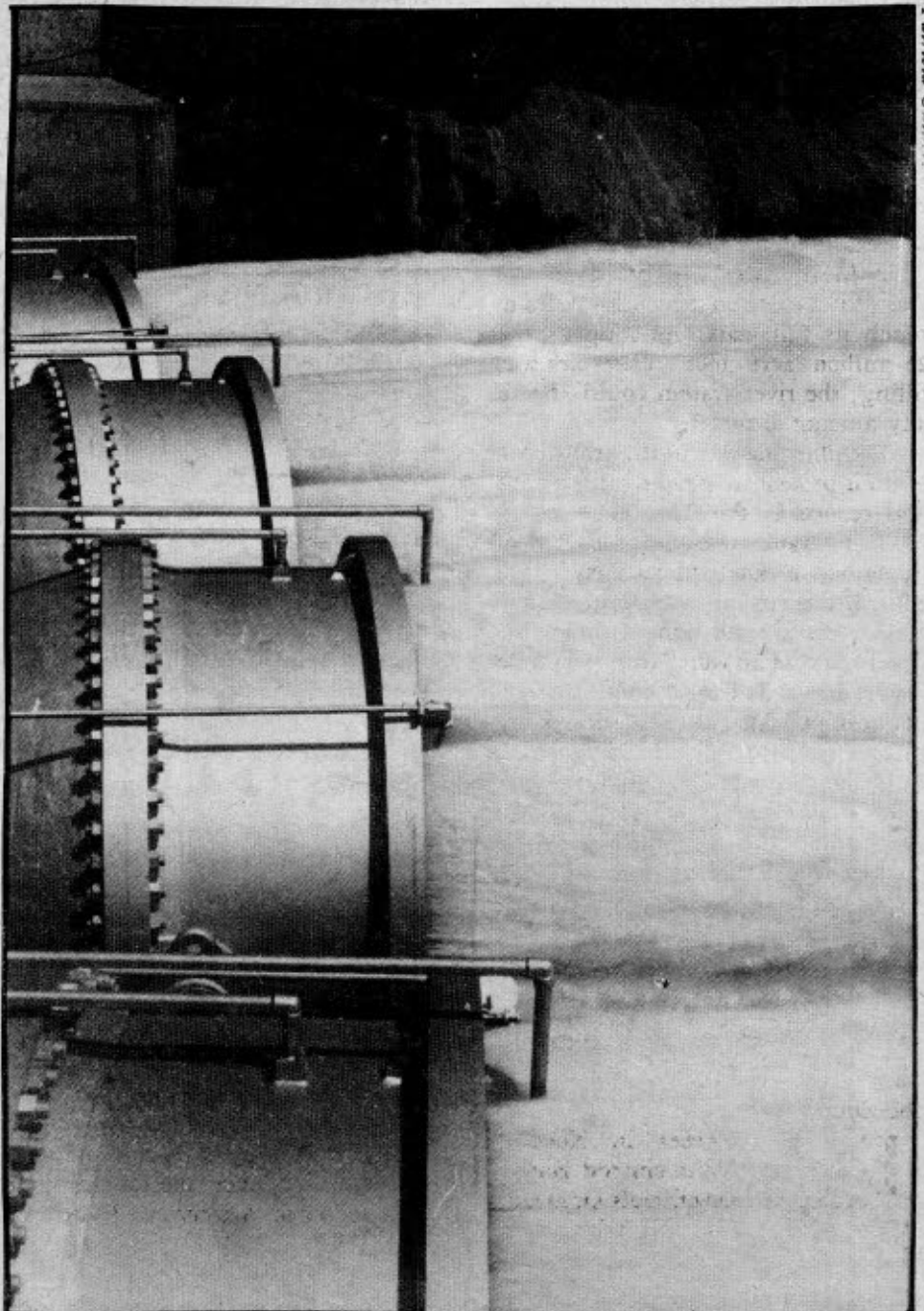
Furthermore, there is the nagging question of whether such a collapse at Fontenelle could have endangered the structural integrity of Flaming Gorge. It's a question worth asking, even though it's statistically improbable. For were the Bureau to lose Flaming Gorge, the survival of all the other dams, lined up like downriver dominoes -- Glen Canyon, Hoover, Parker, Davis -- would be debatable.

If, as it seems, this is not the most prudent way to operate a multi-billion dollar system which supplies a portion of the drinking water used in Denver, Albuquerque, San Diego, Los Angeles, and, shortly, Tucson, Phoenix, and Tijuana, one must only wish the Bureau godspeed in their efforts to lower Lakes Powell and Mead 'off the splashboards,' repair the spillways at Glen Canyon and Flaming Gorge dams; and reseal Fontenelle.

For despite the heated controversy, the snow will, once again, soon begin to fall.

□

James R. Udall has worked as a professional boatman on the Colorado. He has written about the river for various publications and he currently lives in Denver. This article was paid for by the *High Country News* Research Fund.



Close-up at Glen Canyon Dam: steel jet tubes releasing 17,000 cfs this summer

Patricia Gull

Flood victims now face eviction

by Sandy Tolan and Patricia Guthrie

"The best of the Rockies is yours," sings a cheery chorus on prime-time TV, as fresh-scrubbed, flannel-clad beer drinkers swill down bottle after bottle of mountain brew.

To the people living and working along the Lower Colorado River in Arizona and California, this happy beer jingle has taken on special meaning. Homes, docks, crops and nightclub dance floors are buried under several feet of the best of the Rockies.

These people, part of a generation raised on rhetoric about man's technological prowess, wonder how a river system plugged with 24 major dams mandated for 'flood control' could have the worst flooding since the first dam was plugged into the riverbed 48 years ago.

It's not just the flooded-out people who ask the question. "I find this incredible," scoffs former Interior Secretary Stewart Udall, speaking in Santa Fe. "I think it's bungling of the worst sort. Somebody just ducked out on the responsibility."

But responsibility and accountability are clouded by the many competing demands on the desert river and its reservoirs. Of the conflicting priorities, no two are more at odds than flood control, which requires empty space behind dams, and water for beneficial use, which requires that water be held behind dams.

