

High Country News

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A Paper for People who Care about the West

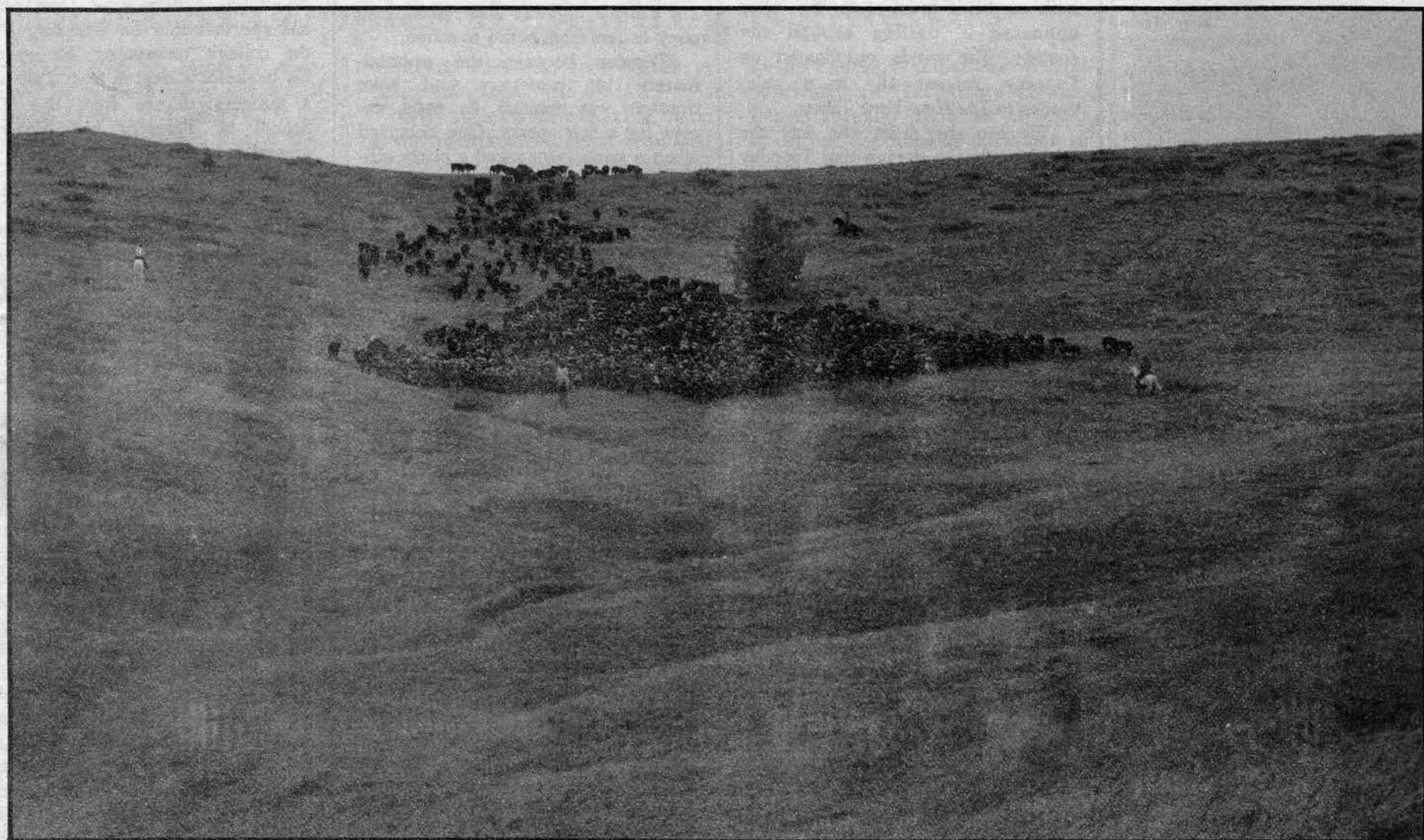
One Dollar



On the national grasslands

Range war in South Dakota

✓ See page 8



Cattle drive in South Dakota

Dear friends,



High Country News

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The muggy Rockies

Staff has always believed that in this part of the Rockies fall begins on August 1, with cool, blowy evenings and diminished day-time heat. This summer has either been an exception to the rule, or yet another example of how we lie, even to ourselves, about local climate.

For whatever our belief about fall arriving in August, along with the peaches and bowhunters, the meteorological truth has been high day-time humidities -- up to an incredible 50 percent -- and warm nights. It was not until mid-August that one could detect the snap of fall in the night air, although the days stayed hot and soggy.

It is interesting that the real weather has remained in the summer doldrums, because HCN's weather has been unusually brisk and fall-like. We think of HCN as a boat. Normally it is propelled by its oars, but occasionally a brisk wind comes up and sends the paper scudding.

Until now, brisk winds never came in the summer. HCN's constituency is an out-of-doors one, and readers and writers start disappearing in May, become scarce in June and July, and are totally unavailable in August, when the flows of manuscripts, cash and even telephone calls go dry.

15 minutes of fame

This August, however, was different, thanks to Associated Press writer Tad Bartimus and her husband, photographer Dean Wariner. Back in late June, the pair spent a day in HCN's Paonia labyrinth and went on to sit through the entire June board meeting in Aspen. Then, nothing, until August 10 or so, when a faint breeze appeared in the person of a Californian, who called to say: "I just read about your paper in my local paper, and I'd like to subscribe."

From then, the letters and calls built to brisk levels, as the story appeared in dailies around the country. The winds culminated on Tuesday, August 18, in a gale, thanks to *The New York Times*.

We can say, from the way the telephone began to ring that Tuesday morning with requests for samples and subscriptions, that the *Times* has as much reach as the rest of the nation's newspapers put together (even including this one). The story that appeared in the *Times* was about one-third the length of Tad's original piece, but it gave the flavor of HCN. The headline, "Tabloid keeps eye on environment: Colorado newspaper raises loud voice for the Rockies," caught the eyes of many *Times* readers who are now HCN subscribers.

We are grateful to the people quoted in the story who found complimentary things to say about HCN, especially since a couple of them tend to see the world from a different perspective.

Mary Kay Hill, press secretary to Wyoming Senator Alan Simpson, said, "The Senator's staff clips articles for him to read. There is really not another publication like it in the West." Bill Cleary, president of Club 20, an organization that promotes development of Colorado's Western Slope, said, "I don't think *High Country News* is balanced, but

it doesn't pretend to be. It is a very well done paper, very professional."

Thus far, the most distant paper to carry the story has been the *Pacific Stars and Stripes*; its story brought a request from Frank Lester, Jr., of Tokyo for a sample copy, and another from Robert Robbins in Manila. Onshore, we have heard from both coasts and from the heartland -- from Omaha, Wichita, Ames City, Chicago, Beaver City, Nebraska, and Oakley, Kansas.

We hope the brisk winds will continue into the fall. At the moment, the HCN offices and various basements around town are host to teetering piles of cartons containing letters, envelopes and cards for a 75,000-piece direct mail effort to find new subscribers. The story about HCN -- which has prompted requests for interviews from Voice of America and Monitor Radio -- gives us hope that this mailing may do better than our traditional one percent return.

Staff has ambivalent feelings about direct mail. It is necessary for the survival of the paper, but you won't find us bragging about how many pieces of junk mail we sent out last month. Because of our ambivalence, we handle writing and production in-house, and avoid the standard tricks of the trade. Our envelopes don't say, "Official document," "Perishable information," or "A curse on those who fail to open this envelope." Assuming the pros know what they are doing, our restrained hucksterism probably puts us at a disadvantage, but now the name recognition conveyed by the AP story may erase that handicap.

Civil disobedience

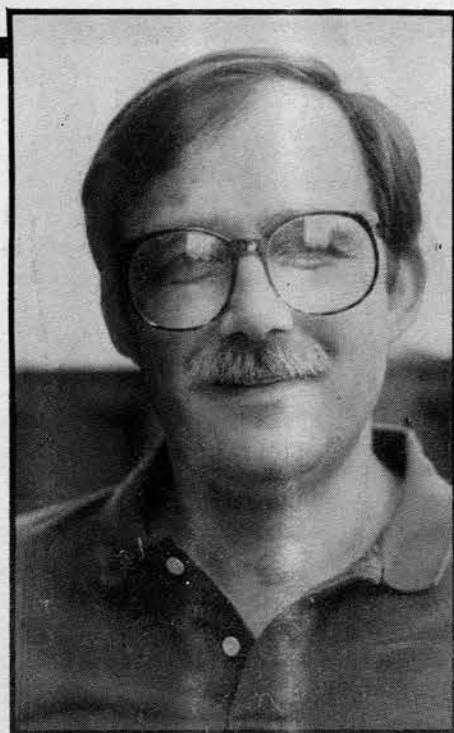
HCN staffer Steve Hinchman took a break last weekend and traveled the five hours to Denver to take part in a demonstration at the Rocky Flats nuclear-weapons plant. His first act of civil disobedience was relatively painless, he reports. Arrested and carried off at 8:12 a.m., he was free three hours later, after being charged with two misdemeanors: obstructing a state highway and refusing to obey orders from police to move.

Tension between the approximately 500 protestors and state troopers was minimal, he says, except for a few sparks. One occurred when a participant asked a burly officer why he was wearing rubber gloves. The officer responded, "Don't want to catch nothing."

After the protester asked, "What



Arrest at Rocky Flats, Colorado



Andrew Melnykovich

do you think AIDS will do to you that plutonium won't?" he was read his rights while the crowd booed.

If that seems like the 1960s in 1980's garb, rural western Colorado experienced another flashback as 25,000 Grateful Dead fans converged on the ski resort town of Telluride. Tye-died hitchhikers, broken down VW vans, and BMWs with radar detectors packed mountain roads in all directions as Telluride was literally overrun. But the "dead-heads," as the fans are called, were peaceful, with many taking part in "harmonic convergence" ceremonies. By Monday, Telluride business people were reporting a profitable weekend.

Straight from the Hill

HCN has a Washington, D.C., connection. He is Andy Melnykovich, whose last name is pronounced exactly as it is spelled. Andy has been D.C. bureau chief for the *Casper Star-Tribune* since May 1986. Before that, he worked for the state-wide daily in Wyoming, specializing in natural resource issues.

And going way back, to before 1983, he was a lab instructor in biochemistry at the University of Wyoming, a film critic, and photo and sports editor for *Branding Iron*, the college newspaper. He earned his bachelor's degree from Yale and a masters degree from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies in 1977.

Some Washingtonians believe the nation's capital is the center of the world; all of us who live in the rural West know it is the center of our world. Andy's *Capitol Hill* column, which began in the last issue, will tell us about that center once a month.

--the staff

HOTLINE

Fire on sight

Faced with wolves killing more livestock in northern Wyoming, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ordered the deaths of three adults in the six-member pack. Before the cattle were attacked, the wolves had killed 10 sheep. The agency's plan was to find the pack by helicopter, capture the animals with net guns, and relocate them to the Flathead National Forest, said Wayne Brewster, a state supervisor for the Fish and Wildlife Service. The new order has already resulted in the shooting of a male wolf.

Wolves and humans: depredating kinfolk

Most people who live or hunt near a wolf pack in northern Montana support the return of the species, according to a recent survey. In 1986, wolves colonized Montana's Glacier National Park for the first time in 50 years; pups were born that year and another litter followed this spring.

Biologist Patricia Tucker, who is with the Wolf Ecology Project at the University of Montana, wanted to know what people living near the pack thought about the wolves. So she devised a questionnaire last year, surveying 480 hunters and the residents of Polebridge, a tiny town near Glacier National Park.

Tucker found that a high 72 percent of residents wanted wolves to live in the North Fork of the Flathead River region. Hunters surveyed agreed with that sentiment, but by a lower 58 percent.

The responses to her 47 questions led Tucker to conclude that "people are beginning to see that wolf depredation to livestock is not a major problem." Citing a report by Steven Fritts of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Tucker said it is not a problem in Minnesota, where 1,200 wolves inhabit a 30,000-square-mile area. Nearly a quarter-million cattle and 90,000 sheep are raised on 12,000 farms in Minnesota, and from 1976 to 1980, an average of 13 farms reported losses due to wolves, she said. The current rate of depredation is five cows and 12 sheep for every 10,000 -- less than a tenth of 1 percent.

Nonetheless, "It is a problem to the individual rancher who sustains the loss. A lot of conservationists feel that ranchers over-react to the threat of depredation, that they should learn to live with the wolf. Well, that sounds nice but it isn't very realistic."

Tucker said the first thing most people do if a gopher gets into their garden or a mouse raids the granola



is to set out a trap. The concerns of ranchers must be addressed because "they can make or break wolf recovery."

While most local residents told Tucker they favored the wolf's presence, they also said they didn't want to change their personal use of the outdoors or any commercial activities that took place there.

Tucker said she added one statement just out of curiosity. It was that humans by nature are predators. Sixty-eight percent of the hunters and 70 percent of the residents agreed with that sentiment. By cross-referencing, Tucker found that hunters who viewed themselves as predators were also more likely to favor the presence of wolves.

Tucker concluded that one of the important things to emerge from her study is that people who live with wolves nearby favor wolf recovery. "We already knew the general public is behind it. Dave McNaught's study showed that visitors to Yellowstone

National Park favored wolf-introduction six-to-one."

Tucker acknowledged it was easy for city residents to favor wolves in the West. "It's another thing altogether when wolves are using your ski tracks as a lane of travel," she said.

Finally, Tucker found that when a person is alone in wolf country there is still some fear of being attacked: 19 percent of the hunters said they were afraid and a lower 13 percent of residents agreed. "That's a very low percentage, but nevertheless almost two of 10 people expressed a personal fear of the wolf," Tucker said. "You run more risk of being kidnapped by terrorists in the North Fork than being attacked by a wolf."

--Bruce Weide

The writer is a freelancer in Missoula, Montana.

Colorado cripples its mining regulators

When Newport Minerals abandoned its gold and silver mines near Cripple Creek, Colo., in 1985, it left cyanide-contaminated ponds that threatened to pollute the valley below.

This month, Colorado's Mine Land Reclamation Board, the regulatory agency for the state's minerals industry, sued Newport and won a \$250,000 settlement to clean up hazardous wastes at the mines.

By the time of the settlement, however, Colorado's budget-axing Legislature had laid off all 15 staffers in the minerals division of the reclamation board.

This was not the only state agency to come under the ax. Legislators cut funding for 174 state jobs, but eliminating the entire reclamation division sparked the most concern among environmentalists. Under Colorado law, the division permits and monitors the state's 1,845 gold, silver, uranium, molybdenum, zinc, iron, oil shale, and sand and gravel mines, plus the 100,000 acres those mines disturb.

The 15 staff members oversaw clean-up operations once a mine was abandoned and also granted permits for new mines at monitored opera-

tions and conducted spot checks to insure compliance with the law.

Why such drastic cuts were made in the reclamation division remained something of a mystery. Ed Bischoff of the Mined Land Reclamation Board said there was a story circulating that the state program duplicated a federal agency's. "When it was pointed out this was wrong -- that there was no federal (minerals) program -- it was like trying to get toothpaste back into the tube," Bischoff said.

Pressed by citizen concern and second thoughts of its own, the Legislature passed another bill on Aug. 11 during the final days of the 1987 session. It brought the minerals division back, but not to full strength. The bill allows for 9.5 people and a \$250,000 budget drawn from industry grants and donations.

Bischoff said the reduced staff would be enough to handle high-priority issues. "But even with a full staff the division fell short of its monitoring duties. We did 600 inspections last year out of 1,845 mines."

The Legislature also felled funding for two fulltime lawyers in the attorney general's office who were working exclusively on hazardous

waste cleanups under the federal Superfund law. Their cases included Denver's Rocky Mountain Arsenal, which has the dubious distinction of being called the most polluted area in the country (HCN, 8/4/86). Nerve gas and pesticides were manufactured there by the U.S. Army and Shell Corp.

Chuck Howe, chief deputy attorney general, said the cuts will make prosecution of the case and other Superfund cases tougher. "We were stretched thin and now we're stretched thinner. We will not be able to prosecute the cases with the same vigor."

