

High Country News

January 19, 1987

Vol. 19, No. 1

A Paper for People who Care about the West

One Dollar



Steve Hinchman

Carrie Begay with her herd of goats and sheep

In New Mexico's uranium belt:

Rebottling the nuclear genie

by Steve Hinchman

Sometime in the pre-dawn hours of July 16, 1979, an earthen dam holding back wastes produced by United Nuclear Corp.'s uranium mill parted in Church Rock, N.M. From the widening breach poured 94 million gallons of highly contaminated effluent and 1,100 tons of wet slurry sands.

The spill filled the nearby Pipeline Arroyo and flowed south into the Rio Puerco. The flood deposited streaks of yellow sand and "hot spots" in the riverbed for miles downstream, contaminating surface and ground-water as far away as Arizona. About

115 miles downstream, in Holbrook, Ariz., monitors registered chemical alteration at the junction of the Rio Puerco and the Little Colorado rivers. Although most Americans probably think of the Three Mile Island nuclear reactor first, it was the largest release of radioactive waste in the history of the U.S.

The morning of the spill, Flora Naylor crossed the Rio Puerco in pursuit of the family's sheep, as she often did. A Navajo Indian, Naylor, her three sisters and their families live together in a valley along the North Fork of the Rio Puerco, five miles downstream from the United Nuclear mill and 20 miles east of Gallup. The

day after Naylor crossed the Puerco, industry and Indian Health Service officials arrived to warn the family not to go near the river, nor to let their animals water there.

Flora Naylor died at 2:30 in the morning on Nov. 8, 1986, the night before I interviewed her family. As the extended family of 15 or more sat in their two-room house in mourning, Naylor's sister and family elder, Etta Lee, told the story. Bernice Coleman, her niece, translated.

“She didn't know that the water had spilled and she walked in the water. Not even a month

later her feet started getting sores; open sores, with pus, in between her toes. She went to the Indian Health Service in Gallup. Since then it just got worse. They treated it, washed it, but it just got all black. They amputated below her ankle. It was cancer. They said it was because she had diabetes. A month later they amputated again, above the ankle. Then a year later below the knee. Two years ago they cut the other side... It got worse. She was in a wheelchair in the care center in Gallup.”

Family members say the sheep drank water from the spill, and their

(Continued on page 6)

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Dear friends,



High Country News

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The skipping of an issue has led to some audible creaking in the office, as a rusty, rested staff seeks to return to action. How quickly sloth and inactivity become a way of life.

This is the first issue of 1987 and as usual it contains the High Country News index for the preceding year. If you find articles in it you missed, we will be glad to send you back issues, if we have them. The index page also contains a request for issues we are perilously low on.

The office was kept open by Becky Rumsey, the new intern who replaced Steve Hinchman at year end. Thanks to her, most of the mail was opened and the newspapers (we get six dailies and countless weeklies) were read and clipped. But the subscription and Research Fund envelopes sat there, awaiting the return of circulation manager Carol Beth Elliott from a visit to family in Louisville, Kentucky. The accumulation was immense, and it took C.B. a week of long days to dissolve the pile.

December is a big subscriber month: Gift subscriptions come in, and some gift receivers from the previous year drop out because HCN is not for them. We don't bill those who gave the gift because we hope the recipients will decide to stay aboard on their own. And, given our computer, it would be a nightmare to track. As a result, December churns. After all the dropping and adding, the subscription level stayed where it was at the beginning of the month -- an altitudinous 5,450.

All 50 states and a bunch of foreign nations are represented in that group. The most distant subscriber, until we hear otherwise, is Vicki Collins in Singapore, more than halfway around the world, if such a thing is possible. Although Vicki is very eastern now, she worked with the BLM in Idaho, and is wondering how the Great Rift proposal is doing in Idaho.

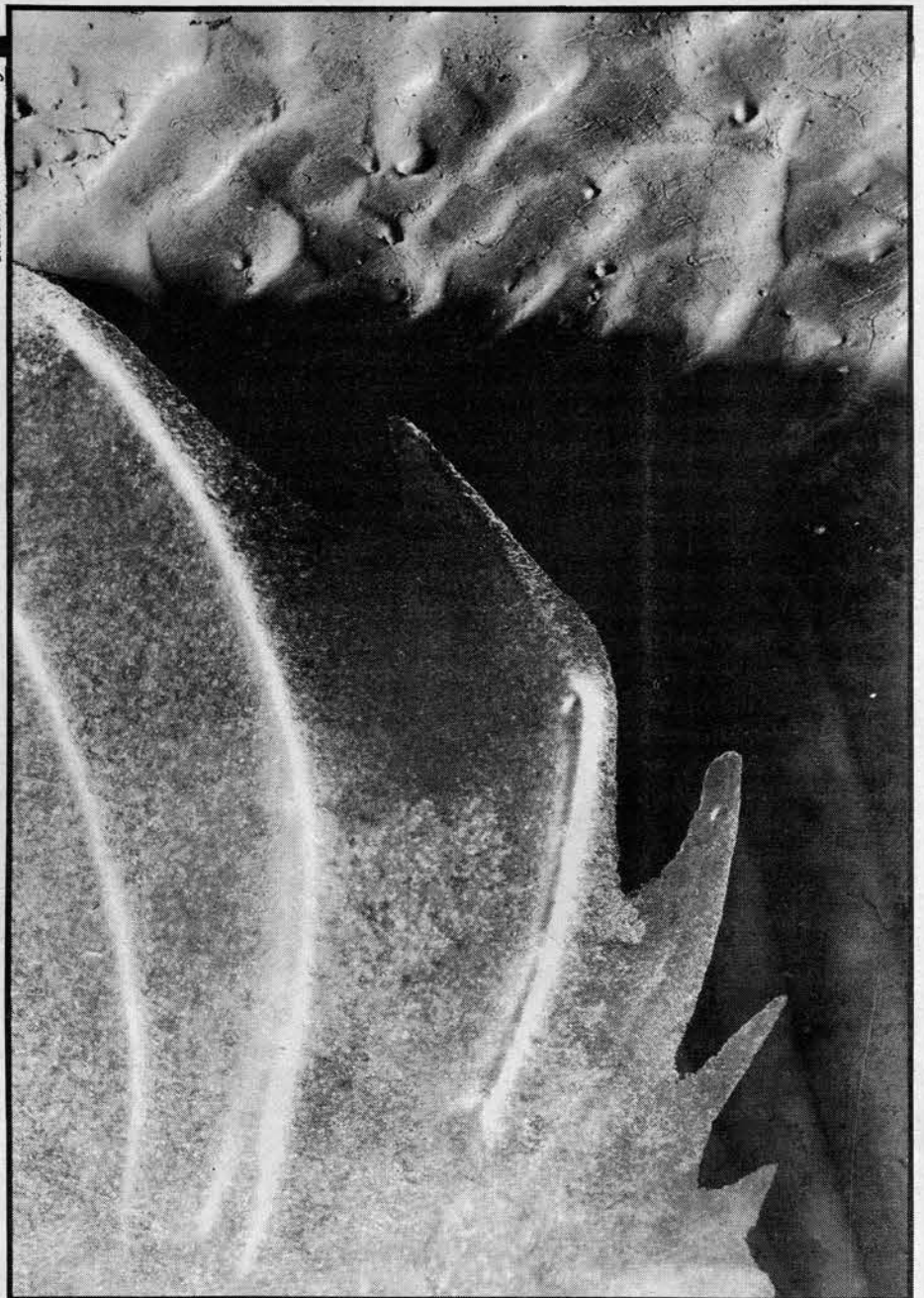
Other readers have written asking that we cover one topic or another. Lillian Hayes of Provo, Utah, asks that we write more about the Central Utah Project. An upcoming story will deal with the relationship between CUP and the Ute Indians. Gene Lorig of Eagle, Colo., says HCN is too late: "Wish you had written about it (water) when I was Eagle County member of board of Colorado River Water Conservation District." He says he has "become an optimist in the Ed Abbey tradition. We are doomed, but it is fun watching."

Speaking of Abbey, part of the staff drove past Oracle, Ariz., on our way to Tucson. Until we saw the town sign, we thought Oracle was a town name Abbey made up. We were on our way from Canyon de Chelly in northeast Arizona to the Desert Museum outside Tucson. We also spent a fruitless hour or so searching for Tucson's downtown (it doesn't have one).

On the trip north, we blundered into the Fiesta Bowl Parade in Phoenix and spent two hours quartering that city in a hopeless attempt to outflank the traffic. The car was filled with internal bickering and curses against the mining of groundwater and the Central Arizona Project, without which Phoenix couldn't have such large traffic jams. We made it home in time to watch some of the Fiesta Bowl, and can report that the game was better than the traffic jam.

The trip was inspired by the stories we've edited about the Southwest. So

Michael Newberry



Ice and quicksand, Utah

we visited the copper towns of Ajo and Globe, Arizona, the Mexican border town of Mexicali, and -- for R and R -- the fishing and tourist village of Puerto Penasco in Mexico along the Gulf of California/Cortez. There are many wonderful things to say about Mexico, but we were most struck by that nation's dire need of several million environmental and safety zealots. Mexico cries out for garbage cans, landfills, mufflers, catalytic converters, gates, handrails and building codes. At the same time, the sanitary, safe, neat Sunbelt cities are mighty colorless after a few days in Mexico.

Development Director Judy Moffatt spent dawn on New Year's

Eve day with 120 other people at the confluence of the Roaring Fork and Colorado rivers in the city of Glenwood Springs, Colo. The site was the scene of that town's observation of the World Instant of Cooperation, which was being observed in all 50 states and more than 45 other countries, including the Soviet Union. More than 6,000 people gathered in McNichols Sports Arena in Denver for a candlelight service.

Finally, the stunning photo is by Michael Newberry of Ann Arbor, Michigan, who sent it to HCN in the form of season's greetings.

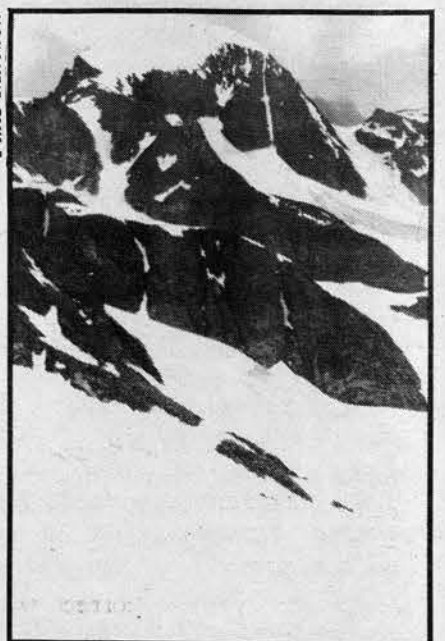
--the staff

HOTLINE

The Bridger-Teton comments roll in

Public comment on the 1,800-page management plan for Wyoming's Bridger-Teton National Forest has been extended again, with the new deadline Feb. 28. Forest Service officials said they needed more time to conduct "listening sessions" in communities. There have already been some 45 public meetings since the controversial plan was released in October. So far, more than 200 people have sent letters to the Forest Service about the plan, says public information assistant Mark Van Every. Still to be heard from are local and national conservation groups, which met last month to plan strategy, and Louisiana-Pacific, the timber company that had hoped for higher timber cuts. The new round of meetings are set for Star Valley High School, Afton, and Library Meeting Room, Kemmerer, Feb. 16; Multimedia room, Middle School, Pinedale, Feb. 17; Dubois High School, Feb. 18; Americana Snow King Teton Room, Jackson, Feb. 19; and Casper College

Finis Mitchell



13,804-foot Gannett Peak, Wyoming's highest, in the Bridger-Teton National Forest

Administration Building, Room 198, Feb. 20. All meetings will begin at 7 p.m.

WESTERN ROUNDUP



Pilgrim Lake in Montana's Swan Range, proposed for wilderness designation

The MWA: 28 years of plotting for the land

In frigid Bozeman last month for the 28th annual meeting of the Montana Wilderness Association, 200 members talked strategy -- the state has yet to pass a wilderness bill -- celebrated outstanding volunteers, and heard from speakers such as rancher Cecil Garland and Montana Sen. Max Baucus (see accompanying story).

The MWA, which has grown to about 1,000 members, gave its Arthur E. Sedlack Award for the most outrageous act in defense of wilderness to Rep. Ron Marlenee, R-Mt. MWA Program Director John Gatchell said that when Marlenee halted the consensus approach to writing wilderness legislation, it was an act that "rescued millions of acres

of Montana's wilderness." The Sedlack Award is named for a Glacier National Park ranger who shot at a snowmobile to stop its driver from trespassing.