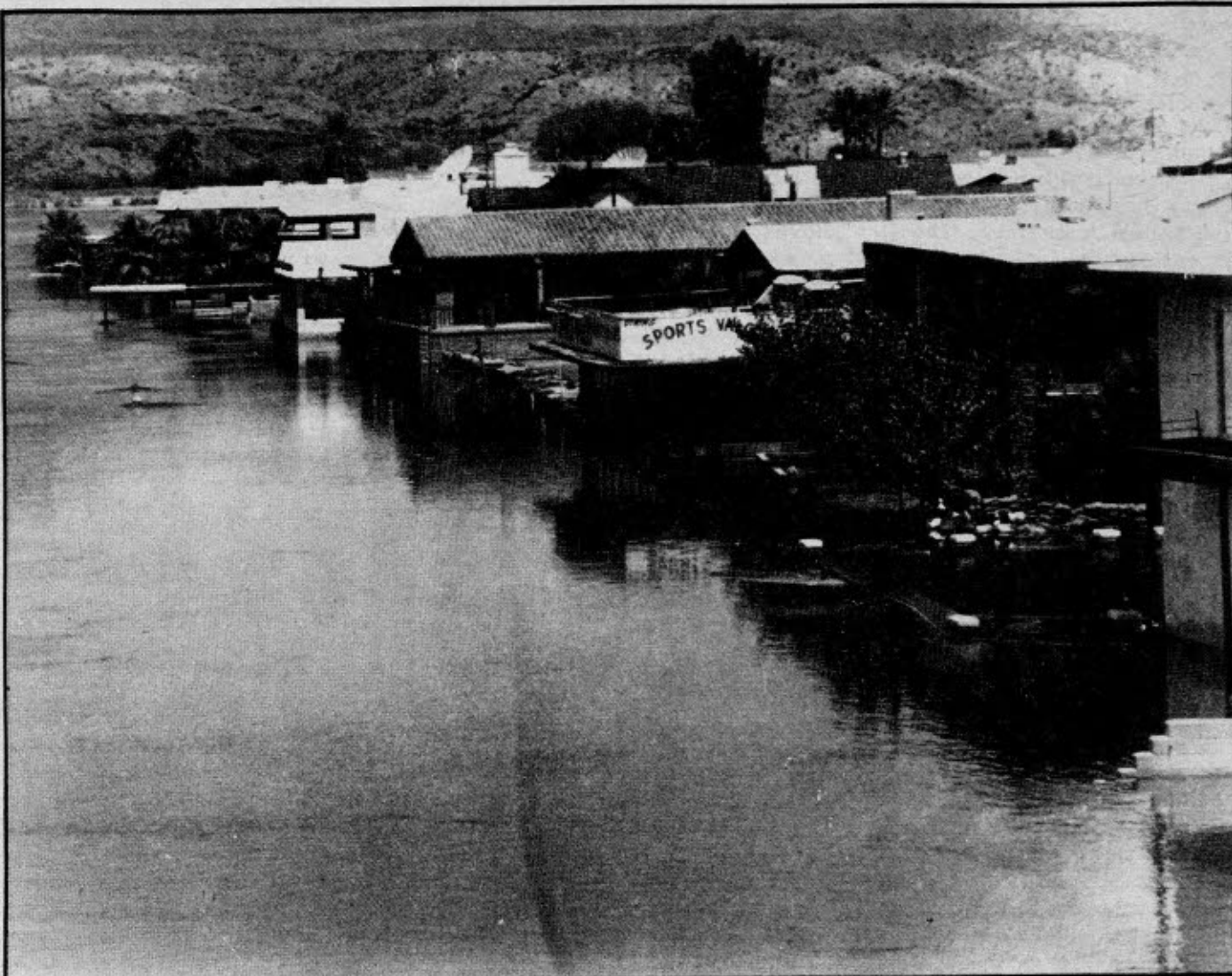
These two mutually incompatible goals pit the states and their water users, represented by the powerful and shrewd state water engineers, against the people living along the river.

It did not require a crystal ball to see the confrontation coming. The conflict didn't arise earlier because of 17 years of grace offered by Lake Powell, behind Glen Canyon dam, upstream of the Grand Canyon and Lake Mead. Glen Canyon dam was closed in 1963, and it took 17 years to reach its full mark. As long as the 25-million acre foot reservoir was filling, the river system could absorb any amount of runoff.

Possibly unaware of the transience of their protection, people built homes and resorts in the flood plain below Hoover Dam. But the Bureau of Reclamation knew that easy flood control was coming to an end, and in 1968 it issued regulations outlining the flood plain as anything that would be covered by a flow of 40,000 cubic feet per second (cfs). The regulations were reissued in 1980. But homes were built as low as the 28,000 cfs level. It is not clear who is to blame for this -- the residents, the developers, local government or the feds.

At this point, blame isn't the issue. The issue is who gets to suffer for past mistakes and who escapes responsibility. The issue is: for whose benefits will the river be managed? That issue, and the future winners and losers, were on hand last month at hearings in the Southwest.

It is 103 degrees in Needles, California. White-shirted Bureau of Reclamation officials sit in lawn chairs, trying to cool off under a palm tree on the high school lawn. Inside, the House Interior Committee is holding its second day of hearings on the management of the Colorado



Flooded-out Parker Strip this summer

River. People shift uncomfortably on the rows of cushioned auditorium seats, fanning themselves with the hearing testimony.

"One of the major purposes of the Colorado River reservoirs is conserving water for irrigation, municipal and domestic use," says Myron Holburt of California's Colorado River Board. "It is well to remember that they were authorized by Congress as multi-purpose reservoirs, and that the maximization of one purpose usually diminishes the benefits of the other purposes."

To Holburt and other state engineers, the river is simply a controlled channel that brings cities, industries and farms what they must have. The engineers, on behalf of those interests, have fought consistently in letters to the federal government, and at the recent hearings, to keep the levels of Lakes Powell and Mead as full as possible, thereby preventing untapped water from flowing needlessly downstream into Mexico -- especially since demand on the river will soon exceed supply. If a few people suffer because of this policy, the argument goes, it is for the greater good.

"Should this valuable resource be threatened by early dumping to assure the protection of a couple hundred homes and businesses which were thoughtlessly constructed in the flood plain?" asked Lowell Weeks, general manager of the Coachella Valley (Calif.) Water District. "I think not," he answered.

The states have fought each other frequently in the past over their rights to their share of the overburdened river, most notably in the landmark Arizona v. California case of 1963. But on this issue they are together. If the states have their way, not one gallon will pass through the dams without being harnessed for "beneficial consumptive use."

To the state engineers and their constituents, who view the reservoirs as their "insurance policies" for current needs and future use, the only solution seems to lie in moving the people who have built in the flood channel.

"The basic problem leading to damage," said Steve Reynolds, state engineer of New Mexico, "was encroachment on channel capacity. Except for those encroachments, there would have been minimal, if any, damage." (In fact, much of the flood-related damage is reported outside of the flood plain.)