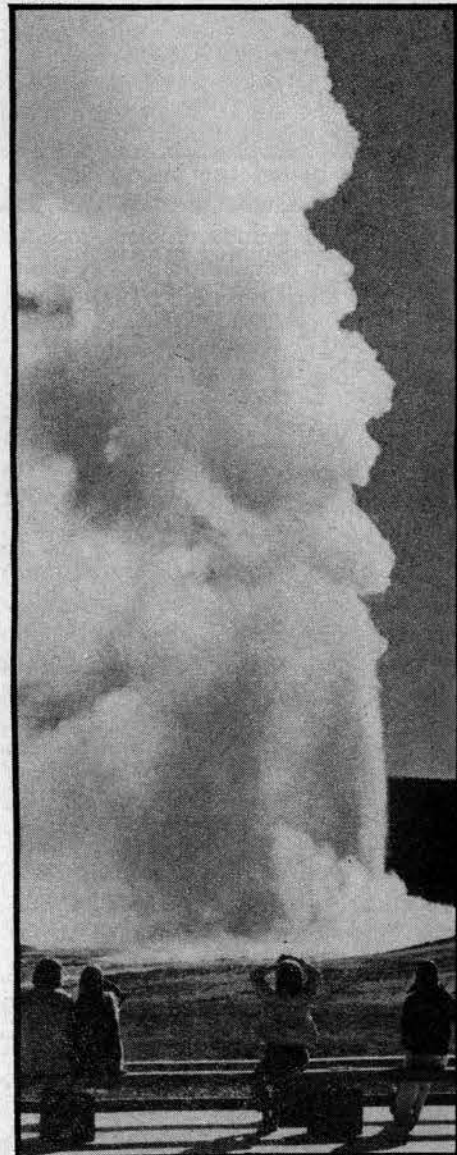
The rate of clean-up at the arsenal, however, probably won't change, said Tom Looby, assistant director of the Colorado Health Department, which has been the state's research arm for its arsenal suits. "What we're concerned about is our need to protect the state's analytical ability so we can continue to analyze the clean-up plans," Looby said. Colorado is suing the Army and Shell under the 1980 federal law that created Superfund and allows for recovery of costs associated with cleanups.

--Staci Hobbes

HOTLINE

A Yellowstone buffer

To protect the most famous geysers in the world, the Greater Yellowstone Coalition has proposed an amendment to the Geothermal Steam Act of 1970. The amendment would create a 15-mile buffer zone around Yellowstone National Park, prohibiting geothermal drilling and oil and gas leasing in the zone. Ed Lewis, executive director of the coalition, concluded that legal protection was needed after the Park Service and U.S. Geological Survey officials said that mining and development could pose a long-term threat to the geyser basin. "Yellowstone is the last place remaining on the planet where we have large geothermal features that are still intact," Lewis said. "Similar features elsewhere have been touched (by development) and are all dried up." The coalition has received political support from the Park Service and Montana Sen. John Melcher, D, he said.



Geyser groupies

Five Park Service volunteers are spending 2,500 hours this summer researching the geysers of Yellowstone National Park. Known as "geyser gazers," they clock thermal activity non-stop seven days a week. Herb Warren, an 87-year-old gazer from Denver, begins his daily round at 3:30 a.m. He has been observing the geysers for 15 years, and says, "The one thing I like about geysers is they're always changing." The volunteers also help explain the park's thermal dynamics to visitors, reports AP.

BARBS

Thousands for broadcast towers, but only pennies for trees.

The U.S. Forest Service wants to raise the fees for broadcast towers on public lands from about \$100 a year at present to about \$1,000 a year.

Yet another unneeded power plant starts generating

A mammoth coal-fired power plant in the heart of rural Utah was fired up this summer. It is the latest in a series of large power plants in the Southwest that keep California cities lighted. It may be the last.

Although the plant's 1,500 megawatts add to the West's large pool of unneeded power, the Intermountain Power Project, or IPP, will not sit idle. The California utilities that own most of the project will shut down older oil and gas-fired plants and cease buying surplus power from elsewhere to keep IPP's turbines spinning.

Opening ceremonies attended by 10,000 people on June 13 for the Delta, Utah, plant were both grand and religious. There were balloons for kids, clowns moving through the crowds and food for all. The Mormon Tabernacle Choir sang and First President Thomas Monson of the Church of Latter-Day Saints gave the dedication.

The tiny Delta air strip brought in an air-traffic controller to help land some 60 private planes carrying utility executives and dignitaries from California and elsewhere. Speeches hailed the project as "an example of God's creation and the inspirational genius of men working together." Republican Sen. Orrin Hatch of Utah boasted, "Utah is the Saudi Arabia of the coal world."

Project sponsors had much to celebrate. Contractors completed the plant, with its two 750-megawatt coal-fired, steam-powered turbines, 17 percent under budget and two months ahead of schedule. IPP completely avoided the kind of disaster that the Washington Public Power Supply System, or WPPSS, blundered into when cost overruns and a decline in demand forced it to default on billions in bonds.

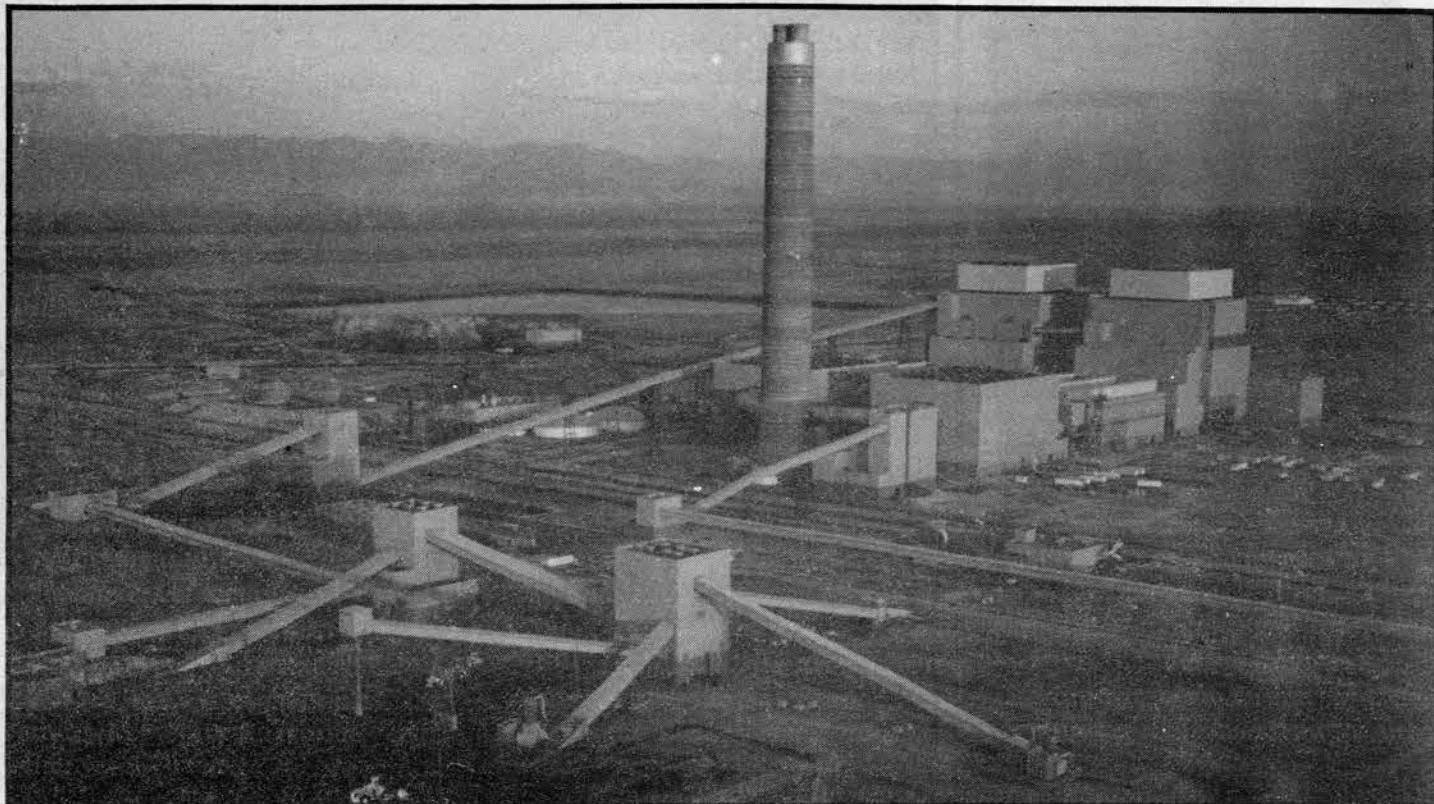
For Utah, the \$5.5 billion project created at its peak over 4,500 construction jobs. In addition to electricity, it will now generate \$38 million yearly in taxes. It will consume 4.4 million tons of low-sulfur coal annually, providing 1,000 jobs in five Carbon County coal mines and in trucking and railroad firms, according to plant construction manager Gary Rose.

The plant will be cooled by irrigation water purchased from area farmers before construction started. By arrangement, the utility purchased only part of each farmer's water. By using the money to conserve water, some farmers will be able to farm about as much land as they farmed before their water was diverted to make electricity (HCN, 4/1/83).

Delta, a town of 2,000 before construction began, tripled to 6,000 during construction. It took advantage of the project to get a new city hall, town parks, a larger police department and two new schools.

To level out the construction boom and bust, the Intermountain Power Agency has guaranteed the town 600 new, permanent jobs. The Delta Chamber of Commerce and the Millard County Commissioners have responded by passing resolutions asking the Los Angeles Department of Power and Water to build its next power station in Delta, as units three and four of the IPP.

The plant was built by a consortium of 38 Utah and Nevada



Intermountain Power Project

utilities, with 25 percent ownership, and six California utilities owning the remainder. Los Angeles dominates the group, with 45 percent of the total.

IPP is the fourth large power plant in the Southwest to have substantial California ownership. The others are the Four Corners, Navajo and Mojave power stations. California prefers to generate its coal-fired power in the rural West, avoiding the expense of shipping coal by rail and the controversies over air-pollution that a California-based plant creates.

IPP made much more noise at conception than at birth. It was proposed by L.A. about the same time San Diego Gas and Electric and Southern California Edison proposed a mammoth plant for the Kaiparowits Plateau in Utah. Kaiparowits was killed by falling demand and environmental objections. But IPP's project survived when L.A. agreed to move it from Cainville, UT., near Capitol Reef National Park, to the western side of the Wasatch Mountains, at Delta.

IPP illustrates how much the world has changed since the late 1970s. Then, utilities were racing the clock against predicted blackouts and brownouts. Unless new plants were quickly built, they said, each part of the nation would suffer periodic shortages.

At least for the next few years, blackouts are not a problem. David Marcus, an energy consultant in Berkeley, Calif., said that 120,000 megawatts of power are hooked into the U.S. Western grid. Of that, 108,000 megawatts are needed to keep the lights on and to provide 25 percent reserve. The other 12,000 megawatts, or 10 percent, is unneeded by some measures of reliability. IPP's \$5.5 billion investment adds 1,500 megawatts to the surplus.

Why did IPP build the new plant, rather than buy power or an unneeded plant from another utility? Ann Garret, spokeswoman for the utility, says construction began before the energy glut became apparent in 1982. But the glut did force IPP's sponsors to cut the project from four units and 3,000 megawatts to two units and 1,500 megawatts after construction started.

Marcus added that municipalities

like Los Angeles, the major owner of IPP, are not subject to regulation by the California Public Utilities Commission. In today's glutted market, a regulated, investor-owned utility needing more power probably would be told to buy another utility's surplus electricity, or perhaps institute conservation. But Los Angeles, he said, can go its own way. It will consume IPP's output even if cheaper power is available from elsewhere. In addition, Los Angeles continues to grow. Marcus suggested that the city could build another coal-fired power plant in the Southwest even as other power plants in the region sit idle for lack of customers.

Because they are free of state regulation, municipalities such as Los Angeles are immune from other trends affecting the nation's power supply. At the moment, the trends are contradictory. To chew into the surplus, utilities are again encouraging consumers to use electricity and downplaying conservation. As a result, some predict that the extra power will be gone by the mid 1990s.

Other trends run in the opposite direction. Power plants originally expected to have 30-year lives may now stay in service for 50 years, which means fewer replacement plants will be needed.

But the main factor that may prevent reduction of the surplus is the entry of outsiders into the utility business. During the energy crisis, Congress passed a bill, called PURPA, to encourage non-utilities to build cogeneration and small hydro-electric power plants. In 1985, according to the Edison Electric Institute, non-utilities had 20,000 megawatts of power, with most of it being sold to utilities for resale to their consumers.

The trend continues. Marcus said 10,000 megawatts of cogeneration is under contract in California, and he guesses that several thousand megawatts of that total will be built. Many basic industries, such as cement plants and refineries, are producing electricity as a byproduct. In some cases, large industries are simply cutting free of the local utility, generating their own power but not selling their surplus to the utility.

Conventional public and private utilities now prevent this trend from becoming an avalanche through

control of the transmission grid. But there are legal and political assaults on that monopoly, and some predict electric power will go the way of telephones, with transmission lines becoming common carriers, available to anyone with power to sell.

For example, Marcus said, Simplot Industries of Idaho wants to build a transmission line from Idaho into Arizona. The line, Marcus continued, will be used to market power generated by Idaho companies to the Southwest.

According to Marcus, the utility industry's Western wish list -- the 10-year plan published by the Western States Coordinating Council in Salt Lake City -- has only one power plant on it over 500 megawatts -- Los Angeles' 1500-megawatt White Pines plant. He speculates that utilities do not want to show a fat wish list because it would weaken their argument against independent power generators.

The unofficial wish list, he said, has many plants on it. It includes Nevada Power's Harry Allen Plant near Las Vegas, the New Mexico Generating Station on the Navajo Reservation, IPP 3 and 4, and Sierra Pacific's Thousand Springs Plant. Each is in the 1,000 to 2,000 megawatt range.

How many of those plants will be built depends in part on how well the utilities market their enormous, expensive surplus. But it is probably more dependent on the political struggle now going on between conventional utilities and the non-utilities who would eat their lunch.

---Layne Miller, Steve Hinchman,
Ed Marston

BARBS

How wonderful -- only a month of "very unhealthy" air.

Los Angeles has had the "cleanest smog season" in at least 30 years, according to the area's senior meteorologist. The first seven months contained only 29 days of "very unhealthy" air.

In an Idaho wilderness, trekking is by air

The 1964 Wilderness Act may have lost some teeth this spring. A public airstrip was improved with motorized equipment in Idaho's Frank Church/River of No Return Wilderness.

Construction crews completed a \$160,000 airstrip resurfacing project at Indian Creek in the 2.4-million-acre wilderness, a townering giant among its sitters in the lower 48. The contractor flew several Bobcat tractors, a dump truck and other pieces of equipment into the site to convert a dilapidated 4,000-foot-long, 20-foot-wide dirt strip into a 40-foot lignite/granite airstrip.

"It is a unique action, as near as we can tell," says Jim Stone, a public affairs specialist for the Forest Service's Region 4. Fifteen air miles inside the wilderness border, Indian Creek is the most popular of the Forest Service's seven airstrips in the Frank Church. It receives about 2,000 flights per year and up to 100 per day during high season. Those landing are outfitters and their clients, sight-seers and picnickers.

In addition, Indian Creek has a boat-launching area on the coveted Middle Fork Salmon River, considered to be one of America's premier wilderness floats. The Forest Service issues about 650 launch permits a year on the Middle Fork, accounting for a large part of Indian Creek's traffic.

All the airstrips in the Frank Church Wilderness are anomalies. When Congress passed the Central Idaho Wilderness Act in 1980, creating the Frank Church/River of No Return Wilderness, a compromise was struck allowing the airstrips to remain open. They had been in use since the 1930s, and the bill would not have passed without the exemption.

Although the main issue has to do with the intrusion of motorized equipment into wilderness, something the Wilderness Act bars, it also raises the question of increased air traffic the improvement may attract to Indian Creek. At present, neither the state Aeronautics Board nor the Forest Service regulates flights into any of the 24 airstrips in the Frank Church. Some pilots know to dial their radio to 122.9, the universal channel for uncontrolled airfields, and announce their presence prior to landing. Others don't know, or don't care to do it.