The group gave its Sutton Award, including a \$500 gift from Ann and Myron Sutton, to Joan Montagne, former president of both the MWA and Madison-Gallatin Alliance. Others receiving awards for their work on behalf of wilderness were: Lou Bruno, a teacher who has "launched a great grass-roots movement on behalf of the wild Rocky Mountain Front;" Jim Conner, for his work against oil and gas leasing; Jerry DeSantos, retiring backcountry ranger at Glacier National Park, "who joined in the fight against Cabin Creek Coal Mine;" Cary Lund,

coordinator of the wilderness walks program; and Noel Rosetta, retired Forest Service Ranger and leader of the Helena Forest Conservation Coalition.

The MWA elected new board members but candidate Howie Wolke was not among them. An Earth First! co-founder, Wolke spent six months in a Wyoming jail last year for removing survey stakes. Gatchell said Wolke ran on a platform calling for the preservation of all 6 million acres of Montana's wildlands as wilderness. The association position is support for 2.75 million acres of Montana wilderness.

--Betsy Marston

Forest Service refutes senator's attack

Sen. Max Baucus was wrong when he said in a speech to the Montana Wilderness Association that the Forest Service employs more engineers than foresters.

It turns out that not only does the Forest Service have more foresters than engineers, it has five times more.

In his talk, Baucus charged that the Forest Service has become a public-works agency instead of a resource-management agency. He also told MWA members that the Forest Service employs more engineers than the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, the federal agency responsible for public works projects. That statement also turned out to be wrong.

"We certainly regret the fact we were incorrect in that," said Suzanne Lagoni, Baucus' communication director. Lagoni said the person who had helped out with the speech had heard the statistics at a seminar and assumed they were correct without double-checking.

"As soon as we were questioned we did check and found out it was a problem," she said.

The Forest Service has 5,365 foresters and 1,061 engineers, Lagoni said, adding that another source said

there were 10,000 engineers in the Army Corps and 4,000 in the Forest Service.

In the national forests of Montana and northern Idaho, there are 121 professional engineers, down from 181 in 1982, and 583 professional foresters, down from 669 in 1982, said Dick Guth, who heads the information office in the Forest Service's regional office in Missoula.

In his speech, Baucus said: "The Forest Service has opted for extensive roading, forcing timber harvests to the top of drainages -- or encircling drainages as has been done in the Big Hole. Many of us are concerned that these subsidized roads will bring intensive forest management to areas that can't be sustained."

Ranchers, the ultimate stewards of the land, are questioning the short-term commodity orientation of the Forest Service, Baucus said, adding, "more and more, I'm hearing the same concerns from people from all walks."

It's wrong to have a road running to the top of every drainage, Baucus said. "The environmental costs are too high -- and the payoffs in timber are too low."

Baucus' comments reflect concerns expressed by environmental groups nationally, who have sought to cut the Forest Service road budget.

Although his figures were wrong, "it doesn't change the focus of the speech, which is that Sen. Baucus is concerned about the basic mission of the Forest Service," Lagoni said. "Perhaps there is too much emphasis on engineering and not enough on resource management."

Baucus' comments were not appreciated by Jim Rathbun, supervisor of the Kootenai National Forest in Libby. "We don't cut timber so we can build roads," Rathbun said. "We build roads so we can gain access to the forest."

Keith Olson, executive director of the Montana Logging Association, said he was concerned about the statewide wilderness bill Baucus would introduce. He said he disagreed with the senator's position that preservation of natural resources was more important to Montana's economy than commodity development. Olson said the tourism industry provided minimum-wage jobs while the natural-resource industry provided good-paying jobs.

--Bert Lindler

HOTLINE

Cutting more

The Forest Service reports that timber harvesting in the Northern Region's 13 national forests increased 6 percent last year, although sales were down by 2 percent. The Northern Region includes Montana, northern Idaho, North Dakota and northwestern South Dakota. The past year's increase of 79 million board feet was almost all sawtimber, which is sold by competitive bidding. Back in 1940, 118 million board feet were harvested in the Northern Region; in 1986, 1,023.7 million bf were cut -- an increase of 800 percent. The federal share of all timber harvested from the region, however, has declined over the last decade as logging on private lands has increased, says the Forest Service.

Forest plan appeal

Three conservation groups have appealed a management plan and impact analysis for Utah's Manti-LaSal National Forest, charging that it leaves 95 percent of the 1.3 million-acre forest open to oil and mineral leasing without gauging the impacts on watersheds, wildlife and recreation. The groups, the Utah Wilderness Association, Slickrock County Council and Slickrock Outdoor Society, say the plan fails to protect important unroaded areas, and that although it acknowledges the forest's overgrazed state, proposes to increase livestock grazing. The Manti-LaSal has the highest potential for big game of Utah's six national forests and contains the 45,000-acre Dark Canyon Wilderness Area, the LaSal and Abajo mountains, the Sanpitch Mountains, and the high, central Wasatch Plateau.



A climbing organization

The National Outdoor Leadership School, better known as NOLS, will be able to build its dream campus in Lander, Wyo., with the help of Wyoming State Sen. Frank Dusi and his wife. The couple recently donated 38 acres to NOLS, and a Wyoming state planning grant will help fund the new \$2-\$3 million facility. The school, which began in 1965 in Lander, runs wilderness skills courses in Wyoming, Colorado, South Dakota, Montana, Utah, Texas, Alaska, Washington, Mexico and Kenya, and has outgrown its present headquarters. Executive Director Jim Ratz says the new campus will allow the school to expand by providing space for research facilities, seminars and an expanded library. NOLS courses range from rock climbing and sea kayaking to outdoor cooking and glacier travel; all emphasize minimum impact conservation techniques.

HOTLINE



Tom Georges

Anschutz drills a dry hole

Mosquito Creek well draws no blood

Anschutz Corp. plugged its controversial well in the Mosquito Creek drainage near Wilson, Wyo., early in December after finding it dry at 5,200 feet (HCN, 9/1/86). The well, which was within the 240,000-acre Palisades Wilderness Study Area, was almost unanimously opposed by residents of Teton County and the nearby resort town of Jackson. They feared that if oil were discovered, full-field development was inevitable, and they said that oil development was not compatible with an outdoor, tourist-based economy. The wilderness study area overlies parts of the Overthrust Belt, a geologic formation rich in hydrocarbons that runs through western Wyoming and into Idaho. Anschutz will finish reclamation of the drilling site this summer.



Daniel Hoffman, courtesy TPL

Sinkyone Wilderness State Park, California

A scenic addition

About 3,000 acres of redwood groves, Douglas fir and black-sand beaches have been added to a California state park, thanks to the efforts of a state agency and local and national conservation groups. Virgin stands up to 1,000 years old are now part of the Sinkyone Wilderness State Park, which doubled its size and now boasts 17 miles of unbroken, publicly owned shoreline along northern California's Lost Coast. State acquisition of the acreage ends 10 years of dispute among residents, county officials and timber interests. The state bought the land with the help of \$1 million from the Save-the-Redwood League, the Trust for Public Land paved the way by negotiating the purchase of 7,100 acres from the Georgia-Pacific Corp., which helped by selling the land at a low price.

An attempt to save the last 10 percent

In one of the more contested timber sales late last year, 20 people were arrested while demonstrating against the logging of 63 acres near Detroit, Ore.

The area in dispute, the Devil's Ridge Roadless Area, stretches between the Mt. Jefferson Wilderness and the community of Breitenbush, a retreat and conference center built around a series of natural hot springs. Community members say logging the area would ruin the atmosphere that has made their center popular and threaten their water supply.

The forest has such mass that it acts like a sponge after the area's frequent rains, says Mark Ottenad of Breitenbush. In 1981, after a series of clearcuts, the largest flood in almost 20 years struck. "The Breitenbush drainage, an area about 20 (miles) by five miles," he says, "is already more than 50 percent cut. This is the last bit of old growth left here."

When they learned of the Forest Service's plans to have the area logged, a citizens' group, the Oregon Natural Resources Council, appealed the decision. When that was denied, ONRC went to court, where they still hope to save the trees this winter. The Devil's Ridge area was included in the 1984 Oregon Wilderness Bill, according to the council's Wendell Wood, but was removed by Oregon Sen. Mark Hatfield under pressure from the timber industry. The area is an arm of the Mt. Jeff Wilderness, he claims, and the current logging is an attempt to "cut it off at the shoulder instead of the fingers" to exclude it from any future wilderness consideration. Wood also charges the Forest Service with pressuring Bugaboo Timber Company to move quickly, that the loggers had been pulled off other jobs. "That's not," he says, "normal procedure."

But John Fertig, timber sales planner for the Willamette National Forest, says it was economics that prompted the loggers to make haste. "Bugaboo had to put up about \$200,000 of the total sale of \$1.6 million," he says, "and they can't touch it until they've removed at least 25 percent of the volume. Obviously they wanted to get that back quickly." Fertig also says that only a small section of Devil's Ridge was ever included in Wilderness consideration, and that ONRC's appeal came too late.

On Oct. 18, some 18 people lined up to block the roadway Bugaboo was clearing down to the south fork of the Breitenbush River and a quarter-mile up Devil's Ridge on the other side. Four protestors were arrested, while three others climbed into the branches of two Douglas firs and a cedar that were slated to fall. There they remained, 100 feet up in the trees' lower branches, sleeping in hammocks harnessed for safety, for four days and three nights.

The Forest Service closed the area to public access and the logging continued. Tim Holloway, one of the tree-sitters, says that high-powered flashlights would periodically shine on them, and once they were startled by the blast of a siren. All the trees around them came thundering to the ground.

"I was just hugging my tree, talking to it," he says. "I've never been so scared in all my life."

On Oct. 23, a dozen people blocked a temporary bridge Bugaboo had

Jim Stiak



Bumper sticker in Oregon

installed over the river. Four more were arrested. The next day, ONRC announced they had reached an agreement with the Forest Service to stop the logging, the three tree-sitters descended and the area was re-opened. But three days later, when the Forest Service denied they had made such a deal, the protestors gathered again. This time two were arrested for disorderly conduct, but they were released because of overcrowding in the Marion County jail.

Nov. 3 saw 40 people at the logging site, where some stretched a cable across the road, one protestor chained himself to a tree, six were arrested and three others climbed once more into the huge old trees to spend the night. A few days later the Forest Service received a letter claiming that metal spikes, which could damage the saws of both the loggers and the mills, had been driven into the trees. And although the Forest Service's metal detectors found no spikes, the logging came to a temporary end.

"There's no plans to do logging this winter," says Fertig, "but it is permissible in the contract with a day's notice."

Working in favor of the trees, however, is the weather. At 4,000 feet up the west slope of the Cascades, snow tends to accumulate fast and linger long.

The protests were just one of a continuing series of activities aimed at halting the logging of Oregon's old growth. A week before he scaled the fir at Devil's Ridge, Tim Holloway had spent the night in the branches of another tree at the Duck Soup sale, near Eugene. But he only temporarily delayed the "slayings of the giants," as he puts it, and soon they were mill-bound.

In early November, about 60 people staged a march and demonstration at a 40-acre site known as the Sentinel Stand, tucked in rolling farm and forest country at the southern end of the Willamette Valley. They wrapped ribbons and hung signs from the trees. A little to the east, 110 acres known as Bunker Hill has become the center of a lengthy battle of words between Lane County commissioners and the Bureau of Land Management over the county's desire to build a park to preserve the old growth there. The BLM would rather the trees be used for lumber than recreation.

A hundred miles south, near Grants Pass, protests against the logging of the North Kalmiopsis

Roadless Area continue to make news. Earth First! members and others have demonstrated both at the site and at the Siskiyou National Forest headquarters, but have yet to win a permanent victory. In early December, Forest Service officials received a letter claiming that trees in the Kalmiopsis had been spiked by granite cylinders metal detectors cannot sense. The letter, postmarked in Denver, was signed, "Sierra Clubbers Who Aren't Whimps."

All this ado is about saving the last 10 percent of Oregon's old growth. Old growth, as ONRC defines it, is trees 32 inches or more in diameter, 200 years or older. By that definition, less than 3 million of the original 30 million acres remain, and less than a third of what's left is protected. There's a lot of talk about saving the world's tropical rain forests, conservationists point out, while we're destroying the ones in our own backyard.

