

Special Issue, Part I

on agriculture

High Country *views*

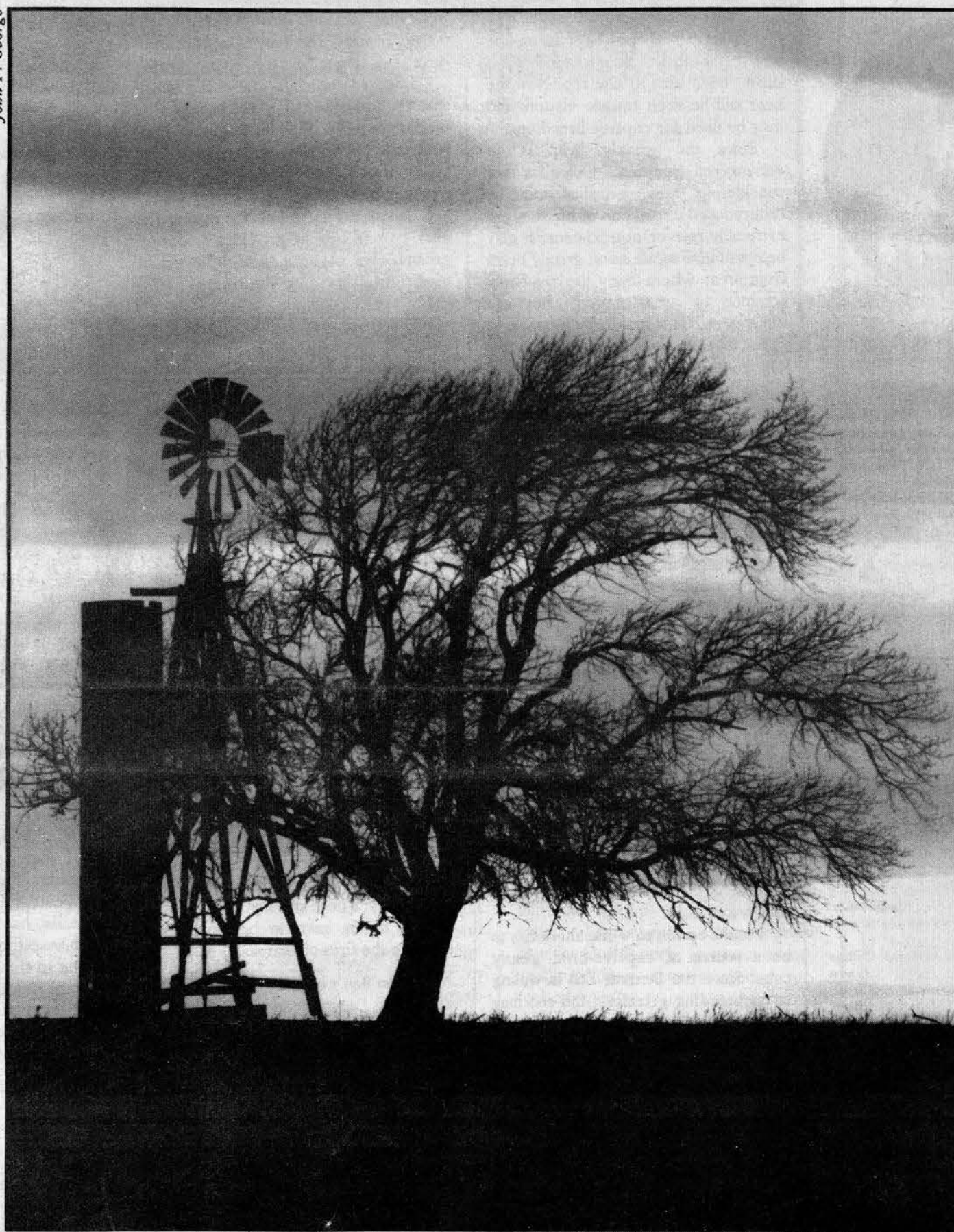
June 9, 1986

Vol. 18 No. 11

A Paper for People who Care about the West

One Dollar

John P. George



The dismal science grabs agriculture by the throat

✓ See pages 10-14

WESTERN ROUNDUP

Mischief lands a grizzly in Motor City



High Country News

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A grizzly bear that got in trouble for raiding beehives, eating crab apples and generally living too close to people along the Rocky Mountain Front is adjusting well to life in the Detroit Zoo.

The 2½-year-old female grizzly was flown to the zoo last month. It had been captured under the front porch of the Harold Yeager ranch house 12 miles west of Choteau, Montana.

Since the bear had been in trouble so often, it might have been killed if it hadn't been sent to the zoo. Now the bear will be seen by zoo visitors and may be used for captive breeding.

Since the grizzly bear is an endangered species, biologists are considering how grizzlies can be reintroduced into areas where they are extremely rare or nonexistent. It may be possible to move adult grizzly bears from areas where they are relatively common to areas where they are uncommon. Or it might be possible to have wild black-bear mothers raise captive-bred grizzly cubs.

Both options are being considered now in an environmental assessment studying whether to move grizzly bears to Montana's Cabinet Mountains, where there may be fewer than 20 grizzlies.

Bears give birth during the winter when they are hibernating. Female black bears have raised orphaned black bear cubs that were placed in the den with them. No one knows whether a black bear mother would raise a grizzly cub. If she did, she could teach the cub how to live in the wild. For the experiment to succeed, the cub would have to seek out a grizzly bear, rather than a black bear, when it was ready to mate.

No one knows whether having black bears raise grizzly cubs would work, or whether it would be more desirable than transplanting adult grizzlies. But the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wants to have the option available.

For the option to work, there has to be a source of captive-bred grizzly cubs. Since the Detroit Zoo is willing to try breeding grizzlies, the zoo may get a male grizzly if one that has run out of chances to be released to the wild is captured in the northern Rockies.

"So someday, we may have offspring from the northern Rockies from known parents," said Chris Servheen, grizzly bear recovery coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Missoula. "If we have a way to place those offspring, we would have a source for them."

However, he cautioned, "It's all hypothetical. We're still way, far away from that."

The Detroit Zoo has been breeding polar bears since the 1920s and has been very successful at it, said Kathy Latinen, the zoo's curator of mammals.

She views captive breeding of grizzlies as a valid conservation project. Meanwhile, the female grizzly is alive, her genetic material is being preserved and visitors are able to see her.

The grizzly arrived at the zoo after being shipped air freight from Seattle in a modified culvert trap. It was taken to a special uncrating area in the zoo where the trap was opened. Then a series of doors were opened,

leading the bear to a portion of the outdoor polar bear exhibit normally used by female polar bears and cubs.

The bear's living area contains a five-foot-deep pool and several horizontal levels. In addition, it has an area where it can rest in seclusion. When the zoo is open, the bear is spending three-fourths of its time in seclusion. Latinen expects the bear to gradually increase the time it spends in public view. The bear is not behind bars, but is confined by a deep moat.

Since zoo officials knew the bear was fond of honey, they encouraged it to eat its pellet feed by dipping the pellets in honey. Now the bear eats its five pounds of pellets without sweetening.

The pellets are about one inch wide and two inches long. They contain ground corn, soybean meal, bone meal and vitamins and minerals. In

addition, the grizzly gets to eat herring.

The day after the grizzly arrived, the press was invited to see the grizzly. Detroit residents saw the bear on television and newspapers also featured the new arrival.

Residents of Montana have had several opportunities to read about the bear in the past, since it has had a penchant for getting in trouble.

It was moved three times last year, twice for raiding beehives and once for raiding crab apple trees by the Cray ranch house west of Choteau. When dogs chased the bear under the front porch of the Harold Yeager ranch house this year, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks felt she had run out of chances to be released to the wild.

--Bert Lindler

Dear friends,

When an individual or group suffers a certain number of mishaps, the initial sympathy often turns to suspicion: What did the victim do to deserve all these problems?

So it is reluctantly that we mention Paonia's latest 'occurrence': a fire at Colorado Westmoreland, Inc.'s, Orchard Valley coal mine. The fire started at dawn Sunday, June 1, and as of this writing on Monday afternoon, continues to billow clouds of smoke from a ventilation shaft. The fire is several hundred feet from the mine entrance, but the ventilation fans are drawing the smoke through the mine and out the shaft.

The fire didn't trap or harm any miners, but it could mean a lengthy or even permanent shutdown. Underground coal fires can be difficult to extinguish; one doesn't simply send in the Paonia rural fire department with some axes, a hose and a pumper truck. Often, mines have to be sealed to deprive the fires of air.

If you don't believe what we have written in *Dear Friends* about Paonia -- the 800 mine layoffs, the frozen fruit, the world-class dirt slide, and now the fire -- we invite you to come see for yourself on Friday, June 20, at 6:30 p.m. As part of the High Country Foundation's June 21 board meeting, the board and staff are hosting a potluck at Ed and Betsy Marston's house. It's a chance to visit with each other, and we hope people will come from near and far.

When the paper was in Lander, Wyoming, it celebrated spring with a footrace. But this staff is older, and slower, so we're marking summer with a potluck. If you plan to attend, please call us at 303/527-4898 for directions and other information. Paonia is near the Black Canyon of the Gunnison, the Grand Mesa, the West Elk Wilderness, and is relatively close to Aspen and Glenwood Springs.

The HCN Traveling Poetry Desk returns this month to Boulder, Wyoming, and the Wind River Mountains, with a not-necessarily-sadder but perhaps wiser Chip Rawlins. He put in a year as a Stegner Poetry Fellow at Stanford University while residing in a mossy cabin just around the bend -- so to speak -- from Ken Kesey's old homestead in La Honda. Rawlins

returns to his seasonal ranger job, and all poetry submissions should be mailed to him at: Box 51, Boulder, WY 82923. Please enclose a SASE.

While Chip comes to Boulder, Wyoming, which is barely a wide spot in the road, HCN board member Michael Clark departs from a very different Boulder -- the one in Colorado. Clark was just appointed president of the Environmental Policy Institute -- a Washington, D.C., research and lobbying group. He and his spouse, Deborah Tuck, current head of the Needmor Fund in Boulder, will be moving to Washington in July. The acting president of EPI, Brent Blackwelder, happily returns to his main love -- research and lobbying.

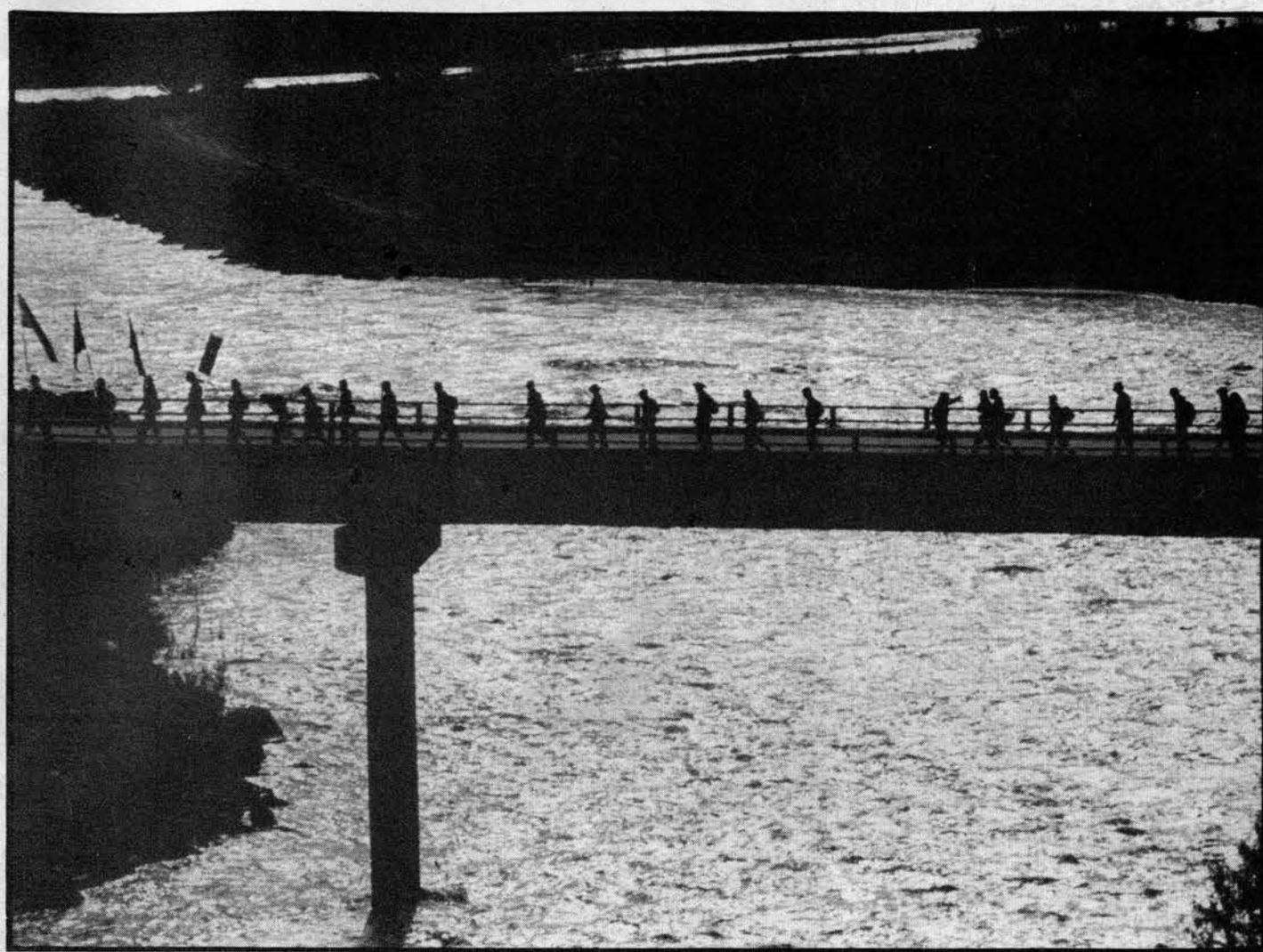
HCN is losing another Colorado board member, and gaining one in Montana. Patrick Sweeney, head of the Western Organization of Resource Councils, has moved his headquarters and himself to Billings. That means he will be in the same city as his spouse, Theresa Erickson, the new head of the Northern Plains Resource Council.

Turning to newsprint, this is the first of a three-part series on agriculture. The anchor writer is Sam Bingham, a Denver-based freelancer who worked for *Newsweek* before living on a Navajo reservation for several years. He has been in Denver for about a year and is working on a book; his wife Janet is a reporter for the *Denver Post*. These three special issues have been made possible by the 1985 Research Fund.

The responses to the reader survey are coming in at a steady rate. We have not begun to analyze the returns, but they have been scanned, and have reminded us that the paper has a lot of new readers. Several people, for example, asked that we do an article on grazing guru Allan Savory. Writer Jim Robbins did a lengthy profile of Savory for us in the July 23, 1984, issue; the comments tell us it is time for another look.

Finally, there is an ad in this issue asking readers to think about bequests to *High Country News*. It is part of an overall effort to convert this still tenuous institution into a stable and lasting one.

--the staff



The Great Peace March crosses the Colorado River on its way to Glenwood Springs.

Great Peace March crosses the Rockies

Leaving the Utah desert behind, 550 people in the Great Peace March for Nuclear Disarmament arrived in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, May 14. They set up the tent camp they call Peace City for two days in this city of 7,000, which is known for its outdoor hot mineral-springs pool. And as they do at all their stops, marchers made it a point to get to know local residents and to talk about their quest for peace.

During an evening get-together in a grassy park at the confluence of the Roaring Fork and Colorado rivers, they clapped in appreciation when energy consultant Hunter Lovins told them, "There is no greater power on earth than the single committed individual."

The march began as the vision of organizer David Mixner, whose goal was to attract 5,000. But his group, called PRO Peace, succumbed to organizational and financial difficulties, and only 1,400 marchers set out from Los Angeles March 1. Mixner's group went bankrupt, creditors repossessed vehicles and equipment, staff departed and the marchers stalled for almost a week in the desert near Barstow, California.

A remaining group of slightly under 500 faced an uncertain future, but finally assembled enough money and determination to continue the trek under a new name and a new nonprofit organization.

Like America, the marchers are heterogeneous. Ages range from under a year old to 78. There are 40 children who attend classes in a mobile school bus and 60 marchers over 50. Before the march, they were secretaries, students, laborers, professionals, homemakers.

Some are long-time peace activists. Others signed up for reasons such as the physical challenge, and it has taken weeks of walking to stir their involvement. They come from all over the United States, and about 20 people are from eight foreign countries.

Bill O'Neill, 25, was working as a reporter for a Florida newspaper when he read of the proposed march in

Mother Jones magazine. O'Neill said he's found only one trait missing in the group so far: "There's not a single Republican."

The logistics of moving 550 people across country in 15 to 18 mile hops each day dwarf Outward Bound. About 300 group members are on the road six days of the week, with one rest day, but all spend two days a week doing chores from kitchen duty to security. Outreach workers from the group attempt to visit every school along the route and speak at various community groups.

Participants are quick to point out the seriousness of their purpose. Melissa Davis, a 23-year-old legal secretary from Des Moines, Iowa, and Mike Tisserand, a 22-year-old college sophomore who'd been working in New Orleans as a professional clown, ran an information table on a downtown sidewalk the day the group arrived in Glenwood Springs.