The improvement was mainly a result of the Forest Service's concern about safety. Some pilots were so worried by the strip that they chose to land on grass instead of risking a broken prop from flying rocks. Dust was another problem. On busy days, the planes generated a huge dust cloud, reducing visibility for pilots and polluting the environment.

"Pilots are on their own," said Nancy McConaughy, administrative assistant for the state aeronautics department. "There's no control towers -- it's just up to the pilot to make sure no one else is trying to land at the same time."

With 24 airstrips in the Frank Church -- seven federal, four state and 13 private -- it's conceivable that motorized equipment will be used again to upgrade or maintain airfields. The Forest Service has no say over what kind of improvements are done on private strips in the

USFS



Improved airstrip at Indian Creek

wilderness, although it can ban motorized equipment from the work.

All the strips need periodic maintenance, and the use of motorized equipment within the wilderness may be easier to approve now. Region 4's Stone said future proposed motorized intrusions will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Pat Ford, spokesman for the Idaho Conservation League, said the group is not opposed to the Indian Creek project. "As long as the equipment was flown in, that obviously would be our main concern," Ford said. "But we wouldn't like a

precedent being set, applied to private withholdings in the wilderness, administrative sites or anything else, for increasing the use of motorized equipment for improvement work."

Jane Leeson, regional associate for the Wilderness Society in Boise, said her group is not opposed to maintaining wilderness airstrips, but it does oppose improving them. "Maintenance for safety and things like that is OK," Leeson said. "But enhancement or enlargement is a problem."

--Stephen Stuebner

James R. Conner



Trekkers at journey's end are, standing: "Walkin' Jim" Stoltz, Dale Baker, Karen Mass, Jim Curtis, Judy Stron, Nancy McLane, Megan Stron, and Judy Stron. Kneeling: Tamara Blank. Donkeys Joe and Jereco carried the gear for the three-generation Curtis-Stron contingent.

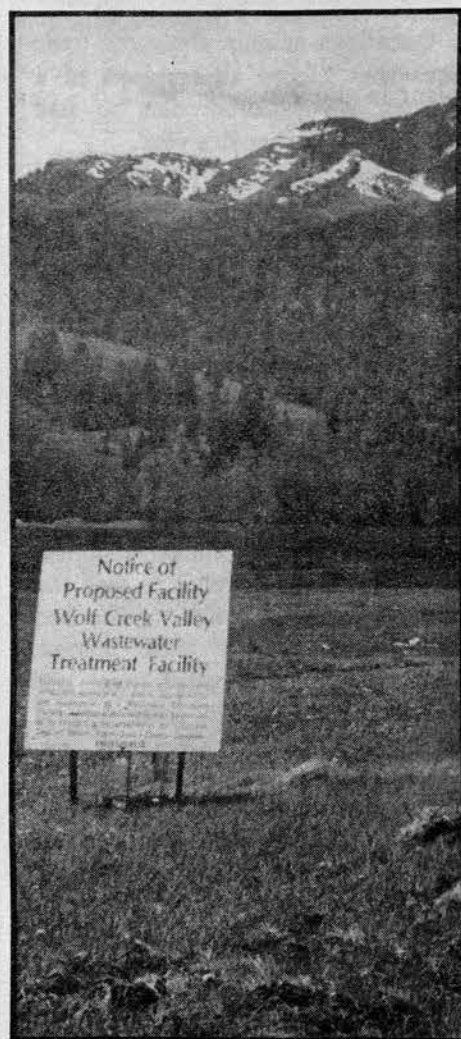
Circumnavigating wild lands

A trek around Montana's Scapegoat, Bob Marshall and Great Bear wildernesses ended at Holland Lake in the Swan Valley Aug. 15. But efforts of Montana's conservationists to add half a million acres to the 1.5-million-acre wilderness complex south of Glacier National Park continue. Speaking between thunderstorms to 150 people who welcomed the trekkers home, John Gatchell, program director for the Montana Wilderness Association, said, "The trek (has) brought the focus back to the land." The group proposed the 350-mile walk that began two months ago to call attention to unprotected wildlands.

Gatchell told the group to urge Montana's delegation in Congress to "put into wilderness what we can agree on now, release what we can agree on, and take time to study the rest." Congress takes up wilderness legislation for Montana again on Sept. 9, when the subcommittee on national parks and public lands meets to mark-up a bill by Rep. Pat Williams, D-Mont., designating 1.3-million acres of wilderness. Republican Rep. Ron Marlenee of Montana, a champion of the "average recreationist," is expected to oppose Williams' bill.

--James R. Conner

HOTLINE



Developer may lack loot

Finances are holding up a controversial ski area in southwestern Colorado. Last December the Forest Service told Westfork Investments Ltd. it could build a four-season resort in Wolf Creek Valley on the San Juan National Forest as long as the firm was financially sound (HCN, 3/2/87). This month Regional Forester Gary Cargill decided that the partnership's finances may have worsened. Westfork has been delinquent in paying property taxes, says forest planner Jim Furnish, and it lacks a partner to replace California developer Harvey Doerring. Doerring declared bankruptcy after an investigation by the Securities and Exchange Commission (HCN, 9/1/86). As part of his remand decision, Cargill has delayed any review of appeals for 90 days because environmental issues may well become moot, he says. Eight appeals are on hold. Meanwhile, the agency recently approved development at East Fork, only five miles away from the Wolf Creek Valley site and involving 4,662 acres of forest land adjacent to a wilderness area. East Fork would have a capacity of 13,500 skiers-at-one-time.

A \$2.2 billion string

There may be a new law of physics -- conservation of dams. That law came to light in connection with Interior Secretary Donald Hodel's recent suggestion that California's Hetch Hetchy Valley be drained. This companion valley to Yosemite is blocked by three dams whose reservoirs provide water to San Francisco. According to *The New York Times* for Aug. 12, restoration of Hetch Hetchy is tied by Hodel to completion of Auburn Dam near Sacramento, Calif., to supply San Francisco with a new water supply. Environmentalists and fiscal conservatives stopped Auburn Dam in 1975, after \$226 million had been spent, with no end in sight. Today, the hydroelectric-flood control-water supply project on the American River has an estimated cost of \$2.2 billion.

6-High Country News -- August 31, 1987

Toxic gas drives families out of a Wyoming subdivision

Questions remain about the toxic gases that forced all residents of a Gillette, Wyo., subdivision to flee their homes earlier this year.

Studies by county, state and federal agencies are inconclusive about why methane, hydrogen sulfide and hydrogen selenide seeped into Rawhide Village, which was built on top of a coal seam next to strip-mining operations. There are also conflicting opinions about whether the health of the 190 families would be threatened if they returned to their homes.

In late June, President Reagan denied Gov. Mike Sullivan's appeal for federal disaster relief to ease the financial plight of residents who had walked away from their homes. When mortgage relief was not readily available from some federal lending institutions, residents encountered another source of stress.

"People are angry and frustrated," said Ben Wieser, a former resident of Rawhide Village. "Nothing's been resolved, no one can live there. There are lots of us, including my family, who don't know what we'll do."

Five months ago, county officials evacuated 31 of the 190 Rawhide Village homes after dangerously high concentrations of methane and hydrogen sulfide were found seeping into homes in the southern part of the subdivision. The county installed monitoring equipment and contracted a study of the situation. After a consulting firm completed a report on the seepage, the county allowed some families to return.

But at the end of May there were new readings of methane seepage in the previously uncontaminated northern part of the subdivision, and two cases of hydrogen sulfide poisoning that prompted county commissioners to order evacuation of the entire subdivision. Residents were given until July 31 to complete moving out.

Testing programs launched by the county and the state in the early months of the crisis focused on why gases were emerging. Methane, for instance, is released not only by natural causes, but also during the mining of coal, both surface and underground.

Three coal mining operations, AMAX, Carter and Triton, are located near the Rawhide subdivision. AMAX's Eagle Butte Mine is the closest, with mining activity only 1,600 feet from the affected homes. A report funded by the county said, "Mine pit dewatering may be a contributing factor (in the release of methane), but this has not been confirmed. When water pressure surrounding coal is decreased, absorbed methane can no longer be retained and will begin to desorb and flow," the report explained.

Methane, a colorless, odorless and tasteless gas bubbles up from creeks in the area, reaching dangerous concentrations within some homes. Mostly a fire hazard, it can cause asphyxiation at high concentrations.

Hydrogen sulfide has a characteristic rotten egg smell long before reaching dangerous levels, but close contact can rapidly produce eye

damage, unconsciousness and death. An even more toxic gas, hydrogen selenide, entered the picture in early July when Wyoming's Department of Environmental Quality found its presence during extensive drilling and monitoring. Hydrogen selenide is most commonly encountered in industrial processes and can cause kidney, liver and spleen damage.

But studies of health threats are conflicting. A report released at the end of June by the federal Centers for Disease Control attributed symptoms reported by residents to stress more than toxic gases. The report indicated "most of the houses appear to be habitable" and that gases are "basically at a nuisance level."

County Commission Chairman Tom Ostlund, however, said that the team spent only four hours in the subdivision and never conferred directly with doctors who had treated Rawhide residents. The report was also full of typographical and factual errors, he pointed out.

Nonetheless, on the basis of that evaluation, the Federal Emergency Management Agency recommended that President Reagan deny the request, which he did.

The decision was not unexpected. Federal emergency-management officials said earlier that the unique nature of the application would complicate the process. Dave Grier, FEMA regional manager in Denver, Colo., said that disaster declaration regulations are written for the "measurable destruction caused by floods and tornados." As there had been no injury or property damage in

Rawhide, federal officials were wary of setting a precedent, he said.

Another precedent could also be set. A gas-related disaster declaration could pave the way for federal relief to homeowners with high readings of radon gas. Recent Environmental Protection Agency studies show that 26 percent of Wyoming homes tested in a recent sample showed dangerously high levels of the inert, colorless, and odorless gas formed by the naturally occurring decay of radioactive substances in the soil.

Within a few days of the denial, Gov. Sullivan announced he would appeal the President's decision. An extensive drilling and testing program would focus on the safety of the area, rather than the probable causes of seepage. Sullivan sought the cooperation of a number of state agencies, as well as AMAX Coal Co. and the federal Bureau of Mines in assembling the information needed for the appeal.

State Geologist Gary Glass said there were two goals for a new study. "We wanted to enable people to weigh the risks of staying in the subdivision, and we wanted enough information to appeal the President's decision on disaster relief."

Overall, the federal report indicated a greater degree of contamination than had been previously detected. It also indicated a potential for subsurface gas migration, contaminating even more homes. The appeal was filed July 31. State and county officials went to Washington this August to state their case to FEMA officials.

Meanwhile, the people of Rawhide are trying to put their lives in order. County Commission Chairman Ostlund said county officials have rescinded the evacuation order, after being told by state legal experts that they lacked the legal authority to enforce it.

"In any case," he said, "most of the families have moved out. They don't want to go back. They feel better, their eyes don't hurt, their noses don't run and they no longer have headaches."

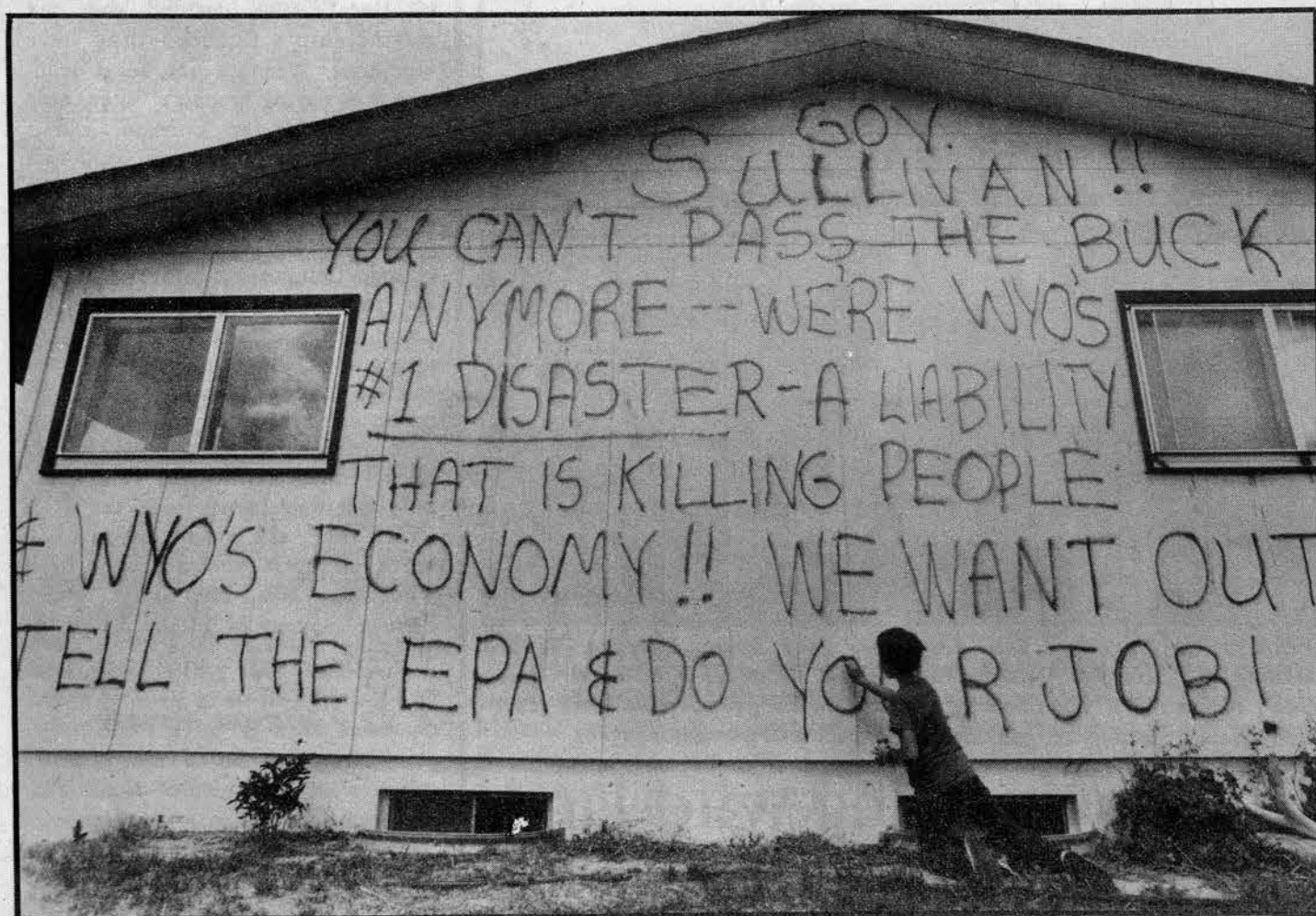
Ostlund said that residents with loans backed by Farmer's Home Administration and Federal Housing Authority have fared well. "They let them just walk away from their loans and the county paid lodging expenses until the end of June." But he noted that the Veterans Administration was less cooperative, foreclosing on affected homeowners and destroying their credit ratings.

But most homeowners are "dealing with their situations, organizing themselves and making choices," said local mental-health therapist Bill Heineke. Nonetheless, a fairly close-knit group of neighbors is now scattered in all directions he said. This was especially hard on children, who in some cases have become shy and reclusive.

Heineke praised Campbell County as the only governmental entity that provided direct relief to Rawhide residents. County Emergency Services Coordinator Martell Hildebrand estimates a county outlay of \$250,000 for temporary housing, monitoring and testing. A spokesman for Gov. Sullivan said the state has probably spent an equal amount on testing.

--Katharine Collins

--Katharine Collins



Brookhurst subdivision residents in Wyoming continue their graffiti campaign

Wyoming has aquifers full of fouled water

Contaminated water problems seem to abound in Wyoming this year. According to state Department of Environmental Quality, there have been 13 enforcement actions in recent months dealing with groundwater contamination.

Four related to contamination of domestic water at the Brookhurst subdivision in the Casper area. Residents have been plagued by

unusable well-water since petroleum products were discovered to be poisoning their water early this year.

The state recently issued notices of violation against four gasoline companies, and the attorney general's office filed suit in District Court seeking to have three of the firms clean up cancer-causing and probable cancer-causing compounds in the area's soil and groundwater.

The state has also asked for payment of damages and penalties, which can run as high as \$10,000 a day.

Brookhurst residents had hoped that the Environmental Protection Agency would buy their homes. Instead, the EPA said it plans to build a new \$3 million water system for the community by the end of the year.