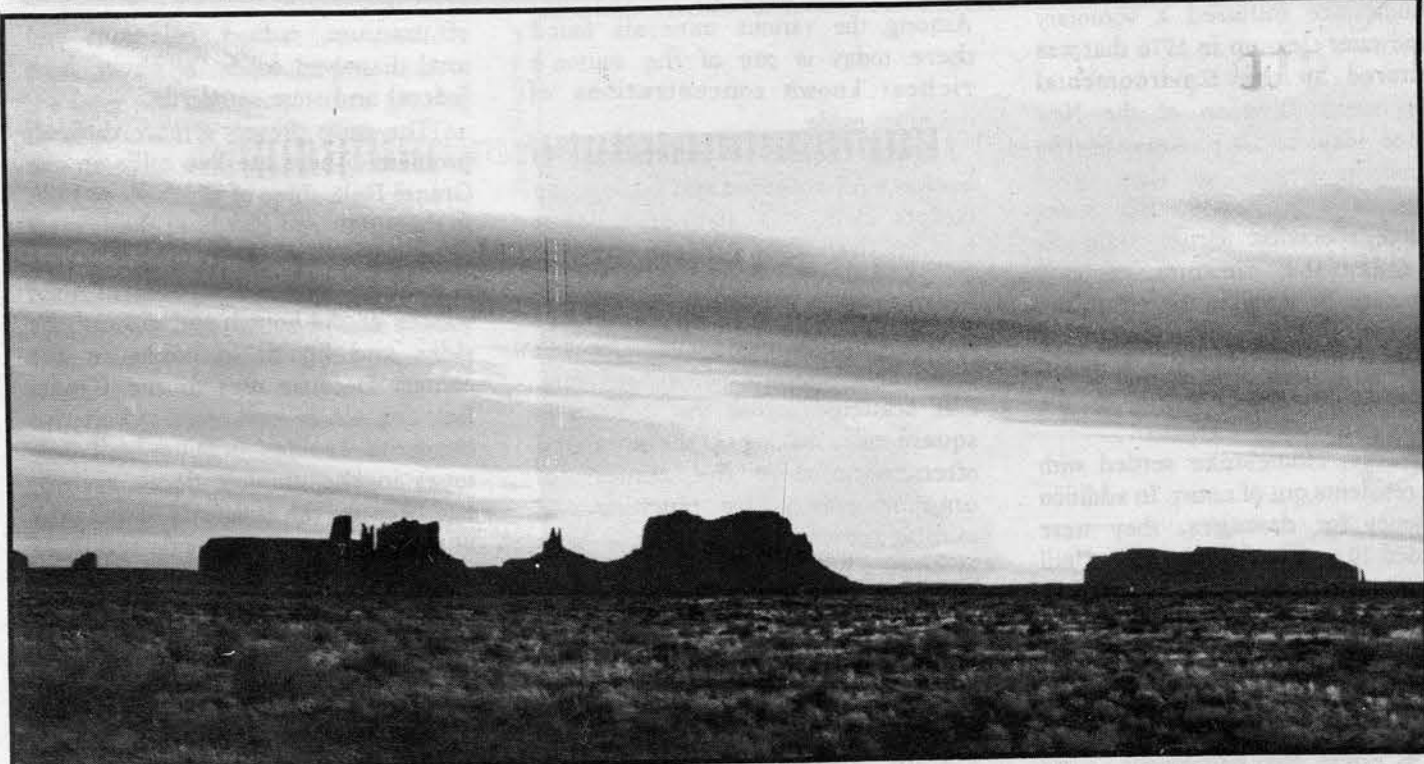
In its preliminary environmental impact report on old growth logging in the Northwest, the Forest Service used the spotted owl, a friendly and easily-studied creature, as their indicator species, which could, by inference, show how logging affects all the species dependent on old-growth for habitat. The Forest Service has proposed preserving 1.8 million acres of old growth in Oregon and Washington, a compromise that has pleased almost no one.

The timber industry charges that more jobs than the Forest Service estimate of 1,300 will be lost, while the other side condemns the loss of wildlife habitat the plan would permit. The Audubon Society has urged the Forest Service to preserve all existing old growth in the region. Over 100 species make their homes in the old growth, they say, and the spotted owl is just one of the victims.

Old growth also benefits the economy, conservationists say. Tourism is an increasingly lucrative industry in the Northwest, and many tourists are drawn by the very trees that are disappearing. It's time, many say, to re-tool the mills and convert the lumber industry into one using second-growth trees.

"The economic effects of logging old growth are on the decline," says Wood, "while those of saving old growth are on the rise. These two lines will intersect soon, if they haven't already."

--Jim Stiak



Monument Valley, Utah

Utah commission issues a visionary report

A citizens' commission has concluded that the major problem affecting the visual grandeur of national parks in Utah is a phenomenon known as "regional haze."

Caused by layers of suspended particulates, haze creates a whitewash effect that blurs spectacular sandstone formations, particularly in late afternoon. Because the ability to see within Utah's parks is "a rare and unique treasure," the seven-member panel said some industries should be prohibited in areas where their pollution would obscure views.

The committee specifically recommended against large coal-fired electric power plants, large smelters, large steel mills, major pulp, lumber or plywood operations, major aluminum reduction plants and coke ovens.

Appointed by Utah Gov. Norm Bangerter, the blue-ribbon commission included two county commissioners, two members of the Sierra Club,

the publisher of the Moab *Times Independent*, a businessman and a Republican legislator. Their study took six months.

The group's support of a ban on industry that threatens park visibility is a signal that "economic growth and environmental protection can be compatible," said Terri Martin, Rocky Mountain staffer for the National Parks and Conservation Association.

But when the concept of protecting "integral vistas" from national parks was first outlined by the federal government as far back as 1980, elected officials in southeastern Utah rebelled. Their political pressure forced Interior Secretary Donald Hodel to retreat, and he eventually turned the integral vistas program over to the states. Last year Bangerter appointed his commission, and it looked at all 17 corridors in the state's parks that were earlier proposed by the Park Service as worthy of protection.

Voting unanimously, the state panel said those vistas need to be preserved "both for the benefit and pleasure of Utah residents and to support our large tourist industry."

The panel also examined existing Park Service studies of air pollution, learning that most pollution drifted into the state from miles away. They also found that the most damaging ingredient in regional haze was sulfur, most of which was produced by smelters and coal-fired plants in Arizona and Mexico.

Terri Martin said the question now is how a state can block pollution that is emitted by industries in other states. There is an "interference clause" in the Clean Air Act that can be applied, she said, but only after a state develops its own standards and puts pressure on the Environmental Protection Agency to get tough.

--Betsy Marston

Report on recreation stirs land use debate

A report to the White House from the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors may fuel a land-use debate.

After spending last year collecting testimony from citizens (HCN, 6/9/86), the commission has urged the president to lead a crusade for the preservation of open space and the development of a land ethic.

The commission recommended that the president create a \$1 billion annual trust fund to buy, protect and develop land as a replacement for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which dies in 1989. The Conservation Fund, which draws its revenues from off-shore oil royalties, has been little used since the 1970s. It was created 20 years ago by a similar commission.

According to Ed Darrell, a spokesman for the President's Commission, the group decided that local agencies should be encouraged to identify and develop land projects for recreation. Since the commission was told to include cities in their review, the 15-member panel also proposed the creation of a network of greenways to link existing parks and to prevent open spaces from becoming ecological islands.

The basic commission assumption -- that the status of recreation on public lands deserved emphasis -- aroused some criticism from other

land use interests, including members of the petroleum industry, the American Farm Bureau Federation, Edison Electric and the American Mining Congress. The Congress' Keith Knoblock said recreation should not take priority on public lands designed for multiple use.

The National Parks and Conserva-

tion Association will sponsor a special conference to discuss the commission's report March 16-18 in Washington, D.C. For information contact Ellen Barclay at NPCA, 1015 31st Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20007 (202/944-8530).

--Becky Rumsey

A new chapter in bankruptcy

Western farmers and ranchers are just beginning to learn how they can take advantage of a new bankruptcy law passed by Congress last summer. Designed especially for farmers who want to remain in business, Chapter 12 allows them more control in re-financing debt than previous bankruptcy legislation. According to Steve Bailey, a Denver-based attorney who talked to western Colorado farmers last month, Chapter 12 allows an operator to sell collateral, such as crops, equipment and land, without the permission of creditors. If filed early, Bailey says, Chapter 12 can be used offensively to reduce debt, "but most will use it defensively."

Bailey says other laws often require monthly payments, which are difficult for farmers waiting for a crop

harvest. A plan must be submitted within 90 days of filing, so timing is critical, Bailey says. Once a plan is approved, its term is three or sometimes five years and a farmer is not dismissed from bankruptcy court until a plan is completed. If it is not approved or completed, a farmer cannot refile.

Family farmers with less than \$1.5 million in aggregate debts are eligible for Chapter 12 if 80 percent of those debts arise out of farming. Family farmers may include individual, joint, partnership and corporate filings so long as the persons filing are engaged in the farming operation. For more information about Chapter 12, Bailey suggests contacting an agricultural extension agent.

--Becky Rumsey

LETTERS

A DESPICABLE SAGA

Dear HCN,

Steve Hinchman's update on the proposed Egin-Hamer road in southeast Idaho missed a few important points. Despite the sleazy way the Bureau of Land Management planning process was circumvented by machination in the Department of Interior, despite the hatchet job on one of the BLM's finest managers (O'dell Frandsen), despite the outstanding work of Jerry Jayne of the Idaho Environmental Council and others, this despicable saga would have remained unknown had it not been swept up in Idaho election politics.

The Egin-Hamer elk herd summers in Yellowstone Park. The herd should have a national constituency defending it, not just the overworked conservationists of Idaho. Over the past two decades, several hundred thousand acres of Desert Land Entry homesteading by agribusiness has removed tens of thousands of acres of wildlife winter range from the recently wild desert grasslands of the vast Snake River Plain of south Idaho.

The result of those encroachments has been massive winter die-off of antelope and deer over the last two winters on the recently developed wildlife range all across the Snake River Plain. Wildlife "depredation" is overwhelming the Idaho Fish and Game Department's ability to respond, costs have skyrocketed, and special "depredation" hunting for wildlife is becoming commonplace.

New potato homesteads in the Egin-Hamer region have pinched off the traditional elk migration route. The proposed route lies along the boundary of the Wilderness Study Areas of the St. Anthony sand dunes complex. The road would directly impact the adjacent Area of Critical Environmental Concern and threatens rare and endangered species.

While the road would reportedly speed potatoes to market along a 10-mile shorter road, potential homestead lands lie throughout the area. The BLM has 4,000 acres of Desert Entry lands pending in the Sands Habitat Management Area. If the road is constructed, there would be irresistible pressure to allow more of this public domain to pass into private hands. Conservationists question how homesteading has been permitted on these sand-dune soils that are among the most erodible in Idaho, a state known for erodible soils.

Regarding the so-called "compromise" of building the road and closing it in the winter: The BLM has been impotent in enforcing off-road vehicle closures in the area. The agency could not prevent the recent illegal blading of three miles of the road across public lands. The county commissioners defy the BLM and will continue to do whatever they want as good ol' boys will. The BLM lacks personnel to monitor the road, let alone enforce a multitude of individual trespass violations.

The message is clear: If the road goes in, the elk go out, "closure" or no "closure."

Randall E. Morris
Mountain Home, Idaho

The writer is chairman of the Committee for Idaho's High Desert.

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The nuclear genie...

(Continued from page 1)

lambs were born damaged. "When you touched the nose it fell off. It left a hole on each side," Coleman translated. Most of the lambs died within a week. Only 10 survived. Then the sheep started to die.

"When they died, the meat was yellow, like there was jello on top of the meat," said Coleman. The family had 155 sheep before the spill; now they have 60. "Flora wore the same shoes forever," Etta Lee told the translator. "She only had one pair. It was contaminated leather."

Seven years after the spill the warnings against using the Puerco are still in effect, although New Mexico health officials say that levels today are low enough so only those exposed over the long term are at risk.

The Navajo are not the only ones affected by New Mexico's uranium industry. Almost 60 miles to the east, near the mining and ranching community of Milan, another group of New Mexicans have long been exposed to dangerous levels of contamination. Just outside of Milan is the Homestake Mining Company uranium mill, which was built in 1958 and is now the second largest facility of its kind in the nation. Bordering the mill site are four housing subdivisions.

