

WYOMING WILDERNESS CONSENSUS? | URBAN HEAT | THE GREAT BEE TRAP-OUT

High Country News

For people who care about the West

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The Big Swing

How one Colorado county
went from blue to red

By Leah Todd

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A memorial to its prosperous coal-mining past stands watch over sleepy downtown Walsenburg. BROOKE WARREN

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Editor's note

Our 'Montana moment'

In May, Republican Greg Gianforte, a candidate out of Bozeman, Montana, was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. He managed this despite having the night before body-slammed a journalist and punched him hard enough to smash his glasses. Gianforte is a millionaire whose Twitter feed includes posts about elk burgers and huckleberry pie, as well as a pastoral ad campaign for the state that implores folks to find their own "Montana moment." This assault, I guess, was his. But this moment of folly belongs to all of us.



Gianforte works hard to exude a romantic, mythic West, a cowboy of purple mountains and majesty. He also happens to be a man of no apparent self-restraint. More importantly, regardless of his political affiliation, he represents the caricature of an ideal Westerner, a rugged man, thoroughly capable of handling his business. One voter said the alleged beating showed that Gianforte was not "scared to jump in and fight somebody in Washington." That Gianforte's persona ruse worked is a sad comment on the way things are going and how simplified our politics have become.

In this issue, we take a subtler approach to Western politics. Reporter Leah Todd got to know the voters of Walsenburg, Colorado, trying to understand why Huerfano County swung from blue to red in the last election. The county has long been Democratic, with roots in coal production and unions. But coal is long gone, and the town now has an influx of retirees. People there want to see improvement in the local economy, and the Republicans in town were willing to mobilize for the sake of it. Voters in Walsenburg pray, fear God, and did not trust Hillary Clinton's connections to Wall Street. They trusted Donald Trump.

The people of Walsenburg, in other words, have lost faith in professional politicians. And who can blame them? Our congressional representatives are the people we have entrusted to run one of the most powerful nations on Earth, to write the legislation of a nation of laws. Little of that is actually getting done. Instead, our representatives spend most of their time either undermining one another, or running around looking for special interest money to keep them in office.

Our nation is falling apart, literally and figuratively, yet Congress has proven incapable of fixing even itself. We have too many lawmakers, on both sides, who are unworthy of our votes; yet they are clever enough to stay in office, regardless. What Walsenburg teaches us, I think, is that we as citizens have a lot of work to do. We would do well to sit down and listen to each other, with a sympathetic ear, perhaps over a huckleberry pie. I'd even do so with the new congressman from Montana, if he promised to keep his hands to himself.

—Brian Calvert, editor-in-chief

On the cover

Once a Democratic-leaning coal-mining town, Walsenburg, Colorado, voted Republican in the 2016 election, in hopes of bringing back a vibrant economy.

BROOKE WARREN



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Marilyn Covarrubias covers her face while talking to reporters after her son, Daniel, was shot and killed by police in 2015; Daniel's sister, Lanna, looks on. Per capita in 2016, Native Americans were the group most likely to die at the hands of police. TED S. WARREN/AP PHOTO

Native victims of police violence

In 2015 Daniel Covarrubias, a 37-year-old member of the Suquamish Nation, was shot and killed by police in Lakewood, Washington, on his way home from the hospital. The shooting happened in a lumberyard, after Covarrubias reached into his pockets and raised a dark object towards the officers, who opened fire. Only afterward did they discover that the object Covarrubias had pointed was a cellphone. In the U.S., Native Americans are more likely than any other racial group to be killed by law enforcement, at a rate three times higher than whites. But even as public scrutiny over police shootings of African Americans have grown in recent years, Native American deaths have remained largely absent from the conversation. The Native Lives Matter movement hopes to change that by calling attention to what Chase Iron Eyes, a Lakota attorney and activist, calls America's "undeclared race war." SARAH TORY

MORE: hcne.ws/native-lives-matter

Trending

Elk slaughter triggers debate

In April, rancher Larry Michael Harshfield was charged with the slaughter of 12 elk found dead on his property in northeastern Oregon (another 13 were found on the adjacent property). The killings highlight a simmering conflict: What rights does a rancher have on his private property, and what responsibilities do state agencies have in managing the wildlife that range there? The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife doesn't compensate for financial losses but did offer fencing and kill permits, which Harshfield turned down. His trial is scheduled for late June.