Colorado's water laws leak, say critics

Colorado has a water plan. It is the state constitution and the Doctrine of Prior Appropriation.

Such conventional wisdom was challenged by almost every speaker -- from "water buffalos" to environmentalists -- at the 12th annual workshop on water held at Western State College in Gunnison.

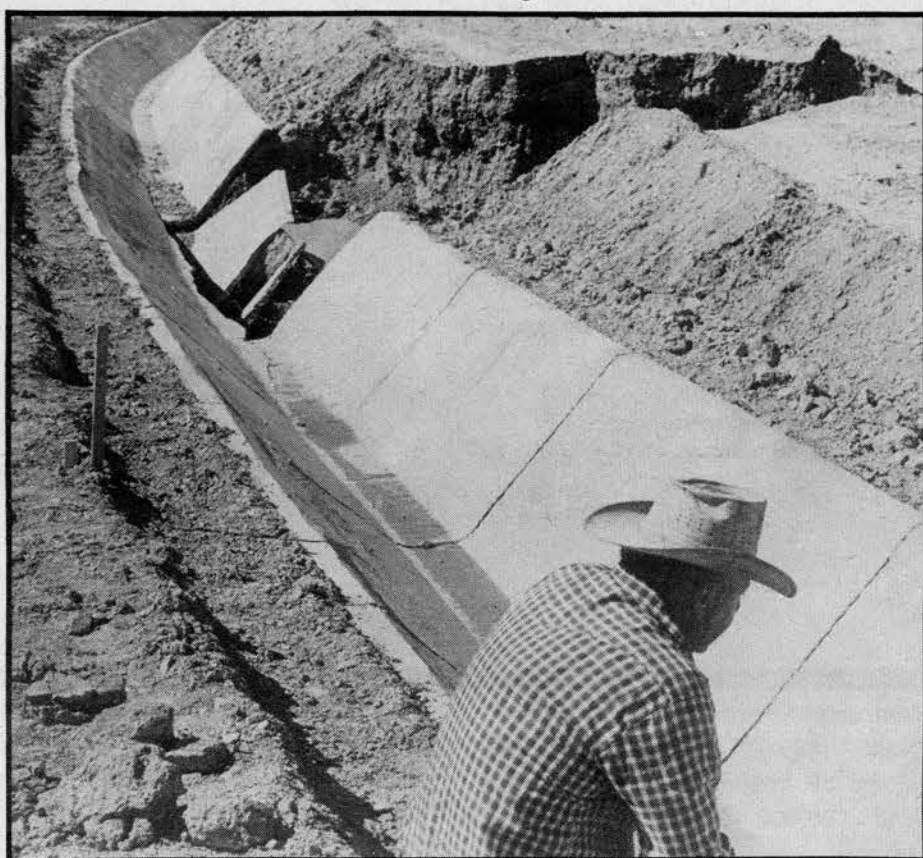
The broadest call for change came from University of Colorado Law Professor David Getches, who was natural resources director under former Gov. Richard Lamm. He said in a survey of other states all but Colorado have or are creating a water plan. Kansas, Montana and Oregon had developed the best plans, Getches said, because they are constantly updated by supplements, yet are not telephone book-sized documents. For those states, he said, the water plan is more a process than a document. filed on water first, "is the antithesis of planning," Getches said. It promotes "immediate self-interest" and not public need.

Representing the status quo, Chris Paulson, majority leader of the Colorado House of Representatives, challenged critics to show what was wrong with the current system.

Paulson pointed to the program created in the 1970s to insure minimum stream flows for fish and to protect the environment "to a reasonable degree." "Those who want to change the system want to protect the environment to an unreasonable degree," he said. Paulson is a water lawyer and works for a firm whose senior partner, Glenn Saunders, has represented the Denver Water Department for over 50 years. Saunders is often called the father of trans-mountain diversions.

Getches said that Colorado's water system fails to work in the following ways:

- Water quality and water quantity concerns are not integrated,



Irrigation canal, Colorado

- No consistent data base of water information exists for decision-making,

- Colorado has no system to satisfy the rights of downstream states,

- Colorado is spending money on water projects with no prioritization of which projects are most important,

- Finally, "There is no public involvement."

Public involvement is the element of the system most in need of improvement, said James Lochhead, a water attorney who chairs the Colorado Water Conservation Board. The decentralization and diversity of water institutions has led to a "mystique about the workings of the Colorado water establishment," he said.

"Meetings of the Colorado Water Conservation Board are boring and

it's hard to stay awake for the whole day," Lochhead admitted. Nonetheless, public interest groups must inject themselves into the process or private vested interests will dominate.

The decision by the Colorado River Water Conservation District's decision to cut its funding for the workshop from \$3,000 to \$1,500 was a topic of conversation between workshops. Lee Spann, the district's representative from Gunnison County, led the fight for the cut because he was unhappy with the appearance at the previous year's workshop of Aurora Mayor Dennis Champine. The Front Range city has announced a plan to take 70,000 acre-feet per year from the Gunnison River to its thirsty lawns and residences. Spann refused to comment about the cut.

--Gary Sprung

BLM: ORVs and rare plants can coexist

There were protests from an unlikely duo -- ranchers and members of the Colorado Native Plant Society -- but the Bureau of Land Management recently issued permits for two off-road vehicle races.

The races are set for the Sand Wash area near Craig in northwestern Colorado where the scenic area is home to four rare plants, two of which are found only in Moffat County. Part of the land has been designated an Area of Critical Environmental Concern in the current but not yet approved BLM Little Snake Resource Management Plan.

A motorcycle race organized by a local businessman will take place Sept. 6, but it is a four-wheel-drive vehicle race, set for Sept. 12, that has generated the most opposition.

Race organizer Walter Lott of Las Vegas, Nevada's High Desert Racing Association said that the 150 to 200 cars won't do any harm because they will only race on graded county roads. "That is not off-road in the sense most people think of that word," he said in an interview.

Kirk Koepsel, a staffer with the Colorado Environmental Coalition in Denver, disagreed. "There's nothing to keep them on the road. What about when one vehicle passes another?"

Moffat County ranchers based their appeal on several arguments. They said the Sand Wash Basin has been designated a Wild Horse Area under the proposed resource management plan, and that designation, once adopted, would prohibit off-road vehicles. They also said the area includes parts of the "Critical Environmental Concern Area" recommended to protect rare plants, and that the soil is highly erosive and subject to damage from vehicles. Finally, ranchers pointed out that the

plan currently in use also prohibits off-road vehicles in the area.

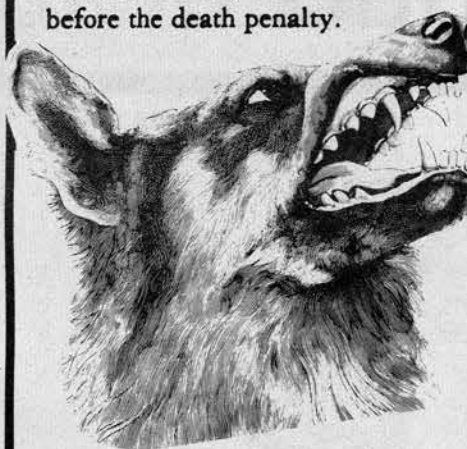
Gary Hoppe, a multi-resources staffer for the BLM in Craig, said the agency's management plan has been misinterpreted since only 8,000 acres in the Sand Wash area bar ORVs. "We believe the races are completely consistent with the plan," Hoppe said precautions will be taken to prevent vehicles from leaving the road and several plant areas will be flagged no passing zones.

--Staci Hobbes

HOTLINE

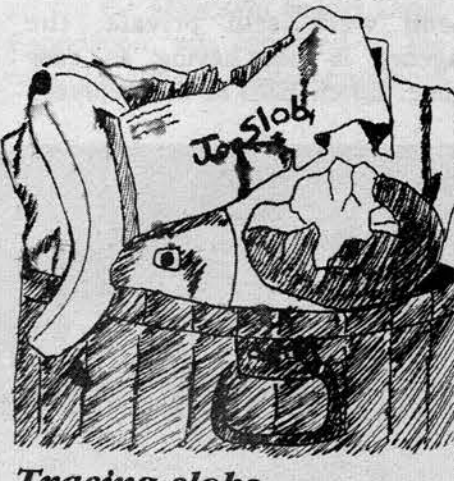
Two are executed

A grizzly bear in Montana had to be killed after 36 zoos rejected it in early August. The bear was considered too dangerous to be free because it returned to a populated area just southeast of Glacier National Park. State officials had moved it earlier to the backcountry after it was trapped near the town of Dupuyer. The zoos told the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks that they didn't want the grizzly because they rear their own. Two days earlier in Swan Valley, Mont., a female grizzly was killed by the department after it raided a trailer house. It was its third offense, the number allowed before the death penalty.



No room on the range

A number of ranchers and hunters near Yellowstone National Park aren't keen on wolves returning to the area. Both the Wyoming Woolgrowers Association and Wyoming Farm Bureau have criticized the just-adopted Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Plan, fearing predation on livestock. Hunter Bill Fairhurst of Montana said, "The brunt would not only be felt by the livestock industry but by the sportsmen as well." His group of hunters told the Casper *Star-Tribune* they'd unearthed a Forest Service report about a wolf pack devastating elk herds in 1920. Wyoming's three-person congressional delegation also opposes the plan, which may delay an environmental impact statement required to reintroduce the wolves into Yellowstone. That opposition last week prompted Park Service Director William Penn Mott to say he'd put the wolf recovery plan on hold.



Tracing slob

Mesa County's health department in western Colorado is getting tough on people who toss their trash where it doesn't belong. Workers are rummaging through illegal dumps to extract the names of offenders, then mailing out letters telling the alleged perpetrators to clean up their trash. "None of them really admit they did it, but most are conducive to cleaning it up," health official Don Whetstone told the Grand Junction *Daily Sentinel*. Failure to comply with a cleanup order can carry a penalty of up to \$2,000 a day. So far, 40 letters have been sent.

HOTLINE

Marbled wilderness

The possibility of a marble quarry in Colorado's Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness has the state's environmental heavyweights up in arms. The Colorado Chapters of The Wilderness Society and Sierra Club, plus the Colorado Environmental Coalition and the Aspen Wilderness Workshop, charge that the Forest Service is "tripping over itself" to accommodate the Colorado-Conundrum Marble Corp., which owns mineral rights to marble deposits in the wilderness. The Forest Service

responds that under federal law it must allow reasonable access to the proposed quarry above Conundrum Creek. The Forest Service plans to write an environmental assessment of the project, but the conservationists are pressing for a full-scale environmental impact statement. Established as one of the nation's first wildernesses in 1964, the area is heavily used. Darrell Knuffke of The Wilderness Society says the conservation coalition is prepared to sue if the agency refuses to do an EIS that would weigh the comparable values of wilderness and mining marble.

On South Dakota's national grasslands

Ranchers and Forest Service butt heads

by Peter Carrels

On the Great Plains of western South Dakota and Nebraska, there sits an anomaly -- 800,000 acres of federal grassland bobbing in a sea of millions of acres of private land.

Until the 1930s, the 800,000 acres were also private. But during that troubled era, they were bought by the federal government from distressed ranchers and failed farmers. The government's mission was to restore the health of the wind-swept, badly-abused lands, and then to maintain them.

That task is the responsibility of the U.S. Forest Service. But because the ranchers never lost control of the now-public land, and often continue today, 50 years later, to run cattle as if the land were still private, the agency is not having an easy time. Butch Ellis of the Nebraska

National Forest in Chadron, Neb., which manages 90,000 acres of grassland in Nebraska and 700,000 in South Dakota, says:

"The land has had ample time to recover. But almost immediately (after federal acquisition) permits were issued to grazing associations. Plus, there are intermingled blocks of land. It's not a good land pattern. As a result, we have some land out there that is just beat to pieces."

The land has an unhappy history. Some of it was broken to the plow even though it is in arid country. Much of the rest was overgrazed. The resulting ecological distress, aggravated by the financial collapse of the 1930s, forced the sale of the worst of the land to the federal government. For some ranchers selling off chunks of holdings was a way to stay in business. Others sold out completely and left the region.

It was government policy to give sellers first chance to lease back the land, and much of the newly-acquired federal land ended up being grazed by the original owners.

Still, the federal presence was never fully accepted. Especially in South Dakota, the Forest Service often occupied a backseat when it came to management,

with the ranchers' grazing associations exercising powers that in the Rockies would have been the agency's.

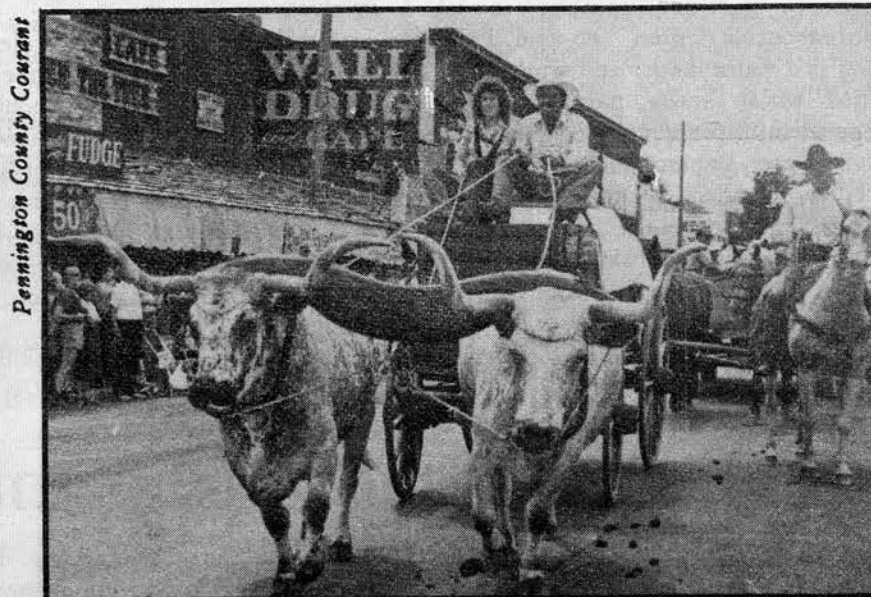
A NEW CONCEPT

In 1984, the Nebraska National Forest took a step toward upsetting that status quo. It adopted a 50-year management plan which required managing the grasslands for several values, rather than just grazing.

habitat and grazing opportunities."

He says the clash is a result of the newness of multiple use on the grasslands. "On most national forests, there have always been several dominant uses: mining, timber, livestock and hunting. They always shared the land. But on the grasslands, there's only been grazing. So the ranchers don't have the feeling that others have a right to share the land."

Because there have been no



Downtown Wall at festival time

The plan was designed to recover the wooded draws, to provide high-enough grass to give grouse protective cover, and to restore grazing land by reducing cattle stocking. Although the plan took on several hot issues, it delayed until 1988 a decision on the hottest -- prairie dog management.