Wes Steiner, Reynolds' counterpart in Arizona, testified: "We must do everything we can to remove all development from the design floodway that is subject to damage from controlled releases from upstream reservoirs."

These are fighting words to the people who live on the river bank. "The cause of this year's 'controlled' flooding is simple," charged a front-page editorial in the *Needles Desert Star*. "The government started the snow run-off period with all reservoirs approximately 90 percent full. They tried to pour a glass of water into a glass that was already almost full, and this will never work."

The river, declared the editorial, is controlled by "selfish water-users," and by the "water engineers, (who) are no different than any other profession... Without proper restraints they will gradually lose their sense of balance. They are the 'experts' and all others are merely peons, and have no right to interfere or to question... This arrogance becomes an important part of their psychological health, of their macho."

The controversy between the states and the people living along the river was nearly invisible before 1980 because Lake Powell had room to hold the heaviest run-off without spilling a



Steve Reynolds, New Mexico State Engineer

drop. Now "the system is full," as Reclamation officials like to say, and the gap between those who rely on concrete canals to bring them Colorado River water and those who live on the river's banks is clearly and deeply drawn.

People in Yuma, Needles, and the Parker Strip want a new way of managing the river -- one that guarantees flooding will not become routine. The states, meanwhile, want assurance that water will be conserved and not sent downstream unnecessarily.

"We are caught in the middle," admits Broadbent. "There's going to be a continued battle over whether you ought to conserve it and take a chance on floods, or whether you ought to lower it and not take a chance on some floods. We're probably going to have to reach a balance somewhere in between. And that's the tough place. Where in between do you reach that balance?"

(Continued on page 12)

Rick Velotta, courtesy Arizona Daily Sun

Mary Tolan

Floods...

(Continued from page 11)

Another Bureau official was less diplomatic. The real question, he said, comes down to "do you devastate 2,000 (people) or irritate 15 million?"

While the states and the local communities debate over whose rights are more inalienable, it is clear something has to give. Either the reservoirs must be lowered to protect people encroached in the flood plain, or those people must be moved.

Testimony and interviews from the recent hearings, as well as conversations with water officials and letters

written to the federal government by the states indicate that the Bureau is leaning toward the second option.

During the hearings, the states uniformly praised the Bureau's performance during the floods. "Masterful manipulation of the unforeseen," said New Mexico's Steve Reynolds. "A fine job," said California's Myron Holburt. "Reasonable and consistent," said Colorado's Bill McDonald. "Exemplary and deserving of high praise," said Arizona's Was Steiner.

A resident of the Lower Colorado offered his opinion for the flow of compliments from the states to the Bureau. "The water-users are getting their way, so they all kiss the Bureau's ass," said Bill Claypool, a lifelong resident of Needles, who helped

organize the testimony of people living along the Lower Colorado.

Whatever the reason for the state engineers' praise, Broadbent appeared to return the favor. "My feeling is that the states are entitled to the development of their water resources and as much as they should be allowed to develop and use their water," the commissioner said.

After his testimony, Broadbent was more specific. Despite claiming he favors a "balanced" solution, he endorsed a recent report by the Federal Emergency Management Agency that "indicates that there are two solutions. One of them is moving people out of the flood plain, and the other is 'flood-proofing' " (For example, building dikes and levees around structures within the flood channel.) "I think it's going to have to

be a combination of both," Broadbent said.

Other Bureau officials confirmed that this solution is strongly favored over any major change in the flood-control requirements. If, as it appears, the Bureau and the states are together on this solution, the people along the river will stand virtually alone, against more than 15 million water-users, in their attempts to get the river's management plan reworked.

□

Sandy Tolan and Patricia Guthrie report for the *Desert News Service*, in Flagstaff, Arizona, on behalf of various publications. This article was paid for by the *High Country News* Research Fund.

A river once more?

Has the spring 1983 flooding transformed the Colorado into "a river once more?" Not according to Philip Fradkin, author of *A River No More*, whose theme is that dams and aqueducts have transformed the Colorado into plumbing.

The California author said he believes the river is still plumbing. In a telephone interview September 22, he also said he'd already been asked the same question by *National Geographic* and *Mother Jones*.

He had told those magazines that the flooding and the ripping out of spillways by the surge of water is a temporary phenomenon. "In a few years we'll be back to where we were. If you look over rainfall records, it's a jagged curve."

This year's high runoff, he guesses, is temporary. "To talk of a

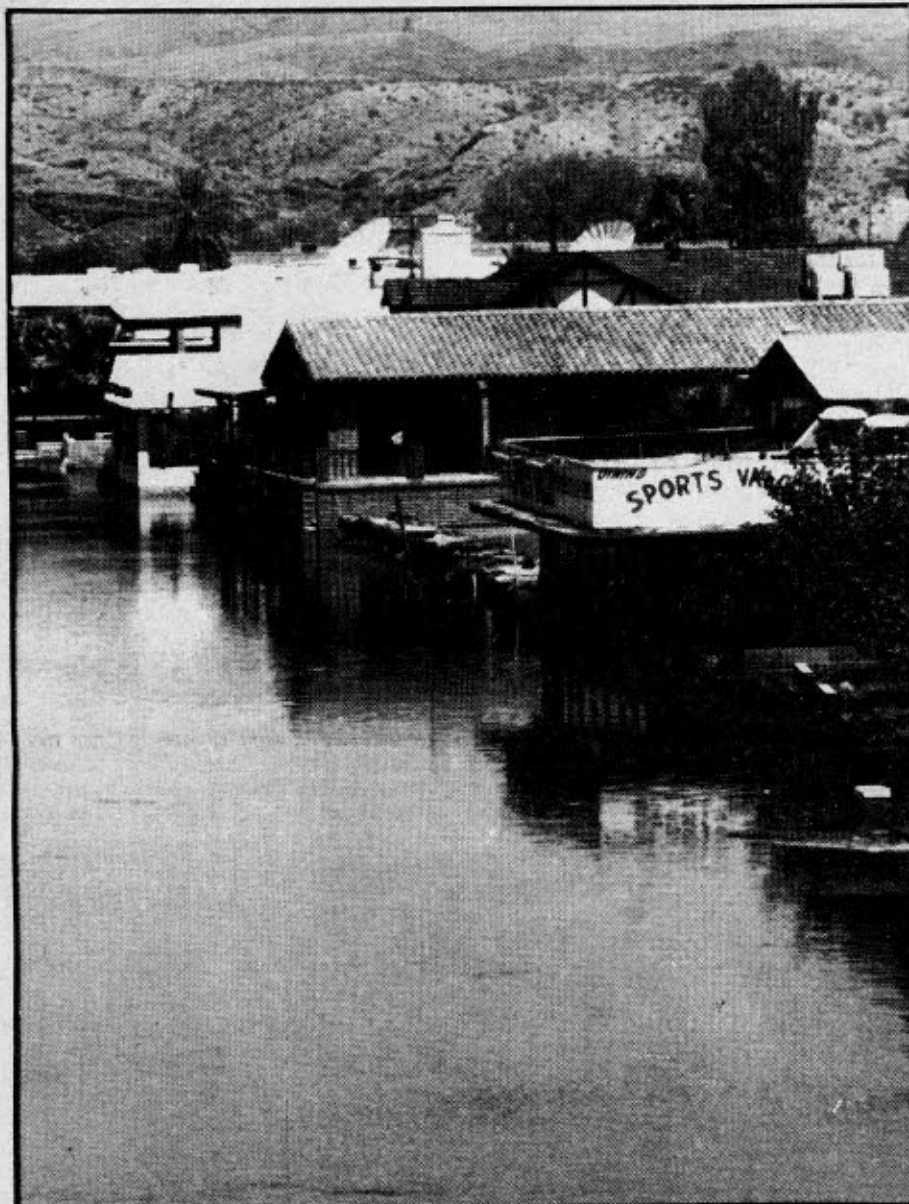
'river once more' you have to say the high water levels will extend ten to fifteen more years."