Tisserand explained the group's goal of having nuclear weapons taken down. "Our technological skills have developed ahead of our humane skills. It takes a real courageous scientist to

say, 'Yes, we've learned how to do this, but I don't think we should do this.'"

Davis said she was "almost out the door twice" when the group was stranded in Barstow. She said she now feels she will complete the march, and "I'll have the satisfaction of knowing I've done something about living and dying."

The group reached the crest of the Continental Divide May 22, crossing over 11,900-foot Loveland Pass, and arrived in Denver a week later. They hope to reach Washington, D.C. by November 15.

Additional marchers are invited to join the group as it crosses the country. Communities along the route have been donating food and money and providing showers and home-cooked meals to the marchers. In return, the group has been planting "peace trees" in many communities. Donations may be sent to The Great Peace March for Nuclear Disarmament Inc., P.O. Box 3416, Hollywood, CA 90028.

--Judy Moffatt

Preserving rural communities

One speaker called the choice of a theme for the 6th annual meeting of the coalition Western Colorado Congress an "indication of the maturation of the activist movement."

The speaker was a WCC founder, Michael Kinsley, who now codirects the economic renewal project at the Rocky Mountain Institute in Snowmass, Colorado. The theme of the meeting was preserving rural communities, but the day's panels paid closest attention to the outlook for agriculture. Panelists agreed that the prognosis for the traditional economic bases of farming, mining and manufacturing is gloomy while the outlook for tourism, recreation and retirement is much brighter. The only disagreement was over the roots of

agriculture's difficulties and who will participate in setting economic agendas for rural communities.

Members passed nine resolutions related to rivers, air quality, aspen management, economic development, federal land and resource planning, regulation of public utilities and higher education. Newly elected officers are Marv Ballantyne, Montrose, president; John Randolph, Steamboat Springs, vice president; Margaret Orjias, Olathe, treasurer; and Brenda Bafus-Williams, Montrose, secretary. Senators-at-large are Art Goodtimes, Telluride; Steve Herndon, Norwood; and John Baldus, Montrose.

--Judy Moffatt

HOTLINE

A 1.3-kiloton oak

A radioactive disaster was narrowly averted during a recent underground weapons test at the Nevada Test Site, 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas. According to the *Las Vegas Sun*, the 1.3 kiloton explosion, called "Mighty Oak," breached two of the three safety barriers. A spokesman at the site said no radiation leaked, but the tunnel continued to burn for 10 days after the blast and 100 workers were kept away from the area. The April 10 test was the first conducted after the Soviet Union extended a unilateral nuclear test ban that had been in effect for eight months.

Collaring grizzlies

The Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, representing federal and state agencies, has decided that more female grizzly bears in the Greater Yellowstone Area need to be trapped for radio-collaring. Five are already wearing collars that transmit their whereabouts. The committee says 10 adult female grizzlies over a three-year study period are needed to provide more reliable information about population trends and survivability of the threatened species. Only about 200 grizzlies are thought to live in the Yellowstone ecosystem (*HCN*, 5/26/86). The bears will be baited into culvert traps, a method that has led to the smallest percentage of grizzly deaths, the committee says.

Ken Retallic



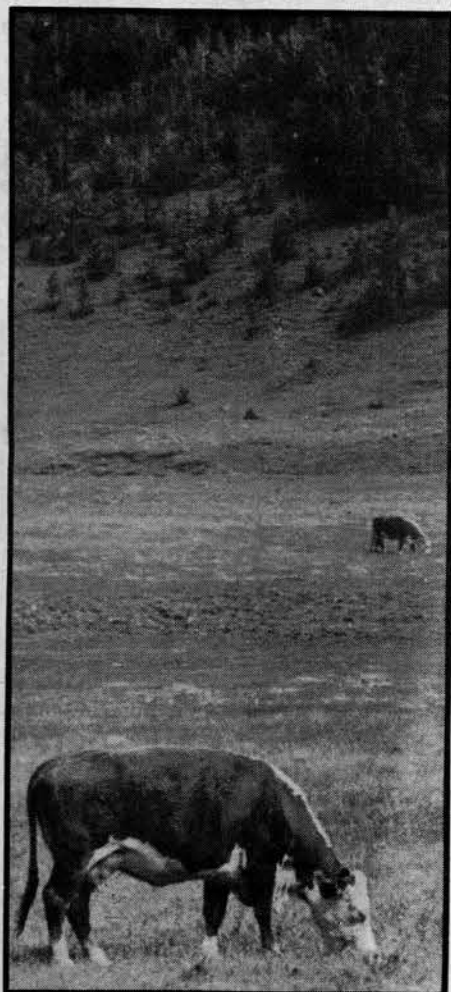
Un-bearable

Chanting "Fishing Bridge is unbearable" and "habitat, habitat," 35 conservationists -- most members of EarthFirst! -- demonstrated inside Yellowstone National Park May 24. In contrast to a similar demonstration last summer when 11 were arrested after a shoving match broke out with park rangers, the event was peaceable, well organized and permits were in order. Protesters, some of whom wore bear costumes, told the press they wanted park officials to honor their agreement to close the Fishing Bridge campground at the end of Yellowstone Lake. The popular area in prime grizzly habitat is responsible for more bear-human conflicts than any other part in the park. And when a grizzly comes into conflict with humans, protesters pointed out, the bear usually ends up dead. Park officials say they want to close the campground (*HCN*, 5/12/86), but will not make that decision until an environmental impact statement is completed next year.

HOTLINE

Logging industry splinters

Environmental groups, plagued by low budgets and resulting instability, often feel at a disadvantage in natural resource struggles against their better-funded industry counterparts. But the Montana *Great Falls Tribune* reports that industry is not the monolith it appears. Poor times have hit the Inland Forest Resource Council in Montana and Idaho, which two years ago raised a \$230,000 annual budget from member dues assessed on the volume of timber produced. The council, which works for imposition of trade restrictions on Canadian lumber imports and lobbies the Forest Service for increased timber sales, will lose all its Idaho industry members and two Montana timber companies in July. Council members said the council needed to do some "financial belt-tightening." But some Idaho members said the council does not meet their needs, and that they will form a new Idaho-based group.



Subleasing attacked

This spring Defenders of Wildlife petitioned Interior Secretary Donald Hodel to stop subleasing grazing rights on BLM lands. Steve Johnson, who represents Defenders in the Southwest, urged Hodel to amend Bureau of Land Management rules to ensure that ranchers own both the land to which permits are attached and any animals grazing on public lands. Permittees are now free to "rent" or sublease their grazing rights -- sometimes at a large profit -- by grazing other people's animals. Johnson said the Forest Service already demands that permittees own both the land and livestock for which they have grazing permits. The current federal grazing fee formula charges ranchers \$1.35 per animal unit per month. That is one-fourth to one-eighth what it costs a rancher to rent private land, according to a \$4 million federal grazing study completed last year. Only 2 percent of all U.S. beef producers have grazing permits.

A commission looks at outdoor recreation

DENVER, Colo. -- It seemed like Old Home Day for public land managers, recreationists and decision-makers at the Colorado Capitol last week. Look one direction and there was Rep. Tim Wirth, D-Colo., telling about the importance of recreational lands to the state's public. Look another and there was a ranching representative talking about the problem of recreationists trespassing; look yet another and there were regional representatives of conservation groups pitching in their views on public land management. There were more views offered than a panorama from a mountain pass.

The occasion was the Denver arrival of the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors to take testimony from local and regional public land-use interests. One of 16 stops around the country for the 15-member panel, the commission is in the process of winding up its public hearings. The topic in Denver was the recreational role of multiple-use lands. The panel also took suggestions on trail system improvement and solicited suggestions on approaches to the federal role in the water rights conundrum plaguing wilderness areas.

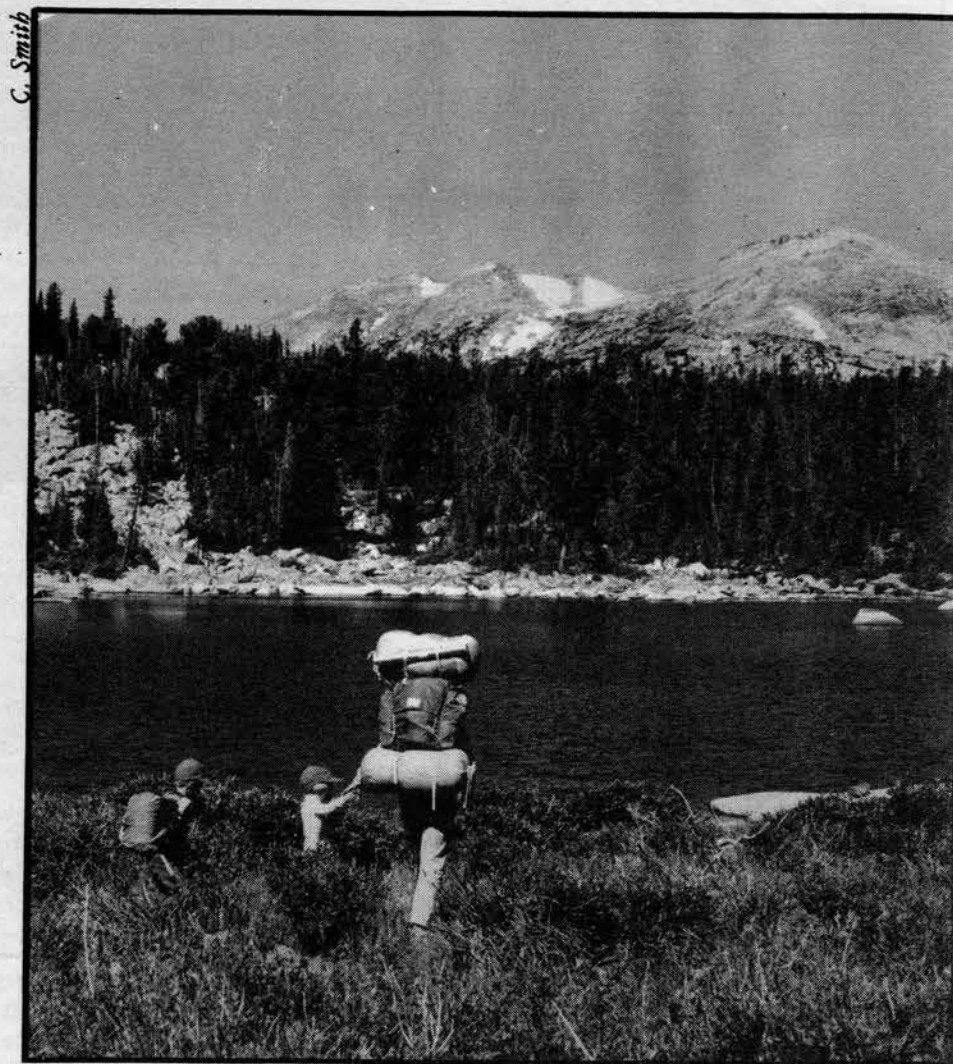
President Reagan established the commission, chaired by Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander, in 1985 to study American outdoor recreation and use of the nation's public lands. Based on the tone of the hearing, the commission seems to be recommending that management for all public lands focus on the recreational role they play in American society.

Outdoor recreation is a \$250 billion industry nationally, according to surveys offered to the commission. In Colorado, tourism and recreation generate more than \$4 billion annually and employ more people than any other industry in the state. Cathleen Beamer, from Recreational Equipment, Inc., told the commission that REI's co-op members spent over \$111 million last year on recreational equipment--double what they spent five years ago. According to their surveys, Beamer said members are concerned about the continued existence of quality recreational areas, especially in light of the forest service's priority of spending money on building roads rather than building trails.

Beamer told the commission that despite expressed interest from trail users, "49,000 miles of hiking trails have been erased from the forests while the Forest Service builds roads for timbering...there needs to be an emphasis on muscle-powered recreational activity. Current funding assists mechanically-powered recreation."

Commission member Patrick Noonan, president of the Conservation Fund, asked Colorado BLM Associate Director Bob Moore how much he had to spend on recreation. Moore said he had a budget of \$300,000 last year to cover the 8 million acres under his jurisdiction. That amounted to only 27 cents per acre for recreation management and facilities from trails to latrines and information services. "Amazing," was all Noonan could say upon hearing about the budget.

On another matter, Noonan pressed several speakers to come up with a figure or estimate of how much it would cost to buy water rights for wilderness areas. David Harrison of



the Colorado Office of the Nature Conservancy ventured a guess of "at least in six figures for Colorado" alone.

One of the major points of focus at the Denver hearing was increased user fees for recreationists. A National Geographic Society survey prepared for the President's Commission reported that 48 percent of the 2,000 adults surveyed were "strongly favorable" toward being taxed to preserve natural areas and another 39 percent were "somewhat favorable" toward the taxation. Fifty-five percent felt that existing areas should be maintained with user fees rather than taxes. The thrust of the testimony in Denver by a wide variety of interests was that increased user fees were acceptable so long as they were returned to the areas from which they were collected.

"The distribution of fee revenues should reflect use patterns by allocating them back to the areas which generated them," said David Getches, director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources. "This would enhance the ability of land managers to provide services to maintain some of our most heavily stressed resources."

Allocation of part of the federal gasoline tax to build and maintain motorbike, four wheel drive and snowmobile trails was advocated as well. Representatives of the various snowmobilers' associations were quick to point out that hikers and pack-horse users also used the trails built and maintained by snowmobilers off-season. "I strongly urge this commission to consider the recommendation of a federal snowmobile gas-tax refund back to the states for use in expanding and improving those trail programs already in place," John Mitchell, chairman of the Western Chapter of the International Snowmobile Council, told the commission.

One of the more interesting ideas presented to the commission concerned establishment of a Natural Assets Trust Fund to succeed the current federal program known as the

Land and Water Conservation Fund. David Getches noted that the Conservation Fund has provided Colorado with \$42.5 million for parks over the last 18 years. The Natural Assets Trust Fund would be a logical extension of the program.

A similar idea currently before the commission is the creation of a National Trust for Recreation, Open Space and Scenic Resources, presented by the American Society of Landscape Architects. The trust would be for "the furtherance of the preservation, acquisition and enhancement of recreation, open space and scenic resources and the increasing of opportunities for all Americans to access these resources," said Dr. Lane Marshall of the ASLA. He added that the trust would pick up where the National Trust for Historic Preservation leaves off, since Historic Preservation does not include natural and scenic resources.

The President's Commission on Americans Outdoors will consider other ideas on public recreation until July 1. The final hearing will take place in Seattle on June 5 and 6, with recommendations to President Reagan to follow in December 1986.

□ --Darby Junkin

Darby Junkin is a former *Newsweek* writer and the author of a just-published book on public lands titled *Lands of Public Destiny*, published by Fulcrum Press of Golden, Colorado.

Ranney is recovering

The American Wilderness Alliance's Salley Ranney, a member of the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors, spent about two weeks in the hospital and is still recovering from an accident connected with the commission. The day after she chaired its meeting in Denver, the commission flew to Wyoming for a "look-see" snowmobile tour in the Snowy Range. During the tour, Ranney's snowmobile tipped over, and she fractured two vertebrae in her lower spine.

Utah's officialdom opposes all wilderness

A surprise move by Utah's Republican Gov. Norman Bangerter prompted angry responses from conservation groups. In one 24-hour period Bangerter signed an anti-wilderness resolution passed by the state Legislature and testified publicly against the designation of any further wilderness in the state.

Afterward, the Utah Wilderness Association accused Bangerter of taking a stand on wilderness that is "inconsistent with sound multiple use management on our public lands and contrary to past and present state policy." The group called his actions "incomprehensible."

Bangerter testified May 15 in Salt Lake City at the last of 16 hearings held statewide on the Bureau of Land Management's proposal to add 1.9 million acres to the state's wilderness system. Originally scheduled for 2 p.m. and 7 p.m., the two hearings merged into a single marathon hearing. As 1 a.m. neared, Roland Robison, the weary BLM state director, rescheduled remaining testimony for the following evening.

During the 10½ hours of testimony, pro-wilderness advocates outnumbered anti-wilderness speakers by a 3-to-1 margin. But in calling for a halt to designation of more wilderness areas, the governor joined representatives from the livestock and mining industries. The governor said his objections centered on the creation of possible buffer zones around wilderness areas, and a recent water-law court ruling in Colorado reserving water rights in wilderness areas. Woolgrowers said they feared restrictions on motorized access in wilderness areas would make their operations more difficult. Mineral industry representatives charged the BLM with using outdated and inadequate data on oil and gas reserves in proposed wilderness areas.