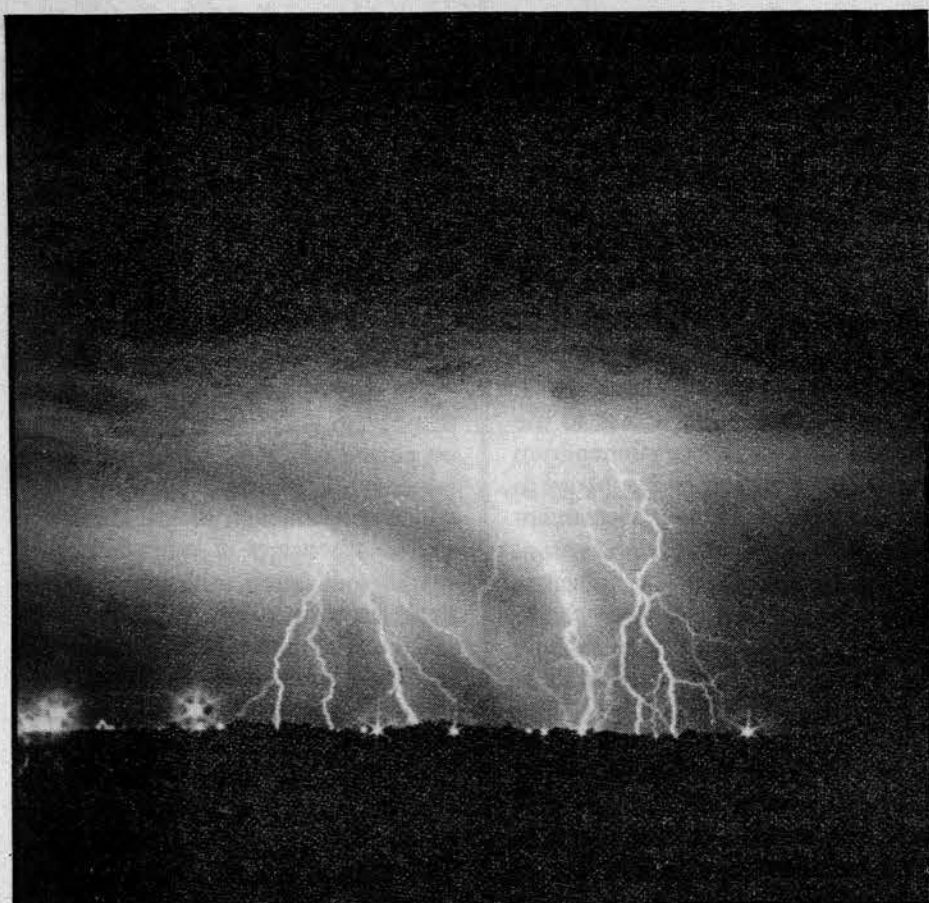
Even without urban renewal for prairie dogs South Dakota ranchers were outraged. "There seems to be a smear campaign against cattlemen, especially by the Forest Service," says Pat Stout, a Wall, S.D., rancher holding permits to run cattle on 4,000 acres in the Buffalo Gap National Grasslands. Stout is echoed by many other national grassland permittees.

Ellis, who is in charge of implementing the plan, says the ranchers are over-reacting. "They think we're trying to put them off the land. That's not so. The management plan will ultimately improve both wildlife

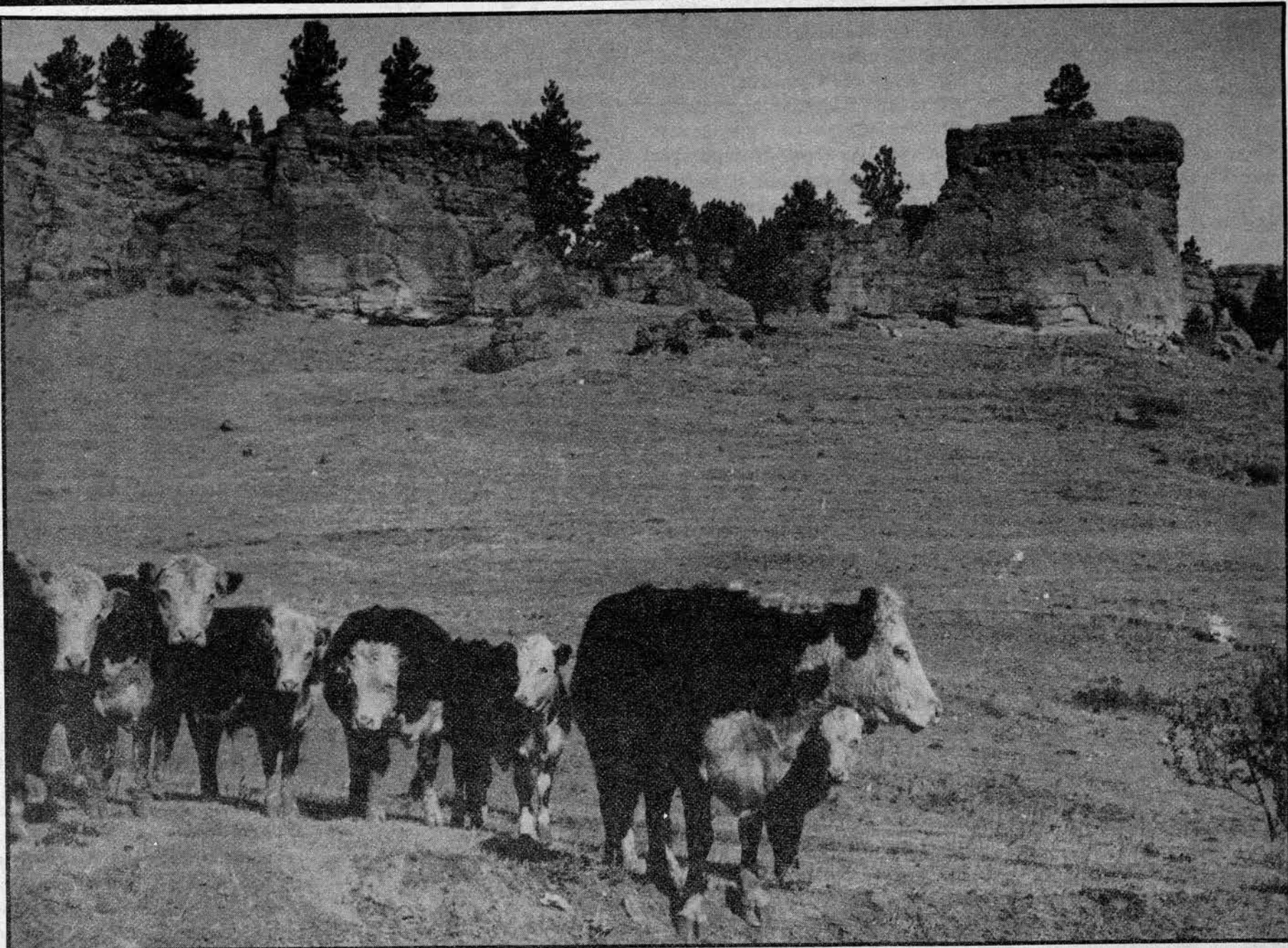
other users, excepting a few bird hunters and people who like to shoot at prairie dogs, there was also no constituency for multiple use. Often, the Forest Service reacts to pressure from outside. In this case, Ellis says, the initiative for change came from the agency's own sense of what had to be done.

Conservationists have applauded the approach, and a coalition of 18 South Dakota groups, ranging from the Sierra Club to the Western South Dakota Bowhunters, has formed to support multiple use.

"The grazing associations are used to getting their own way," says Jocie Baker, head of the South Dakota Ornithologists Union. "In the past, grassland management practices did not reflect multiple use. The Forest Service not only has a legal obligation, but also a moral and ethical mandate to maintain healthy range conditions that enhance diverse populations of



Custer National Forest



Cows grazing in South Dakota

wildlife and plant life. Our group wholeheartedly supports the concept of multiple use."

Bob Storch, supervisor of the Nebraska National Forest, who inherited the management plan in 1984, praises cattlemen for improving some grazing land.

"But we've got other interests to consider," he says. "We've never had the diverse interest in the grasslands that we have now, and we do have some poor range out there yet. Cattle numbers must be reduced because of that. I wish the livestock interests would recognize that change is coming, and that they'd be willing to accept changes."

The agency's push for multiple use on the treeless, nearly waterless grasslands surprised environmentalists. Perhaps even more surprising was the Nebraska National Forest's evident intent to implement the plan. On many forests, controversial plans are adopted and then studied for years, rather than implemented. But despite the fierce opposition of South Dakota ranchers to the plan, the Nebraska National Forest apparently is moving to implement it.

The plan was released in 1984, and then appealed by an assortment of ranching and landowner groups represented by the Mountain States Legal Foundation in Denver. The appeal resulted in a settlement agreement which the ranchers hailed as a victory, and

which the Forest Service said simply clarified the plan.

Whatever the truth, the fight now is over how the plan's multiple use guidelines will be put into effect. Those guidelines reach the ground in the form of Allotment Management Plans, or AMPs. An allotment is a few thousand acres of public and private land; an AMP tells how each allotment will be managed. AMPs have been issued for some areas, mostly in Nebraska, where multiple use is relatively non-controversial. But this January, the agency will grab the bull by the horns and issue AMPs for 27 allotments in western South Dakota, where 700,000 acres, and almost all the controversy, lie.

The AMPs would be controversial even if they applied only to federal land. But because of mixed land ownership, the federal and private grazing lands have historically been managed together. Until now, the public land has been managed largely as private grazing land. The new AMPs are expected to change that.

The ranchers challenge the very legality of the AMPs. The debate goes back to the Bankhead-Jones Act of 1937 and its amendments. Under the act, administration of nearly 4 million acres of rangeland in 11 western states acquired during the Great Depression was assigned to the Secretary of Agriculture. The land became today's national grasslands, run by the Forest Service. Local grazing associations were set up to serve as liaison between the Forest Ser-

vice and the individual permittees.

Ranchers say Bankhead-Jones was passed to stabilize rural areas hard hit by the 1930s droughts. As they see it, single-purpose use of the grasslands is embedded in law.

"Reducing grazing and increasing wildlife habitat is contrary to what Bankhead-Jones was supposed to do," says Jack McCulloh, executive director of the South Dakota Stockgrowers Association. "Bankhead-Jones is supposed to keep folks on the land. The Forest Service's Allotment Management Plans will work against that. It seems few of those guys understand their decisions can make it hard for ranchers to survive economically."

McCulloh especially objects to the application of AMPs to private land. "AMPs end up imposing government plans on private lands."

Supervisor Bob Storch says ranchers need not include private land in an AMP. "If a rancher wishes to exclude his own land, he has the choice to fence his land out."

McCulloh counters, "That's no option. The cost of fencing is a prohibitive factor. And where do they get the authority to use AMPs on private land, anyway?"

Connie Brooks, general counsel for the Mountain States Legal Foundation, was involved in the original appeal and settlement

(Continued on page 10)

Pennington County Courthouse



Range war...

(Continued from page 9)

agreement between Buffalo Gap permittees and the Forest Service. She argues that AMPs are illegal. "There is nothing authorizing the Forest Service to use AMPs on the national grasslands." But Storch defends his agency's position. "Grazing interests fail to recognize the Bankhead-Jones Act has been amended more than once. Up to 80 percent of the original act has been repealed. Other values are now being addressed."

The Forest Service agrees that Bankhead-Jones does not specifically authorize AMPs. They also make it clear the act does not prohibit AMPs.

The act, he says, requires the agency to "develop a program of land conservation and land utilization" on the national grasslands. He says AMPs are the tools the Forest Service uses to develop and run its programs, and that without them, there could be no effective management of the grasslands.

Even if the Forest Service succeeds in managing the land for multiple use, the grasslands of South Dakota and

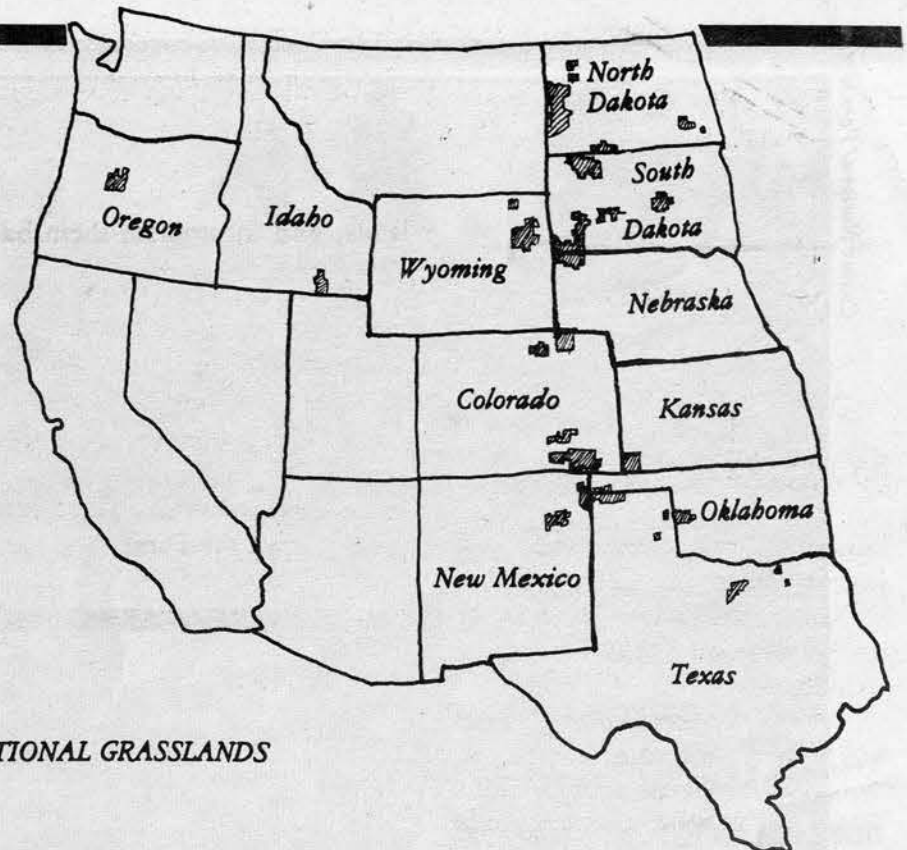
Nebraska will not be a paradise. The dry, treeless, often shaley land will never support herds of big game or towering trees. Water is limited, and cattle survive thanks to the many stock-watering ponds ranchers and agencies have built.

But properly managed, the grasslands can support a variety of wildlife. The policies the Forest Service lays out in its 50-year plan will achieve this in several ways.

•First, the plan will protect and enhance wooded draws, which are drainageways occupied by trees and shrubs. Draws are places of maximum biological activity even though they are less than 1 percent of the entire northern high plains. They provide half the mule deer habitat in the region, and coyotes, bobcats, and others rely on them.

The deterioration of the draws was blamed on overgrazing, and the plan requires protective fencing and banning cattle from those areas in summer.

•Second, the plan requires more grouse habitat, with the best potential grouse areas selected by the agency for special treatment. Rather than ban cattle, the ranchers must monitor the height of the grass so that there is always enough cover for



NATIONAL GRASSLANDS

the grouse. Studies regarding the grass height and species diversity needed to host sharptail grouse are underway.

•Overall, the plan calls for 45 percent of the forest to be managed with an emphasis on wildlife habitat.

•Finally, it calls for a 9 percent reduction in cattle stocking in an attempt to help the land recover.

THE DOG CONTROVERSY

All of those objectives were adopted in the 1984 plan. This January, the plan will be amended to deal with the most controversial issue -- prairie dogs. There are two types of prairie dogs in the West. The white-tailed prairie dog favors high plains and mountain valleys above 5,000 feet. The black-tailed prairie dog frequents dry, upland prairies and is more likely to live in "towns." In a black-tail town, the barren, excavated mounds around the many dens stand in stark contrast to the grassy plains.

The black-tailed prairie dog is found in South Dakota, where ranchers have long complained about the damage they do to the plains. "Prairie dogs are non-conserving," says rancher Pat Stout. "They destroy roots and eat grass. If they were called prairie rats instead of prairie dogs, there'd be less concern for them."

The issue is particularly sticky in western South Dakota because of some recent history. When former President Richard Nixon banned the use of toxic controls in the early 1970s, prairie dog numbers exploded, rising at a compounded rate of 23 percent a year. On the Nebraska National Forest prairie dog towns went from about 2,000 acres in the early 1970s to about 40,000 acres in 1978, according to Ellis.

As a result, in 1978 the Nebraska National Forest did an environmental impact statement and got permission to use chemicals to drive the population down to its current level of 3,120 acres. That level will be held steady until the forest releases a study in January.

The ranchers, aware of the prairie-fire speed with which the animals can breed, want them strictly controlled. But prairie dogs have diverse, emotional support. Among backers are "shooters" -- people who travel long distances to do target practice on prairie dogs standing at attention outside their holes.



Prairie dog

Dick Randall, Defenders of Wildlife

(Continued on page 11)

Range war...

(Continued from page 10)



Shooters have been short of targets since the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation killed off prairie dogs on 175,000 acres of its land.

Other support comes from those who see the towns as centers of biological activity. Ellis says, "If you want to see wildlife on the plains, you go to prairie dog towns. There are birds, rattlesnakes, the swift fox, raptors and others."

Ornithologist Jocie Baker says, "We look at the prairie dog as a wildlife species, not as a varmint or pest. An entire ecosystem revolves around this species. Management practices that affect the prairie dog also impact the 90 or more wildlife species that form a part of that ecosystem."