Fradkin, who has spent the last several months in Sale Lake City working on his next book, says he is aware of the rising of the Great Salt Lake and of speculation that the West is entering another wet cycle.

But even a long wet period, he says, won't free the Colorado and turn it back into a river. If the West is in a new wet cycle, he predicts, the dam builders will simply get back to work.

"If it keeps spilling, there would be a cry to build more reservoirs." And with more water to store, "More people would come into the area." At least until the cycle again turned dry.

-Ed Marston



Did a mum Bureau foresee the floods?

It doesn't make any practical difference. But it would be nice to know if the Bureau of Reclamation saw the flood coming, but bowed to Upper Basin political pressure and kept the floodgates closed during the winter and early spring.

There is evidence the Bureau knew by early spring that very heavy flooding was possible. In April, Bill Plummer, director of the Bureau's Lower Colorado Basin Office, proposed to increase releases "in excess of downstream requirements." That means the Bureau wanted to let more water flow to California than California wanted.

He made the proposal in a letter to Myron Holburt, chief engineer of California's Colorado River Board. Plummer, citing "record high precipitation events" and "reductions in downstream demands," proposed a modified plan to make room for

coming runoff. In the jargon, he called it "space evacuation releases for flood control." Plummer was citing "record high precipitation events" at a time when official forecasts showed snowpack accumulations more or less normal.

It didn't take long for New Mexico's Steve Reynolds to get the letter. Reynolds, who jokes that he has been the state water engineer "forever," objected to Plummer's proposal, fearing it might be an attempt "to depart from the Law of the River."

Reynolds wasn't as hardnosed as he could have been. He carefully wrote on May 3, "It seems marginally possible that a full explanation of the probably unique situation and some indication that your current proposal is based on this uniqueness and not reflective of any intent to depart from the Law of the River in the future might dissuade the Upper Division

States (Upper Basin) from seeking whatever recourse is available to them at this point."

It is difficult for outsiders to understand bureaucrats writing in code. But Reynolds, in his May 3 letter, appears to acknowledge the "probably unique current situation" and to tentatively offer to "not seek whatever recourse is available." Reynolds seems to be saying the Upper Basin won't sue the Bureau if this once they let a bit more water go downstream than the Upper Basin thinks is legal.

It is interesting that Reynolds' offer to bend the sacred Law of the River came on May 3, when the official run-off forecast was only 117 percent of normal. That is by no means a crisis. It took another six weeks for the forecast to jump to 191 percent of normal -- which is a crisis. In the end, spring runoff was 210 percent of normal, which was a disaster.

The point isn't that Reynolds and his fellow Upper Basin state engineers were to blame for the flooding. In fact, the Bureau went ahead in April with its increased releases. But those releases, following the winter trickle, did little good.

The letters written by Plummer and Reynolds are interesting because they indicate the experts knew in the late winter or spring, 1983, that the region was in for trouble. The question is: Did they know how much trouble? Their letters can be interpreted in two ways.

First, that they were concerned about even a small above-normal runoff because Lake Powell is now full. And second, that they didn't trust the official forecasts showing near-normal runoff, and were far more worried than they have ever let on.

-S. Tolan and P. Guthrie

Oct. 3, 1983-High Country News-13

OPINION

A straight shot of Wyoming

"Is Anyone Home on the Range?"

A TV documentary by Bobbie Birleffi

Preview by Tom Wolf

Easterners writing about or filming the West often dwell on the double bind their 'sensitivity' puts them in. On the one hand, they say they are better off than the native Westerners because they appreciate the West's beauty and solitude. But, they continue, they are also worse off because the Westerners, not understanding what they have, don't mourn what they are about to lose.

Director Bobbie Birleffi, although she now lives in Los Angeles, was raised in Wyoming and she does not indulge in such sleight of mind. Instead of an angle, she has the ability to let Wyomingites, old and new, speak for themselves about boom and bust in the New West.

As might be expected, the result of such film making focuses more on human than on economic or environmental issues. The oil fields and coal mines are in the background, but in the foreground Birleffi's people struggle with the challenges to

personal identity brought on by yet another turn in the West's boom and bust cycle.

Birleffi can make a human - rather than an issue - film because she knows how to get her camera and tape recorders into the industrial man-camps, the trailer parks, and the ranches of the new Wyoming. The people she finds there talk about the things that matter to them: personal change, identity, attitudes toward work, and attitudes toward the land -- whether it's public or private land.

The film is not a series of unrelated walk-ons. Her people interact, and in the interaction bring out the stresses in the boom towns. When one of the natives describes newcomers as "a lower grade of people," Birleffi shows how the newcomers defend themselves against these everyday personal and social assaults:

"We aren't trash. We work hard. We are just like anyone else. We want our own homes."

The attack came from one of Wyoming's prominent native environmentalists, and it is typical of the way she goes about examining the statements environmentalists and



Cinematographer Dyanna Taylor, left, and producer-director Bobbie Birleffi

their foes make about Western ecosystems.