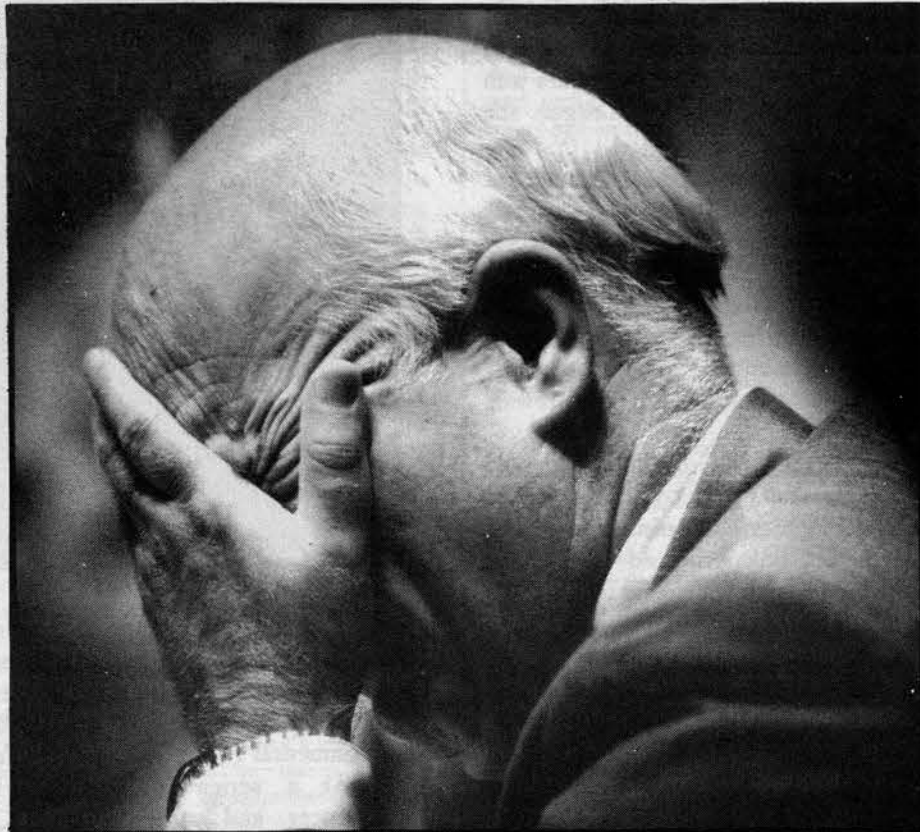
Gary Macfarlane of the Utah Wilderness Association, which had backed a proposal for 3.8 million acres of BLM wilderness, said he "was not positive everyone in the governor's office was pleased" with the governor's position. He said a wilderness subcommittee in the governor's office is still at work on a technical review of the BLM proposal, and that the governor's public anti-wilderness statements would "undercut" the committee's work.

But a spokesman for Bangerter explained that the governor was "just making a basic philosophical statement -- he's opposed to single use (of public land)." Ruth Ann Storey, the governor's assistant for physical resources, said the wilderness subcommittee is part of the Resources Development Coordinating Council, a group that generates state responses to federal management plans. She said the subcommittee will complete its work on the document before August 15, BLM's deadline for public comments on the draft EIS.

"The governor has no intention of being dealt out of the process," she said. "The subcommittee will submit suggested comments but the final determination will be his."

Although the Utah conservation movement failed to present a united front in its wilderness proposals

Ravell Call



Utah state BLM director Roland Robison rubs his eyes as the wilderness hearing enters its tenth hour.

(HCN, 10/21/85), all factions expressed dismay at the responses of the governor, the legislature and local officials. The Utah Wilderness Coalition, composed of 18 local and national conservation organizations, proposed 5.1 million acres of wilderness. Darrel Knuffke of The Wilderness Society, a coalition member, said it was "unusual for a governor and a legislature to so plainly misread the mood of the people."

Knuffke said his unofficial count of the 770 persons who gave testimony in 16 locations revealed that 450 favored

additional wilderness and 320 were opposed.

The legislative resolution, which easily passed both the State Senate and House, opposes BLM's proposed designation of 1.9 million acres of wilderness, and urges Congress to modify the Federal Land Management Policy Act to exclude from the 1964 Wilderness Act any state with a greater than 30 percent federal ownership. Utah is about three-fourths federally owned.

--Katharine Collins

HOTLINE

Dump sites narrowed

The Department of Energy decided late last month that Utah and Mississippi were out as potential sites for the nation's first high-level nuclear waste dump. The three finalist states are Texas, Washington and Nevada. Each will undergo six years of tests that require the sinking of shafts 4,000 feet deep. In protest, Nevada immediately filed five lawsuits against the DOE and officials in Washington and Texas threatened lawsuits of their own. The DOE also said a second permanent repository to safely bury radioactive debris for 10,000 years was no longer needed now. That eliminates consideration of sites in the eastern states of New Hampshire, Maine, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Virginia, North Carolina and Georgia. Most of the high-level nuclear waste is produced in the East.

The Sierra Club and economic development

A Sierra Club spokesman, citing the sorry state of Idaho's economy, says his group supports a proposed \$4 billion project for the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory near Idaho Falls. Ralph Maughan of Pocatello, chairman of the Sierra Club's Rocky Mountain chapter, admits it's unusual for the club to take such a stand. But he says the new Superconducting Super Collider would provide high-paying jobs without disrupting the environment. The purpose of the SSC, an electromagnetic track 60 miles in circumference, is to help scientists discover the basic building-blocks of matter. Thirty-nine other states are competing for the project.

REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

A struggle over Wyoming's rock cathedrals

by Tom Bell

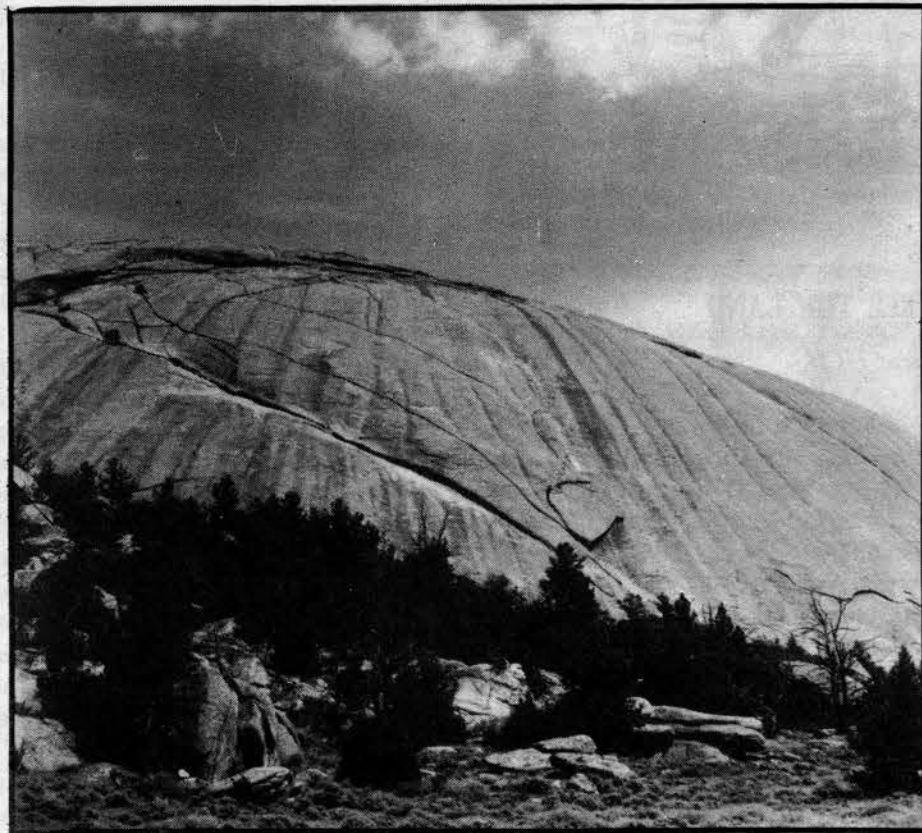
Centuries before any white man beheld these cathedrals of granite in central Wyoming, the red men knew them well. Ancient man drove buffalo up from the rich pastures to the broad platforms of rock over precipitous jumps. Piles of stones along the ridges remain to mark the trails where hunters tricked the hunted.

Mountain men may have looked with awe on the soaring spires of rock as they rode the Sweetwater Valley. The great Splitrock became a landmark along the way to their rendezvous and again on the return, loaded with rich treasures of furs.

Behind them came the Fortyniners, the Mormon emigrants and the Oregon-bound, whose ox teams trudged up the trail to the South Pass and the West beyond.

Cattle replaced buffalo, and huge ranches flourished beneath these towering domes. Cattle Kate and Jim Averill met their fate here -- at the end of a rope. Outlaws holed up in hidden canyons; moonshiners' cabins still stand in secluded pockets amidst spectacular scenery.

This area, called the Sweetwater Rocks, has withstood the advances of man, and today there is growing sentiment for making some 48,000 acres of the Sweetwater Rocks a BLM wilderness. That sentiment, however, is countered by anti-wilderness hostility. The Bureau of Land



Sweetwater Rocks, Wyoming

Management's draft management plan does not recommend a wilderness designation.

A recent draft resource management plan and environmental impact statement recommend no change in the status of Sweetwater Rocks. The plan and EIS are available from the BLM, Lander Resource Area, Lander, WY 82520.

Tom Bell



LETTERS

ICL IS CHALLENGED

Dear HCN,

As one of the principals in your article "Permanent Wilderness Camps Challenged" (April 14, 1986), I feel compelled to comment on the Idaho Conservation League's statement that they have no opinion on the Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association's appeal of the Forest Service's management plan for our Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness.

The deplorable conditions of the outfitters' commercial camps in our wilderness is a matter of record and obvious to most backcountry visitors. The association's attorney claims that there are 88 commercial outfitters licensed to use this wilderness and that each outfitter uses as many as 12 backcountry camps. The potential for over 1000 commercial camps with an unlimited occupancy period and permanent facilities should warrant a formal opinion from any organization that advocates conservation. I would also think that a proposed violation of our 1964 Wilderness Act by the outfitters and guides would also justify the attention of the ICL regardless of the "tenuous relationship" that they may be having with this special-interest group.

The ICL should heed the advice of Martin Sorensen when he suggested that all of us are going to have to reevaluate our attitudes regarding wilderness use and that permanent structures have no place in our wilderness (reference letters to HCN, April 23, 1986).

Howard Spaletta
Idaho Falls, Idaho



FREE THE LAND

Dear HCN,

There is a big push out here in the West for control of public lands (HCN, 4/28/86). Landowners with a few acres of land are blocking off large sections of public land by denying access. Many are also setting up their own hunting preserves on public lands.

There are several ways to stop these rip-offs. One way is to revoke their low-cost grazing permits, which cost the taxpayers more than \$50 million a year. Some of their subsidies such as wool payment can be stopped. We could also enforce the unlawful Enclosure Act of 1885.

The only reason unscrupulous landowners get away with these abuses is that they have so much political clout they can control local and state politics. But the big rip-off can be stopped. Call me at 307/348-7337 for more information.

Harvey Duncan
Hanna, Wyoming

Lill Erickson throws oil into Idaho's gears

Early this spring, Lill Erickson left her adopted home of Salmon, Idaho, to move to Boise, for after five years with the Idaho Conservation League she has a new job.

As central-Idaho field organizer for the league, Erickson ended her five years with a major organizing success -- the 1986 Idaho Legislature's passage of a much-strengthened state water-quality law. She also leaves behind in central Idaho the best-organized region in ICL's statewide reach.

Due primarily to lobbying and publicity generated by ICL's central Idaho chapters, Idaho's mining laws have been strengthened in the last three legislative sessions. In 1984, the Dredge Mining Act was amended to increase reclamation bonds and speed up enforcement procedures, and that same year Idaho's mine inspection staff was doubled -- from one to two. In 1985, the Surface Mining Act was amended in similar fashion. This past session, the Environmental Protection and Health Act was amended to increase penalties, dramatically shorten enforcement procedure, close a loophole allowing one free violation of the law, and allow the state to shut down operations causing serious environmental damage.

The amendments are Idaho's most positive environmental legislation since a minimum-flow law passed in 1978, and they passed virtually without opposition. That this occurred in the most divisive, unproductive session in recent memory says much for the organizing skills of Lill Erickson.

Central Idaho is largely identical with the Salmon River drainage -- the wildest part of Idaho and the heart of Idaho's recreation economy. Eighty-three percent of Idaho's multi-million dollar river-running business is located there. It is the biggest and best remaining chunk of wild salmon and steelhead habitat in the Columbia River Basin.

The drainage is also highly mineralized. There is one huge mine -- the Cyprus open-pit molybdenum mine near Challis -- and many smaller ones. Most of the latter are heap-leach operations: cyanide is filtered through heaps of low-grade ore (often waste ore from earlier mining) to leach gold out.

In October 1983, operators of the Dewey Mine on the west edge of the River of No Return Wilderness dumped mine wastes from a full tailings pond into Mule Creek and thus into Monumental Creek, which flows into the Wilderness. Two years earlier the same tailings pond had breached, destroying 80 to 100 percent of the salmon, steelhead, and trout in upper Monumental Creek. The company failed to report both spills, but was cited for neither; Idaho's attorney general pointed to provisions in the law allowing one, and sometimes two, free violations before a company could be cited.

Erickson had been working on mining issues since 1981. By the second Dewey spill she had organized a mining network, linking members in ICL's five central Idaho chapters, to monitor mines and lobby for changes in the Dredge and Surface Mining Acts. Those laws primarily concern reclamation, but the Dewey spill (and several others elsewhere) made clear that catastrophic or cumulative water

Philip Herne



Lill Erickson

quality violations were a more immediate threat to the Salmon River.

Under Erickson's guidance conservationists began learning about the Environmental Protection and Health Act. At a series of twice-yearly conferences and mine tours, ICL members, recreation businesspeople, and reporters learned the law's complex workings. A tour of the Dewey Mine, which revealed an almost-obliterated Mule Creek, helped drive its weaknesses home.

"EPHA had several critical faults," Erickson says. "The convoluted enforcement procedures allowed one, sometimes two, free water quality violations, however serious... The minimum time to get an administrative order was 42 weeks, with court action on top of that. Penalties could only be invoked for violations of those orders -- not for the violation itself. And Idaho had authority to shut an operation down only if human health were threatened. Environmental damage could not be stopped if fish, not people, were the victims."

In 1985, while lobbying the Surface Mining Act, ICL's mining activists began talking about the Environmental Protection and Health Act as well. They presented the Legislature's resource committees with a slide show featuring grim views of Mule Creek and other streams affected by mine spills. Their criticisms of EPHA were backed up by the Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association and many central Idaho recreation businesses.

"Our goal on EPHA was to get an interim committee to study it and report back to the '86 session," Erickson says. That strategy worked well on the Dredge and Surface Mining Acts: committees to study the laws brought the powerful Idaho Mining Association into the process, forcing them to compromise rather than flatly oppose any change. "It meant we had to compromise, too," Erickson explains. "But that was a given from the start. With this strategy our compromises were matched by the other side."

The 1985 Legislature strengthened the Surface Mining Act, and also appointed an interim committee to study EPHA. Conservationists were lucky in the choice of Chairman Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho Falls. He had credibility with fellow Republican legislators, recognized as an attorney the inefficiencies of EPHA, and unlike many older legislators understood the value of Idaho's recreation economy. Democrat John Peavey, one of few conservationists in the Legislature, also served on the committee.

July 1985, Erickson proposed ICL's amendments: reduce decision-time on a violation from more than 10 months to two months; close the one-free-violation loophole; increase penalties; provide injunctive authority to stop operations causing serious environmental damage; allow public appeal of agency orders under the law; and require an advance contract between each operator and the state detailing the water quality system to be installed and standards to be met.

"From the environmental perspective," Crapo says, "Lill was the primary one who carried the ball. She visited me personally as well as coming to the meetings."

At their final meeting before the 1986 session, Crapo distributed his proposed amendments. All of ICL's recommendations but the advance contract and public appeal were included. "I was a bit surprised when everyone agreed with them," Crapo recalls. The Idaho Mining Association had some internal disagreement, but signed on. Then the amendments sailed through both houses, with the Senate voting 41-1.

"It will make a big difference on the ground," one Division of Environment employee says. (The Idaho Division of Environment enforces EPHA.) "We've got a case now, a mercury spill at a mine, where we've spent 2 1/2 years so far and don't have a prosecution or a cleanup yet. These changes should end that kind of thing. And they are due to Lill Erickson. We'd tried to get the law changed before, but never had the strategy or public support to get anywhere. Lill put those together. Sen. Crapo deserves credit, but he might not have heard of EPHA without Lill's work."

ICL's mining network now has over 200 people, most in central Idaho. In addition to legislative work, members monitor active mines, review and comment on proposed mine plans, and appeal adverse decisions.

ICL has about 400 members today in its five central Idaho chapters. Four years ago Erickson organized a central Idaho ICL conference, at Redfish Lake, which has become an annual event attracting conservationists statewide.

Tom Pomeroy represents the Wood River Valley chapter on ICL's statewide board; eight of those twenty members are from central Idaho. "Lill's major achievement isn't on an issue," he says. "It's the way she's brought people together. The issue network just wasn't there six years ago; there was little contact around the region. Today people in all the chapters have friends in all the others, and the recreation-based businesses and people are involved too. There's a working community of conservationists that keeps growing."

Erickson's new job in Boise is also as an organizer, for a short-term project called Idaho '86, spawned by Idaho's intense political doings this year. Its goals are to build organizing and political skills throughout Idaho's conservation and sportsmen's community, and to help fund public information on major "quality of life" issues in Idaho. It is, as Pomeroy described, work that brings people together.