Radon gas levels in the area often top New Mexico limits of allowable exposure, and radon-daughter levels in many homes are elevated, possibly as a result of being built on foundations of uranium waste. Occasionally, when the wind blows from the wrong direction, some homes get doused with radioactive sands from Homestake's 170-acre tailings pond.

In 1974, the Environmental Protection Agency discovered that seepage from the tailings pond was contaminating an alluvial aquifer underlying both the mill and the housing subdivisions. The aquifer had been the main supply of drinking water for residents for many years, and in it the EPA found concentrations of selenium 500 times federal standards as well as elevated levels of uranium and other radionuclides.

Homestake initiated a voluntary groundwater cleanup in 1976 that was monitored by the Environmental Improvement Division of the New Mexico Health Department. The reclamation began to show good results in 1980, says EID water resource specialist Bruce Gallaher, but today the cleanup remains incomplete. So despite the effort, the EPA placed the site on their Superfund list in 1982 and required Homestake to pipe water to the community.

In 1984, Homestake settled with most residents out of court. In addition to money for damages, they were awarded 10 years of free water. Until the pipeline into the area was completed in 1985 Homestake hauled water, but many residents still used their wells.

Despite the settlement, some residents are still angry and, they say, stranded. Harriet Wilcox's property borders the mill. "You couldn't give this place away," she said. "All the value went out of it when they discovered the water was bad. We lived here 10 years and drank that water before we ever knew it was contaminated. It's a wonder we hadn't all died." Two blocks away from the Wilcox house is a home that has been for sale since the contamination was discovered.

The Church Rock and Milan sites are both located in New Mexico's Grants Uranium Belt, the most productive and possibly the most polluted uranium mining and milling district in the United States.

The New Mexico uranium industry has generated nearly 40 percent of all uranium ever produced in the U.S., and the state led the nation in total production every year but one from 1956 until the 1982 bust. More than 99 percent of that production came from the Grants Uranium Belt.

The Grants Belt was created about 100 million years ago when volcanic eruptions in what is now western New Mexico brought large amounts of minerals to the earth's surface. Streams carried the minerals down from the mountains and deposited them over a broad area more than 100 miles long and 20 to 30 miles wide.

Among the various minerals found there today is one of the nation's richest known concentrations of uranium oxide.

Lying north of Interstate 40 between Albuquerque and Gallup, the Grants Belt is a semi-arid desert broken by high, chunky mesas, windblown rock formations and the Continental Divide. In the center lies the town of Grants itself, as yet relatively untouched by contaminants. But scattered across the 2,500-plus square miles making up the area, and often adjacent to the centers of uranium activity, are ranching and mining communities that have been infiltrated by contaminants.

At its height, the industry employed nearly 8,000 people in New Mexico, most of them at the five mills and more than 200 mines in the Belt. Today, fewer than 500 people are working in uranium in the Grants Belt and only one mill, at one-tenth capacity, and two mines still operate. Sitting idle are the four other mills, some 80 million tons of tailings, and hundreds of abandoned and flooded mines.

The mines and tailings are idle in economic terms only.

Active or abandoned, the mines and tailings almost continuously release contaminants in four different ways. First, the mines vent radon gas into the air, beginning immediately after the protective coating of topsoil and rock is removed and radioactive ores exposed. Second, a steady flow of contaminated water must be pumped out of the mine shafts to keep them from flooding. (Even when abandoned, radon gas and flood waters will leak out unless the mine has been sealed.) Third, the tailings ponds, or mill wastes, leach contaminated water and liquid mill effluent into groundwater. And finally, powerful southwestern winds scatter radioactive sands off tailings mounds.

Until the New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission established water standards in 1977, the industry pumped tens of thousands of gallons of raw mine water per minute directly into nearby streams. Samples of such raw mine water, taken in 1979 after most mines had treatment plants, show concentrations

of uranium, radium, selenium and total dissolved solids far above both federal and state standards.

The mills present a more difficult problem. There are five mills in the Grants Belt, three of which were built in the 1950s and now have the largest uranium tailings ponds in the nation. A tailings pond is composed of solid wastes at the bottom and around the sides and liquids in ponds in the center. Because ores in the Grants Belt contain several other radioactive elements besides uranium (all isotopes in the uranium decay series), and because the mills only extract the uranium, the tailings ponds retain 85 percent of the ore's original radioactivity.

Efforts to control releases from mill tailings have resulted in little more than containment. The Homestake groundwater reclamation project in Milan has been most successful. Collection wells catch the contaminated liquids as they seep into the ground beneath the tailings pond. The contaminated water is then recirculated, but seepage from the unlined ponds is never stopped. Groundwater that was already contaminated has been partially cleaned by a complex of injection wells at the mill property boundary; they pump clean water into the aquifer to dilute and disperse contaminants that had already escaped downstream.

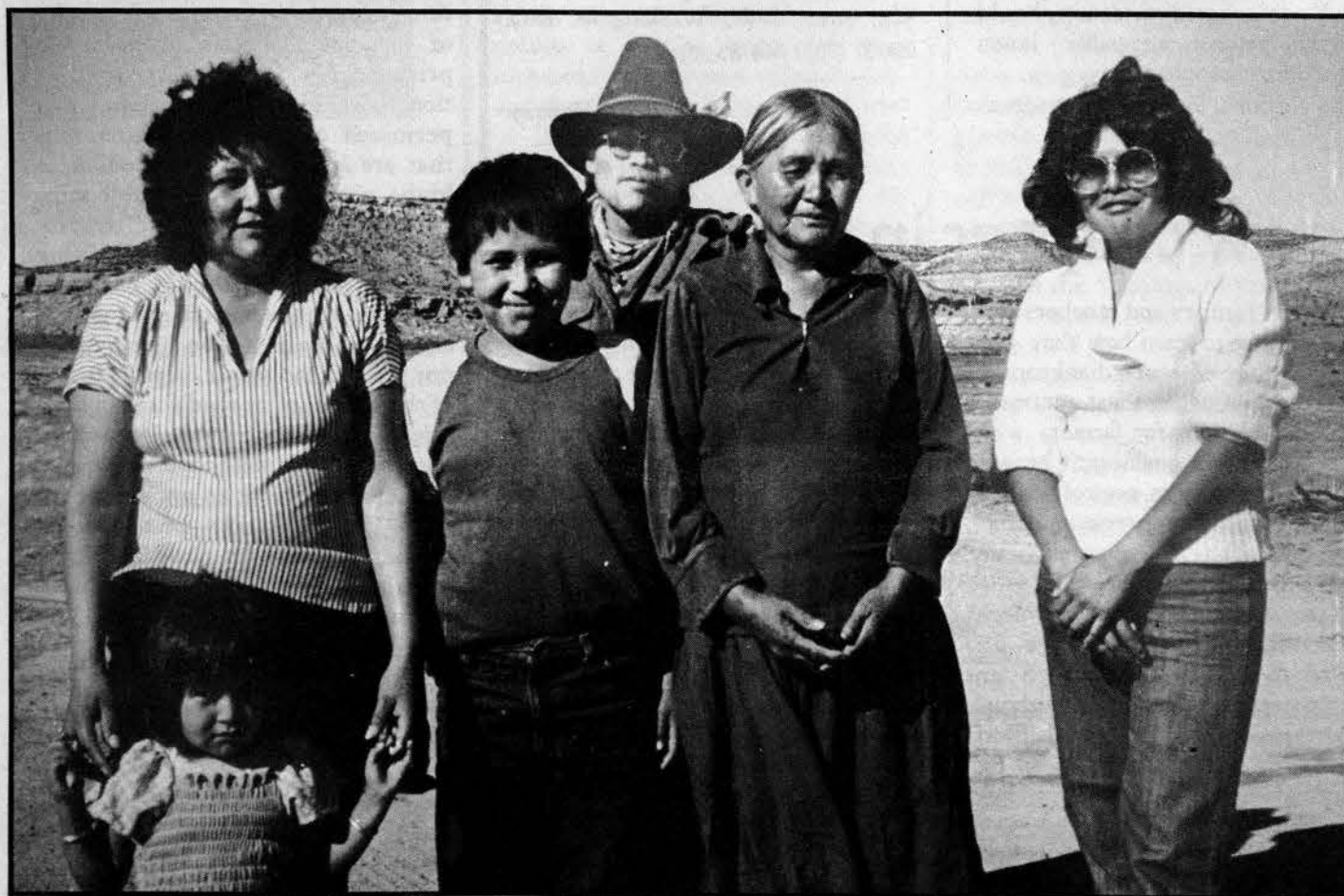
Homestake has repeatedly tried to control the sands blowing off the top of the tailings pond, but residents say gales whip sands off the pile in plumes that can stretch six miles. Homestake's containment efforts include water sprinklers, chemical stabilizers, snow fences and old tires.

United Nuclear Corp. has not even been able to contain its problems. The EID discovered in 1980 that its mill at Church Rock was leaching contaminants into the groundwater. UNC had built the mill and tailings system before its license was granted, and the waste discharge plans were never approved. The tailings were improperly impounded in unlined ponds, says Mike Brown, the acting chief of EID's radiation protection bureau. UNC attempted to solve the problem by buying up the contaminated land, but Brown says the company, which only operated its mill sporadically from 1979 to its closure in 1982, is still in violation of its license and causing contamination.

Leaching, along with residual contamination from the 1979 spill, prompted the Environmental Protection Agency to add the site to the Superfund National Priorities list in 1983.

Radionuclides released from both mine and mill sources can affect the surrounding environment and human populations by several paths, most of which are now regulated by federal and state agencies. Despite these regulatory protections, federal and state studies have recently found that radioactive particles are building up in plants and animals at several stages in the food chain.

Air, soil, vegetation and water samples taken from locations near mine and mill sites and along the Rio Puerco show elevated concentrations of radionuclides. Many of these radionuclides have been found in muscle tissues of both wild and domestic animals foraging in the same area. A 1980 federal Center for Disease Control study found high



Bernice Coleman, left, translated for her Aunt, Etta Lee, second from right, and members of Flora Naylor's family.

Steve Hinchman

levels of the radioactive nuclides thorium, radium, lead and polonium in the liver and kidneys of cattle grazing on the banks of the Rio Puerco. The worst cases were found upstream of the United Nuclear spill site, close to mine dewatering sources. Using the cattle data, the federal study concluded that human exposure to radioactive materials had come mainly from water pumped from uranium mines.

On the western edge of the Grants Belt, nearly half the estimated 10,000 Navajo that live in the Rio Puerco valley depend on the river or adjacent wells to water their livestock. Uranium mines less than a mile upstream of the United Nuclear mill at Church Rock pumped mine waters into the Puerco for 15 years until February 1986. The Puerco, by nature an ephemeral stream and often dry in the hot summer months, flowed continuously during the years of mine dewatering. And even though the two companies operating at Church Rock, United Nuclear and Kerr McGee, installed water treatment plants in 1977, EPA records show consistent violations of their discharge permits.

That contamination lingers. Carrie Begay, 64, lives along the Rio Puerco on the Navajo Indian Reservation near Lupton, Ariz. She and her family have herded sheep and goats along the river all their lives. They used to water the animals by means of a shallow well along the bank, or simply by digging a hole in the dry riverbed.

Today, the Begays truck in their water from sources up to 15 miles away at \$5 to \$10 a load. But even with clean water near the corral, they say it is almost impossible to keep the animals away from the river when they get thirsty.

The Begays still find red spots on the pancreases of butchered animals, but Carrie Begay says her family eats the meat anyway. "We are afraid, but can't help it because we can't afford to buy meat from grocery stores."

Over the past six years, an Albuquerque-based environmental group, the Southwest Research and Information Center, has monitored the quality of the Puerco and compiled a list of clean wells and safe sources of water. The water quality data is relayed back to local residents through a series of community education meetings at each of the eight Navajo chapter houses along the river.

The center provides an educational service not covered by state health officials, said Puerco River Education Project Coordinator Chris Shuey. "All the information that sits in government files is public information, (but) even though it's labeled public, it does the public no good. We try to make it useful." Because the Navajo speak a different language, the information is even more difficult to understand, he added.

Once the Navajo understood that the river was dangerous -- and that was helped by seeing some bloated carcasses -- Shuey said the Navajo began to ask questions, such as how to reduce their risks and exposure. One man, seeing far into the future, said he felt guilty for handing down contaminated animals to his children and grandchildren. He explained that the animals are part of the Navajo's religious and spiritual system and he was concerned that his descendants would reject their religious and spiritual heritage for fear that the

Steve Hinchman



The North Fork of the Rio Puerco in Church Rock, N.M., two miles

downstream of the United Nuclear Corp.'s mill. The low banks on the left and right are fords for animals that graze in the area.

animals would always be contaminated.