The film has its share of snowscapes and sunsets, stripmines and oil rigs. But it also has a sense of the complexity of the moral and social issues involved in energy development in a state like Wyoming. Birleffi has gotten the natives and the newcomers to speak frankly about their complicity in the changes coming to Wyoming. The same environmentalist who sees newcomers as a sub-species is also hard on himself: "I've sold out," he says.

The film also confronts assumptions about wealth, property and class that are often hidden in environmental rhetoric. It made me wonder whether the rush to convert and convince has prevented us from a continuing examination of our own values. For example, the film shows ranchers who sell out to energy companies and ranchers who hold out. The close look it takes at both made me think twice

about some of the relations between environmentalists and the agricultural community.

Adding to its depth and complexity is the film's sensitivity to the roles available to women on the new frontier. Recording artist Cris Williamson provides a score that is more than background. Her comments on the major scenes adds warmth and the sense of continuous personal crisis that the film is about.

Is Anyone Home on the Range will premiere this fall on PBS, with local affiliates determining the exact showing times. There will also be showings in Denver and Cheyenne. For more information, contact Lynn Birleffi, Sagebrush Productions, 3318 Snyder Ave., Cheyenne, WY. 82001. 307/635-1705.

Tom Wolf is the former director of the Wyoming Outdoor Council in Cheyenne.

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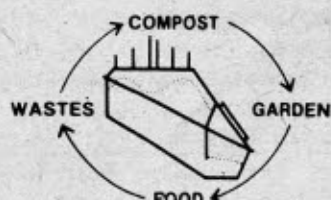
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LETTERS

AGENCY FAILED

Dear HCN,

Your HOT LINE article (HCN, 9/19/83) on the Quail Mountain proposed ski area has prompted a reply from me.

Hank Deutsch confirms what our local Ranger Gene Eide maintains: Nothing is binding on the Forest Service. It seems to me that Forest plans and impact statements are meaningless paper drills as far as the Forest Managers are concerned.

The Forest Service Ski area design capabilities are incredible. At least we now know that all those long gashes running vertically down the mountains on ski row and viewed from I-70 aren't ski slopes after all.

Mr. Deutsch must be joking. Or does he really believe the public is dumb enough to buy his line of "bull."

Sincerely,
Walter J. Maass
Granite, Colorado

A MODEST REQUEST

Dear HCN,

I saw your ad in the *Next Whole Earth Catalog* and I'm hoping you can help me.

I am currently incarcerated in New York State. I love and miss animals and nature. If possible could you please send me any nature posters I could use to decorate my cell, and bring up my spirits.

Thank you,
William Mangot
83-A-2095
354 Hunter St.
Ossining, NY. 10562

14-High Country News--Oct. 3, 1983

BULLETIN BOARD

1983 COLORADO ENERGY CONFERENCE

U.S. Representative Morris Udall (D-Ariz.) will be the keynote speaker at the 1983 Colorado Energy Conference in Grand Junction Oct. 14. The 9 A.M.-4 P.M. session at Two Rivers Plaza also features national, state and local leaders from government and industry. Sponsors are U.S. Representative Ray Kogovsek (D-Colo.) and the Washington, D.C.-based Columbia Institute for Political Research.

Participants include William Alesio, vice president of Union Carbide, David Getches, executive director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, Daniel Yergin, co-author of *Energy Future: Report of the Energy Project at the Harvard Business School*, and J. William McDonald, director of the Colorado Water Conservation Board, among others. The conference is free but lunch and refreshment breaks cost \$9.

MEDIA EXPERT WANTED

The Northern Rockies Action Group, which goes by the handy acronym NRAG, is looking for a media specialist to work primarily in its Helena, Montana office. NRAG is a non-profit organization which for ten years has helped to train citizen activists in the areas of environment and human rights. The salary is about \$15,000 depending on experience and qualifications; startup is this January 15. Write Michael Scheetman, NRAG, 9 Placer St., Helena, Montana 59601 for details.

COLORADO RURAL COUNCIL

Colorado's Rural Council, founded and chaired by Lt. Governor Nancy Dick, meets for its second annual Rural Conference this October 27 at Steamboat Springs. For once, there is no "panel of experts" to talk about hazardous waste, water, public utilities, rural housing, and other subjects. Instead, some of the 30 Council members and the audience will bounce questions and answers back and forth.

The get-together also features barbecued pig. The registration fee of \$25 for non-members should be sent to Suzanne Harber, Rural Council secretary, 5300 S. Cherry Creek Dr. #817, Denver, CO. 80222.

RANKING FOR THE GREEN VOTE

By digging up past voting records, the League of Conservation Voters has profiled *Current Democratic Presidential Candidates for 1984*. This first edition examines environmental track records of the six Democratic contenders.

The current report is available for \$5 from the League of Conservation Voters at 317 Pennsylvania Ave., S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003.

TO MARKET, TO MARKET

If you have a few million tons of coal to sell, and \$295 to spend, you may wish to attend the first annual "Marketing Western Coal" conference October 10 to 12 in Denver. Sponsored by the Western Coal Export Council and the Colorado School of Mines, the conference features a luncheon talk by Utah Governor Scott M. Matheson, as well as sessions on acid rain, railroad deregulation, a comparison of different states' taxes on coal, the Aquatrain, slurry pipelines, and export possibilities to the Pacific Basin (this session is bleakly titled: "Prospects for Recovery"). For information, call the School of Mines at 303/273-3590.

SUPERSTITION VOLUNTEERS WANTED

A Forest Service Wilderness called Superstition east of Phoenix, Arizona is looking for volunteers for a four-month stint beginning this January, 1984. The Information Specialist will talk to visitors about no-trace camping and other matters at a trailhead, while a Wilderness Ranger Assistant will work in the field and office. Uniforms are provided and there is something called "subsistence reimbursement." But, "a desire to work hard," and with the public, is necessary.

To apply, send a resume and letter indicating job preference to: Wilderness Ranger, Mesa Ranger District, P.O. Drawer A, Mesa AZ 85201, or call 602/261-6446 for more information.

DECISION MODES, ET AL

A short course on "The Economics of Environmental Regulation and Corporate Compliance" is best described in its brochure: "Course participants will be introduced to a decision model for determining efficient modes of environmental compliance." If that's the kind of introduction you're looking for, this \$195 course is available November 10-11 and April 5-6. Write: Continuing Education, School of Mines, Golden, CO. 80401.