--Pat Ford

BULLETIN BOARD

WESTERN GOVERNORS

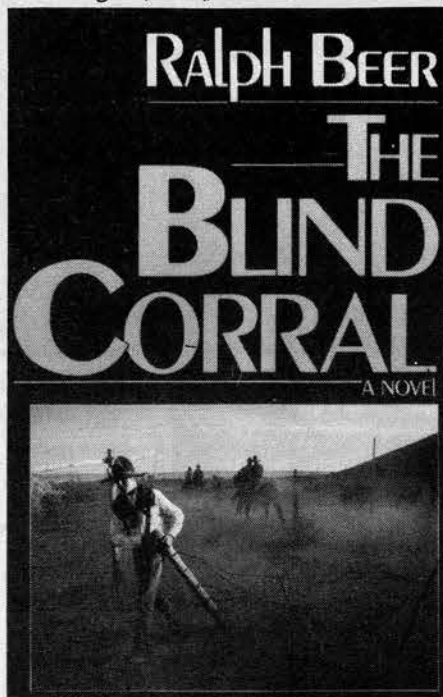
Governors from 16 western states and three Pacific territories are expected to attend the third annual meeting of the Western Governors' Association, July 7-8 at the Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs. The program theme, "The Western Agenda," includes discussions on water, western states' competitiveness in international trade and regional economic research. One issue to be considered is the establishment of a joint, public-private economic research center to help guide western development. A featured speaker will be Pulitzer Prize winning author, Wallace Stegner, who has lived in and written about the American West for most of his life. For more information, write Western Governors' Association, 600 17th St., Denver, CO 80202 (303/623-9378).

CAMP WITH STAMPS AND SAVE \$\$\$

Campers visiting America's 156 national forests this summer can save 15 percent on camping fees by using new Camp Stamps, the U.S. Forest Service announced recently. On sale at many retail outlets and most Forest Service offices, the stamps must be purchased in advance and do not reserve a campsite. Besides the discount, the Forest Service notes the additional advantage of reducing the need to carry cash while camping. For a listing of major Forest Service offices selling the stamps, write CAMP STAMPS, Forest Service, USDA, P.O. Box 2417, Washington, D.C. 20013.

GRACEFUL AND COMPREHENSIVE

T.H. Watkins, the editor of *Wilderness*, has written a lengthy account in the spring 1986 issue of the Forest Service's history and present that conveys a great deal of information while being a very good read. The historical overview is interesting, but we were most taken by his accounts of the below-cost timber sale issue and the current forest planning effort. *Wilderness* is The Wilderness Society's quarterly, and while the society plays a prominent role in Watkins' account, he also gives substantial credit to other organizations involved in this struggle. The piece is beautifully illustrated with numerous color photographs. Single issues are \$2 from The Wilderness Society, 1400 Eye St., NW, Washington, D.C., 20005.



TRANSFORMING COURAGE

Ralph Beer's first novel, *The Blind Corral*, bears reading for its careful and caring language about how sticking with the land transforms those with the courage to endure. Set against a background of energy development around Helena, the novel tells what those changes mean for multigeneration ranching families. Beer details land, people and a way of life under siege -- from the knapweed invasion of more than 2.5 million acres in the state (HCN, 9/16/85) to the careless helicopters of land speculators and prowling dogs loosed by subdivisions. A story of loss, *The Blind Corral* is also one of hope based on the strength of individuals. Ralph Beer is a Montana rancher and contributing editor of *Harper's* magazine; his novel is for anyone who has loved a place and mourned its changing.

Viking Penguin, Inc., 40 West 23rd St., New York, NY 10010. Cloth: \$16.95, 229 pages, published 1986.

KANNON RICHARDS RETIRES

Kannon Richards, state director of the Bureau of Land Management in Colorado since June 21, 1984, has announced his retirement from office, effective June 21. Richards' 19-year career with BLM has included posts in Oregon and service as associate state director in Montana. The current associate state director in Colorado, Bob Moore, will be acting director until a new state director is appointed.

TALK ABOUT THE TARGHEE

The Targhee National Forest will consider portions of the Henry's Fork of the Snake River and the Warm River for addition to the National Wild and Scenic River System. The study area is in Fremont County, Idaho, west of Yellowstone National Park, and includes 45 miles of Henry's Fork from Big Springs to the confluence with Warm River, except Island Park Reservoir, and six miles of Warm River from Warm River Hatchery to the confluence with Henry's Fork. The 1968 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act protects designated free-flowing rivers and their immediate environments from development. Targhee's supervisor asks for comments on issues to be considered in the environmental impact statement, which is scheduled for release in July 1987. Comments should be sent by June 13 to John E. Burns, Forest Supervisor, Targhee National Forest, St. Anthony, ID 83445.

I'D RATHER BE BIKING

A newly-revised Colorado bicycle touring map is now available from the state highway department. The "Guess I'd Rather Be In Colorado" bicycling map is color-coded to show the best bike routes, noting campgrounds, paved shoulder widths, medical facilities and bicycle shops as well as areas where bikes are prohibited or where restaurants and grocery stores can't be found. For \$2 this handy guide is available from the Colorado Department of Highways, Map Sales (rm. 117), 4201 East Arkansas Ave., Denver, CO 80222. Checks should be payable to "Colorado Department of Highways."

CONFERENCE ON NATIONAL PARKS

The National Park Service and the George Wright Society of Hancock, MI., are co-sponsoring a mammoth "Conference on Science in the National Parks" July 13-18 at Colorado State University, Fort Collins. The 28 half-day symposia deal with current park resource issues as varied as urban ecosystem revitalization, management of wildlife habitat and fisheries, recreation user-fees and impact assessment, and air pollution in parks. A total of 350 Park Service personnel, academics and representatives of industry and environmental organizations are expected to attend including Park Service Director William Penn Mott, Jr., who will discuss the role of research in the agency. The registration fee is \$85 for those who register before June 1, and \$100 thereafter. Write to Office of Conference Services, Rockwell Hall, CSU, Fort Collins, CO 82523 (303/491-6222).

NO LONGER A DISMAL SCIENCE

In general, environmental goals are approached from the liberal side -- an expansion of government powers over the private sector. But John Baden of the Political Economy Research Corp. in Bozeman, Mt., has long argued that environmentalism is best advanced through the proper workings of a free market economy and less, rather than more, government. The May 1986 PERC report provides an introduction to Baden's approach. It lists several reports the group has prepared on the New Resource Economics and Free Market Environmentalism, and announces some upcoming conferences. The major conference will be held Sept. 18-22 in Big Sky, Montana, for journalists. Its title is "Economics and Public Policy: From the dismal science to great expectations." Speakers will include oil man T. Boone Pickens, Peter Emerson of The Wilderness Society, Robert Crandall of the Brookings Institution, and Zach Willey of the Environmental Defense Fund. For information or a copy of the newsletter, contact PERC, 502 S. 19th, Bozeman, MT 59715.

CAPITOL REEF LIVING HISTORY

A "living history" project at Capitol Reef National Park in south-central Utah calls for replanting of what was probably the first orchard in the Lower Fremont River Valley. Guides will use the orchard to demonstrate the techniques of grafting and orchard care used more than 100 years ago on this "last frontier" in Utah. The land was homesteaded and farmed by Nels Johnson who planted fruit varieties little-known today. Though locating the older fruit types was not easy, all will be on hand for the spring 1987 replant. Park Superintendent Robert W. Reynolds said the living history will be "evocative of the hard, quiet toil required to establish an agricultural outpost on America's western frontier."

HEAL

The Hanford Nuclear Reservation 100 miles from Spokane, Washington, produces at least half of the nation's plutonium and is a major source of plutonium for the build-up of America's nuclear arsenal. Already one of the most radioactively contaminated spots on earth, Hanford is a candidate to become America's first permanent repository for commercial nuclear waste. A citizen group called the Hanford Education Action League gathers, analyzes and disseminates information about ionizing radiation and its effects on health and the environment, with its main focus the Hanford plant. HEAL says it also provides information on nuclear programs throughout the country and encourages citizen involvement. The group's bi-monthly newsletter is available for \$6 for one year by writing HEAL, S. 325 Oak St., Spokane, WA 99204, or by calling 509/624-7256.

OWL CREEK WILDERNESSES

The Bureau of Land Management in Wyoming has recommended the "all wilderness" alternative for a 710-acre wilderness study area called Owl Creek, which is next to the Washakie Wilderness near Thermopolis. The BLM notes that the area is critical habitat for deer, elk, bighorn sheep and moose and that transient use by grizzlies possibly occurs. Copies of the draft are available from the BLM's Worland District Office and from the Cody Resource Area Office. Written comments should be sent by June 26 to BLM, Worland District Office, P.O. Box 119, Worland, WY 82401. Oral and written comments will be taken at a public hearing June 26, 7:30 p.m. at the Hot Springs County Museum, Thermopolis, Wyoming.

SONGS AND STORIES OF WYOMING

The Wyoming Council on the Arts has produced an audio cassette series entitled, "You know that Wyoming will be your new home." It's a collection of informal performances by the descendants of the early stockmen, farmers, railroad workers and miners who made their new home on Wyoming's frontier. The seven half-hour programs were recorded at celebrations, on front porches and during branding-time at a northern Wyoming ranch. Funded by the Folk Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, the series reflects Wyoming's varied cultural tradition -- Eastern European, Hispanic, Russian-German and Basque. The series is available for \$12.50 by writing Wyoming Council on the Arts, 2320 Capitol Ave., Cheyenne, WY 82002, or calling 307/777-7742.

SCOUTING THE RANGE

Thanks to an Oakley, Idaho, boy scout troop, an overgrazed four-mile stretch of creek inside the Sawtooth National Forest now has 3,500 poplars, Russian olives and cottonwoods. A local rancher, Ray C. Bedke, who heads the Wild Rose Grazing Association, supervised the planting to overcome damage done by generations of improper grazing. Trees and willows were eaten out and streams had become so laden with sediment that fish habitat was destroyed. This year's project was a continuation of the Oakley scouts' efforts last year when they planted 3,700 trees on eight miles of stream. With Forest Service budgets declining, Twin Falls District Ranger Jerry Davis said he welcomed private efforts to improve the range. He also said some of the helpful scouts would inherit the livestock operations that used the Forest Service land.



WYOMING NATIVES

The sixth annual meeting of the Wyoming Native Plant Society is scheduled for July 4-6 at Big Firehole Canyon on the east side of Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming. Anyone interested in the preservation of Wyoming's native plants and plant communities is invited to attend, according to Society Secretary Robert Dorn. Participants will spend most of the weekend looking at a large number of rare and unusual plants in the area, including the pinyon pine and white fir communities. For more information write the society at Box 1471, Cheyenne WY 82003.

MAKING AGRICULTURE WORK

Project ARC, whose members represent 18 Colorado agricultural organizations, will host a conference called "Sharing Approaches That Work for Agriculture and Rural Colorado," June 24-25 at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley. The conference will focus on farmers and ranchers who have discovered positive methods of facing the agricultural crisis. Workshops will include agricultural innovations, premium beef, alternate crops, fundraising, financing of public and private projects, developing a business plan and managing stress. For more information, write Project ARC, 1525 Sherman, Room 406, Denver, CO 80203 (303/866-3219).

MICHAEL FROME HONORED

The winner of a \$5,000 National Parks and Conservation Association award says he plans to "divide equally the award money among 10 different grass-roots environmental groups." The winner is Michael Frome, noted writer and columnist for several national newspapers and environmental publications, and author of a number of books on American wilderness. He just won NPCA's Marjory Stoneman Douglas Award for Citizen Conservation. A grant from the Bon Ami Company in Kansas City, Missouri, makes the award possible.

Signs Along the River

Learning to Read the Natural Landscape



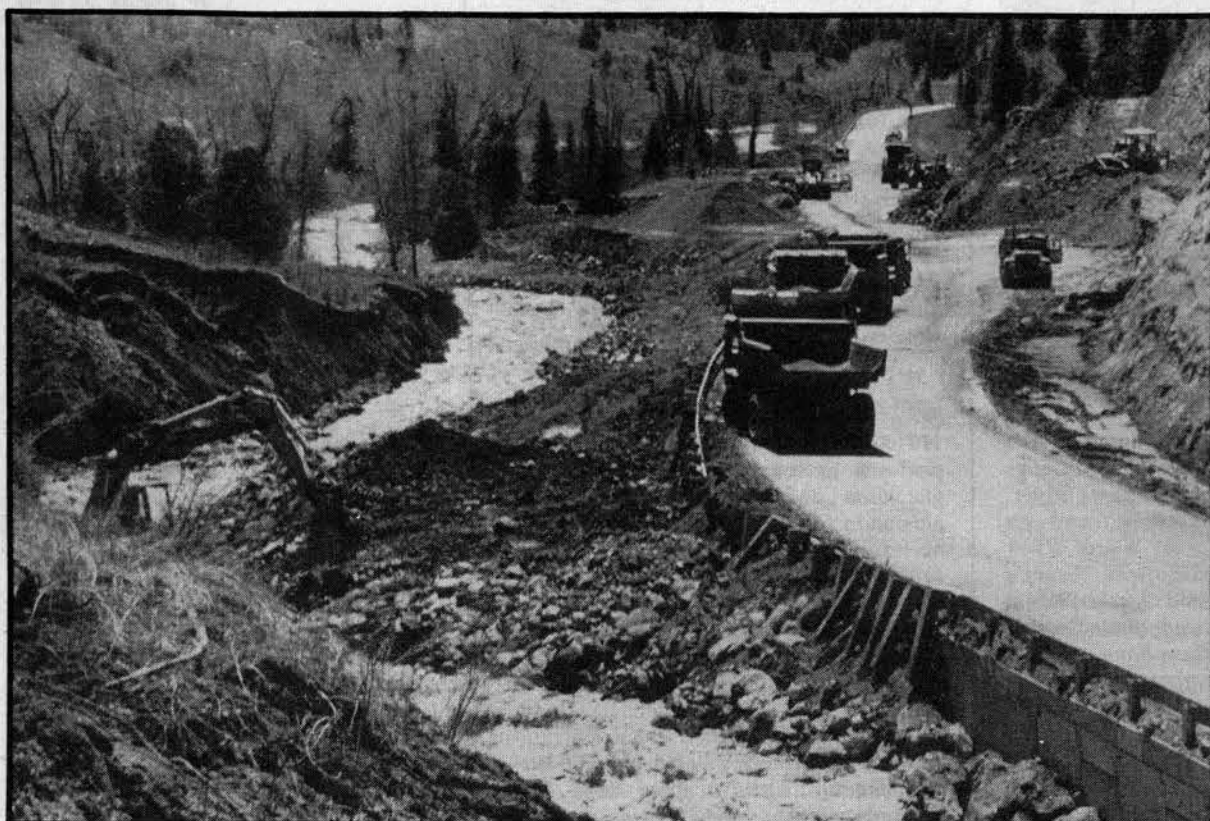
WATCHING FOR SIGNS

Signs Along the River, Learning to Read the Natural Landscape is a new book written and illustrated by Kayo Robertson that helps both children and "guiding adults" understand what they see in the outdoors. With drawings to match, the author shows us that "Fresh snow is like a new page," or that "Gnawed branches are stories written by teeth." This little book can be read to youngsters again and again.

Roberts Rinehart, Inc. P.O. Box 3161, Boulder, CO 80303. Paper: \$4.95. 58 pages.

8-High Country News -- June 9, 1986

Slip-sliding away



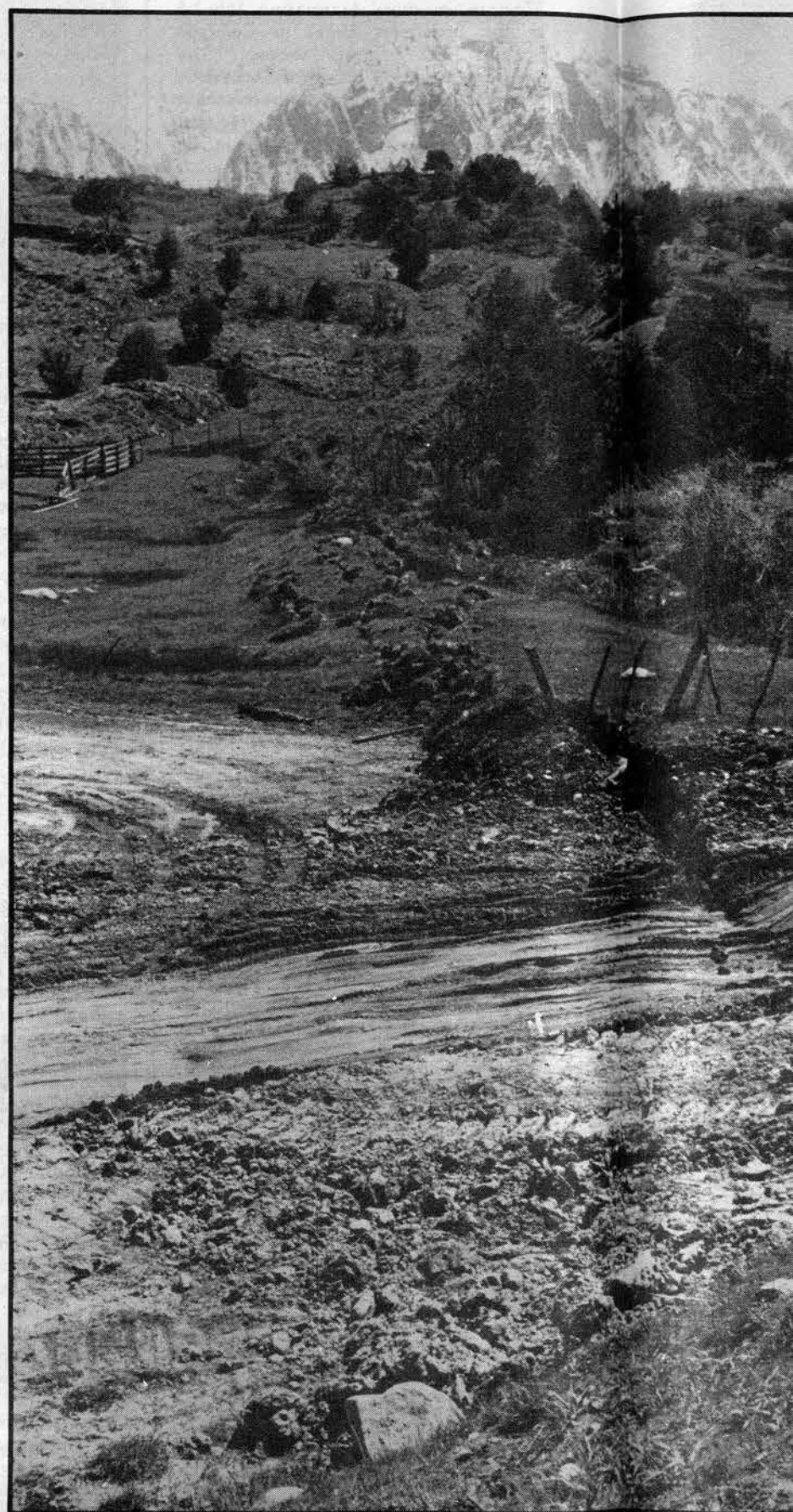
Ed Marston

Highway crews at the downstream [southwest] corner of the main slide lobe.