EID engineers say a year after the spill there was a tenfold decline in radionuclide concentrations in the Puerco, and that this year contaminants in the river returned to natural levels. Yet data from the center's monitoring shows concentrations of radium 36 times greater than EPA drinking water standards. Samples for those figures were taken in March 1986 during high water at the New Mexico and Arizona state line. Shuey says the samples show a correlation between high sediment concentration and high radionuclide levels. That means the riverbed is still contaminated, so the river water becomes contaminated when the water runs high and muddy, scouring the bottom.

The spread of contaminants in the Grants Uranium Belt threatens cowboys as well as Indians. A state study, begun in 1983 and just released this year, found concentrations of uranium and other radionuclides in tissue samples collected from cattle and sheep that foraged near uranium mines and mills in the Church Rock and Ambrosia Lake districts. The EID warned that people who regularly eat beef from cattle raised near uranium mines face a higher risk of cancer, and they told

area ranchers that if they continued to eat their own beef, they must not consume the liver and kidneys, which concentrate the radionuclides.

One area rancher, Kyle Roundy, who grazes cattle near the Homestake mill and the Ambrosia Lake mines, said, "I've lived all my life around Homestake and we've never had any problems." Roundy said his family eats their home-grown beef regularly, including the organs, and that they will continue to eat it. "I'll probably die of exhaustion or in a car wreck before I die of cancer."

However, his wife Jeannie, an Albuquerque native, said she has long felt there was something odd about Milan. "I feel it has to do with the really high miscarriage rate they have in this area," she said. "I think the people that live here, that were raised here, are dulled to it."

The state did an epidemiological study of blood, fingernails and hair samples taken from residents in the Homestake area in 1982, but found no adverse health effects. However, a March of Dimes study conducted in the Shiprock mining area in northern New Mexico found a correlation between higher birth defect ratios and the local uranium industry. Almost all of the children with birth anomalies had parents that were either employed in the mines or that lived near the mines (HCN, 2/4/85).

left and right are fords for animals that graze in the area.

Milan and the surrounding communities are mining towns, and the people have lived with and benefited from the uranium industry for over 30 years. They take the risks lightly. In 1977, a leaky pipe at the base of the Homestake tailings pond caused a cave-in of the sand walls holding up the pile. Liquids and slurry sands washed out and flooded 90 acres, all on Homestake's property. According to Harriet Wilcox, the company had to use bulldozers to keep it out of the subdivisions.

One reaction to that spill captures the ambivalent feelings in the community toward the uranium mills. Kenneth Crawford, who has 34 years' experience in the uranium industry, said the spill didn't bother him. "At that time I was working on top of a tailings pile," he said. Crawford and his family seem to be living proof of industry claims that fears of contamination are exaggerated. Crawford said he has mixed yellowcake -- pure uranium concentrate -- with his bare hands. His wife Daisy said, "I've washed more uranium out of his clothes than most people will ever see." They have five healthy children and are grandparents many times over.

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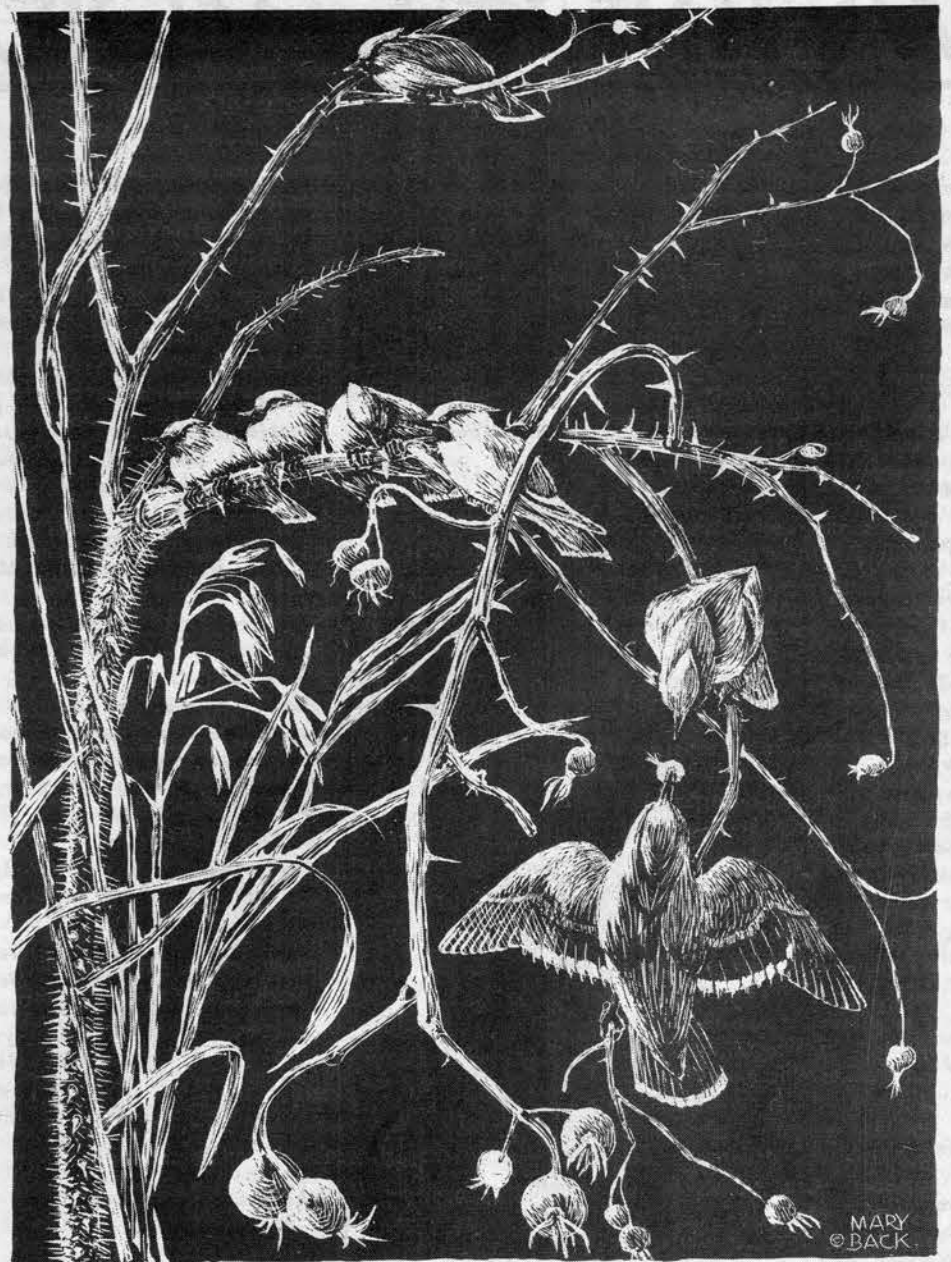
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The cost for back issues of *High Country News* is \$1 per copy, plus \$1.25 postage and handling for the entire order (in most cases). Discount rates are available for multiple copies of the same issue. Copies of most of the 1984 issues and many of the 1970-1983 issues are available. The

HCN office has a shortage of Nos. 12, 13 and 14 from 1984, and 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 18 and 19 from 1986, so if you have spare copies, we would appreciate your sending them our way. Call us at 303/527-4898, or write *High Country News*, P.O. Box 1090, Paonia, CO 81428.

BULLETIN BOARD



COLORADO MOUNTAIN RANGES

The second in the Colorado Geographic Series, *Colorado Mountain Ranges* by wilderness guide Jeff Rennie, vividly describes a state that boasts 54 peaks above 14,000 feet. There are 135 excellent color photos of wildlife, mountains, flowers, trees and desert, as well as schematic maps showing where Colorado's mountain ranges are located. Photographers include Larry Ulrich, Jeff Gnass, David Muench, Pat O'Hara and Stewart Green.

Falcon Press, Box 279, Billings, MT 59103. Paper, \$14.95, cloth, \$24.95, 128 pages. Photos, maps, illustrations.

CONSERVATIVE FARMING

The annual Inland Empire Conservation Farming Conference will be held Feb. 2 and 3 at Washington State University in Pullman, Washington, for farmers interested in topics such as preventing soil erosion and enhancing soil fertility. The conference is sponsored by the Inland Empire Chapter of the Soil Conservation Society of America in cooperation with 10 other public and private organizations, and some 450 conservation-minded farmers attend. Registration is \$30 in advance and \$35 at the door. Contact Carla Root at the Whitman County Conservation District, S. 106 Mill St., Colfax, WA 99111 (509/397-4636).

GIGABUCK GAMBLING

The unnecessary building of power plants may cost our economy \$18 billion a year, reports the Environmental Action Foundation in Washington, D.C. According to the report by Alan Noguee, *Gambling for Gigabucks: Excess Capacity in the Electric Utility Industry*, overbuilding drives up electric rates and costs each household nearly \$200 annually. The installed capacity of electric companies in 1985 was 50 percent above that needed to meet peak demand, and EAF estimates that ratepayers are currently paying over 90 percent of the resulting excess capacity costs. Utility forecasts appear to be improving, says the report, although current projections show that in 1995 most regions will still have excess capacity. Based on information filed with federal agencies by 110 of the largest, privately owned utilities, the report concludes that utility investors should bear the burden of unneeded plants; not the rate payer. *Gambling for Gigabucks* is available in two volumes for \$10 each to individuals and non-profit groups from the EAF, 1525 New Hampshire Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20036 (202/745-4871).

CELEBRATING COLORADO'S VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado will hold its second annual buffet dinner and dance Feb. 13 at the Tivoli in Denver to promote the preservation of public lands in Colorado, from city parks to wilderness. Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado is a three-year-old, non-profit group that encourages citizen participation in public lands through volunteer projects such as building trails, doing impact studies and cleanups and planting trees. Advisory board members include William Coors, Sen. Timothy Wirth, D-Colo. and John Welles, Regional Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. The celebration includes beer and wine, live music, and an auction of outdoor excursions with celebrities, trips, and recreational equipment. The group will also honor the work of outstanding volunteers for the outdoors. Tickets are \$30 at the door or \$20 for members and \$25 for non-members if purchased in advance from Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado, 1410 Grant St., B105, Denver, CO 80203 (303/830-7792).

WYOMING'S FUTURE

The reports of Wyoming Futures Project task forces on tourism, economic stability and communications-transportation will be the focus of a statewide conference Jan. 24 in Cheyenne. The Futures Project is a cooperative planning effort between the public and the private sector that has brought together Wyoming experts to identify alternatives to an economy suffering from declines in agriculture and natural resource industries. A thousand people attended the first conference in 1985, which gave rise to the three reporting task forces and to two others expected to complete reports on government reorganization and agriculture-ranching. For information contact the Wyoming Futures Project, P.O. Box 366, Casper, WY 82602 (307/577-1772).

FOR CROSS-COUNTRY SKIERS

Thanks to the effort and ingenuity of some residents of western Colorado, a new nordic ski area is open and free to the public. The Spring Gulch ski area, about seven miles from Carbondale on the Snowmass Coal Mine Road, features 8.6 kilometers of groomed trails that were built by 30 local volunteers this summer. Ski coach Mark Clark, who is a director of the Mount Sopris Nordic Council, says the cross-country trails will also be used by the Colorado Rocky Mountain School for its ski training program. To make a contribution by becoming a council member, or to request a Spring Gulch brochure, write the Mount Sopris Nordic Council, Box Holder, Carbondale, CO 81623.

WASTE POTENTIAL

A Jan. 31-Feb. 1 workshop in Chevy Chase, Md., will focus on a ubiquitous but usually ignored tool for community development: garbage. Community representatives are invited to learn how recycling garbage can be linked to economic development and community self-reliance. Topics range from alternatives to incineration to health impacts and the creation of joint venture partnerships among low-income organizations. *Garbage as a Tool for Economic and Community Development: Citizen Training in Non- and Low-Incineration Alternatives* is sponsored by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, the Environmental Task Force and Atlantic States Legal Foundation. For information write the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, Attn: Kimberly Crunkleton, 2425 18th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009.