The animal is also important as potential prey for the nearly-extinct black-footed ferret. A colony of black-footed ferrets went extinct near the South Dakota grasslands. Until another colony was found in the 1980s in Wyoming, the South Dakota colony was thought to have been the last in the world.

McCulloh of the South Dakota Stockgrowers Association objects to any plan to increase prairie dogs. "The Forest Service isn't in the business of raising prairie dogs. Their business on the grassland is to keep cowboys on the range. We need to isolate prairie dogs away from ranching units, not increase them."

The Forest Service hopes to have its multiple use plan implemented on all 800,000 acres in Nebraska and South Dakota by the mid-1990s. But that will depend on the struggle now going on between the agency and the South Dakota ranchers.

Almost certainly, the ranchers will keep the legal, political, and administrative pressure on the forest, and at times bystanders will be caught in the action. In the last session of the South Dakota State Legislature, for example, ranchers tried to pass a bill (S.B.214) that would have forbidden the state's Game, Fish and Parks Department from entering cooperative agreements with the Forest Service on Wildlife habitat on the grasslands. The bill passed, but in a watered-down version.

There is also the chance that some outside force will affect the struggle. The asset management

plan of former Interior Secretary James Watt in the early 1980s would have permitted the ranchers to buy the national grasslands, and incorporate them back into their private holdings.

The grasslands could also have been affected by the recent proposed land swap between the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. McCulloh says, "The BLM is better suited to manage Buffalo Gap ranch lands" than the Forest Service.

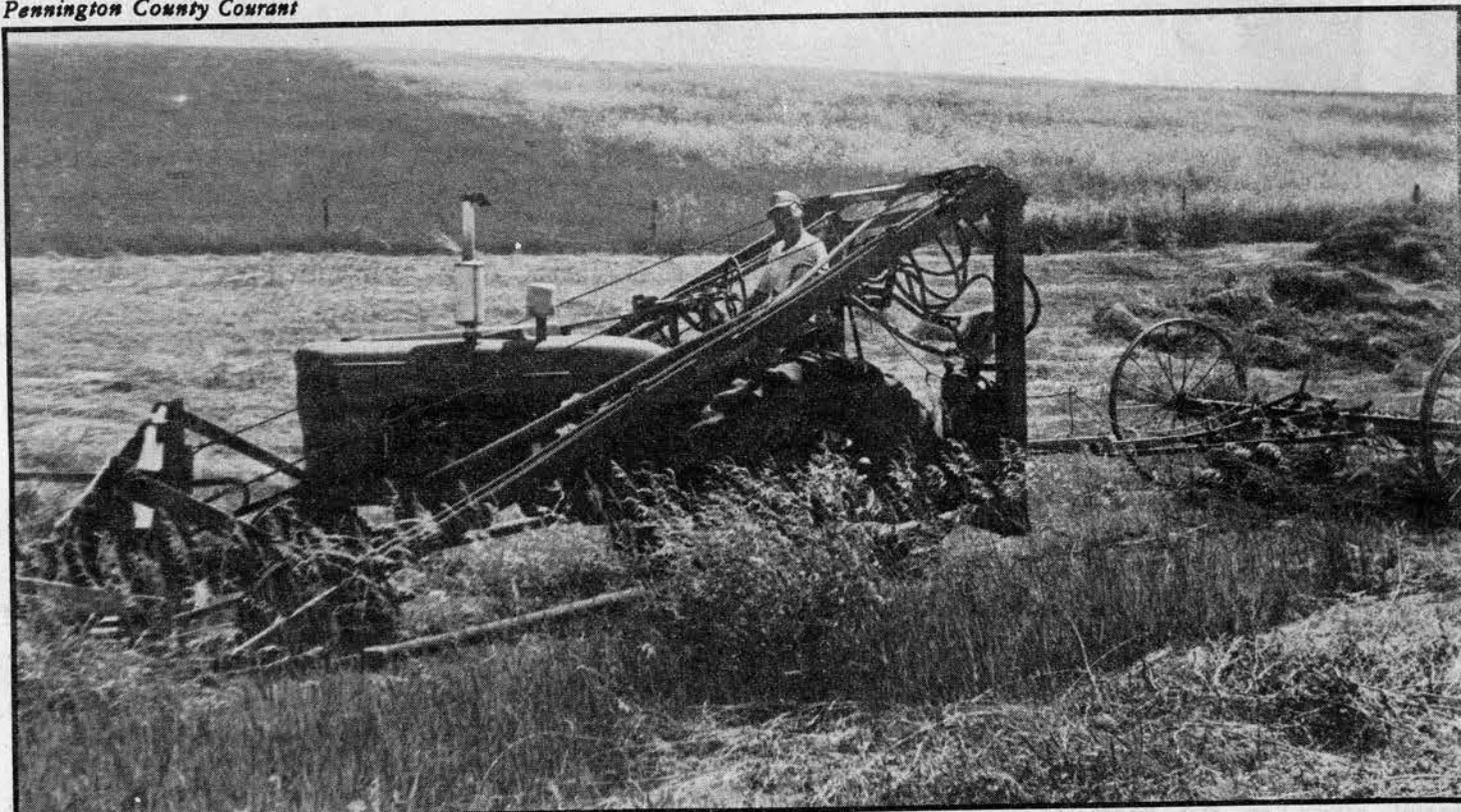
Barring some such large stroke from the outside, however, the Forest Service's long-term ability to achieve multiple use may depend on the behavior of non-ranchers in western South Dakota. If the numbers of people who hunt grouse, bird watch at wooded draws and prairie dog towns, and go shooting on weekends at prairie dog towns increase, then political support for multiple use will grow. Without such a constituency, the

land will probably remain in the hands of the ranchers.

□

Peter Carrels lives in Aberdeen, South Dakota, and is a regular reporter for *High Country News*. This article was paid for by the High Country News Research Fund.

Pennington County Courant



From dust bowl to national grasslands

The 3.8 million acres of National Grasslands in 11 Western and Great Plains states were once part of farms that failed.

It was during the Great Depression when drought and erosion made homesteads unlivable and unsalable. Something had to be done to save the soil blowing away and the families suffering in dust bowls.

President Franklin Roosevelt looked for answers by calling a national conference on land use in 1931. The gathering of experts led to the creation of a Resources Board within the Public Works Administration. Its solution was first, to restore land through reseeding, fencing and other projects.

The second part of the solution was to buy farmers out and resettle them elsewhere. There were many thousands of farm families looking for help.

According to a 1932 federal survey, there were at least

454,000 farms on land too poor to provide a living through row cropping. The farms covered some 75 million acres, of which only 20 million acres were in cropland. Thirty-five million acres were in pasture and range, and 20 million acres were in forest.

In 1937, the land restoration and resettlement program became official with passage of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act. The Soil Conservation Service ran the program until 1953, initiating hundreds of studies of land use, and in 1954, the Forest Service took over the lion's share of the program, although states, the Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Indian Affairs also gained some lands.

Of the 3.8 million acres of Forest Service grasslands, 2.7 million are grazed under cooperative agreements with grazing associations, and 1.1 million acres are grazed directly through the Forest Service.

According to the agency,

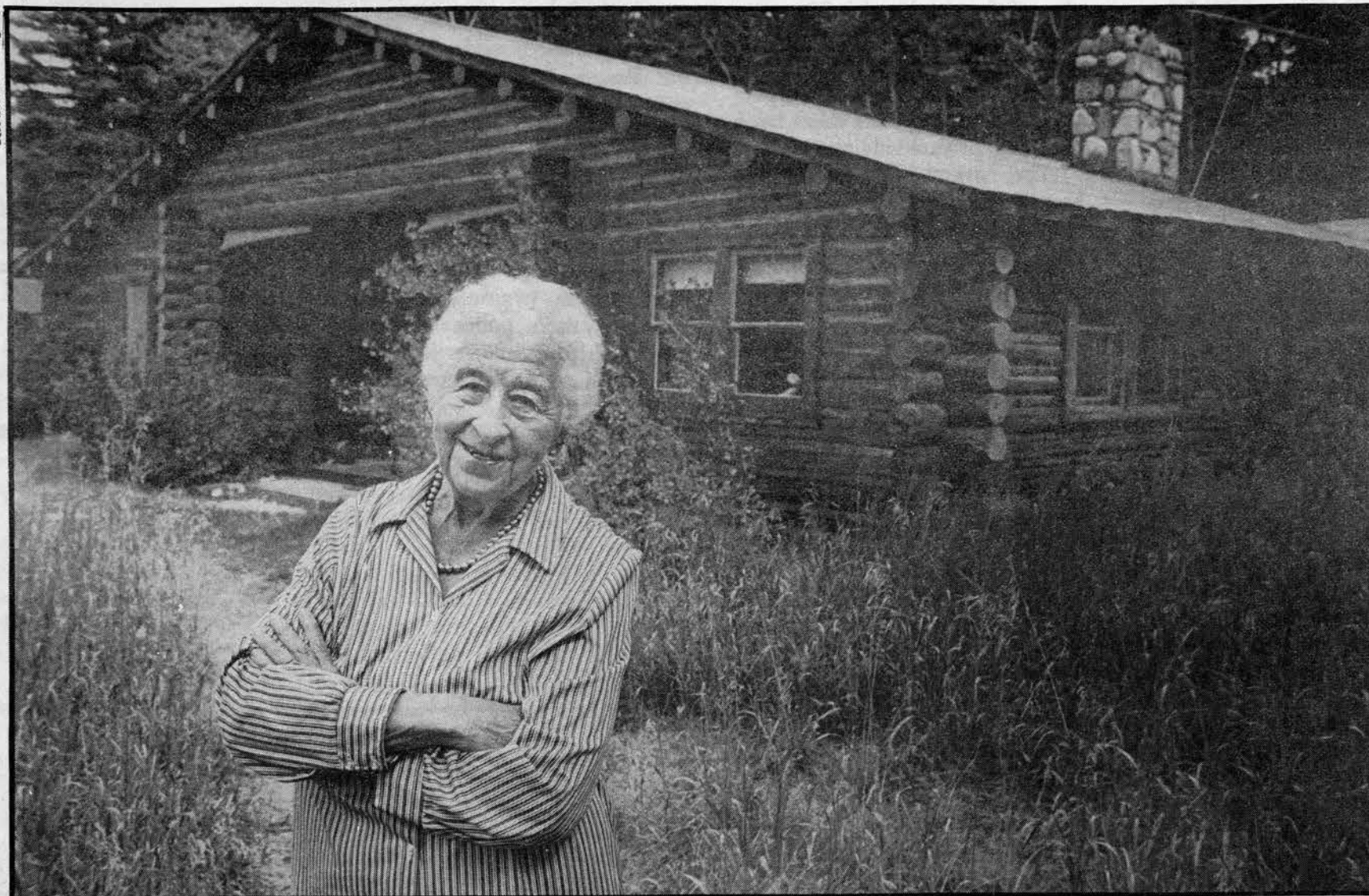
165,000 cattle and 47,000 sheep graze annually on the grasslands, which also provide food, cover and water to some 27,000 antelope, 19,000 deer and a variety of fish, birds and other animals and plants.

Deen Boe, a grasslands specialist with the agency in Washington, D. C., says it was not until 1963 that the Forest Service spelled out for itself precisely how grasslands were to be managed. The guiding principles of the 24-year-old Administrative Order are multiple use and sustained yield that "demonstrate sound and practical principles of land use for the areas in which they are located."

The order also tells land managers that what they do should "exert a favorable influence for securing sound land conservation practices on associated private lands." Boe says the order still stands.

--Betsy Marston

Richard Murphy



Mardy Murie

Fighting to save what she loves

by Rocky Barker

MOOSE, Wyo. -- The area of Alaska encompassing the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge holds a special place in the heart of Margaret E. Murie.

It was there that she and her husband, Olaus, traveled 700 miles on dog sled during their honeymoon 60 years ago. It was principally through Olaus's efforts that the land of caribou and waterfowl was set aside as a wildlife refuge in 1960.

"That is the place that means the most to me," Mrs. Murie said. "It meant the most to my husband."

Mrs. Murie played a key role in the passage of the Alaska Lands Act of 1980 that protected millions of acres in the 49th state and increased the size of the refuge to 19 million acres. When Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, proposed legislation that would have watered down the original law, Mrs. Murie spoke out again, before Congress and in letters and interviews.

She typifies the citizen conservationists who have led the way to the environmental reforms of the past 50 years.

"That's the kind of thing I'm trying to tell some of these young folks," she said. "People themselves are getting concerned. I don't think we can expect much from big government and big business."

With the Reagan administra-

tion sponsoring legislation that would open 10 percent of the refuge to oil and gas exploration, Mrs. Murie is still speaking out nationally. Now 85, Mardy Murie has been blazing trails her entire life. She was the first woman graduate of the University of Alaska in 1924; she is the author of three books, *Two in the North*, about her life in Alaska, *Wapiti Wilderness*, which she wrote with Olaus, and *Island Between*, a novel.

"For people like myself that have grown up in the conservation movement she's a role model," said Jay Hair, executive vice president of the National Wildlife Federation. "spires others."

She shared the life-work of her husband, Olaus, a wildlife biologist and conservationist in Colorado and Utah, whose studies continue to be the basis for elk management in the them from Alaska's Brooks Range to Jackson Hole, Wyo., and around the world.

They worked as a team when Olaus served as director and president of the Wilderness Society from 1945 until his death in 1963. Together, they helped protect such wild places as the Quetico-Superior Wilderness in Minnesota and Dinosaur National Monument in Utah, and helped lay the groundwork for passage of a national wilderness protection law.

Olaus died before final pas-

sage of the Wilderness Act in 1964, but Mrs. Murie carried on his work and was honored for their efforts by President Lyndon Johnson at the signing ceremony. Her speeches and writings since have helped spur the passage of dozens of important environmental laws.

She will step down from the Wilderness Society this year, whose board she's sat on since 1976. She has won conservation awards from most major environmental groups, including the Wilderness Society's Robert Marshall award, the Audubon Medal and the Sierra Club's John Muir Award.

"There aren't too many organizations more than 50 years old, which have people active on its board that were virtually there at its creation and reflect the entire history of the organization," said George Frampton, Wilderness Society president. "It's particularly important now because the Wilderness Society now has two very important issues in Alaska, trying to protect the Tongass National Forest and seeking wilderness protection for the Arctic (refuge)."

She has lived in Jackson Hole since 1927 when Olaus came to the valley to study elk for the Biological Survey, predecessor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. With the first two of their three children, 2-year-old Martin and 7-week-old Joanne, Mrs. Murie set up housekeeping

in a tent on a meadow above Pacific Creek. It set the pattern of her life for several years as she followed Olaus around the valley in the summers as he studied the elk herd.

"Many women ask me, 'How on earth could you live that way?' I tell them about all the things I didn't have to do like go to bridge clubs, wax the floors or talk on the telephone," Mrs. Murie said.

Mrs. Murie appears younger than her years. She still cross-country skis in the winter and lives a relatively vigorous life.

She is also as much at home arguing education issues in Jackson Hole as she is articulating the importance of wilderness. That interest is apparent in her relationship with the Teton Science School, headquartered near her log home at Moose.

Each class of high school students that attends the school is invited to her home for tea and cookies and a talk with Mrs. Murie. Her house is full of treasures gathered during the years of travels and studies. She takes students into her study and shows them her albums and the watercolors and pencil drawings done by her late husband. It is her way of passing the mantle of conservation to new generations.

Mrs. Murie shares with them the message that man is a part of nature, not above it.

(Continued on page 13)

Fighting...

(Continued from page 12)

"We're losing too many birds and animals," said Mrs. Murie. "We're losing the attractiveness of the planet." She is concerned about the continued growth in Jackson Hole itself, including condominiums, golf courses and other development. "I think that we have reached the saturation point."

The protection of the greater Yellowstone ecosystem and U.S. Bureau of Land Management wilderness are among her continuing concerns. Roads and logging are threatening the wildlife in the region, she said.

"In these high-altitude forests it takes 140 years for lodgepole pine to reach merchantable size, and they have trouble with reforestation, at least on parts of the Bridger-Teton," Mrs. Murie said. "They have reached a point where they should be left alone."

When the Wyoming Wilderness Act was approved in 1984, which included the Gros Ventre Wilderness overlooking Jackson

"What has she ever done?"

Merely everything that had to be done."