ANNA V. SMITH

You say

NANCIE MCCORMISH: "It is undeniable that elk are managed in unnaturally high populations by sportsmen's demand, not biological imperatives."

ROBERT LUCE: "The (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife) must pursue prosecution under the law. They can't just let it go. But can the trial be used as a catalyst to constructively address the frustration of the ranchers and lead to a solution?"

QUIN OURADA: "Much of the moral issue in this case revolves around what element of the kill-permit issuance was too onerous. It seems that the only solution was eliminating the elk, and there was a channel to do so legally."

MORE: hcne.ws/elk-slaughter and [Facebook.com/highcountrynews](https://www.facebook.com/highcountrynews)

9 Number of members of the Board of Scientific Counselors, out of 18, dismissed by the Environmental Protection Agency in May.

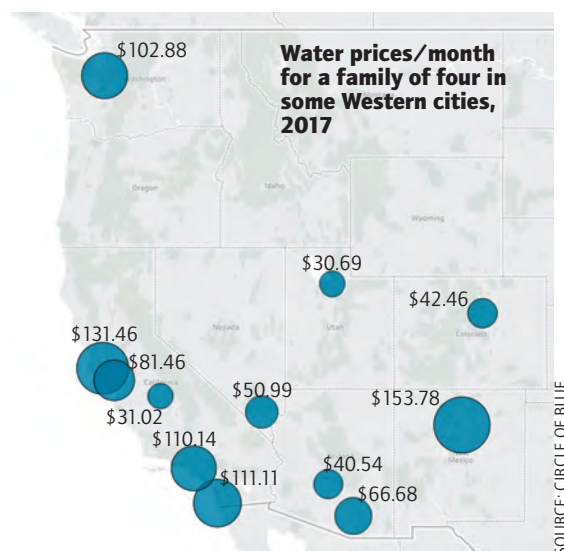
200 Number of advisory boards — many of which allow citizens to make recommendations on natural resource management — suspended by the Interior Department around the same time.

Government spokespeople say the dismissal of scientists and the suspension of citizen advisory groups are designed to bring federal agencies in line with the goals of the Trump administration. Yet the moves have instigated intense outcry from members of the public and of the wider scientific community, who say they block crucial input on federal decision-making. The Board of Scientific Counselors for the Environmental Protection Agency plays a critical role when it comes to the integrity of the science that environmental regulations are based on. The board helps ensure that agency research adheres to scientific standards; the group reviews research results before the agency uses them to develop regulations on issues ranging from water pollution to air quality. The Department of Interior's freeze of Resource Advisory Boards includes 38 committees made up of members of the public representing diverse interests. Those committees directly advise the Bureau of Land Management on grazing, mining, recreation and other issues vital to the West, but they have been put on hold until at least September by the administration. TAY WILES MORE: hcne.ws/science-purge

Where's water cheapest?

Where you live has a lot to do with the price of the water that comes out of your kitchen faucet. Of the 12 Western cities included in a nationwide survey, the nonprofit journalism network Circle of Blue found Salt Lake City's residential water the least expensive in 2017. There, approximately 12,000 gallons — at the top of the range the USGS estimates four people might use in a month — costs \$31. The same amount costs \$154 in Santa Fe, the surveyed city with the most expensive water. And prices are going up: In some cities, rates have more than doubled since 2010. EMILY BENSON