Instructors include Cooper Wayman, EPA attorney; Robert Yuhnke, regional counsel for the Environmental Defense Fund; and Lynde Gilliam, of Mines' Mineral Economics Department.

TALK TO CURECANTI

The National Park Service asks for comments until Oct. 17 on managing the Curecanti National Recreation Area in Western Colorado, which hosts nearly one million visitors each year at its three reservoirs -- Blue Mesa, Morrow Point and Crystal. A Draft Natural Resources Plan was released Sept. 15; comments are accepted until Oct. 17. Write Superintendent, Curecanti NRA, P.O. Box 1040, Gunnison, CO 81230.

BEWARE OF BEARS

Bear Us in Mind is the name of a brochure just issued by federal and state agencies whose beat is the Greater Yellowstone area. Grizzlies roam throughout the region, which takes in parts of five National Forests and two National Parks in Montana, Wyoming and Idaho.

The brochure is blunt: bears don't like surprises, they are attracted by food, and they are wild and unpredictable. Because grizzlies can manage short bursts of speed of up to 40 miles per hour, "running away is a poor option," we're told.

If you encounter a grizzly, the order of defense is: stay calm and let him leave. If that doesn't work, detour around the bear, keeping upwind and scouting for a climbable tree. If a grizzly charges, drop a pack or coat as distraction, climb at least 12 feet up a stout tree, or as a last resort, assume a cannonball position to protect your head and stomach while playing dead.

Free to tourists, the brochure is the latest in many attempts by Park and Forest officials to make sure people understand that the grizzly is not just a fuzzy overgrown dog. Brochures can be ordered from the Forest Supervisor of Bridger-Teton Forest, Box 1888, Jackson, WY. 83001.

BLM WILDERNESS TRIPS

BLM Fall '83 Wilderness Trips in Western Colorado continue in October with John Randolph shepherding a group Oct. 15-16 to mountain lion country on the north slope of remote Brown's Park. Call him at 879-6764 to be included.

Then on Oct. 22-23, Gary Duncan (882-7513) will lead an expedition to Cahone Canyon in southern Colorado.

There, we're told, is a rich concentration of archaeological sites. The last trip, Oct. 29-30, will be to Squaw-Papoose Canyon on the Utah-southern Colorado line, also a treasure trove of archaeological sites. Call James Mischke at 565-4061 to make arrangements.

All trips to BLM areas under consideration for Wilderness designation are free and sponsored by the Two Rivers Citizens' Association, Grand Junction; Audubon Society of Western Colorado; Montelores Citizens' Resource Forum and Colorado Open Space Council.

A UTAH WILDERNESS EVENING

The Utah Wilderness Association invites folks to an evening of wilderness and song Oct. 14 in Salt Lake City. A \$5 admission guarantees the Oquirrh Ridge Drifters, talk by rancher Cecil Garland, and the prize-winning film by Marty Stouffer, *The Predators*, narrated by Robert Redford.

The place is South High Auditorium at 1575 State Street; the time is 7 P.M. All proceeds benefit the Utah Wilderness Association.



Note: Color can't be used for identification.



ARCHES AND CANYONLANDS WORKSHOPS

Do Arches and Canyonlands National Parks need a mandatory permit system? How much four-wheel driving and pack tours on horseback should be allowed? These and other questions will be discussed at seven workshops conducted by the National Park Service in Utah and Colorado this month. Although both parks will be discussed jointly, public participation at the workshops will help park officials develop separate management plans and Environmental Assessments.

All meetings start at 7 P.M. at the following places: Oct. 11 -- Room 111, Salt Palace, Salt Lake City, Utah; Oct. 12 -- Ramada Inn, W. 6th and Simms, Lakewood, Denver; Oct. 14 -- Senior Citizens' Hall, Green River, Utah; Oct. 17 -- Student Union, Mesa College, Grand Junction, Colorado; Oct. 18 -- Public Library, Monticello, Utah; Oct. 19 -- Pancake Haus, Moab, Utah; Oct. 20 -- City Office, Blanding, Utah.

Workbooks to be used at the workshops are now available by writing Canyonlands, 446 S. Main St., Moab, Utah 84532, or by calling the park at 801/259-7165.

AN HONEST REPORT

The federal Office of Technology Assessment has shrugged its shoulders: it doesn't have a clue as to how much natural gas the nation will have available through the end of the century.

The report says our geologic ignorance is such that no one can make an accurate estimate of future production. If the effects of new technology, price changes, and conservation are thrown in, the picture becomes totally blurred.

The 100-page "U.S. Natural Gas Availability" publication does give a readable account of why predictions are impossible. It is available for \$4.75 from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Supt. of Documents, Washington, D.C. 20402. Ask for stock number 052-003-00926-9.

COLORADO-WYOMING COAL LEASING

BLM officials in Craig, Colorado will receive comments until October 7 on Round II of the Draft EIS for coal leasing in the Green River-Hams Fork Region of northwestern Colorado and Southern Wyoming.

BLM's preferred alternative is the "high" level, one notch below maximum, and calls for leasing 11 tracts in Wyoming and eight in Colorado. They include a total of 100,419 acres underlain with 2.5 billion tons of coal. Federal, state and private lands are all covered in the Draft EIS. Comments go to Team Leader Carol McDonald, Green River-Hams Fork DEIS II, Box 1136, Craig, CO. 81626.

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OPINION

Watt calls out to the 'True America'

The actions and sayings of James Watt cannot be understood by viewing him as a Secretary of Interior or as a political appointee. Were he either, this forceful and driven person would not -- as many falsely put it -- keep 'putting his foot in his mouth.'

Watt must be seen as a man with a mission. Unlike a Richard Nixon or a Ronald Reagan, Watt's mission is more important to him than politics. He is that which Americans always claim they want: a public figure who puts principle first.

There is an almost automatic assumption that anyone committed to principle must be a good guy. Watt is another reminder that dedication to causes is found on all sides of the battlefield.

If Watt survives the present 'black, woman, Jew, cripple' controversy (as of this writing, he has survived), we will learn -- in a month or two -- that he hasn't 'learned his lesson.' His apparent inability to learn is not due to slow wittedness; it is due to Watt's commitment to be more than just another Secretary of Interior.

If Watt's only goal were to hand over the federal government's coal, oil, and uranium to corporations, he could do so in far more effective ways. For starts, he would butter up the environmental public on the don't-count things. He'd support some wilderness, keep snowmobiles out of pristine areas and spend lots of time enjoying raft trips through the Grand Canyon and hiking through wilderness areas. When he wasn't rafting or hiking, he'd be on TV telling America how much he loves such activities.