Hole, the Wyoming congressional delegation honored Mrs. Murie for her role in its passage. Even though the conservative delegation regularly disagrees with Mrs. Murie on most issues, she has kept their respect and had their ear.

Sen. Alan Simpson, R-Wyo., lived in Mrs. Murie's cabin as a boy in 1941. "She has known me since I was in swaddling clothes," Simpson said. "She not only has the obvious ability to speak from her heart, she also

speaks her facts," he said. "She makes you sharpen yourself."

For her part, Mrs. Murie, who has been called the "matriarch of the environment," is uncomfortable with her role as a symbol of the conservation movement.

"Too much fuss and feathers," she said. "I think, 'What have I done?'"

George Ames, Wilderness Society chairman, answered Mrs. Murie when he presented her with the Marshall Award in 1986.

"What has she ever done? Merely everything that had to be done to ensure that the love of the land that she's always possessed is passed on intact and flourishing to another generation, and another, and another beyond that. That is all and it is everything."

□

Rocky Barker reports from Idaho for *High Country News*.

LETTERS



Linda Hasselstrom

A RANCHER RETORTS

Dear HCN,

Lynn Jacobs' letter (HCN, 6/8/87) says, "There are better and less destructive ways to experience Nature while making a living. There are also better and less destructive ways to produce cattle!"

Unfortunately, like many critics of the ranching business, Jacobs does not list the improved methods. How about confining cows to muddy pens to be fed chemical-laden grain from conveyor belts; do you really want to eat that stuff? I don't.

Not all of us choose ranching as a profession; some are chosen, and our primary reason isn't to experience Nature. But once we're here, most of us become absorbed in Nature's cycle, and study it not only for its interest, but to learn from its ways. And once in ranching, most of us try to minimize the destructive effects. A

saying I hear often, among even the most hide-bound and conservative of my neighbors, is "If we don't take care of the land, it won't take care of us." Coyotes, eagles, buzzards, deer and antelope, say some of my neighbors, are an indication the land is healthy, and we're glad to have them. Third-generation ranchers in the arid West wouldn't be here if we didn't care for natural resources and succeeding generations. We walk or ride a horse over our land more often than we drive; that enables us to check the cattle, as well as study the conditions of grass and wildlife.

We don't like the fantasy any more than Jacobs does; the lean, handsome cowboy driving cows at a gallop across the TV screen makes us laugh bitterly as we struggle into our coveralls at midnight to slog down to the corral when it's thirty below zero. We don't have time for nostalgic romanticism, because we're practicing hands-on environmentalism in a job that lasts 24 hours a day -- unlike some environmentalists who look at pretty pictures, or advise from armchairs, or whose lives are filled with the daily exploitation too many of us take for granted: eating chemically-treated fast food imported from countries with less resource protection than ours, driving fast cars run on fast-disappearing oil, living in resource-wasting houses, throwing away instead of fixing our broken toys, discarding tons of waste paper and indestructible plastic, using precious water to flush away a resource we might use to fertilize our barren soil, buying cheaply-made synthetic clothes -- well, examine your own life.

On the other hand, some small, one-family ranches that practice the finest in resource conservation methods won't be here much longer because they're being bought or forced out by major corporations who will overgraze and/or plow fenceline to fenceline. Some small ranchers can't afford to neighbor with a big operator if the 8-to-5 hired hands

don't fix fences, or don't round up wandering cattle or sheep. Some are leaving because their children went off to the city to make more money in a job that will ultimately destroy more of the environment. Etcetera, etcetera.

Instead of whining at small operators, Jacobs ought to be lobbying Congress for legislation to prevent the kind of major destruction a small rancher couldn't afford, even if we could bear to do it. Has Jacobs read the Harkin-Gephardt bill, called the Family Farm Act? It's full of practical ideas for saving family farming and ranching, as well as the land, most of the ideas coming from people who practice what they preach. Some of its provisions include redefining efficiency, which until now has meant maximizing production no matter what the cost; requiring conservation practices, instead of intensive fertilizer use; and protecting consumer health by prohibiting import of food produced using any chemicals not allowed for use by U.S. producers, or with higher chemical levels than allowed here. Even city-bound consumers could help by ceasing to demand unblemished fruit -- which requires spraying for insects, harvesting at a certain time with the help of chemicals to loosen cherries from the tree, and similar expensive and potentially dangerous practices. You want to help starving Africans? Stop demanding steaks with fat streaks; demand organic beef, fed on grass, and send the corn to the starving millions. Want ranchers to stop overgrazing? It would help our economic situation if you refused to buy from chains like Burger King that use foreign beef.

Not knowing Jacobs' profession, I can't assert it could be done less destructively; most professions could stand improvement, and I trust Jacobs is working on that as hard as I'm working on improving mine. Besides ranching carefully, I've written a book discussing the difficulties

(*Going Over East*, scheduled for October publication from Fulcrum in Golden, Colo.), and am perpetually active in half a dozen environmental projects in my home state; right now we're trying to stop the dumping of nuclear waste and sewage ash from energy-wasting eastern cities, as well as the cyanide leaks into local water supplies.

I commend HCN for being a magazine that includes *all* the economic interests of its potential readers in its coverage, and for recognizing that ranchers not only can read, but we support magazines that take a responsible look at the whole picture. Plenty of articles in HCN have criticized ranching, with plenty of justification in some cases -- but overall, the coverage is fair. Ranchers were early lovers of the West, and its first defenders; naturally we made mistakes, but we're learning, just like everybody else, and we're tired of always being seen as the bad guys. Analogy: Europeans correctly criticize all Americans for our wasteful ways, but they've been confined to tight little countries that were already exploited; they *had* to conserve. If they'd been on a continent as rich and wide as ours, they'd have wasted too, before learning to conserve as we must, and soon.

Narrow-minded environmentalists who shout without ever listening to the other side are part of the reason destruction in the West has been so extensive and gone on so long. If we hadn't been so smugly forceful in the 1970s, perhaps the reaction against non-polluting regulations wouldn't be so strong now. If we don't stop the in-fighting and get on with the conservation, the eastern trash-dumpers, energy-seekers and profit-takers are going to bulldoze us all under the sagebrush with their sewage and nuclear waste, and make the West just another slave colony.

Linda Hasselstrom
Hermosa, South Dakota

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BULLETIN BOARD

FEISTY GROUP

The Clark Fork Coalition recently won the 1987 Conservation Organization of the Year Award presented by the Montana Wildlife Federation. The coalition's efforts to clean up the Clark Fork River in Montana have led to fights against mines, sewage treatment plants, logging groups and even the Environmental Protection Agency, reports the coalition's newsletter, *Currents*, Box 7593, Missoula, MT 59807.

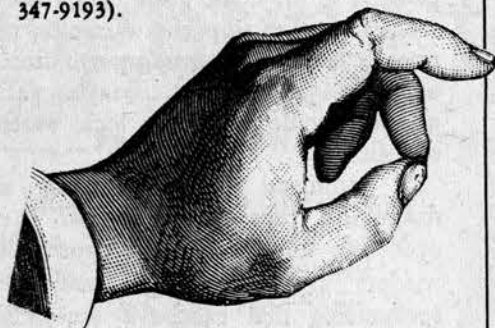
A RIVER RUNNER'S GUIDE

Zoom Flume rapid in Brown's Canyon often has more water than any rapid in the Grand Canyon; Big Drop rapid offers one of the largest waves. Floaters must approach Widowmaker cautiously, so as to avoid a large rock that produces a six-foot pour-over. River runners can find these descriptions and more in Thomas Rampton's *River Runner's Guide to Brown's Canyon*, which provides a mile-by-mile account of Colorado's most popular white-water river trip, floated by more than 100,000 people each year. This stretch of the Arkansas River starts just below Buena Vista and ends 25 miles downstream near Salida. The handbook also describes the geology of the canyon.

Thomas Rampton, P.O. Box 601, Buena Vista, CO 81211. Paper: \$4.95. 57 pages. Illustrated with maps and black-and-white photos.

SUSTAINING FARMS

A conference on "New Directions for Rural Communities" will explore alternatives for sustaining towns and farms on Oct. 20-22 in Bozeman, Mont. Coordinated by the National Center for Appropriate Technology, the conference will suggest methods to improve rural life, including ways to conserve soil, protect groundwater and safeguard farm family health. Contact NCAT, 815 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C., 20005 (202/347-9193).



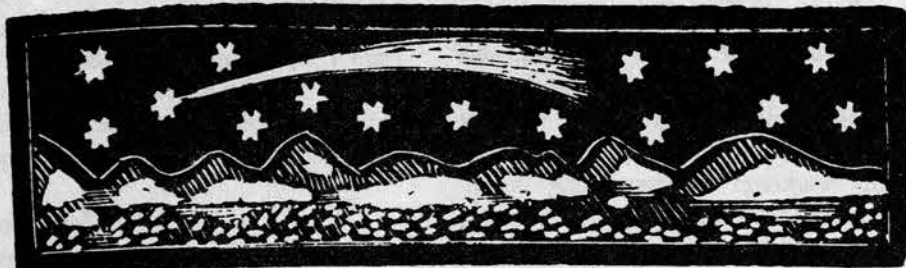
SCRATCH A SKUNK

Children may get the feel of a trip to the wilds by reading an 18-page softcover book, *Let's go Camping in a National Park* Illustration Caron Hupp, a naturalist at Rocky Mountain National Park, and writer Jean Bullard of Carbondale have devised a realistic visit that features a scratch and sniff flower, tree, fish and even a very realistic skunk. Bullard tells us she will inscribe copies on request.

SIRPOS Press, Box 785, Carbondale CO 81623. \$4 postpaid.

WOC CELEBRATES 20

The Wyoming Outdoor Council celebrates its 20th year at the annual meeting Sept. 12 and 13 at the Central Wyoming College Field Station just outside Lander, Wyo. Called Retrospect and Prospect, the Conference will look at gains made by Wyoming's conservation movement in the past two decades and help redefine goals for Wyoming's environment for the next five years. Speakers include author Gretel Ehrlich, former gubernatorial candidate Dave Nicholas, Wyoming Senate President John Turner, Bob Yuhnke of the Environmental Defense Fund in Boulder, WOC President John Perry Barlow, and WOC and *High Country News* founder Tom Bell. For more information, contact Gwen Arnesen at the Wyoming Outdoor Council at 307/332-7031.



A WILD GORGE

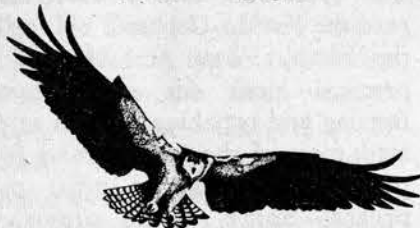
A new Bureau of Land Management plan recommends designating Colorado's Gunnison Gorge a wilderness area but advises against wilderness designation for badlands study areas in Delta County. The plan proposes limiting livestock grazing and off-road vehicle use in the Camel Back badlands in order to introduce bighorn sheep, and managing the Adobe Badlands as a salinity control area for the Colorado River. Wilderness designation in the Gunnison Gorge would mean increased protection for wildlife, including the establishment of a peregrine falcon habitat. The study finds that a "wild" gorge would also complement the adjacent Black Canyon of the Gunnison Wilderness Area. The BLM wishes to continue managing the gorge for multiple uses, including grazing. Public hearings will take place in September and written comments must be received by Nov. 5 by Robert Vecchia, Team Leader, Bureau of Land Management, Uncompahgre Basin Resource Area, 2505 South Townsend Ave., Montrose, CO 81401.



BURROUGHS ON AUDUBON

The Overlook Press has just resurrected the biography, *John James Audubon*, by John Burroughs, renowned nineteenth century essayist and naturalist. Burroughs used Audubon's extensive journals for his portrait of the eccentric ornithologist. Traveling, adventuring and painting, Audubon contributed more than any other wildlife observer to an understanding and appreciation of birds in North America. First published in 1902, this book is a facsimile of the original edition.

The Overlook Press of Woodstock, 12 W. 21st St. New York, NY 10010. Hardback: \$16.95. 144 pages.

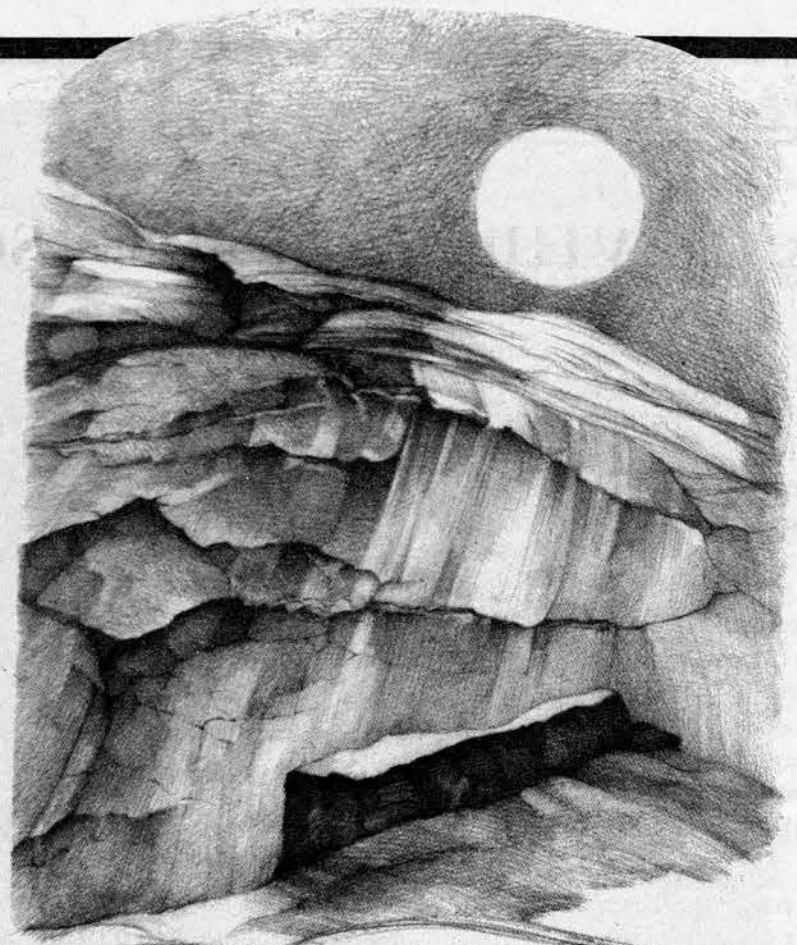


DESERT FARMING WORKSHOP

The Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix, Ariz., will host a workshop on desert agriculture from Oct. 8-11. Designed to promote an exchange between Latin Americans and Native Americans who live in remote desert communities, the workshop will focus on native plants that are most useful for conservation farming. Instructors will also take participants to visit Native Seeds/SEARCH plots at Tucson Botanical Gardens and the Arizona Agricultural Experiment Station, also in Tucson. For more information, contact Gary Nabhan, Desert Botanical Garden, 1201 N. Galvin Parkway, Phoenix, AZ 85008 (602/941-1225).

DEVELOPING RIVER PARKS

A conference on river parks will be held in Fort Collins, Colo., Oct. 25-28, with speakers addressing recreation, development, stewardship and conservation. The National Riverpark and Waterfront Association are sponsors and guest speakers include Victor Ashe, Executive Director of the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors. Contact Kari Van Meter, P.O. Box 580, Fort Collins, CO 80524 (303/221-6756).



WILDERNESS SOJOURN

In this slim and provocative book, David Douglas of Santa Fe, N.M., tells us what can happen when a seeker enters the wilderness of Utah alone. "We briefly enter an arena where illusions of self-sufficiency come unraveled. And it is in this state that we are inclined to turn to prayer, to listen to someone beyond ourselves." Douglas is an environmental lawyer turned fulltime writer, and *Wilderness Sojourn: Notes in the Desert Silence*, is his first book.

Harper and Row, 10 E. 53rd St., New York, NY 10022. Cloth, \$11.95, 102 pages. Illustrated with sketches by Jennifer Dewey.

VOICES OF CONSERVATION

Selections by more than 70 writers, teachers, ranchers, naturalists and public officials are brought together in the book *Of Discovery and Destiny: An Anthology of American Writers and the American Land*. Both known and unknown writers are presented by editors Robert Baron and Elizabeth Junkin, including Hal Borland, who writes of pioneer life on the Colorado plains, Ann Zwinger, who explores an aspen tree community, Margaret Murie, whose diary recounts outings in Alaska with her husband, Olaus, and Ivan Doig, who recalls his youth in southern Montana.