MORE: hcne.ws/water-costs



Western cities ranked by cost of water, lowest to highest

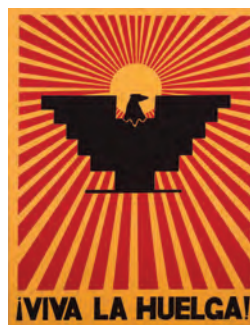
- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Salt Lake City | 7 San Jose |
| 2 Fresno | 8 Los Angeles |
| 3 Phoenix | 9 Seattle |
| 4 Denver | 10 San Diego |
| 5 Las Vegas | 11 San Francisco |
| 6 Tucson | 12 Santa Fe |

SOURCE: CIRCLE OF BLUE

“We will continue to persist, even if it means getting ‘man-handled’ for it. Bring it on.”

—Montana reporter Eve Byron after GOP candidate Greg Gianforte body-slammed a reporter, and the next day was elected over Democrat Rob Quist for Montana's one House seat. ANNA V. SMITH

MORE: hcne.ws/gianforte-wins



United Farm Workers poster from the 1960s.

Trump reinvigorates immigrant labor unions in LA

This year's "A Day Without an Immigrant" protest in early May illustrated the power of a movement that has become a major force in California. In Los Angeles, many laborers are immigrants, and they are increasingly organized, so this year's walkout became a condemnation of President Donald Trump's immigration policies. The so-called "alt-labor" — service workers in restaurants, domestic work, farms and retail, among others — movement in Los Angeles may be the litmus test for whether a new generation of immigrant workers can mobilize into a lasting and progressive political force. RUXANDRA GUIDI

MORE: hcne.ws/la-unions

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Kathy Martinez

CIRCULATION
Kati Johnson, Pam Peters,
Doris Teel

GRANTWRITER Janet Reasoner

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circulation@hcn.org

development@hcn.org

advertising@hcn.org

syndication@hcn.org

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LETTERS

The following comments were posted on our website, hcn.org.

SUBSIDIZED RANCHERS

The article about the American Prairie Reserve and Phillips County ranchers and farmers ignores the role that federal farm subsidies play in helping to keep the ranchers on the land (“Montana refuge divides tribes and ranchers,” *HCN*, 5/29/17). According to the Environmental Working Group, from 1995 to 2014 U.S. taxpayers generously paid out \$219 million to ranchers and farmers in Phillips County. Would these ranchers and farmers be on the land without these payments? If not, their farms and ranches are not sustainable.

Tom Darnell
Lewistown, Montana

VOICELESS NO MORE

It’s very interesting that now that we have a president who looks at national monuments from the other side of the aisle, some people feel that their voices are not heard (“Zinke listened at Bears Ears, but supporters felt unheard,” *HCN*, 5/29/17). Consider how those who voted for this president have felt for the past 30-plus years! The voiceless now have a voice and the sky is falling ... but truth be told, we are having a re-balancing of viewpoints that seems to be very overdue. I am hoping that no more public lands will be locked up and hidden from view so every American can have access to these wonderful places. It’s time for public lands to become public once more and private lands should remain private. No more backroom deals made without public input.

Joe Cosentino
Lakeview, Oregon

NO LAND-GRABBING HERE

The erroneous claim that the Antiquities Act is another form of federal land grab is so often repeated but seldom challenged (“Fact-checking Trump’s Antiquities Act order,” *HCN*, 5/15/17). Switching management from one federal agency to another is not a federal land grab, certainly not in the sense that detractors claim: the federal government taking over state or private land. The Antiquities Act designations usually involve transferring the land from the Bureau of Land Management over to the National Park Service, but lately, it is not uncommon that the land remains under the same federal agency. This is no federal taking or “land grab.” Those spreading falsehoods have



JOEL PETT EDITORIAL CARTOON USED WITH THE PERMISSION OF JOEL PETT AND THE CARTOONIST GROUP. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

certainly controlled and dominated the narrative at the national level, in public venues and in political discussions.