Ed Marston

The lower end of the earthslide meets Muddy Creek and the now-elevated highway surface.



This fracture marks the north slide lobe, about one-fourth end of the slide.



Norm Sunderland, North Fork Times

Fractures of all sizes mark the slide.



y



Ed Marston

Over the past month, western Colorado's Muddy Creek earth-slide has moved an estimated 140 million cubic yards of rock, sand and soil more than 200 feet downslope. This world class slide, many times greater than Utah's Thistle Slide, which drowned a town, railroad and highway in 1984, has wreaked havoc on a sparsely settled mountain hillside.

Its major effect on man's works has been to close State Highway 133 between the Crystal River Valley (Redstone and Carbondale) and the North Fork Valley (Paonia and Hotchkiss). Luckily, very few people live near the slide. But the few residents of this remote high country have suffered. The home of an elderly widow was literally ripped to pieces by the moving, heaving dirt, and a local rancher has had to keep adding fence as sections of earth moved away from each other, opening gaps in the fence as much as 20 feet a day. Dumb beasts have also suffered. The fenced horses and cattle, sensing that the earth was moving beneath their feet, have been nervous much of the time.

Although the slide consists of three lobes, one almost a mile wide and extending two miles up the mountain, the lobes aren't moving as solid units. On the average, the 140 million cubic yards of rock, sand and soil are moving together. But each of the lobes has its own internal stresses and strains. Fissures open here, swallow-

ing a stream perhaps or splitting a tree in half. Elsewhere, the ground heaves and humps.

An older state highway, which crosses the slide, presents the most graphic illustration of its effects. As you drive toward the slide from Carbondale, the road abruptly ends in a crack, with pasture beyond. It is not until you get out of the car that you can see the rest of the road -- a fair distance down the hill.

The major effort to counter the slide is taking place at its bottom, in the canyon formed by Muddy Creek, where contractors hired by the state highway crew struggle to do two things.

Their first task is to keep the creek from being dammed. To this end, huge backhoes patrol the creek front, using their buckets like long poles, to keep rocks from blocking the creek. Basically, the contractors are using swiftly moving Muddy Creek as a conveyor belt, to move the mud the slide keeps pushing into the stream. It is the only practical thing to do, but the dirt being carried off by the stream is hastening the filling of Paonia Reservoir, a 20,000 acre-foot irrigation reservoir which had already been filling with silt at a rapid rate.

Second, the slide has raised the creek about 15 feet thus far. So the contractors, hauling in dirt from a nearby quarry, have been raising the new state highway roadbed just as quickly. Ironically, the state put the

road in the canyon to escape the slide. But the slide came down and bit them.

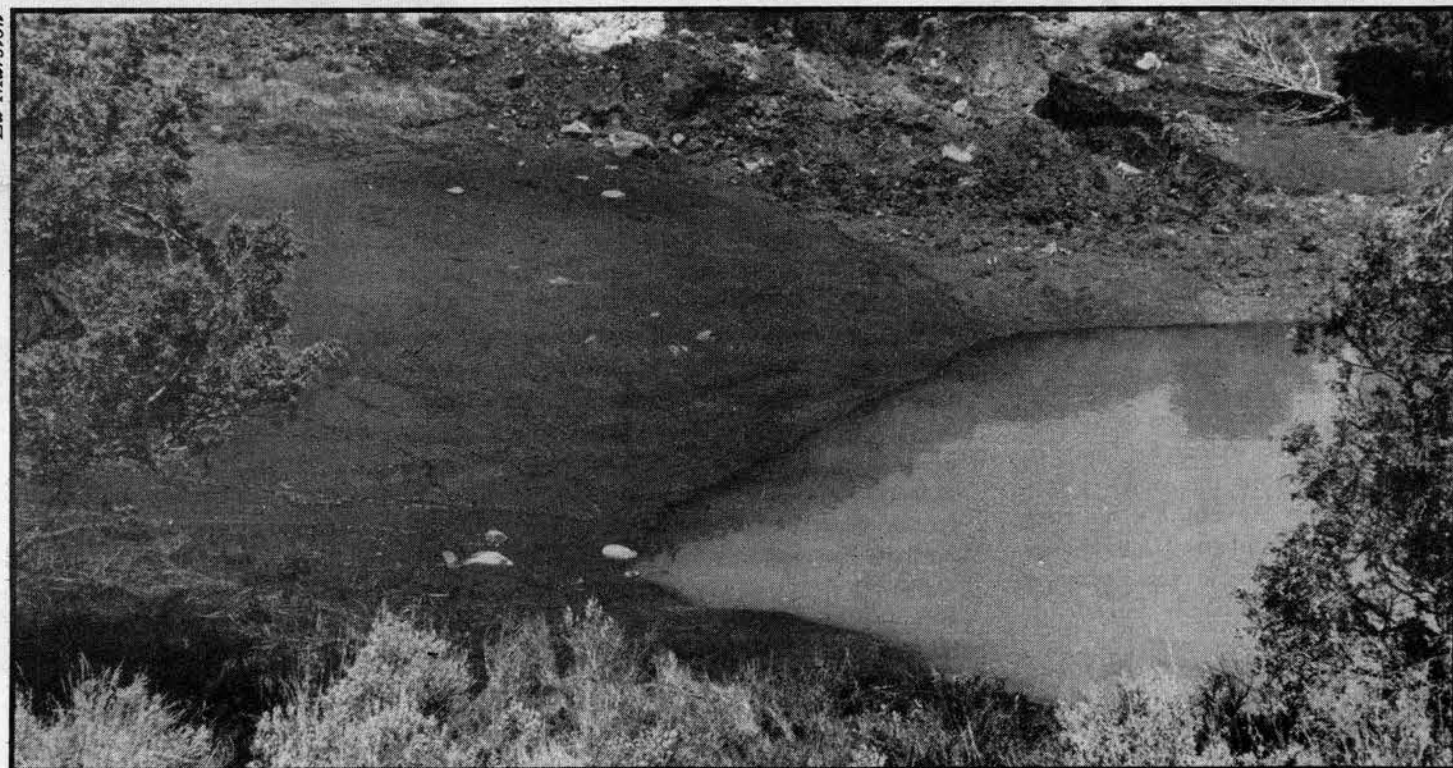
What has caused this havoc? According to Colorado's state geologist, John Rold, the slide probably first moved 5,000 to 8,000 years ago. At that time, the Earth was coming out of its last ice age, and there was abundant water in the soils and flowing above ground. Rold says many Colorado landslides date from this unstable period.

The slide's reactivation this year wasn't a surprise, Rold says. Precipitation has been above average for five years now in western Colorado, building up moisture content in the soils. The last two autumn snowfalls have been particularly high. The area snowfall for October and November, 1985, was 300 percent of the 20-year average for those months. The ground isn't frozen yet in the autumn, so much of the melting snow seeps into the ground. The autumn snowfalls also insulate the ground so that it freezes later in the year, allowing water to seep into the ground for a longer period.

The slide seems to be slowing down now. It started on April 30, and for the first few weeks moved toward the creek and road at roughly 20 feet per day. By late May, Rold says, the rate had slowed to about five or six feet per day.

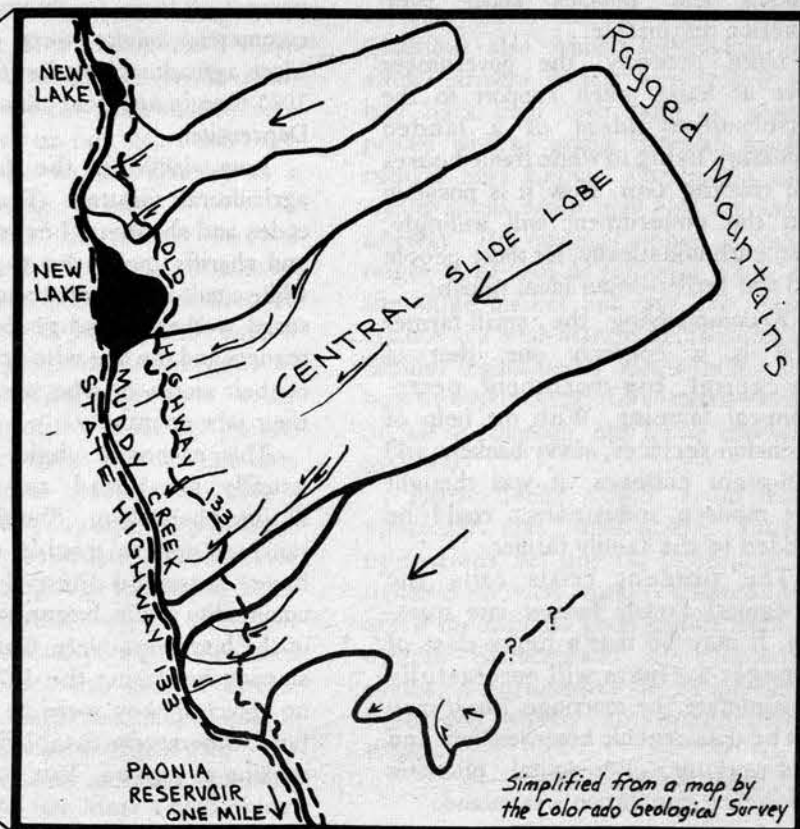
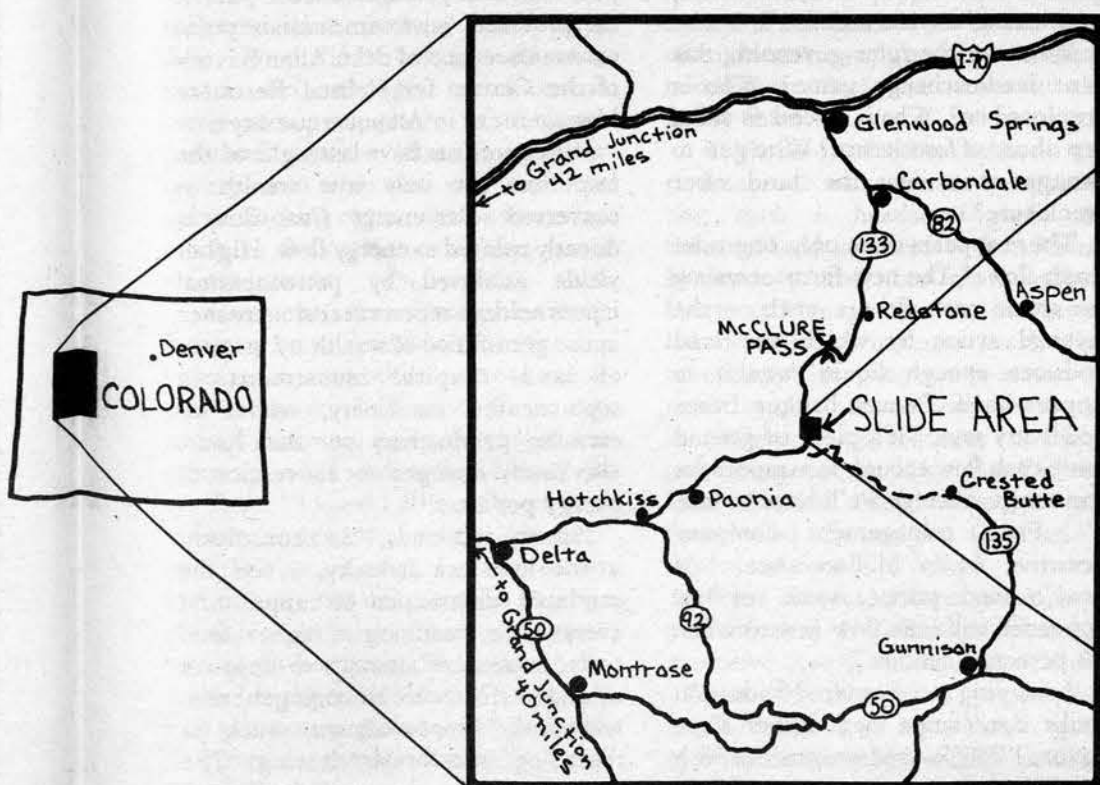
--Ed Marston, Mary Moran

Ed Marston



This pond and its old spongy, peat-like bottom have been separated. The slide is moving from right to left in the photo.

This fracture marks the northern edge of the main slide lobe, about one-fourth mile above the lower end of the slide.



Simplified from a map by the Colorado Geological Survey

The new agriculture:

The land has got to cash flow

by Sam Bingham

“Credit supports agriculture like a rope supports a hanged man,” said King Louis XIV of France.

There are large differences between the United States today and Louis' vanished monarchy. But in today's agriculture the king's grisly allusion holds. As any TV watcher knows, a well-publicized number of American farmers now twist slowly on lines of credit suddenly jerked up short.

It is true that a majority of the nation's farms carry tolerable debt and remain profitable. But it is also true that breakdown on the ever-expanding fringes of the farm economy has made long-fixed attitudes and policies about rural America negotiable.

Until recently, the government gave at least token support to the Jeffersonian ideal of a landed yeomanry living in white frame houses and reading *Grit*. Now it is possible that the government will willingly, even enthusiastically, let those people and the Jeffersonian ideal vanish.

Accompanying the small-farmer ideal is a contrary one: that of big-capital, big-machinery, petrochemical farming. With the help of extension services, savvy bankers and land-grant colleges, it was thought that modern industrialism could be wedded to the family farmer.

The present crisis calls the big-capital family farmer into question. It may be that a future class of manager-farmers will successfully consummate the marriage. But it may also be that organic homesteaders and hard-working, low-capital pioneers will inherit the nation's farmland.

The fact that formerly sacred assumptions about how America raises its food are open to discussion indicates just how far off the track the existing system has gone. The derailment is easiest seen in the area of credit.

The quasi-federal Farm Credit System, the nation's largest bank, lost \$2.7 billion in 1985. As a result, it had to ask Congress for a \$6 billion line of credit. Another major lender, the Farmers Home Administration, is also in trouble. Auditors say nearly half the \$29 billion debt it finances is shaky. As of June, nearly one quarter of its loans had stopped performing. As of the same date, 11 percent of the Farm Credit System loans were behind in their interest payments.

Private lenders are in somewhat less trouble. At the end of 1985, over 9 percent of farm production loans at commercial banks were delinquent. More agricultural banks (68) failed in 1985 than in any year since the Great Depression.

Less visible is the fallout from agricultural failures. Tractor cavalcades and shootouts between farmers and sheriffs make the 6 p.m. news, while small-town merchants, teachers, social workers, road-graders, meter-readers and the like who are forced out of their stores or who are fired from their jobs go quietly.

This economic chain reaction is usually attributed to unwise or ill-timed borrowing. The farmers and ranchers now in trouble are said to have borrowed heavily just as commodity prices began to fall. Some of the borrowers were young farmers starting out during the 1970s and had no choice if they were to get onto a farm. Others were established farmers seeking to expand. But some now in trouble didn't start out in the 1970s

and didn't expand. They were simply eaten up by high interest rates, high fuel and shipping costs and falling prices.

As a result of foreclosures and “voluntary” sales, a great deal of land now changes hands daily, coming under new stewardship in an extended game of musical chairs. The Farm Credit System, which held only \$36 million in foreclosed land in 1980, held \$532 million by the end of 1984, and \$851 million six months into 1985. Most of the land has dropped below its 1980 prices.

The land that has been foreclosed on or sold is the tip of the iceberg. Much more land would change hands if there were a market. M.J. Coyle, a professional land appraiser in New Mexico, estimates that one-third of the ranches there are for sale, and New Mexico hasn't even made headlines as a crisis area.

What are the rules governing this giant land-exchange game? Who is foreclosed on? Who is forced to sell a step ahead of foreclosure? Who gets to manage or to buy the land after foreclosure?