Fulcrum, Inc., 350 Indiana St., Golden, CO 80401. Cloth, \$17.95. 413 pages. Illustrated with sketches.

RENOWNED MOUNTAINEER

Fred Beckey has recently revised and updated his *Cascade Alpine Guide, Volume 1: Columbia River to Stevens Pass*. It includes extensive descriptions of climbing routes and good black and white photos along with information on the geology, climate and history of the Cascade Range. This is the first of three volumes popularly known as "Beckey's Bibles." Now in his '60s, Beckey lives in San Francisco and travels extensively each year in the Washington Cascades.

The Mountaineers Books, 306 2nd Ave West, Seattle, WA 98119. Hardcover: \$16.95, paper: \$8.95. 328 pages. Illustrated with black and white photos, maps and sketches.

PARK SEEKS A CENTER

Because no federal money was available, Rocky Mountain National Park Associates in Estes Park, Colo., has begun a fund-raising drive to build an educational center at the park's west entrance. Established last year to promote capital improvements and preservation within the park, the non-profit group hopes to raise \$227,885 for the proposed Kawuneeche Education Center. Executive Director Curt Buchholtz said 500,000 people visit the park each year through the west entrance, but they never get a proper introduction to the area. For more information, contact the Rocky Mountain National Park Associates, Rocky Mountain National Park, Estes Park, CO 80517. 303/586-2371.

SKI IMPACTS CONFERENCE

As a response to mushrooming ski area development in the West, the national and Colorado wildlife federations will host a conference called Ski Development, Wildlife and the Environment, Sept. 25-26 in Durango. The event includes a visit to two proposed major ski areas in Colorado's San Juan mountains. Speaking will be Stewart Udall, former Secretary of the Interior, Sen. Tim Wirth, D-Colo., Ben Night-horse Campbell, D-Colo., state Sen. Martha Ezzard, who recently switched parties to become a Democrat, and biologists, economists and ski industry representatives. Call the National Wildlife Federation, Fleming Law Building, Box 401, Boulder, CO 80309 (303/492-6532).

IDAHO GLOBESCOPE

Communication is the theme of the Globescope Idaho conference from Oct. 7-11 in Sun Valley. Sponsors are the Global Tomorrow Coalition, the Global Environment Project Institute and the Idaho Conservation League. The global coalition is composed of grass-roots environmental and humanitarian groups whose concern is population growth and ecological destruction. Topics for discussion and problem-solving include nuclear issues, economic development, alternative agriculture, and waste management and health, among others. For registration or more information, contact Globescope Idaho, Box 1111, Ketchum, ID 83340 (208/726-4030).



\$20,000 PER ACRE

The Aug. 3, 1987, issue of *High Country News* had an article on a \$26,000 per acre condemnation price awarded by a jury in Jackson, Wyo., for private land the National Park Service condemned within Teton National Park. The value of the land came from both its view of the Grand Tetons and from the value added by the presence of the surrounding park. Now comes an advertisement in *The New Yorker* magazine for Aug. 10, 1987, offering 156 acres of private land in Oregon's Siskiyou National Forest: "1,086,000 acres of river canyons, forests, mountains, exactly the way God left it. Unwrecked and unwreckable. Protected forever by Act of Congress against any and all future incursions of private property. The opportunity to buy property such as this will never occur again." The ad states that access to the property is "difficult, sometimes dangerous," and that it is totally isolated, accessible only by foot, horse, boat or helicopter. The property has 2.9 miles of frontage on the Rogue River, and housing for 24 people. The seller is asking \$3.2 million, or \$20,000 an acre. If you are interested, call Tom Staley at 713/931-0303.

afield

Six playful creatures; seven curious creatures

by David A. Smith

I was beginning a 10-mile walk when I noticed something unusual about the turbulence at the outlet of Witch Creek. I stopped and watched the water. Nothing.

An elk bugled. I closed my eyes and listened to Yellowstone National Park's familiar morning sounds: indignant mallards squabbling, coyotes barking and yipping and howling, the whoosh and sign of a geyser erupting.

A splash. Something broke the surface of the water. There. An otter. No, otters. One, two, three...trying to count them was like trying to count spaghetti noodles in a pot of boiling water. They dove and surfaced and swam, their wakes rippling across the reflection of Mount Sheridan's snow-covered mantle. Then they all surfaced at once, six heads bobbing in the water, six curious creatures staring at me.

I pulled out my binoculars and stared back at one of them. Dew-drops of water clinging to long, delicate whiskers. An intelligent face. The otter sneezed, shook its head, arched its body up and forward and disappeared in a swirl of water. The last thing I saw was the tip of its thick rope-like tail.

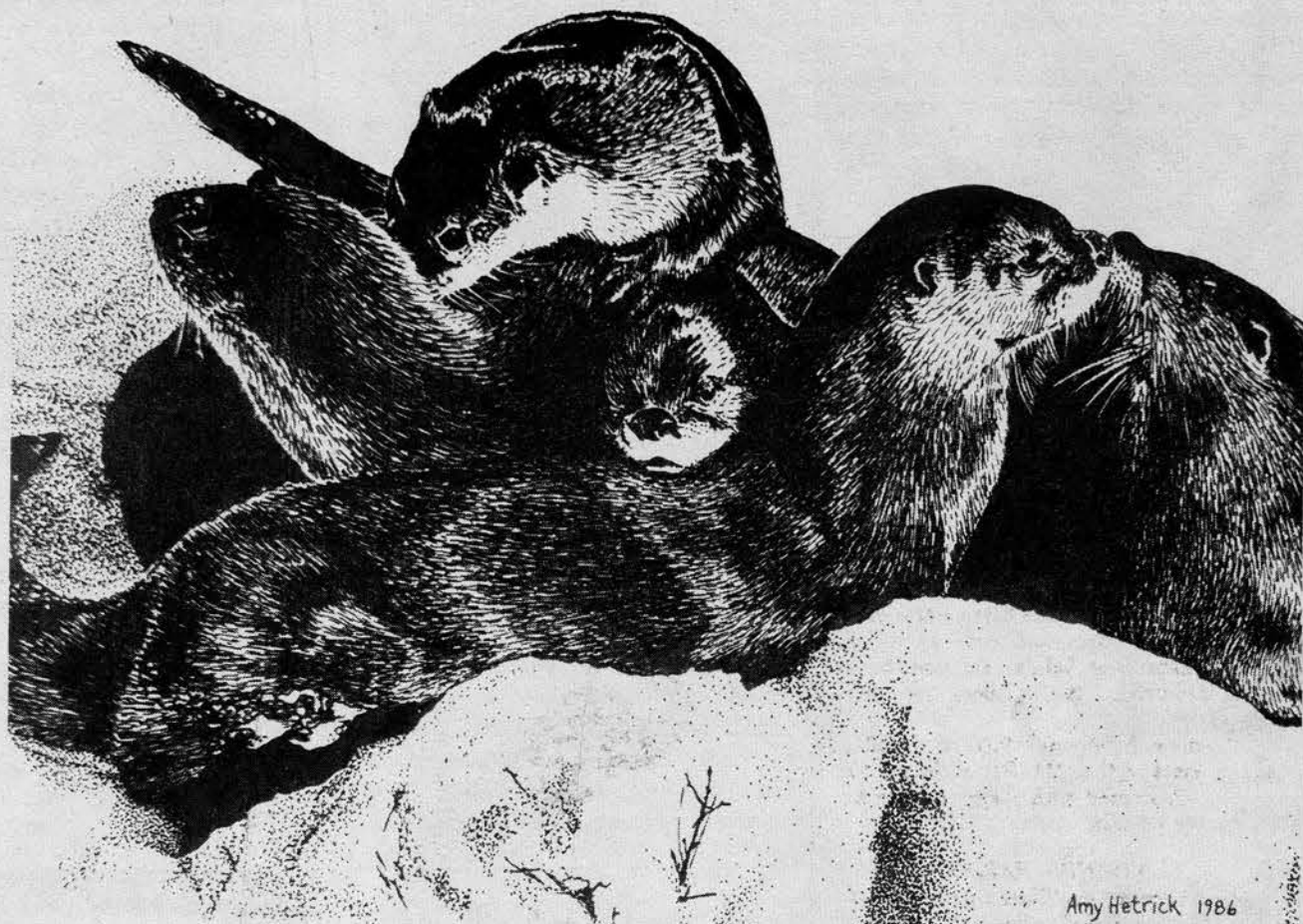
Where were the others? Everywhere. Bobbing, diving, frolicking in the water. Four of them played follow-the-leader and as they arched out of the water and dove, the group looked like a 30-foot long snake, or the Loch Ness monster. Whenever they surfaced, the otters would talk to each other, chirping, chuckling, sneezing, snorting and growling menacingly.

I don't know what was said but by some kind of mutual agreement the group was gradually moving closer to me. They weren't just curious; they were fearless.

In their own element -- water -- otters have no enemies and no peers. Superb swimmers, they catch fish, frogs and insects almost at will; like coyotes and ravens, otters are so well adapted to their ecological niche they can afford to be playful.

One otter broke from the group and swam within 20 feet of me. The rest followed. They studied me. I studied them. We were so close I could see their wet, black noses, their tiny rounded ears. (I wondered if I was the first bald man they'd seen.) They started getting nervous. I squatted on my heels and tried to make myself smaller somehow, like you do when you know you've frightened a child just because you seem like a giant to him. Trust me, I thought.

Nothing doing. They maintained a safe distance. Then they spotted a flock of mergansers feeding along the shoreline, moving closer and closer. The otters dove and swam for the mergansers. Their dark forms looked like torpedos. I could see them clearly against the lake's sandy bottom, twisting and spinning in a



corkscrew motion, vanishing in a trail of bubbles.

The mergansers panicked when the otters popped up just a few feet away. Fourteen birds scattered in 14 directions. They fanned out in a semi-circle, like rays from the sun. They half-ran, half-flew away, whapping their wings on the water but never quite making it into the air. Instead, they plowed furrows in the water. And when they tried to stop, they were going so fast they almost pitched over on their heads. After regaining their senses, the mergansers groomed their ruffled feathers and scolded the otters. The otters, for their part, bobbed up and down in the water, shook their heads and sneezed.

Sometimes other animals manage to benefit at the expense of otters. One winter, I watched a pair of coyotes take advantage of several otters. The otters were catching cutthroat trout in a patch of open water at Sedge Bay. They would bring the fish onto the ice to eat them. Although they can gobble small bits of food underwater, otters are so buoyant it's hard for them to feed for long below the surface.

Their tail-end floats up until their whole body is vertical, head down. They have to paddle hard to maintain equilibrium while eating food on the bottom of a lake or stream -- so it's easier for them to bring fish ashore and dine in comfort.

Yet every time an otter brought a trout onto the ice at Sedge Bay, the coyotes would rush in and try

to frighten them away. Sometimes the otters just dove into the water and left their catch behind. Then the coyotes gulped down the trout, sat back on their haunches and waited patiently for the next course to arrive.

But there were no coyotes to contend with today, and no more mergansers either. There was a three-foot-long snag sticking out of the water at a 45-degree angle. The whole crew raced for it. The snag was only big enough for two otters at a time, so they played king-of-the-hill, otter style. They climbed on the snag, hung on it, dove off it and wrestled with each other.

They were far from shore, and I was forgotten. I knew I had to get moving if I was going to make it around the lake before dark. After walking for a few minutes, I paused and looked back. The otters were still scrambling around on the log. But I was so far away that I somehow felt like a spectator, not a participant.

I circled the lake and returned to Witch Creek before sunset. Carefully, I studied the snag and the cove where the otters had been. Nothing.

But in my mind's eye, I can still see them. And if there's such a thing as reincarnation, I want to come back as an otter.

□

David Smith lives in Missoula, Montana.

LETTERS

INTERESTED

Dear HCN,

I enjoyed the two recent articles on Allan Savory and holistic resource management (HCN, 4/27/87). I thought both Sam Bingham and Steve Johnson did an excellent job of presenting the pros and cons of a challenging theory of range management. My observations are directed at reader responses, which I found to be illuminating, but disappointing.

It's too bad that the promise of some fresh thought in solving long-standing range management problems is being compromised by the rigid mind-set of HRM advocates. For instance, one presumptuous letter writer attacks Johnson

for not completing a one week HRM course, assuming that Johnson or any other conservationist would be a convert after a week's exposure to the "word." She then avoids discussing the merits of the two articles by accusing Johnson of being "emotional" - YIKES-HORRORS - while Bingham is "sane, honest, and professional."

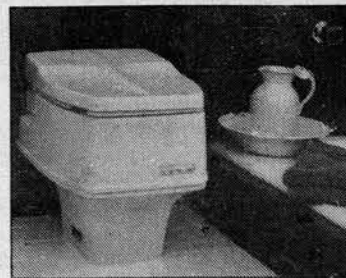
The personal attacks on Johnson continued in another letter in which a reader engaged in a familiar but juvenile "my statistics are better than yours" argument. He conveniently evaded any effort to contest the source of the widely quoted 71 percent unsatisfactory condition figure -- *Our Ailing Rangelands: Condition Report - 1985* by the Natural Resources Defense Council and the National Wildlife Federation -- to happily engage instead in some

personal mud-slinging. Lighten up, HRM advocates! Add a little humility and humor to your "message" (not to mention some positive results) and you'd be surprised at the change in the reception you'll get from your fellow conservationists. Your leader, Allan Savory, is promising the world to both ranchers and conservationists. By his choice, he has the unenviable job of living up to his word or he will have to admit that perhaps there are other ways to achieve the same worthy goals and other conservationists besides himself dedicated to those goals.

Interested, but not a true-believer,

Rose Strickland
Reno, Nevada

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LETTERS



Abersold Foods, Vegetarian Times

THE ONLY SOLUTION

Dear HCN,

I've been reading your articles and letters on overgrazing and Allan

Savory's solution to the problem with considerable interest. Our overgrazed western rangelands have been a concern of mine for many years.

In his article a few issues back, Steve Johnson echoed the concerns of many people, fighting overgrazing with more instead of less livestock, as called for by Savory's grazing method, seems to make as much sense as fighting fire by dousing it with gasoline.

But so did the idea that the earth is round. Anyone could stand on top of a high mountain, look out over a plain, and see that it was flat! The fact is that Savory's ideas make solid "ecological sense." That's a couple of steps up from "common sense." And that is the reason why people who attend one of Savory's schools come away convinced that Holistic Resource Management is the only sound management program for our public rangelands. It is the substance of Savory's ideas, not his style or charisma, that convinces the people who attend his courses.

Most critics persist in equating HRM and SGM (Savory Grazing Method). The fact is, however, that HRM can be practiced without SGM or even without any grazing. On

non-brittle lands Savory acknowledges that they can be managed without any livestock at all.

Steve Johnson's point that many ranchers claim to be practicing HRM without any evidence of improving range is not proof, as he contends, that HRM "doesn't work." It is proof only that most ranchers get hung up on the idea that HRM means more cows on the range without their being willing to put forth the effort (considerable) in planning and on-the-ground management which HRM calls for. It is that unwillingness on the part of so many ranchers which probably explains Savory's performance at Glenwood Springs, reported by Ed Marston.

Critics of HRM, including my friends Steve Johnson and Johanna Wald, who spoke out in support of Johnson in the Aug. 3 HCN, seem to have become conditioned to the idea that the only solution to overgrazing is to kick the cows off the ranges. I felt the same way until I actually attended one of Savory's schools. I'm beginning to think such critics fall in the category of "my mind's made up, don't confuse me with facts." They refuse to get the facts, even when offered the opportunity to

attend one of Savory's schools free of charge.

HRM may not be a panacea but, in my opinion, it is the only solution for brittle rangelands. Whether, in the long term, it turns out to be a practical solution remains to be seen. It will depend on how long it takes the West's moss-backed ranchers to appreciate the fact that it is indeed the only way to go to preserve their way of life. I'm not overly optimistic.

Steve Gallizioli
Phoenix, Arizona

RECALL

Dear HCN,

A recent HCN Hotline implied that the chances of recalling Arizona Gov. Evan Mecham were slight.

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Ray Ring
Tucson, Arizona

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