ONLY LAWYERS PAY

The Fifth Annual Western Public Interest Law Conference will be held at the University of Oregon School of Law in Eugene, Ore., March 13-15. Sponsored by the Western Natural Resources Law Clinic, the conference will feature environmental activist David Brower. Topics include toxic substances, Native American rights and energy issues in the Northwest. Only lawyers pay a registration fee of \$20 in advance or \$30 at the door, while everyone else registers for free. Contact Western Natural Resources Law Clinic -- L.A.W., School of Law, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, 97403 (503/686-3823).



Song Dog . . . Documents the life cycle of the coyote in Yellowstone National Park. Photographed by Bob Landis over a ten-year period in Yellowstone's Lamar River Valley, *Song Dog* is twenty-seven minutes of education and entertainment that can be enjoyed by viewers of all ages.

Purchase or rent films and VHS
Dale Johnson P.O. Box 1421 Huron, SD 57350 (605) 353-1153

POEMS WANTED

Attention, poets: The Utah Wilderness Association is holding its second annual poetry competition, with all work submitted by Feb. 1. First prize is \$50; all poems must be unpublished and about wilderness, its preservation, life and values or spiritual nature. Poems must not exceed 40 lines and no more than three may be entered by one person. Send two copies of each poem, one with your name and address on it and one with the poem alone to preserve anonymity along with a \$2 entry fee to Poetry c/o UWA, 455 East 400 South #B-40, Salt Lake City, Utah 84111.

1987 NWPS DATA BASES

The Wilderness Research Foundation has recently completed the 1987 editions of several data bases on the National Wilderness Preservation System. The NWPS DATA BASE I summarizes each of the 445 wilderness units including name, state, acreage, public law, date, modifications, congressional origins, administering agency, region and managing unit. The NWPS DATA BASE II summarizes each of the 50 states, including acreage, population, urban acreage (and ratios of NWPS acreage to each) and wilderness units and acreage by agency (with mean, maximum and minimum size and percent of NWPS). Both data bases are available in two forms: as printed spiral bound booklets or on 5.25 inch floppy diskette data files for popular PC data base software. Data base files for PCs allow the users to sort, query and arrange data according to their own needs. Both data bases come with a 40x26 inch wall map of the United States showing the location and administering agency of each wilderness unit. DATA BASE booklets are priced at \$20.00 each and DATA BASE floppy diskettes are priced at \$15.00 each. Order by writing to NWPS DATA BASES, The Wilderness Research Foundation, P.O. Box 9502, Fort Collins, CO 80525. Data Base I or II

Tropical Rainforest Conference

University of Colorado
Feb. 5-8, 1987

Tropical rainforests are being destroyed at a rate of one acre per second, 30 million acres per year. This conference will gather 26 leading rainforest experts to discuss topics such as loss of biological diversity, effects of cattle ranching, indigenous peoples, climatic effects, and strategies for wise management.

Keynote speaker will be DAVID BROWER. The conference will focus on constructive action, and will include a banquet of rainforest foods, films, workshops with speakers, and a Brazilian Dance Band.

Sponsored by the CU Environmental Center and the Kuja Sni Research Group, the conference costs \$30 for all 3 1/2 days or \$12 per day.

For more information, contact the CU Environmental Center, UMC 331, Campus Box 207, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO 80309 [303/492-8308].



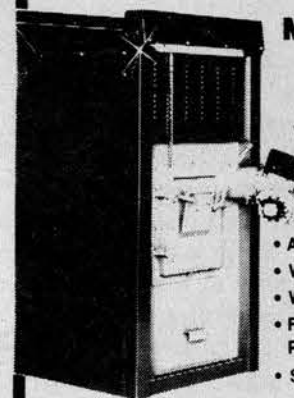
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WESTERN SOLIDARITY, an eight-state coalition working on nuclear and military abuse issues, is seeking applicants for Executive Director in Denver office. Duties: administrative, fundraising, program development, national/regional networking, media. Salary approx. \$17,000. For job description, call 303/355-5124. Application deadline Jan. 26. Western Solidarity, 2239 E. Colfax #204, Denver, CO 80206 (1x19p).

THE ASPEN CENTER for Environmental Studies is looking for a summer intern interested in gaining experience in environmental/outdoor education. ACES provides natural history programs, manages two wildlife sanctuaries and participates in raptor rehabilitation, natural history photography and writing. The internship is from June - August, 1987 and benefits include housing and a stipend. Write Tom Cardamone, Naturalist-Director, Aspen Center for Environmental Studies, P.O. Box 8777, Aspen, CO 81612 (303/925-5756). (1xu)

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PERSONALS

STRONG willing Eastern boy, 17, seeks summer job on Western ranch. Has been camp counselor in boys' camp last two summers. Matthew Bird, 66 Fresh Pond Lane, Cambridge, MA 02138, 617-864-2521. (2x1b)

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12-High Country News -- January 19, 1987

The nuclear genie...

(Continued from page 7)

The only resident to live downwind of the Homestake mill and tailings pond feels differently about the risks than most of his neighbors. He is Kerry Hassell, who last summer spent 14 days from dawn to dusk sitting on a makeshift cross 15 feet off the ground to protest Homestake's refusal to settle with his father-in-law, Fred Holley, who owns the land. Beside the cross was a large home-made sign that read: "CAUTION RADIATION: Contaminated Air, Water, and Land by Homestake Milling Co."

Blowing sands from the tailings pond have deposited radioactive particles on Holley's property, and EID monitors have registered above-background levels of radon gas. Brown says the effects are equal to or below the legal limit for exposure to radiation, but that it is no place to live.

Hassell says the vigil meant more than trying to get a settlement out of Homestake -- he wants the whole area cleaned up. He moved to the land with his wife Lenora and two kids, aged one and two, after his grocery business in Milan failed. It was four months before he ever thought about standing up to the uranium companies. "I didn't think it (the extent of the contamination) was true at first," Hassell said. "I started finding out stuff and I got so mad -- that's when I got on the cross... It causes lung cancer. Really, there's no possibility to clean it up. You have to remove the source."

To the mining community -- even one that has to pipe in its water -- Hassell's position is extreme. Although it is generally known that working in the mines is the most dangerous job of all -- the only job

Grants diversifies

While Homestake may believe there is a future in uranium, the people in Grants are acting otherwise. Grants was New Mexico's uranium boom town. Before the discovery of uranium in the area by Navajo shepherd Paddy Martinez, Grants was a sleepy agricultural town of 1,800. At the peak of the boom in 1978, there were some 12,000 residents in Grants. Since the bust, almost a third of the town has left.

The loss of uranium sent town leaders shopping. The chamber of commerce began an economic diversification program and formed an industrial development foundation. In three years, they brought in a new state women's prison, a coal-fired power plant and the state highway district offices. Chamber of commerce vice president Jean Fisher said in the last year they have brought in five more businesses, including a mattress factory, a plastics molding company and a cement parts maker. As a result of the new activities, Fisher said the town's small businesses are coming back.

The major uranium business in Grants today is the world's first uranium museum, which opened this fall. The museum, an exact replica of a uranium mine, was built by ex-uranium workers who now give guided tours.

David Van Cleef



Kerry Hassell sits atop cross on father-in-law's [Fred Holley] land adjacent to the Homestake uranium mill in Milan, N.M.

local people consider really dangerous -- residents say the miners would gladly keep mining if there were jobs. Kyle Roundy says his mining friends tell him they would love to get their old jobs back. "They say it would be a risk they'd have to take to feed the family rather than do without," he said.

Like a baseball team on its home turf, the uranium industry has the odds in its favor in Grants. "I think that's why these companies are so comfortable," said Jeannie Roundy. "Kerry (Hassell) was a lot of fun to watch but nobody's going to listen." But her husband, for all his acceptance of the risks, displays a growing sense of concern. "I would like to see uranium made safe and mine the heck out of it, or condemn it and get everybody out of here," he said.

As the extent of the contamination became known over the course of the last 10 years, New Mexico authorities began to study ways to make the state's uranium industry safer. By agreement with the Nuclear Regulatory Commis-

sion, the state had regulatory and licensing authority over all uranium mines and mills within its borders. In 1983, Gov. Toney Anaya commissioned a board of scientists to review the state's radiation protection regulations.

Among its 20 recommendations two years later was that the state accept "perpetual control of lands with levels of radioactive contamination unacceptable for unrestricted areas and with such extensive contamination to preclude stabilization and cleanup." On these nuclear reservations the state would prohibit homes, grazing, farming or industrial development. Rather than accept the reservation proposal or update the state's regulations, Anaya decided to give responsibility back to the NRC, pleading "severe budget restraints and other compelling reasons."

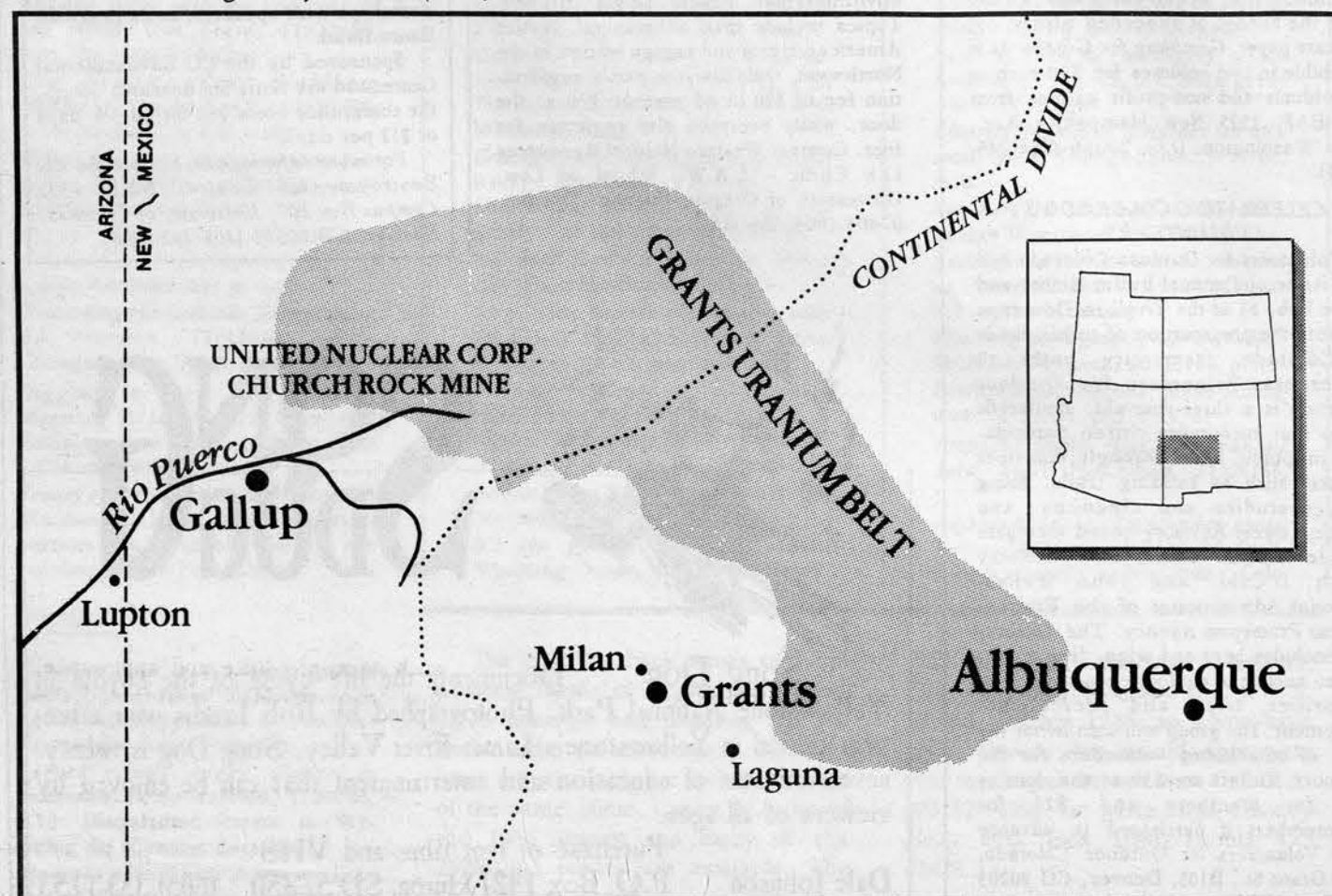
The NRC formally accepted regulatory authority over New Mexico's uranium industry in June 1986 and inspected most of the mills over the course of the summer. They turned up no new violations of New Mexico regulations, but found that several mills needed to improve the stability of their tailings ponds to meet

the new, stricter NRC standards.