When the heat grew because of substantive actions he took -- actions which advance his concept of a private market economy -- he'd go to the aid of grizzlies, or he'd establish a new wildlife refuge, or he'd race up to Jackson, Wyoming to save the Yellowstone geysers by stopping geothermal drilling. All the while, he'd be leasing, building roads, and promulgating regulations that weaken environmental laws.

If he had followed this obvious, time-worn strategy, Watt could have leased and drilled and generally destroyed more things than he has done, without becoming the controversial figure he is.

So Watt cannot be understood as a plundering Interior Secretary, or as a conventional political appointee. Most analysts describe him as President Reagan's symbolic sop to the Far Right.

But Reagan doesn't need to play to that group. Who else are they going to support: Gary Hart? Reagan needs the middle of America -- the middle Watt is supposedly alienating.

Watt, in our view, can only be understood in terms of his self-appointed cultural mission. That cultural mission is to rally what he believes is the True America. Perhaps because of his rural Wyoming upbringing, he cannot believe that America is the way it is presented by the media. He thinks the media are lying to him and to the rest of America.

In his heart, he believes today's America is very similar to the West he grew up in. And he has taken it upon himself to appeal over the heads of the media and the media manipulators to that America.

His black-Jew-cripple remark was a 'joke' a man makes when he believes he and his kind are dominant, and can afford to be benignly contemptuous of other, lesser sorts. He was telling his audience that he has been saddled with an assortment of misfits. But he was also telling them that he was still in charge. And he proved, for the moment, that he was in charge by publicly mocking the accident of birth that -- in this upside down time -- brought those people to a commission pretending to advise him.

The laughter from his clubby Chamber of Commerce audience was later drowned out by a very different reaction. But that won't dissuade Watt. He will remain convinced that the minorities, or liberals, or whatever have again manipulated the media, covering up the real America and letting only the misfits and minorities speak.

His assault on everything the environmental movement values is cut from the same cloth. He correctly recognizes that wilderness areas and wildlife refuges and national parks have less to do with animals and trees, and more to do with human culture. Parks and wilderness are habitats for plants and animals. But they are also habitats for the people who treasure such areas, or the idea of such areas. They are manifestations of the America Watt hates.

The use of snowmobiles and trailbikes, the introduction of drill rigs into wilderness, and the commercialization of national parks, should not be viewed as economic or political strategy. Watt, we

believe, wouldn't lift a finger to damage such areas if no one cared. He might even protect them.

His assault is only incidentally on scenery and wildlife. It is instead aimed at people who care about the areas. It is his way of creating a battleground and of testing strength. Political strategy wouldn't serve him because compromise doesn't create clear winners and losers.

Watt, then, is on the move against those of us who are comfortable in America; those who are pleased at the direction it has taken -- with fits and starts -- since the election 24 years ago of John F. Kennedy.

We are comfortable with America's growing concern for clean air and water, with its desire to set aside some areas as natural preserves, with its emphasis on physical fitness, with its more relaxed approach to sexuality, and with its natural acceptance (rather than 'tolerance') of the ethnic and religious groups which make up America.

Watt is important because he is testing -- with Reagan's approval and with all of his energy and with the considerable power of the Department of Interior -- the direction in which America is apparently moving.

He is saying: Here I am, occupying one of the most powerful positions in the U.S. Government, standing up and saying that America is still a White, Christian, Free Market, Private Enterprise nation. This majority I speak for is not bigoted, but we want it recognized that America is ours to direct and control. The multi-colored, ecumenical, ethnic, environmentally-concerned America may have a place in our world, but it is a very small place. I am here to joke at it and humiliate it, so that it realizes its place.

Is Watt correctly reading America? Speaking from a small, rural mining and agricultural community in Watt's West, we think he is wrong. We think he is frozen in his childhood, and that if he ever chooses to return permanently to his native Powder River Basin, he will find that that area has also moved on, and left him in his own time warp -- in a state of cultural insulation Watt created by living in Washington and Denver, but probably not becoming part of either.

For the moment, we as a nation are listening to Watt's message. But, we predict, not for long.

-E.M.

BOOK NOTES

A book for durability junkies

The Durability Factor

Edited by Roger B. Yepsen, Jr. Rodale Press, Emmaus, Pennsylvania, 1982. 360 pages. \$17.95, cloth, illustrated.

Review by Betsy Marston

This book is not for anyone who would wear the T-shirt we saw displayed this summer at a shop in Park City, Utah: "He who dies with the most toys wins."

This book is for frugality freaks, those of us who get our kicks from using it up, wearing it out and never, if it can be nursed along or jury-rigged, throwing it out. Our 'toys,' we hope, are fewer because they're bought for the long haul.

But what endures is often more costly than products made to self-destruct. The editor acknowledges this irony in discussing cars such as the Mercedes and woolen clothes by Pendleton. The unfortunate

fact in these cases is that those who least need durability are most able to afford it.

Although everyone in theory applauds a durable product, it is a truth universally acknowledged that this society hums along by producing "new" things for the masses to buy. If the things are built to last, profits go down.

Gillette, we're told, bought out the first long-life stainless-steel blade in 1930 but kept it off the market for three decades. Only after the British firm Wilkinson introduced its long-lasting blade to America in 1962, did Gillette follow suit. Gillette's throw-away blades had accounted for 90 percent of the disposable blade market.

The editor insists that companies can survive by turning out well-crafted, long-lived products -- but we are asked to help: "If people demanded no-nonsense products and would back up their words with dollars, then companies would surely produce them."

In the early part of this century, we're reminded, goods were built with intrinsic durability, from the \$19.50 Sears stove with its spare parts to Henry Ford's 1909 Model T. Until 1921, Model Ts rolled off the assembly line in all colors -- as long as the color was black.

Competition ended a standard-built car and the path toward tail fins and "planned obsolescence" was set. Reversing Detroit's mind-set is taking decades to achieve.

With the help of dozens of contributors, products from appliances to bikes are profiled for our benefit. We learn which books are bound for hard-use (this one is), which typewriters can take a beating, and that "real," wind-up watches are no longer made in America. No one knows if electronic watches will endure 50 years from now.

This useful guide, filled with the personality of its many writers, is remarkably free of class bias. Judith New of Allentown, PA, tells us her mobile home has served her family

well for nine years and "has more than 20 years of life in it." The home cost \$5,000.