There appears to be only one rule: “cash flow.” The new farm economy has made cash flow a verb -- the physical action by which the land produces enough liquid wealth to support itself. Denver banker Bruce McGilvary says, “If a piece of ground won't cash flow enough to support the interest (payments), we'll have to take it.” Farm management company executive Aaron Millian says, “At today's land prices, some of our properties will cash flow (even) when 100 percent financed.”

According to former Production Credit Association loan officer Cara Taylor, “People used to come in with their figures written on the back of old

envelopes. We figured everything out for them, and, if they had security, we issued loans. When all this began, some of our farmers didn't know that land *had* to cash flow.”

Those who didn't learn were quickly driven off the land, but many who did know have now lost their farms too.

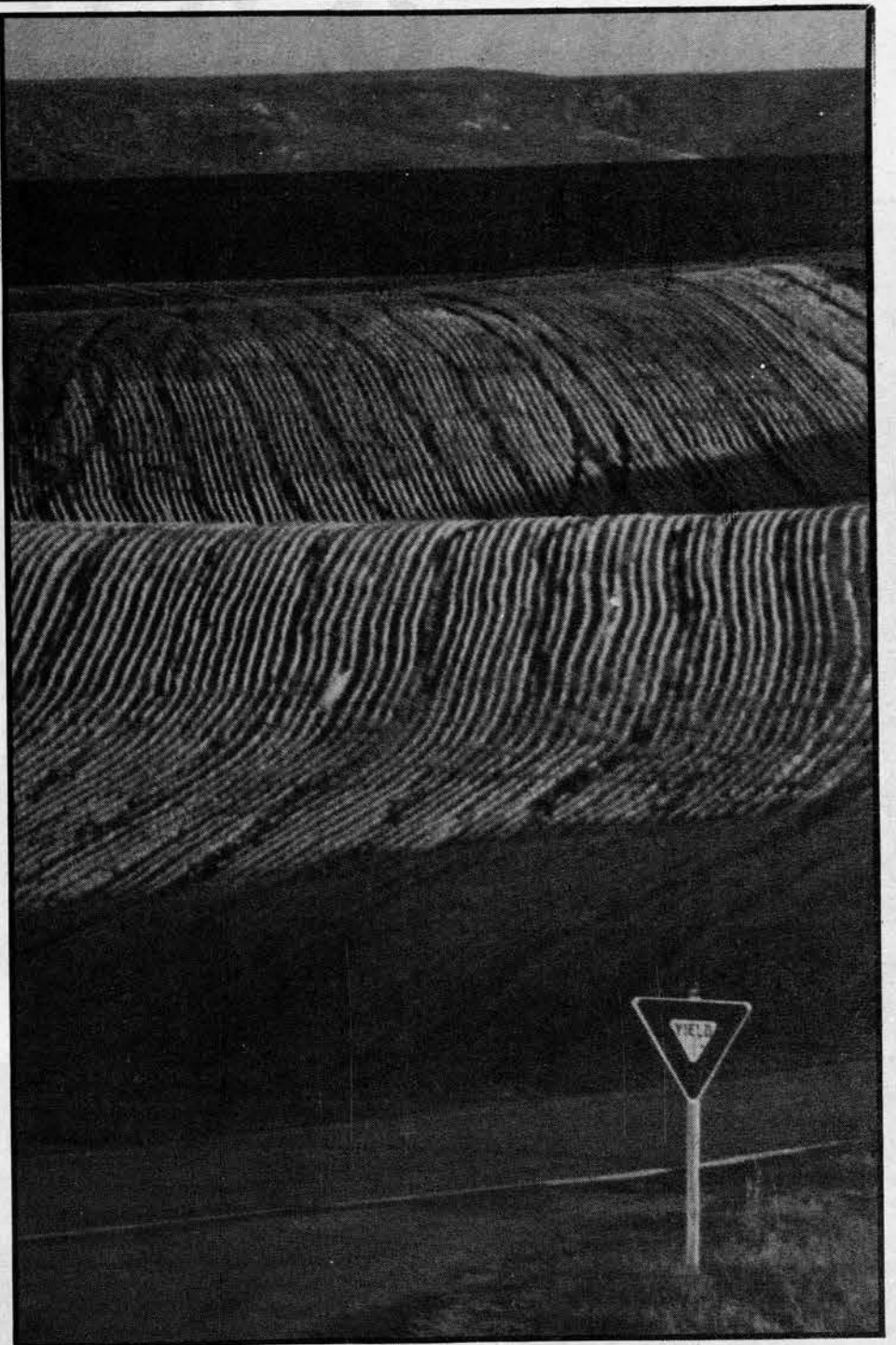
Arguments abound on whether external forces such as bad government policies and world market conditions caused the cash flow crisis, or whether a large number of farmers -- listening to the injunctions to “get big or get out” -- suddenly found themselves in big league business operations they weren't prepared for and couldn't handle with back-of-the-envelope management.

Although they grant that high interest rates, accumulated debt, and poor financial management are part of the problem, environmentalists point out another kind of debt. Allan Savory of the Center for Holistic Resource Management in Albuquerque says:

“Economists have lost sight of the fact that the only true wealth is converted solar energy. Cash flow is directly related to energy flow. Higher yields achieved by petrochemical inputs seldom represent real increases in the generation of wealth by an acre of land. Capital investment in sophisticated machinery, while increasing productivity per man-hour, also rarely changes net conversion of energy per acre.”

Savory continues, “As a consultant in the livestock industry, I see the continual destruction of range land everywhere, resulting in higher feed costs, expensive attempts to improve animal performance through genetics, and costly ‘improvements,’ such as reseeding and brush clearing. The ever-increasing doses of fertilizers,

Kent and Donna Dannen



pesticides and herbicides it takes to produce a grain crop, and the losing fight against erosion, indicate that the same syndrome is undermining farms."

The environmental debt may come due all at once, in the form of a drought, a flood or an insect infestation that would not have threatened a healthy ecology. Or it may simply demand payment little by little, in the form of an extra dose of herbicide, an extra ton of supplemental feed, or the extra cost of digging out an irrigation ditch filled with eroded topsoil.

Savory likes to distinguish between "solar dollars" and "paper dollars," while most economists talk only of the latter. Although they differ on the type of debt, ecologists and economists come to the same conclusion: A massive debt has accumulated that someone is going to pay.

If the lenders foreclose and sell the land at a loss, they pay first, and the rest of us may pay later as financial instability moves through the credit system. If government gives subsidies, taxpayers pick up the debt. Production restrictions that force up prices take from the consumer. Squeezing short-term cash from the farm takes it from the land. Throwing people off the land tears the payment from the social fabric.

At this point, the arguments jump the narrow tracks of economics and crash into megatopics like The American Way of Life, Geopolitics, and holistic theories of land management. Unable to manage the massive change with tinkering, we seek broad philosophical theories.

The laissez-faire capitalists and many older farmers who didn't try any fast moves when times looked flush are likely to express their philosophy in two words: Tough luck! They point to endless examples of bad management, over-extension, greed and unnecessary overhead in many operations that failed.

"Agriculture is no different from any other business," says Gary Levin, a successful land-owning rancher who started out broke on the Colorado plains in 1981. "If you owned a filling station or an oil-drilling company and lost it, taxpayers sure wouldn't say the nation owed you a way of life and bail you out. A cattle outfit is just like any other business."

Levin, a farmer by background and a tax lawyer by degree, and his wife, an experienced businesswoman, started out leasing land at rates that reflected what the land would cash flow. They didn't buy ground until prices fell enough to make it competitive. A graph of Chicago commodity prices hangs over their dining room table, and they say time spent tracking commodities returns as much to the operation as that spent working cattle.

There are other strategies. Some farmers have succeeded by finding investors -- not lenders -- elsewhere in the economy. A Kansas farm boy named Benjamin Palen developed his approach while working in a New York law firm. "I knew I ultimately wanted to farm, and in 1979 I bought 160 acres near Tribune, Kansas. I realized that agriculture was unique as a capital-intensive industry financed almost entirely by borrowing. There had to be room for the same kind of investors who put money into other industries."

After six years in the Big Apple,

As a first article of faith, farmers believe that under a manageable debt burden, all ground will work. Their voices get shrill over the question of who gets to work it -- who gets to make the crops grow and the cash flow.

including three with a stock market brokerage, Palen and his wife Leslie returned to the West determined to profit from this insight and from their New York contacts. They timed their move just as land prices began to crumble. Today, they farm over 42,000 acres of wheatland bought with other people's money and a minimum of debt.

Palen claims that stingy management and chemical-intensive (and environmentally questionable) no-tillage farming allow him to grow wheat for \$1.50 a bushel before finance costs, and to give his investors a 10 percent return on their money.

Bill MacKay, a Roscoe, Montana, cow man, uses a similar approach. He saw the danger in mortgaging his land at high interest rates. So he syndicated his cattle, selling them to a group of investors, to raise operating capital. He keeps a share of the calf crop for his labor. "Everyone's happy so far," he says, "and it certainly kept the wolf from the door."

He found most of his investors, as did the Palens, in high tax brackets. They count the entire value of calves raised on the ranch as capital gain, and so pay lower taxes. Their money yields more than it would in a bank, and gives them flexibility not available to the average borrower.

Many people facing foreclosure look at people like the Levins, Palens and MacKays and say: "If the banks just gave me a chance, I'd be there too." They consider the success of such people a matter of shuffling paper dollars, rather than the generation of real wealth. They point out that these people are making money from land or livestock they often do not own. They have become middlemen. And that strikes at the family farm.

They also, of course, resent the professional management companies that turn a handsome profit by farming land acquired in foreclosure by lenders who then can't sell it. Peterson Management Co. in Denver has doubled its business nearly five times in the last two years (it is now 32 times bigger) almost exclusively on the strength of contracts to farm properties acquired by the Federal Land Banks. Most of them are foreclosed farms in Colorado's depressed San Luis Valley.

Were the foreclosures a result of poor farmers or poor land? Peterson executive Aaron Millian says neither. "The truly bad operators were weeded out a long time ago. Some good operators are going down now because

they just got too leveraged." He also says that the foreclosed land is physically productive. "We are proving that the ground itself will work."

Translated from agriculturist, he means that after the lender swallows a certain amount of debt, many farms will cash flow. "As soon as that becomes general knowledge, I expect a lot of investors will come in."

Although Millian himself grew up on a Utah farm and hopes before long to go out on his own in the sheep business, a vast array of grass-roots farm organizations and individuals take extreme exception to his view that as long as the ground works, there is nothing to worry about. As a first article of faith, farmers believe that under a manageable debt burden, all ground will work. Their voices get shrill over the question of who gets to work it -- who gets to make the crops grow and the cash flow.

The National Coalition to Save the Family Farm, umbrella for a dozen or so grass-roots organizations, says the balance sheet should not be the only measure of worth. Terri Kelly, head of the credit committee of the coalition, picked up the banner of the beleaguered small landholder in the early 1970s when energy companies began twisting arms to let them strip coal under Montana ranches. She now struggles to make a living off 185 mother cows and some irrigated alfalfa near Lame Deer, Montana.

"The work I'm doing now is just an extension of the fight with the coal companies," she says. "My family's been in this valley for five generations. That's a long-term commitment, and I think that's worth something in itself. The (credit crisis) is just one more case of a sudden force trying to push us out, but I don't see any advantage to the country as a whole in getting rid of us."

Kelly cites the recent rise of sodbusting in Montana as yet another example of long-term disaster licensed by government policy and narrow economic arguments. As recently as 1984, high-rolling operators made enormous profits breaking fragile prairie to dry-farm wheat. Tax laws allowed them to credit nearly all the expense of plowing up the grasslands against their taxes as "soil conservation." Generous depreciation schedules let them write off their equipment in five years. If they then found a buyer, the sale of former range land as farm land reaped largely tax-free profits as a capital gain.

Kelly cites one absentee operator,

John Greytak of Billings, Montana, (HCN, 10/1/84), who in 1983 bought and plowed under 30,000 acres of range in nearby Petroleum County as part of a 350,000-acre empire scattered over three states. The impact of such operators on a glutted wheat market was no doubt negative. Much of Greytak's land is up for sale now, and its continued cultivation is in question.

"Don't they see how much it means to the country to have stable rural communities with people committed to maintaining the land?" pleads Kelly.

She and her husband, also a fifth-generation resident, bought their ranch in 1976. But he recently threw in the towel and left for the West Coast, where he now trains cutting horses. "He couldn't take it," says Terri, "doing all he could and watching the whole thing go downhill anyway. I'm still hanging on, but the trend isn't good."

Kelly and her organization support far-reaching legislation that would require the Department of Agriculture to estimate national production requirements annually and mandate planting acreages for all farms according to formulas heavily biased against large operations. She also wants generous debt relief until prices rebound.

The USDA now estimates that wheat would have to sell at \$4.95 for the average farmer to have an income at "parity" with similar workers in the rest of the economy. The price set by the Commodity Credit Corporation is \$2.40.

"We've got to have a price that covers the cost of production, including interest," says Kelly.

The Save the Family Farm Coalition also wants legislation to allow farmers facing foreclosure to buy back their own land at lower prices without going through bankruptcy. Says Kelly, "The banks are taking a loss when they sell the land anyway. The original owner at least ought to be able to compete for it in the same market and get the same chance at a fresh start as an outsider." Similar legislation is also winding its way through several state legislatures, or, as in Colorado, has been enacted into law.

These ideas come from the viewpoint that small-scale, stable operations selling to predictable markets in vital rural communities serve the national good better than a system characterized by dramatic cycles, rapid turnover of people and land and wholly entrepreneurial values.

(Continued on page 12)

Cash flow...

(Continued from page 11)

“They want us to be just like any other business,” laments Helen Waller, chairperson of the Family Farm Coalition, who denounces the financial gamesmanship, mergers, consolidations, and worship of the bottom line that began spilling into the agricultural sector years ago.

Some of those caught in the present agricultural vise are suspicious that a murky human design lurks behind the supposedly celestial revolutions of the economic wheel. At one extreme stand organizations such as Posse Comitatus, the Farmers Liberation Army, the Brotherhood and some others.

They blame the Tri-Lateral Commission and the International Jewish Conspiracy for engineering the farm breakdown. They allegedly have paramilitary training camps in Colorado and Kansas and perhaps elsewhere, and like to talk about the coming violence and total economic collapse of the nation. People who attend foreclosure sales and meetings say they may one day cause real trouble, because their organizing efforts are intense. But even more level heads also see more than the hand of destiny at work in the land.

Richard Gose, a lawyer who has broken many lances with the Farm Credit System, compares the atmosphere today with the spirit prevailing in the depression. Official policy toward farm foreclosures was table conversation in his youth. In the Roosevelt administration, local ranchers elected his father to the Federal Land Bank board that served his corner of Wyoming.

“By 1933 there was a consensus in the country that we would save farmers any way we could,” recalls Gose. “My father oversaw a system that gave out money where no reasonable man would have thought they could get it back. It was just deemed necessary to keep banks open and keep people on the land. That was the goal, and even though it took over 30 years, all the capital the government put into the Farm Credit System then got paid back.

“This time the farmers were set up first and then betrayed. Beginning in the late 1960s and on into the 1980s, the Farm Credit System actively pushed as much money out the door as they could. Remember, Chrysler was in trouble. The Japanese were killing our balance of trade and the Arabs had cut off the oil.

“The American farmer was going to save our ass. People were saying a bushel of wheat for a barrel of oil. Agriculture secretary Earl Butz said, ‘Plant fence row to fence row.’ You can’t tell me that it wasn’t national policy to loan enough money to make that happen. We kept the farmers afloat with loans and supports to boost exports that sold in a world market for less than the cost of production.

“Then we changed our minds, and Reagan was saying, ‘Let’s export the farmers and keep the wheat.’ The word ‘forebearance’ doesn’t exist anymore. And the man who worked the hardest, knew the most and deserved to have the life he built for himself is suddenly disqualified by the fact that he did it.”

Despite appearances, government is not always the heavy. Where a

consensus on goals exists, good people in government have found ingenious remedies. A little over a year ago, Wyoming State Treasurer Stan Smith sat next to the state Farmers Home Administration Director Michael Ormsby at the annual dinner of the Wyoming Industrial Development Bank.

Couldn’t the state do something to redevelop agriculture? asked Ormsby. By the end of the meal, the two of them had hammered out a program to offer long-term loans at under 8 percent. In a state where a number of important legislators and the governor himself are in or facing foreclosure on their land, this required no legislation.

The Farmers Home Administration guarantees the loans up to 90 percent at commercial banks. The state, instead of investing its cash reserves in treasury bills, buys the loans from the banks, and cuts the interest to the treasury bill rate. FmHA regulations, and a late start have limited the program to \$13 million so far, but both Smith and Ormsby look forward to rapid expansion.

Another Wyoming program now before the legislature and modeled on similar programs in Ohio and Illinois would allow the treasurer to deposit state funds in private commercial banks to back specific loans which would then carry lower interest. These could benefit business as well as agriculture.

Meanwhile, what is happening to the land itself? Physically, “The word ‘stewardship’ doesn’t exist anymore,” says Dave Carter of the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union. “The lenders really aren’t set up to take care of land, and many of the borrowers figure they’d better wring everything out of it they can and hope for the best or lose it anyway.”

Statistics telling how much land

Rocky Mountain Farmers Union



the Farm Credit System, banks, insurance companies, and other lenders have acquired in foreclosure are hard to come by. Without doubt, however, it already beats all records since the Depression, and perhaps ever, and more lies ahead.