The NRC also required milling companies to submit plans for the final reclamation of each uranium mill. Once a mill closes down NRC regulations stipulate that reclamation must begin immediately. Of the four closed mills in the Grants Belt, none have begun a final cleanup and only one mill has completed its reclamation plans.

If plans for the Sohio L-Bar mill reclamation and another related cleanup project at the Jackpile uranium mines can be taken as a sample of things to come, the final cleanup of the Belt's uranium facilities could solve both the area's environmental and economic woes. The two sites are located in the eastern zone of the Grants Uranium Belt, near the town of Laguna, and will bring both jobs and money into the local economy.

Reclamation of the Jackpile open pit mines could begin as early as next year and employ about 100 people for up to five years. The Jackpile mines, on the Laguna Indian Reservation, contain 3,000 acres of pits and 2,000 acres of wastes, and have a well-documented history of surface



and groundwater contamination. The cleanup will cost an estimated \$50 to \$70 million, according to a recent environmental impact statement.

Work on the Sohio mill, located on Cebolleta Land Grant property, adjacent to the Laguna Reservation, will also begin this year. Sohio estimates the project will cost \$10 million, and will take four years, with a four-year delay to allow the tailings pond to dry out.

The Sohio cleanup will be relatively easy since the mill was built in 1977, closed in 1982 and only affected about 100 acres of Land Grant property. However, as the first mill to be cleaned up in the Grant's Belt, the project is crucial to those campaigning for reclamation of the area. "It's going to set a standard for the way other mills are licensed for reclamation," said Paul Robinson, research director for the Southwest Research and Information Center.

Reclamation of the rest of the Grants Uranium Belt may not be so easy. Although two sites, the Homestake Milan mill and the United Nuclear Mill in Church Rock, are eligible for federal funds because they are on the EPA Superfund list, no one is sure where the rest of the money is going to come from.

One opinion holds that the companies that profited from the mining should bear the responsibility, but many doubt that they will or can. Two mills, United Nuclear and the Anaconda facility in Milan, have been shut down since 1982. Another, the closed in 1985. Despite regulations requiring reclamation once the mills have closed, none of the three companies have submitted their reclamation plans to the NRC.

Another option is to get the uranium users to share the reclamation costs. From the beginning of production until the late 1960s, most uranium was bought by the Atomic Energy Commission for use in the defense industry. After 1970, New



The 170-acre Homestake Mining Co.'s tailings ponds and mill complex in Milan, N.M.

Mexico's uranium was almost exclusively used by power plants.

Some industry officials say the days of uranium mining in the Grants Belt are not yet over. Homestake, the only mining company left, intends to operate its mill at least until the turn of the century, according to Ed Kennedy, their environmental affairs director. At present, the mill is only in production to fill long-term contracts and it only operates a few times a year. Some Milan residents say Homestake is delaying a shutdown to avoid the astronomical costs of reclamation.

Most analysts predict that the

uranium industry will not come back soon. No new nuclear power plants have been ordered since 1978, and at least 91 plant orders have been cancelled. The spot price of uranium, which rose from \$6 a pound in 1970 to \$48 in 1979, has dropped to \$17 and is still falling. New Mexican ores only contain about 2.8 percent uranium, and it takes a third of a ton of ore to produce a pound of yellowcake. With production costs at over \$20 per pound, the New Mexican industry can't compete with higher grade ores and cheaper production costs elsewhere.

So the next "boom" phase in the

New Mexico uranium industry may be the expensive cleanup. In 1985, the EID estimated it would cost at least \$300 million to reclaim the 80 million tons of tailings in the Grants Belt. Besides the tailings ponds, the rest of the mill equipment, which is also contaminated, must be disposed of. At the bottom of the list are the hundreds of abandoned mines yet to be sealed. If the job is done right, the area's reclamation era may last much longer than its mining-milling era.

□

Steve Hinchman is a former intern at *High Country News*.

LETTERS

A BACKWARDS PROCESS

Dear HCN,

Your Dec. 22, 1986 issue contains a story written by "the staff" on the Colorado-centered wilderness water issue. That story cites former U.S. Rep. John Seiberling's assistant Andy Wiessner as having "...participated in the creation of millions of acres of wilderness around the nation."

With all due respect to Andy, I thought only God and glaciers created wilderness, and that the best our institutions, laws, and leaders could do was to "designate" certain areas for protection. It's a picky point, but since the article ran in HCN and the entire staff took credit for writing it, the point seems worth making.

Along similar lines, I thought readers might be interested in knowing the fate of hundreds of thousands of acres of wilderness in northwest Wyoming -- the "undesigned" wild lands of the Bridger-Teton National Forest. There are about 1.6 million acres of wilderness on this forest which are not protected by the provisions of the Wilderness Act of 1964; 1.6 million acres out there right now, wild and free. The draft Bridger-Teton Forest Plan would change 56 percent of these lands into roaded country in the next decade,

and planned increases in roading and logging over the life of the proposed Plan would in all likelihood reduce "undesigned" wilderness to virtually nothing.

A final thought: I hope we can all keep stored away in the back of our minds the idea that the Wilderness Act of 1964 has set up a backwards procedure. The Act presumes that wilderness will be destroyed and forces us all to go through the incredibly burdensome legislative process to save a few chunks of a not-too-long-ago entirely wild continent. In those few quiet moments when we allow ourselves to daydream unrealistic ideas, let us dream of a system that requires congressional action to build the next mile of road, to interrupt an elk migration route, or to run topsoil into clear streams. Unfortunately, those events are still commonplace, and require only the barest administrative approval.

Leonard Carlman
Kelly, Wyoming

The "staff" replies:

Most of your points are well taken, but you missed the significance of "the staff" tag on a story. It doesn't mean we all take credit; it means it went through many hands and no one would take credit.

MORE ON ALAR

Dear HCN,

I was pleased to note that HCN has taken an interest in the problems of pesticide contamination of food. However, your article ("The Market Eliminates Possible Carcinogen," Nov. 10, 1986) contained several important errors and omissions that I would like to correct. The article correctly points out that several supermarket chains have agreed to boycott apples treated with the pesticide daminozide (tradename "Alar"). But contrary to the article's statement, Alar is *not* "relatively harmless by itself." Two of the five studies cited in the article relate to the cancer-causing potential of Alar and strongly suggest that Alar causes cancer in laboratory animals. The article does correctly state that Alar's by-product, UDMH, is a particularly potent carcinogen. UDMH occurs as a contaminant of Alar and becomes concentrated during apple processing and heating; thus, apple products, such as apple juice and applesauce, may be particularly hazardous if the apples were treated with daminozide.

The article credits a Nader group for beginning the campaign to eliminate the use of Alar. The article fails to note that a petition was filed with EPA in July 1986 by the Natural

Resources Defense Council, on behalf of a Nader group, the states of New York and Maine, and several individuals seeking a ban on the use of daminozide. This petition contains detailed factual information regarding the carcinogenicity of daminozide and UDMH as well as legal arguments for why EPA should ban daminozide's use on food. EPA has yet to respond to the petition, but the marketplace has acted effectively in response to public pressure.

Finally, interested readers should know that daminozide is not applied to all types of apples. For example, daminozide is not used on Pippins or Granny Smith apples. Moreover, certain apple juice manufacturers, such as Martinelli's, did not accept daminozide-treated apples even before the current controversy. The daminozide problem represents merely the tip of the iceberg on the issue of pesticide residues in our food and water; NRDC's 1984 report, "Pesticides in Food: What the Public Needs to Know" (available from NRDC, 25 Kearny Street, San Francisco, CA 94108 for \$10) provides more information on this important issue.

David B. Edelson, staff attorney
Natural Resources Defense Council
San Francisco, California

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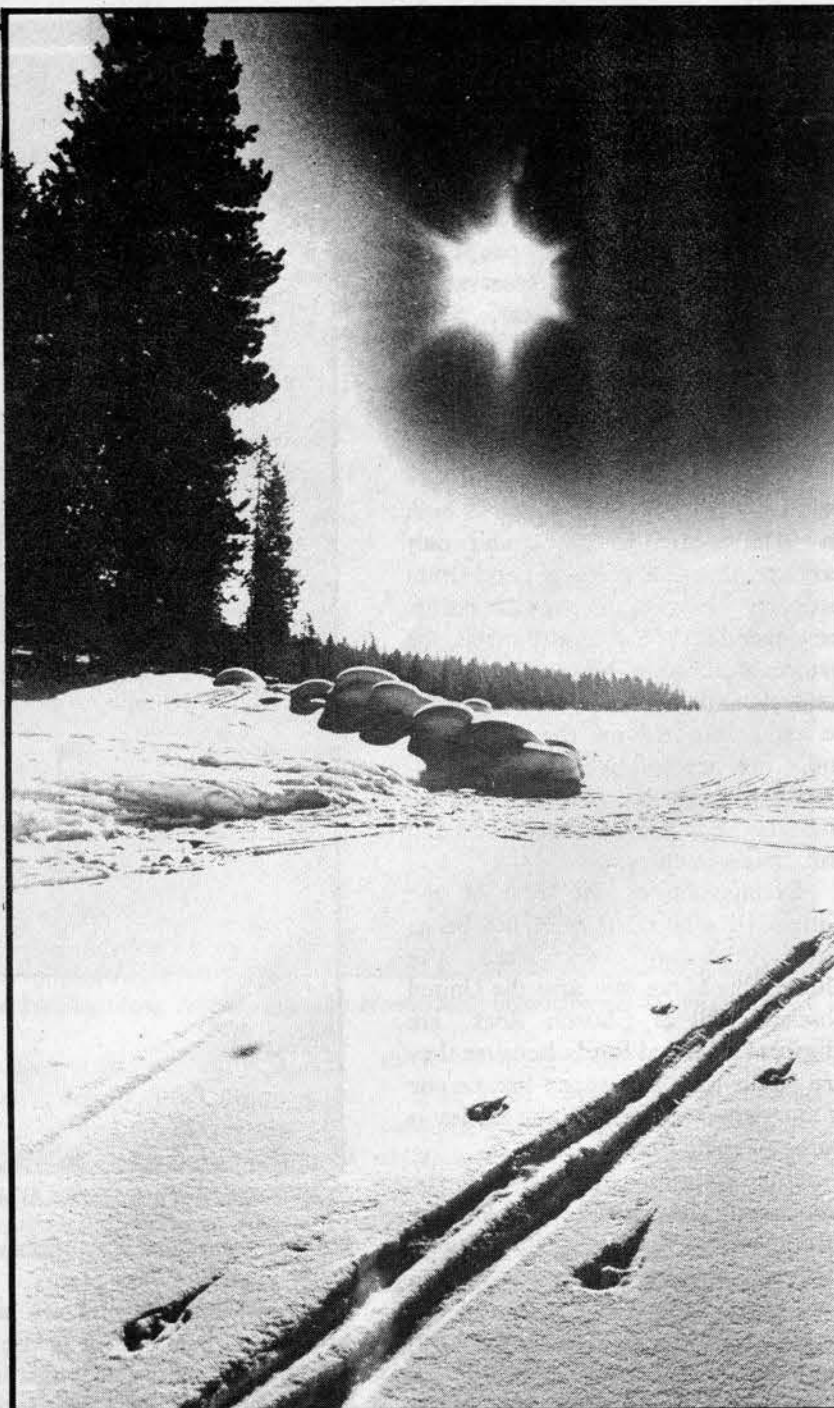
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OPINION

The West's top stories: land, land, land, land

We do not know whether to envy or pity other newspapers when it comes to end-of-year summaries. The tiniest weekly comes up with "10 top stories." Metropolitan dailies choose from a delicious smorgasbord of crime, downtown renewal, homelessness, racial tensions and crippling snowstorms.

The rural West, however, has only one issue. The 1986 *High Country News* index beginning on page 8 lists hundreds of individual stories, but all are about the same question: the use and control of the land.

"Land" is not a few blocks of a downtown, or 20 square miles slated for a new airport. "Land" is thousands of square miles of open space with a few towns sprinkled here and there. The states of Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Utah and Wyoming have about 8 million people. But subtract the Salt Lake City and Denver-Front Range concentrations and you're left with half that number occupying a vast region.

That region is being struggled over today as fiercely as 100 years ago, when the Indians were being pushed out. The two most visible battles in 1986 were for land administered by the Bureau of Land Management in the canyon country of southern Utah and for alpine land run by the Forest Service. In both cases, environmentalists want to prevent development through Wilderness designation by Congress, while the agency and its allies fight to prevent such designation.