16-High Country News--Oct. 3, 1983

OFF THE WALL

Jakey, Jimmy, Teddy

Rocky Mountain residents are puzzled by the many closed mines in the region. People from Montana to New Mexico are asking: How did the mining industry get itself in so deep?

The culprit was a combination of botched political maneuvering and poor market research.

The great oil shale blunder was a result of political miscalculation. Congressional leaders like Jim Wright and industry leaders like Exxon knew oil shale as fuel was iffy. So they had a fall-back position -- oil shale as an all-purpose homeopathic remedy. It was to be marketed as a gritty, scrappy soap; as a purgative; and as an all-purpose salve to cure warts, including those of the herpes persuasion.

These days the free market -- even backed by Madison Avenue expertise -- is not always enough. That's especially true with a product like oil shale medicines. So the marketing was to be 'enhanced' by a bill Senators Jake Garn, James McClure and Teddy Kennedy were to introduce: A National Health Systems and Oil Shale Medication and Defense Security Act bill.

Behind the all-purpose screen of national defense, the bill was to require that all medicines paid for by the federal government were to be oil-shale based. It was to open a huge market -- Americans guzzle more medicine each year than their cars guzzle gasoline.

Tylenol sinks shale

Teddy Kennedy was ecstatic over "finding the key to forging a socially-progressive alliance with the conservative West." McClure and Garn were equally happy over converting the Liberal East to

free market economics. Jesse Helms was supporting, although not co-sponsoring, the bill because each prescription was to be labelled: "This product is more effective with prayer." He would have co-sponsored the bill, but Kennedy, as a matter of principle, balked at the label: "This medicine must be taken with prayer."

Unfortunately, the Tylenol scare broke the day before the alliance was to introduce the bill. The bill's sponsors felt it was the wrong time to introduce the nation to oil shale patent medicines. By the time Tylenol was off the front pages, the oil shale industry was too far gone for help.

It's always fashionable to blame the government for troubles. But aside from oil shale, the mining industry's problems lie totally in the private sector. The culprit, it now appears, was the industry's market research.

The mining companies got into market research because of the flack over boom and bust. To break the boom-bust cycle, they decided to take charge by controlling demand and adjusting supply. Unfortunately, they were new to market research and they made some very serious blunders.

The coal industry based its expansion plans on a West Coast firm's prediction of more and more parental disrespect. The company's experts said rising juvenile snottiness would transform into millions of tons of coal sales if the custom of putting lumps of coal in a kid's Christmas stocking were revived.

Coal takes its lumps

The research statistics were inarguable -- even traditional cultures like China were losing control of their children. The industry's best minds studied the report, counted up the number of disrespectful children, and launched a world-wide coal mine expansion.

Unfortunately, industry didn't heed the entire report. They thought the business would automatically come to them. Carl Bagge of the National Coal Association argued: "When you have a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your mines."

They ignored the part that called for a \$100 million advertising campaign to push the 'coal in stocking' approach. An industry that won't spend a nickel on research isn't about to spend millions on ads that say: "This Christmas, give the brats in your house what they deserve -- a lump of coal," or, "Have your kids given grief all year? Pay them back with American-mined coal this Yule."

So although juvenile snottiness is indeed on the rise, the coal industry isn't cashing in.

Tail fins pierce moly

The molybdenum over-expansion had a different cause. In this case, the projections were wrong. The large expansion in molybdenum mining during the 1970s was based on a still-secret report showing that tail fins on cars appear and disappear in regular cycles. The best news in the report was that the fins get bigger and bigger with each cycle.

It seemed certain that the next uptick in the tail fin cycle would occur in 1980, and the researchers swore it would produce larger fins than Cadillacs had in the Eisenhower years. Those bigger fins would require more molybdenum. So AMAX and other firms geared up for the tail-fin boom.

When the fins didn't reappear in 1980, the molybdenum mines stayed in production, stockpiling ore and waiting for the fins to appear in 1981. But by 1982, they had run out of money and faith and had to close. They're now hoping to hang in there until 1989, when a different market research firm predicts a mini-tail-fin revival.

—Ed Marston

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LETTERS

COAL STORY QUESTIONED

Dear HCN,

I was pleased to see some coverage of the complicated coal issues of the San Juan Basin in the September 5 issue; hopefully your move to Paonia will enable you to more conveniently cover New Mexico issues. However, there were some disappointing inaccuracies in Bryan Welch's article, "Navajos, Utility agree to talk."

The reference in the article to "Navajos squatting on Federal land nearby" is misleading. This area is not an overflow area for the Navajo reservation, but has been occupied by Navajos for several hundred years, is still very largely occupied by the same Navajo families, and was briefly part of the Navajo reservation. The Navajo Tribe has filed a lawsuit last October seeking to regain title to 1.9 million acres in the coal area south of Farmington on the grounds that this area was never legally deleted from the reservation boundaries. This lawsuit may give them a strong claim to the great bulk of the coal in the area, separate from any settlement of the Navajo-Hopi dispute.

It is not true that "BLM managed to stay neutral in the earlier tug of war between the Navajos and the utility." In December, 1981, the State Director of the BLM sent a letter and memo to the Governor of New Mexico and its Congressional delegation, stating that the Tribe's selection of public lands in the Paragon Ranch area "could seriously affect the availability of electricity in New Mexico." This assertion by BLM was the most abject parroting of the utility line: environmentalists disagree violently on the grounds that the power plant proposed for the Paragon Ranch is not to be

operational till 1995, if ever, is not for New Mexico use, and could still be built even if the Tribe selected the land in question, at that or alternative sites (as the continuing negotiations show). In addition, BLM told the Tribe that they could not obtain royalties from coal mining on that land, while admitting to Congress and the State that BLM's analysis showed that the Tribe could obtain royalties. Furthermore, at this time, BLM officials were vigorously attempting to persuade the Tribe not to select the proposed town site and plant site.

I would also point out that the BLM is not being neutral now. The Department of Interior is participating in ongoing discussions (with Public Service Company subsidiary representatives present) attempting to persuade the Tribe to give up legal control over coal leasing and rights-of-way in the Paragon area, in return for a share of the royalties, and to drop the above-mentioned "EO 709" lawsuit.

In any case, Interior is not just supposed to be neutral in Indian-related matters, but has a trust responsibility to assist Indians in getting the best possible deal in negotiations over lands and minerals. Instead they are asking the Tribe to discard their strongest claims and controls in exchange for a concession to which the Tribe may be entitled anyway.

Please let me know if you would like any further information on these or other aspects of San Juan coal development.

Alison Monroe
Albuquerque, NM