The Farm Credit System and the Farmers Home Administration have no firm guidelines yet for either managing or selling land. Although many farm organizations have demanded a rule prohibiting the lenders from separating mineral and water rights from acquired land, both agencies could become big players in that game. Backers of a family farm policy of course also want requirements that the land be sold in small pieces rather than lumped together and sold in huge multi-farm blocks.

Though some lending institutions have leased out large tracts or turned them over to management companies, none are committed to long-term ownership. Sooner or later, most will sell at a price that will allow land to “cash flow.”

Already creditors holding large amounts of land are ready to lease it cheaply, just to keep it in production.

sectors of the economy could move in and grab it, but it hasn’t happened yet. Young, debt-free farmers like the Levins, with the ability to make ground cash flow, can already borrow enough to make a start.

There is evidence that many managers who saw the writing on the wall and chose to go out of business while they still had some capital are in fact able to buy back in or lease ground at today’s low prices. Those who hung on to the bitter end may never recover.

Could the low-chemical, small machinery family farmer rise from the ashes of the farm crisis? Will the 1980s be remembered as just one more disaster in the long string of dust bowls, depressions, and panics that periodically upset the fruit basket of rural America? Will it generate policies that produce a more European kind of stability in agriculture? Or will events and policies open the door to another round of large-scale exploitation?

The jury is still out. A lot depends on who still has faith that the ground will work.

Saving the farm

Two years ago, a Circle, Montana, wheat farmer saw that what was saved from the coal strip mine was about to be lost to the bank.

Helen Waller, the farmer, was featured speaker recently at the 6th annual meeting of the environmental and consumer coalition, Western Colorado Congress. She told the audience of 100 gathered in the mountain town of Ouray that family farms can and will survive.

Currently chairman of the National Save the Family Farm Coalition, Waller wants federal farm policies restructured to favor small producers over large, corporate agricultural producers, and emergency credit solutions for farmers on the brink of losing their farms. “We cannot overlook a basic principle which this nation was founded upon,” she said, “that of the benefit of widely dispersed land-ownership.”

Waller warned of the “financial and political disaster” from absentee-owner, tenant farmer agricultural systems and emphasized the effects of farm failure on the “main street” economy of nearby towns. “When farmers leave the land,” she said, “those left must pay the cost of social services, welfare, roads and schools.”

The coalition is now working on a draft farm-policy reform bill, designed to provide more stability in the production and marketing of grains, cotton and dairy products. Mandatory

controls would limit production to meet domestic, export, humanitarian and strategic reserve needs. A formula for “set-asides,” acreage to be withdrawn from production, would provide advantages to small producers.

The bill also proposes credit reforms, which would enable some farmers to produce enough cash flow to repay their debts. A proposed mediation process would postpone foreclosure for no more than two years while a write-down of principal and reduction of interest on outstanding loans is negotiated. Solutions available so far save the lender; not the farmer, she said.

Not all speakers agreed with Waller’s demand for government policies to save the family farm. One dissenter was Montrose County Commissioner and grain farmer Bill McNeil, who wondered who would police the set-aside program. “Any time the federal government has gotten involved in an ag program, they’ve screwed it up,” he said. “What I want is a fair-market value for what I raise, not a value set by the government.”

Montrose County Commissioner Ken Neesham said capitalism and not the federal government should allocate scarce resources. He opposed government involvement in price structuring or any measures to save small farms, and predicted that in 10



Helen Waller

years western Colorado communities would be dominated by large corporate farms. He said they would then be able to attract capital and use it more efficiently than family farms.

Waller said if Neesham was right about the death of the family farm and the corporate takeover of commodity production, “then we don’t have much of our system of government left. If such a fate is imposed on us whether we like it or not, that’s not democracy. People should have a voice in where they are heading,” she said.

--Katharine Collins

At a farmers' meeting:

Anger, blame, depression

by Ed Marston

A hearing in March 1986 at the Colorado State Legislature almost ended in a fist fight when an attorney for the Farmers Home Administration supposedly called a farmer "boy."

"Stop tapping me with that paper, boy," said the attorney, who objected to the way the farmer was trying to catch his attention as they walked out of a hearing.

That incident might be an aberration. But it turned into the centerpiece of a talk given by an eastern Colorado farm activist at an emergency meeting on the farm situation in a Delta, Colorado, church auditorium on the Western Slope.

The meeting, organized by the Colorado Council of Churches and attended by over 100 farmers, came at a crucial and emotional time. In the best of times, spring is rough on farmers. This year, a mild winter and early spring had dried out the fields enough to allow early plowing, fertilizing and planting.

But agriculture today isn't Edwin Markham's man with a hoe. It is tractors, diesel fuel, herbicides, fertilizer, and tractor tires that cost \$400 each. Even a relatively small farmer or rancher typically needs a several-hundred-thousand-dollar operating loan to get into the fields. Without the loan, there is no farming.

Many of the men and women in the audience had been denied their operating loans, or feared they would be denied those loans in the next few weeks, or they had already been sold out, or were about to be sold out. The private or quasi-federal banking system had shut them off, sometimes for good reason, and sometimes out of caprice or error, or the puritanical overreaction that comes after years of easy credit-binging.

The ministers and farmers who ran the meeting had come over from the Eastern Plains -- home of the radical (to many in agriculture) American

Agricultural Movement. They didn't promise a quick cure to the men and women who sat patiently, without visible enthusiasm or anger, on the church's folding chairs. Nor did the visitors claim much of an organization. "It's amazing what a dozen people can do," they said, echoing every activist group at start-up time.

Whatever form they'd had in mind for the meeting dissolved in the face of the resignation that greeted them. For a while, the four or so speakers behaved like actors who knew the outline of their play, but had forgotten the script and cues.

Nonetheless, they had a message, and over the two hours or so Bill Glover, the pastor of a church in Yuma and Colorado Rural Crisis Hotline official, Bud Mekelburg, a former Yuma wheat farmer now with the Colorado Council to Save Rural Colorado, Jerry Creech, a Limon wheat farmer, and Vince Shively, executive director of the Colorado Council of Churches, sent that message home:

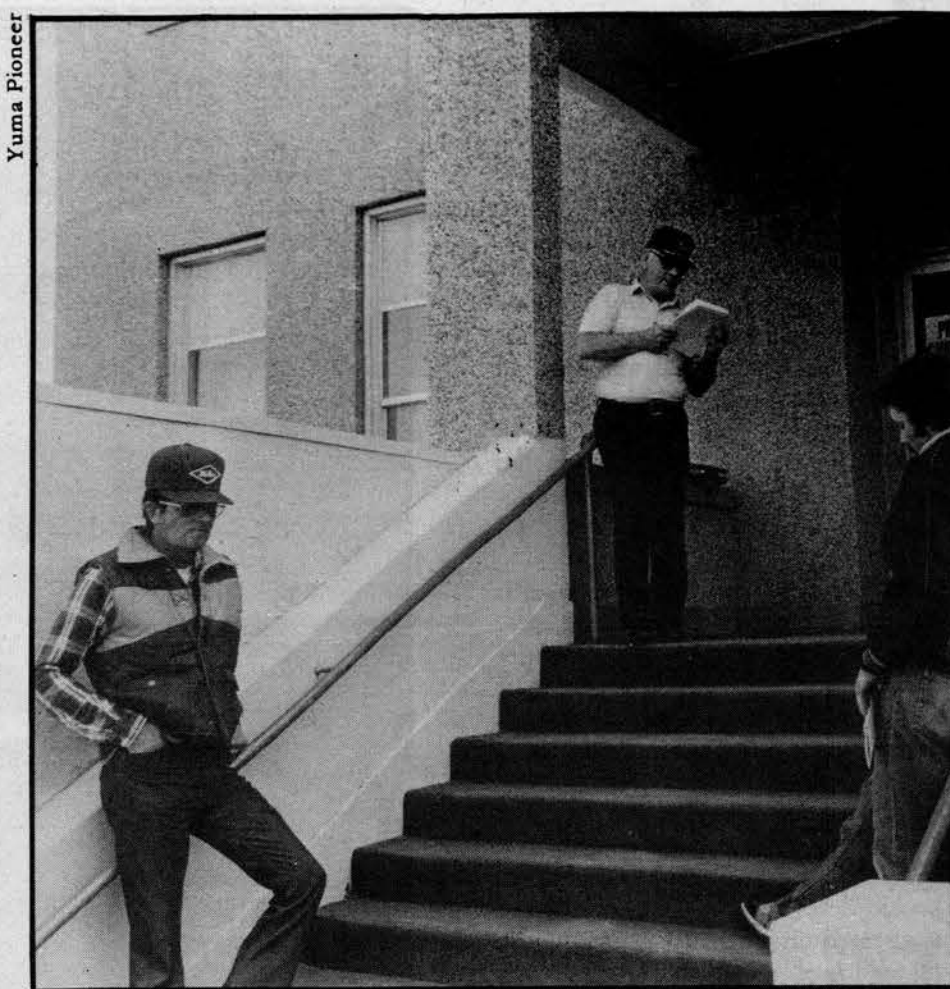
- We were passive so farmers lost control of the Farm Credit System to the bureaucrats, the bankers, the big boys in Wichita (which, during the meeting, stood for Sodom and Gomorrah).

- We were decent people, respectful to bankers, lawyers, doctors, and those "parasites" ate our lunch.

- We didn't stand up on our hind hocks. When the the Farmers Home Administration bureaucrat told us we should come in and sign our deeds over to them, we all too often did.

- We were the victims of plots. A plot by the big banks to keep the dollar high so Argentina, Brazil and Mexico could export to us and repay their loans. A plot by the government to force one million farmers off the land, and millions more out of America's rural towns.

- We were victims of lack of



Forced farm sales are becoming an all too-frequent sight in rural eastern Colorado. Wheat farmer LaVerne Boden, left, lost his home and 640-acre farm this March after the Federal Land Bank foreclosed on his \$130,000 loan. Assistant sheriff

Donald Murphy, standing on top of the steps of the Yuma County, Colorado, court house, auctioned off Boden's holdings. High bidder was the Federal Land Bank. Yuma County is on the plains 150 miles east of Denver.

collective power -- a small rural people in a country where wealth is concentrated in a few hands.

To change all that, there were various proposals, some practical and self-help; some emotional or political.

The emotional ones sounded like the early days of the civil rights movement, right down to the confrontation over the epithet "boy." The appeals were to the lost or slumbering manhood of the farmers. Life was painted as face-to-face confrontation, as arm wrestling, in which the farmer too often goes into battle already beaten because of his fearfulness of the men who wear the suits.

The speakers urged the farmers to stand up to their oppressors. But they also recognized that a lifetime spent in fields rather than offices might prevent that. So they urged the farmers to get professional help, or volunteer mediation from people who could talk to the white collars.

But even the speakers, who presumably had learned how to stand up to the power structure, shied from certain subjects. They spoke of "taking a whip to the modern-day moneylenders in the temple of rural America," and of demonstrations in front of FmHA offices, and of going to Washington to talk to various officials.

But there was never a word about President Reagan -- never an intimation that the problem, rather than a bankers' plot, might be rooted in an old saying: A nation can't afford guns and butter.

Western Colorado gave Ronald Reagan a 70 percent majority in the last election, and it was perhaps unwilling to speculate on the extent to which the area had cut its own throat. But the speakers were willing to discuss how the farmers had failed themselves. The Farm Credit System was set up as farmer-owned and controlled cooperatives. It had elected boards of farmer-directors to set broad policy and to hire and fire staff. Some

worked. But others adopted the good old boy approach. The hardnosed farmers ran their farms while the softnosed ones may have run the farm credit units, collecting a measure of prestige and satisfaction perhaps not available to them in the fields.

In addition to self-criticism, the speakers urged support for a Colorado foreclosure bill -- one that would force banks to give a break to farmers who lost their land. The bill, which has since passed, allows them to separate out their home and a few acres, and to bid on that separately at the foreclosure. The house and few acres are unlikely to have much value (farmers binged in the 1970s, but mostly on tractors and irrigation systems rather than homes) and so might go cheap.

The new law also gives the foreclosed family first refusal when the bank or federal agency sells the land. There was conviction in the hall that sold-out farmers were being discriminated against. New farmers, without the stink of failure, were said to be cutting deals for land the former landowners couldn't get.

The speakers also pushed for changes in banking and regulation policy that would encourage loan restructuring over foreclosure. "The farmer's been in the barrel a long time. Now it's the lenders' turn." The farmer had lost his paper wealth with the decline in land values. Now, the speakers said, the banks should share the pain. If a farmer owed \$400,000 on land valued at \$250,000, the bank should reduce the loan to \$250,000, and write a new loan for the present landowner. A paper cited at the meeting by CPA Kermit L. Allard of Fort Collins said such restructuring could benefit both the farmer and the banker.

As the long meeting went on, the

(Continued on page 14)

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Anger...

(Continued from page 13)

audience warmed up a bit. They participated, they asked questions, they volunteered to be mediators or to lobby the statehouse. But they remained subdued. Many of the men looked beaten that evening. They didn't look like people who still, or until recently, controlled hundreds of thousands or even a million or two in assets. It was hard to grasp that the smallest farmer borrowed each spring \$100,000 or so just to buy some fuel, fertilizer and seed.

Some, no doubt, had come up with the times, buoyed by a rising sea. Inflation, easy money, free management help from their bank or credit association had brought them and their net worth up. There are stories of farmers worth large amounts of money who carried their receipts and cancelled checks to loan officers in a shoebox. The loan officer figured the books, determined an operating loan, suggested or specified the crops to be planted and even doled out a family living allowance each month. In those cases, it is less than surprising that when the system ordered the farmer to sign over the deed, he signed.

Others ran their own affairs. They could prepare and read a balance sheet, they understood the risks, understood what leverage meant, understood that it could all melt away as easily as it had appeared.

This may be why rural people, when polled, show less sympathy for the "plight of the farmer" than city people. To city people, who see farmers only on television at foreclosure sales, surrounded by weeping women and bewildered children, the farmer is a stereotype -- a broadshouldered, hard-working individual brought low by fate. To the rural person, the farmer is many individuals -- the hard-working family man, the shrewd and tough business person, the hard drinker who has trouble getting to his fields by 10 a.m., the guy who'd never left the farm and couldn't read a balance sheet if his life depended on it. As it turns out, his life did.

As the national news reports regularly, some farmers are sunk in despair, brought low by the empty fields around them -- fields that should be bustling at this time -- and by the fact that you can go to a farm sale every day and watch another neighbor sold out. Actually, that's an understatement. Even in the Montrose-Delta area, you can go to farm sales where several farmers are being sold out at once.

Some farmers are no doubt permanently beaten. Others, perhaps because they've been through their despair or because they knew it was a high-risk game all along and don't take the losses personally, are looking to the future. They know washouts are common, and that the result in the past has been to sweep some off the land, and to concentrate more land and productive capacity in the hands of survivors. The bottoms of this cycle may even provide entree for those who could not have bought into farming during the high-cost 1970s.

Anecdotes abound. Some are about suicides. At the Delta meeting suicides were treated

Rocky Mountain Farmers Union



as battle losses. But others are less final. One story is about an onion farmer who, at his own farm sale, bought for \$2,000 a tractor the bank had taken from him for an \$18,000 note. That is loan restructuring with a vengeance, and it shows how you get the banker in the barrel.

Tractors are useless without land. Here, too, the lenders get to pay. Bankers don't farm, and they know that leaving land unworked, especially in the weed-prone West, is bad. So land that they loaned money on as if it were worth \$2,000 an acre, and for which they now want \$1,500 an acre, is now leasing for \$60 an acre.

That's a tremendous bargain. The farmer who bought the land at \$3,000 an acre must pay over \$300 an acre per year interest on the land. The one who buys it today at \$1,500 must pay \$150 an acre. Neither, probably, can make the land cash flow. But at \$60 an acre,

with \$2,000 tractors, the land will probably "cash flow."

Because of leasing, the word is that "good" land in western Colorado will be covered (with a crop) this spring with the exception of marginal pieces. But the important question isn't this spring, it's the future.

The federal or private banker will stay in the barrel, with \$60 lease payments, and all the worry about ditches, weeds, and fences for just so long. Land that leases and works at \$60 an acre is worth, let's say, \$600 an acre. But the bankers are reluctant to clear their books by selling the land at \$600. If that became the new level, they would have to chop the value of all the land they still hold as collateral. That would, by the rules of banking, throw "performing" farmers into foreclosure.

So, the prediction is that banks will sit on the land for the next few years.

But they can't sit on it forever. The ultimate question is: Who will control the land when the lenders finally unload?

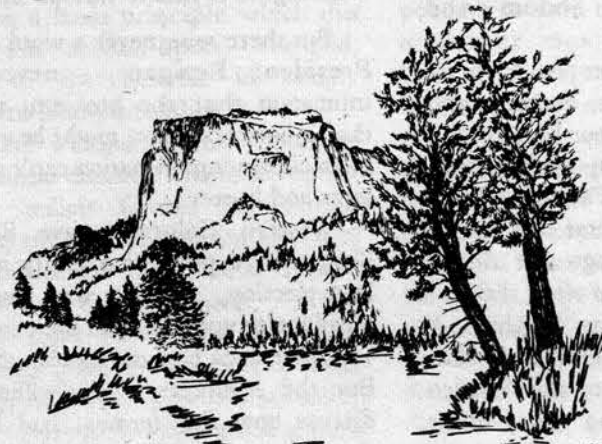
The far-seeing farmers -- those solvent and those broke, but looking to get back into business -- aren't unlikely to talk of dark plots or of bureaucrats who want to destroy rural America.