The stakes are highest on the national forests because the agency has in place a "Sherman's March through Georgia" strategy toward unroaded land. Under Chief Max Peterson, it is engaged in a multi-billion-dollar effort to punch roads through most of the land that is eligible for wilderness designation.

The battle in Utah is less urgent because demand for oil, gas, coal, uranium, oil shale, carbon dioxide and metals is weak. Lack of wilderness designation there does not mean, as on the national forests, imminent destruction. But it does mean the land will continue to be chipped away at, and that it will remain vulnerable.

The wilderness struggles are part of a larger situation. The fight over the 50-year plan for the Bridger-Teton National Forest in northwest Wyoming is not about wilderness. There, environmentalists and others are fighting to limit oil and gas exploration and large-scale timbering. The struggle is to preserve the forest for recreation and for small-scale loggers, ranchers, and guides and outfitters. Bridger-Teton is the most prominent example of the West-wide struggle over the way the Forest Service has chosen to implement the 1976 National Forest Management Act.

It is easy to come to see the West as federally controlled. But a newly visible struggle over access to public land illustrates the role private land plays here. Throughout the region, hunters, hikers, four-wheelers and environmentalists are furious over their inability to reach public land because of closed roads. Wyoming's Elk Mountain access fight has received the most publicity. There, private landowners have charged hunters high fees for access to public land. More generally, it is estimated that as much as half of the BLM land in the West has access problems.

The situation is not always black and white. Some landowners are profiting from their control of access; others have used political pull with county commissioners or with the federal agencies to close roads and block off former public access. But some landowners say they are acting as conservationists rather than profiteers, by protecting land from overhunting or other ravages. Some say, for example, that they oppose public access to prevent the kind of management the Forest Service performs with chainsaws and bulldozers.

The intertwining of public and private resources in the West can create extraordinary situations. A very large elk herd summers in Yellowstone National Park and winters in Idaho.

Its migratory path crosses land owned by farmers who want to see the Egin-Hamer road built across BLM land in Idaho. Because the road would invade the winter range of the elk herd, BLM local officials refused permission. In retaliation, some landowners threatened to build fences -- *a la* Wyoming's antelope-blocking North Rim fence -- to block the herd's migration. Once the herd is destroyed, some landowners say, there will be no reason not to build the farm-to-market road.

A different aspect of the public access question is seen in Montana, where the state Supreme Court and then the Legislature granted right-of-way through private lands to rafters and canoeists. The judicial decisions were based in part on the public trust doctrine, which gives the public some rights on private land.

The access fight is becoming more visible because of the plight of many owners of private rural land. The decline of agriculture has forced many of them to seek additional income or sell out. Landowners who control access to adjacent public land can profit from hunting fees or enhance the value of the private part of the public-private block they have assembled.

The overall decline in agriculture and in the West's other traditional economies -- oil and gas, logging, coal, copper -- will have its largest effect if it changes the West's cultural base. The Rockies are characterized by a small-town culture resting on economies dominated by agriculture and resource extraction and processing. That culture has been mostly hostile to preservation of the land.

With important exceptions, those who have attempted to preserve land in the rural West have been "outsiders" who have influenced land use here through purchase (the Rockefellers are a spectacular example) or through national legislation setting up parks, wilderness areas or wildlife refuges. Almost always, those laws traded off preservation in one place against development in another, with local interests demanding development and outside interests preservation.

Until the 1960s, a relatively small number of people who were opposed to extractive activities lived in the rural West. Then, in the late 1960s and the 1970s, people with a more preservationist point of view moved in. The change was most striking in the ski and tourism towns. Communities such as Aspen and Crested Butte, Colo., and Jackson, Wyo., have had great influence on the public land around them.

Crested Butte's successful resistance to a proposed molybdenum mine illustrated how radically some mountain towns have changed. Crested Butte began life as a mining town, but in the late 1970s, it dedicated itself to stopping the resurrection of mining. Aspen, once a hardrock mining town, is resisting a marble quarry in a nearby wilderness area. Jackson, whose economy once depended on natural resource extraction from the Bridger-Teton National Forest, now routinely opposes oil and gas exploration.

The movement of people with a preservationist point of view is most striking in the ski and tourist towns. But it has also occurred in the still rural towns -- both the high altitude towns that have maintained a logging or mining or milling base and the lower elevation towns that live off agriculture, trade or small manufacturing. These "mixed" towns are most interesting since it is here that the two cultures have clashed most strongly.

There is more to moving into a community than finding a place to rent or buy. Human beings, like wildlife, require a suitable ecological niche. Obtaining water, food, and shelter and learning to drive on icy mountain roads are comparatively easy. The hard part is adapting to rural culture.

"High" culture is almost certainly missing. "Middle" culture -- public radio or television, art films and even a sophisticated local newspaper -- is probably missing. The churches are likely to be much more fundamentalist than those the newcomer attended in a city or suburb. The schools, starting with high school, are likely to be better at preparing youngsters for marriage and

work in mines or mills than for the work many urbanites expect for their children.

The movement of newcomers into a traditional community is likely to exacerbate the differences. When high school biology teachers in small towns walk around the teaching of Darwin's evolution, newcomers may be tempted to balk, resulting in an overt struggle with Creationists.

Some of the blame -- if one can talk about blame when two distinct cultures come together -- lies with the newcomers. The counterculture movement of the 1970s into traditional rural communities and the party-drug atmosphere of the ski towns set local people's teeth on edge. Corrupting urban influences had come to areas they had considered insular and safe.

It was not just the more flamboyant newcomers who had trouble adapting to small town life or carving out a niche of their own. More conservative people seeking a smaller-scale existence and a closeness to the land also had problems.

What has all this to do with important things: wilderness creation, roading, clearcutting, mining reclamation? Everything. It is these questions of culture that will ultimately determine land use in the West. We do not believe the land can be controlled from the outside, or by people who spend part of each year here, or by people who may settle in the rural West for a few years and then move on.

Control of the land depends, as it always has, on the establishment and maintenance of self-sustaining communities and economies. For the past century, communities and economies have stood on agriculture, logging, mining and milling. The schools, the churches and the social networks evolved to support and nurture that way of life. To take one example, rigorous college preparation courses and an openness and receptivity to outside influences make little sense for people who want their children to stay at home. If the children are to be kept in a rural area, they must be receptive to the kinds of careers that small communities have provided in the past.

Now, in a very short period of time, the West's traditional economic base appears to be collapsing. The outflow of people and income from rural areas can be seen by looking at real estate listings, school enrollment, vacant homes and sheriff's sales. Accompanying this, the land base is up for grabs: Water is sold off, irrigated land returns to natural vegetation or weeds, ditches silt up, fences fall down, downtowns sprout vacant buildings. The loss of people and the economic base in and around the small communities means that control of the public land around those communities is also coming loose. Those who once dominated that land through their relationship with the local federal administrators, through grazing and other permits, and through their congressmen are likely to be gone, or to lack the economic means to continue their domination.

The result of the decline has been great suffering, outmigration, and a quest for "economic development" among those who remain. That quest is about four years old now -- long enough for some trends to be apparent. Some attention is paid to tourism, but the wish of most traditional communities is to attract manufacturing since it fits most easily into communities once dependent on mining, milling and agriculture.

But factory owners aren't touring Livingston or Moab or Butte in search of sites near railroad sidings. At the risk of chewing on glass, our crystal ball says the West's fate should lie elsewhere -- with non-consumptive, non-destructive, non-extractive uses of the land. Unfortunately, traditional rural communities can't easily take up such uses on the present cultural base.

There are three choices ahead. One is rural decline. Almost certainly, some parts of the West

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The West's top...

(Continued from page 15)

will come to resemble Appalachia. The second choice is illustrated by the ski towns; people from elsewhere take over or build from scratch high-altitude cities and establish economies and communities that are urban in character.

The third alternative is for currently rural towns to change their culture enough to earn a living in the new world. For our prejudices, such a solution is the most desirable but it is also the most difficult. We can think of Appalachia-like areas in

the West; we can think of urban ski towns; but we do not personally know of a community that has transformed itself without also turning over its population.

To some extent, the pressure for change is a result of the transformation of the West's economy. Were oil, gas, timber and alfalfa to come roaring back, the pressure would ease. But our bet is that the economic pressure for change will continue. Moreover, even if oil rises to \$50 a barrel, the West should still seek to transform itself. Any future boom will be followed by a future bust. The rural West, as presently constituted, is not in charge of its fate. It is undiversified,

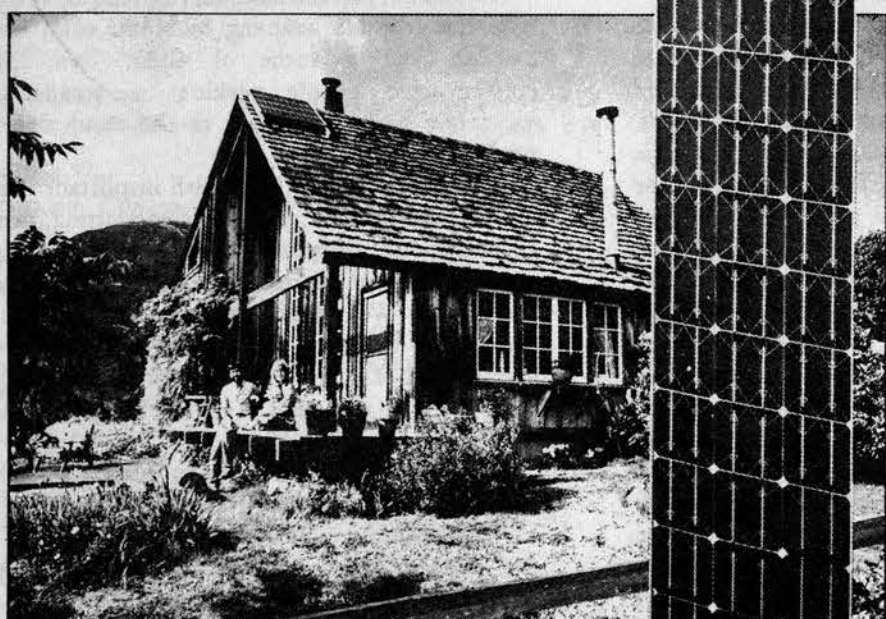
inward-looking, fearful and consequently a straw blowing in economic breezes.

If a boom returns, it will save traditional communities for a while. Whatever happens, families that have learned to live with this region's instabilities for generations will survive. But the broad challenge is for traditional communities to change enough to adapt to a non-extractive, non-destructive future. Those of us who are preservationists include among the things we wish to see survive the people and communities that have been here for the past century.

--Ed Marston

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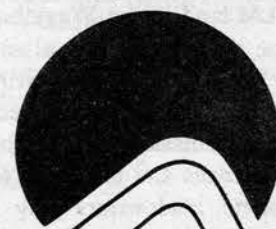
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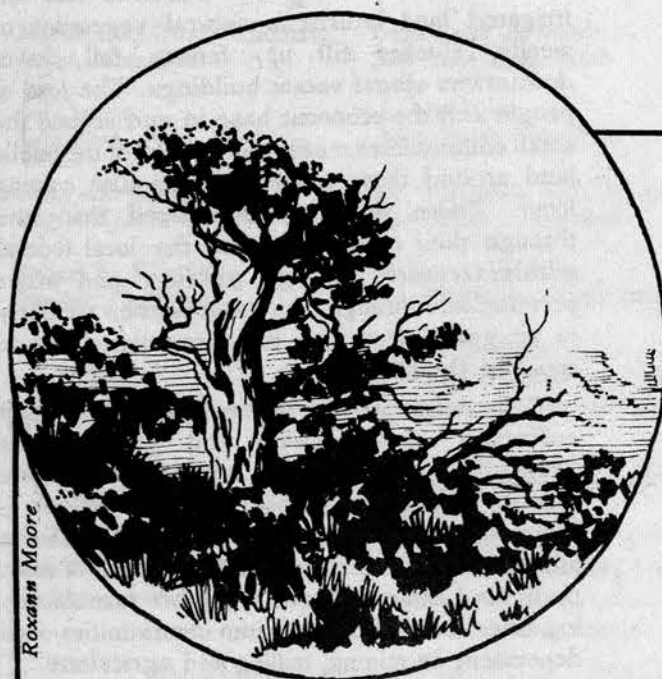
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