But they, too, are fearful of larger forces. They are fearful that farmland won't be allowed to drop to where it will cash flow -- to where they can buy it in the spring and make a principal and interest payment with the first crop that fall.

They are fearful that financial syndicates, insurance companies, pension plans, etc., will buy in at -- let's say -- \$100 an acre above cash flow. Their gamble is that control of farmland and the next round of inflation will make them billions.

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And, if you do decide to include HIGH COUNTRY NEWS in your will, won't you let us know?

BOOK NOTES

This Frankenstein's monster is green

*Altered Harvest:
Agriculture, Genetics, and
the Fate of the World's Food Supply*

Jack Doyle. New York, New York:
Viking Press, 1985. 502 pages. \$25,
cloth.

Review by Ed Marston

It is no criticism of Jack Doyle's *Altered Harvest* to say that the best we can hope is that he is wrong in his view of the most likely future.

Doyle has written a Dr. Frankenstein's monster book. The modern Dr. Frankenstein is the cadre of biologists who cut, snip, alter, add to and subtract from the genetic material of plants and animals. In the process, they create strange miscegenate things -- creatures part sheep, part goat; plants half potato, half tomato.

The ability to mix species almost at will is spectacular. But the interesting, important work is more mundane. For example, biologist Steven Lindow has learned how to slightly alter the genetic material of the bacteria that live on the surfaces of fruit, vegetables and grain. He calls it ice-minus. The alteration means that the bacteria no longer nucleate ice crystals on the surface of the plants. Those crystals are important -- they stab the plants when the temperature drops below freezing, turning them into shapeless, collapsed mounds of mush.

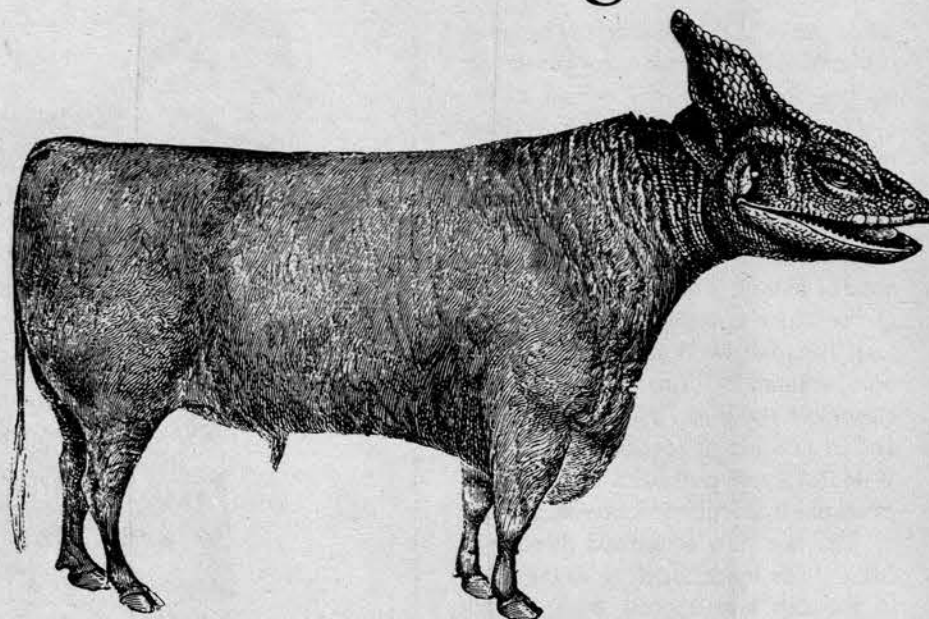
On the surface, this bit of biological alchemy seems all to the good. It means some plants can survive to 23 degrees Fahrenheit. It means billions of dollars in food will survive early frosts to ripen. It means the wheat belt can be pushed north, into country that now has too short a growing season for grain.

But it may also mean that the equivalent of Australia's rabbits will be loosed on the world -- that the altered bacteria will spread from plants seeded with these bacteria to the great outdoors. Weeds may live longer and spread further, and the overall ecological balance may change in unimagined ways. Recently, the genetics firm developing ice-minus was fined \$20,000 for releasing some of the untried bacteria into the atmosphere.

Doyle discusses the ice-minus controversy, but he proves that the challenge posed by the new biology goes far beyond such biologic equivalents to the Challenger explosion. He shows that even if bioengineering works exactly as we wish, there will still be serious problems.

Doyle explains the science and technology very well -- he has steeped himself in the intricacies and language of the double helix, in recombinant DNA, and in the techniques which manipulate this material. But his real genius lies in showing how this technical capability can be used to alter not just molecules but the economic, political and social bases of agriculture. He makes a strong case that this alteration could take us much further from the Jeffersonian ideal than the immense distance we have already come.

Doyle ranges backward in time to provide background and to make his points by analogy. He shows the



Faustian bargain contained even in such apparent win-win "advances" as hybrid corn and the Green Revolution. He argues, for example, that the least part of the Green Revolution was the short-stalked wheat and rice varieties that could support heavier heads.

The major part was the need the high-yielding varieties had for fertilizer. Moreover, the new seeds often lacked rural street-smarts. Unlike native varieties, the short-stalked plants lacked resistance to disease, pests and weeds. So they also needed herbicides and pesticides.

The implication is that the Green Revolution was misnamed -- it was rather a social and economic putsch. Evicting the low-yielding but tough and tenacious varieties led to an eviction of another sort -- of the people who had eked by with those varieties. Farming went from labor intensive to capital intensive. A premium was placed on large blocks of land that could be farmed with large tractors, sprayed from the air and weeded mechanically.

The U.S. is not an undeveloped nation. But Doyle argues that U.S. agriculture is as susceptible to radical social and economic change as was the agriculture of primitive nations smitten by the Green Revolution.

The power of the technology Doyle describes does seem immense. Corn and wheat could be altered to fix nitrogen. Vegetables, grain and fruit could be changed to resist their most pernicious pests. Crops could be taught to poison their own weeds. As the ice-minus example shows, if you can think of it, it can probably be done.

The question is: Whose interests will this new technology serve? Doyle believes it will serve the interests of those who have had the vision and wealth and smarts to get control of it. And while the question of control is far from settled, *Altered Harvest* suggests that an array of American and international corporations are consolidating their hold on bioengineering.

In what direction will they take agriculture? If you have \$500 million in fertilizer plant capacity, you will develop a seed which works best, or only, in combination with a particular fertilizer you make. Or you may develop a grain which has wonderful attributes in weed-free fields. Luckily, it has a gene which allows it to survive applications of one particular weed killer -- the one you make. Or you may develop a tomato which tastes best

when fertilized with a particular fertilizer, which you also make.

Such linkages would make certain corporations wealthier. But the full potential of the technology can be seen only when viewed within the larger context Doyle describes. First, he writes, seeds and their genetic material are no longer the common heritage of mankind. Instead, the Congress and the courts now allow the patenting of genetic material.

Second, there are no longer hundreds of individual seed companies. The direct descendants of thousands of 19th century farm families that chose to specialize in the production and distribution of seed are gone. Seed companies have been taken over by large corporations, which see them as key elements in achieving the vertical integration oil companies achieved. By owning the fertilizer and herbicide factories, the gene splicing labs and the seed distributing firms, they achieve a powerful vertical integration.

The conclusion Doyle reaches is that this ownership of the information we call seeds, and of the techniques to manipulate these seeds, makes ownership of the land almost irrelevant. The corporations don't have to do anything as expensive and time-consuming as buying up huge amounts of land. All they have to do is control the templates which are required to make the land useful.

Although Doyle makes it clear that, in his opinion, large corporations lack the moral values and integrity needed if they are to be trusted with agriculture, his book is not a diatribe, or a one-dimensional portrait of the situation. In fact, *Altered Harvest* lacks an environmental or public interest hero. His most vividly drawn portraits are of the entrepreneurs who saw the potential in bioengineering and who moved to develop that potential. It was these entrepreneurs, rather than the Ciba Geigys and Monsanto, who showed how the various elements of the new

technology and the existing system could be put together. But in the end, the large corporations took over the small pioneering firms.

What stands against this seemingly inevitable extension of the agricultural revolution that started with mechanical harvesters and tractors and went on to incorporate the various chemicals? In Doyle's book, at least, not much. There is Jeremy Rifkin and others who are pushing for a look at bioengineering within the context of the National Environmental Policy Act. There are a few small organizations creating arks to safeguard seed diversity against the flood of uniformity promoted by the large corporations.

But Doyle sees nothing else to contain large corporations intent on transforming agriculture into another profit center even though alarms against the trend are being raised. Several months after Doyle's book was released, the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment seconded some of his findings. In *Technology, Public Policy and the Changing Structure of American Agriculture*, the OTA concluded that genetic engineering represents another nail in the coffin of small farms. Today's "small" farms, which of course are large compared with the farms of yesteryear, will not be able to afford the new technology.

Implicit in Doyle's book is the fact that there is no "answer" to the situation he describes. Gene splicing and the cow/pigs or pomatoes it can create could be easily controlled. Frankenstein's monsters may create consternation, but they are manageable.

The real problem, Doyle indicates, lies in the economic system we have built. It has "given" us lives that are marvelous in some ways. But it has its own dynamics, its own rules and momentum. In the case of agriculture and genetic engineering, those rules and momentum appear to be carrying it into an area we had thought to be sacred -- total corporate control of plant seeds and of animals' germ plasm. Now that Doyle has shown us, clearly and unarguably, that those areas are not sacred, perhaps we will begin to do something about it.

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16-High Country News -- June 9, 1986

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On playing mouse to a hungry wild cat

by Bruce Farling

November in Idaho's Selway River country can be a dismal, soggy experience. Monotonous clouds hug the canyons, accompanied by a relentless drizzle. There is no day or night in the strictest sense. Instead you find an oppressive procession of varying shades of gray, known to some as "day," terminating every eight hours in equally oppressive, sodden dark. Selway Novembers rest heavily on the spirit. That is, of course, until you meet a mountain lion.

One fall, I found myself steering a Forest Service truck down 18 miles of washboard known locally as the Selway River road. Sullen at the general prospects of the weather and that day's gruesome duty -- pulling shoes off a bunch of cranky government mules -- I was on my way to pick up the necessary tools, lots of rope, hard hat, chainmail suit, several stout two-by-fours and the last resort, a 30.06.

But anyway, driving along, depressed at the thought of spending another frustrating afternoon in the mud with those obstinate brutes, I didn't immediately recognize the blur bounding across the road in front of me. At first, old cognitive processes kicked in and my mind focused on familiar sights on that road -- deer, elk, hypothermiated hunters. But, one moment here, they don't have tails THAT long!

The lion crossed the road, walked up the cutbank and lay down. I stopped the truck. We stared at each other for five minutes, the animal 10 yards away remaining motionless. All the mountain lions I had ever seen before were vaporous cats, disappearing the moment I noticed them. I'd see little more than their tails as they glided through a lodgepole stand or over a bluff. This one was different; it was as interested in me as I in it.

After gawking at the animal through the windshield, I got out of the truck for a better look. After all, conventional wisdom has it that mountain lions never attack humans.

Taking my eyes off the animal momentarily I walked about 20 feet in front of the vehicle to examine the

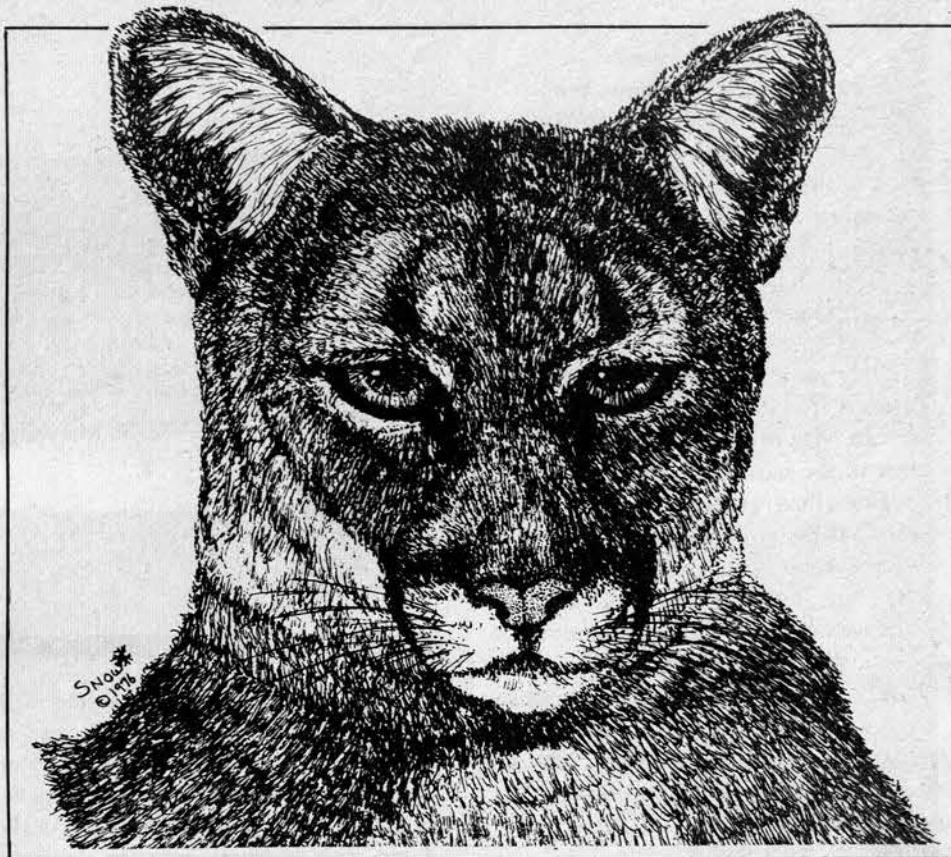
lion's tracks. At that point my belief in conventional wisdom sank to an all-time low. From the corner of my eye I saw a tawny flash explode down the cutbank, toward the road, toward me.

In emergencies, adrenalin has the uncanny ability to overcome limited athletic ability. From my spot in front of the truck I somehow was able to leap/run to driver's side door, open it, dive frantically into the cab, and close/lock the door. All in one motion and in a couple of seconds. I had seen Wile E. Coyote pull off a similar stunt in an old Roadrunner cartoon.

The lion now crouched directly in front of the truck, staring at me. I sat in the cab and stared back, mouth agape, nose pressed to the glass. Every time I moved, a ripple of muscle moved along the animal's back, terminating in a springload tautness in shoulders and hips. Its tail and head remained motionless; the lion's stiffened crouch indicated it was clearly poised for a quick move. Seeing a lion from this distance it is apparent that, like all wild cats, it is among the world's best-equipped predators. Its design is all muscle. Lean and efficient.

This lion was a youngster, weighing perhaps 50-60 pounds -- a half to a third the weight of mature lions in the Selway country. I was probably the first human it had encountered, and possibly its first live prey. And I had no doubt I was considered prey.

It occurred to me during our stare-down that a sudden move on my part might provoke the animal to leap on the hood. While quite sure that both myself and the lion would survive such a move, the truck, a Forest Service vehicle, would undoubtedly be damaged. That is no laughing matter, for it is common knowledge in the agency that those responsible for damage to government rigs spend the rest of their foundering careers exiled to some Forest Service Elba -- say North Dakota -- filling out infinite stacks of accident-related paperwork. I would have none of that. So I did what any respectable commuter would do when confronted with an obstacle, be it Manhattan traffic jam, a Boy



Scout-escorted old lady crossing a street, or a mountain lion blocking a road. I leaned on the horn. Long and loud.

This moved the cat. It disappeared under the truck and emerged next to the driver's side door. It now glared at me from a distance of two feet, snarling and clicking its teeth. I meekly glanced back, whimpering and smiling weakly. The lion was challenging me. Calling me out, as we used to say on the schoolyard. I wasn't interested. I thought of a girlfriend, years ago, who had a gnarled old alley cat with three legs named Tripod. Dutifully I would torment that cat, until one day it snapped. All 10 pounds of it. I found myself with a shredded shirt and some embarrassing claw marks on my back.

So, already 30 minutes late for my appointment with the mules, I let this cat know I wasn't going to be its meal, at least not that day. I rolled the window down a little, cut loose my best imitation Little Richard scream, and let the horn rip again. The lion got the message this time. My last glimpse of it was its tail disappearing behind an old cedar.

Later, after recounting the exper-

ience to friends and co-workers, I was met with some suspicion. Sure, sure, they'd say, not quite believing I'd spent half an hour with a mountain lion. It was suggested I send the story to the "This Happened to Me!" column in "sportsman" magazines, such as, let's see, *Outdoor Strife* and *Field and Stream*. I was accused of making up the encounter to impress people at parties, which wasn't a bad idea, except in this case the story was true.

I still travel the Selway road in November. Only now I drive slower, peering through the ubiquitous fog and clacking windshield wipers, anticipating another glimpse of that mountain lion. But I know that's unlikely. With some luck he's probably 145 pounds now and smart enough to know that chasing whitetails is a far more rewarding and safer endeavor than stalking humans. At least I hope so.

□

Bruce Farling writes frequently for *High Country News* from Missoula, Montana.

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