David Ek
Catlett, Virginia

CHERRY-PICKING CLAUSES

The conservative fantasy that the federal government can’t own land in the states is based on an ability to ignore relevant parts of the U.S. and state constitutions (“Fact-checking Trump’s Antiquities Act order,” *HCN*, 5/15/17). For some reason, they think that Article 1 Section 8, which is written specifically about the District of Columbia, is the only applicable part of the U.S. Constitution. They then deny the existence of Article 4 Section 3, which says that Congress gets to decide how to dispose of and manage any federal property. Their interpretation also depends upon entirely ignoring clauses in each state’s constitution and foundational legislation that specifically, and forever, give up any claim to title to federal lands not specifically granted to the state upon founding.

It’s like complaining that your great-great grandfather sold a piece of land with clear transfer of title but because you don’t like it and weren’t consulted (or born), the validity of the deed should be questioned and the property should be given back to you. Except that in this case the Supreme Court has already said, repeatedly, that the federal government has a clear right to own and manage lands.

Tim Baker
Eureka, California

LOCKED OUT OF LANDS

I guess as I slip into advanced stages of crusty ol’ farthood and fall from my state of grace formerly attained as a member

of various enviro-spiritual organizations, e.g., Sierra Club and Greenpeace, I am developing a certain appreciation for those who oppose the relentless march of special designation of vast tracts of land, such as national monuments, wilderness areas and vastly expanded military bases (“Fact-checking Trump’s Antiquities Act order,” *HCN*, 5/15/17). To me, the numerous special designations are beginning to look like the locking-up of public land for the near-exclusive use of the able-bodied elites, or defenders of capitalism. Access for me is either forbidden (by fences or physical limitations) or subject to obfuscating regulations and arcane permit procedures. It starts to feel very much like bureaucratic overreach, and I can begin to feel some sympathy for those who oppose it, and wish to turn some of it backwards.

Tom Schweich
Golden, Colorado

FLDS AWARENESS

While I might agree that the Fundamental Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and its treatment of its members, is not the usual subject to be discussed in *HCN*, I am glad it is (“Change comes to Short Creek,” *HCN*, 5/1/17). This is part of “our” West, and we should be aware of these cultures. My wife and I started to drive through these FLDS towns several years ago, but we were so uncomfortable, we turned around and left. I am not sure how the states of Utah and Arizona and the federal government have allowed these practices to continue for so long, but as the article points out, rescuing the children and women of the FLDS is not a simple process and may take years.

Bud Phillips
San Diego, California

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Can Wyoming learn from Utah's public-land mistakes?

If the state's initiative succeeds, it could become a model

BY REBECCA WORBY

Where Wyoming's imposing Teton Range ends, the more modest Snake River Range begins. Less visited than its northern neighbor, the remote area is a vital piece of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, providing habitat for elk, deer, moose and bears. Though not protected by a national park, as the Tetons are, 136,000 rugged acres of the Snake River Range — known as the Palisades — have lingered in the contentious limbo of a “wilderness study area” for more than 30 years. In winter, the Palisades’ spruce- and fir-dotted hills and sprawling sagebrush steppe attract snowmobilers and backcountry skiers; in summer, visitors bike, hike and seek out dazzling wildflower displays.

A major source of friction in the public-land wars, over 500 wilderness study areas in the West span at least 15 million acres. Federal land agencies manage them to preserve their wilderness characteristics until Congress decides whether to designate them as official wilderness, meaning that generally mining and logging are prohibited or restricted and mechanized recreation is not allowed. (In the Palisades Wilderness Study Area, however,

Rebecca Worby is an editorial intern at *High Country News*. [@beccaworby](#)

prior uses have been grandfathered in.) This uncertain status irks both those who want permanent protection and those who would rather open the lands to more recreation and mineral development.

In an effort to finally resolve that uncertainty, the Wyoming County Commissioners Association recently introduced the Wyoming Public Lands Initiative, inviting the state's 23 counties to participate. The goal is to pass federal legislation based on measured, locally driven decisions for Wyoming's 45 wilderness study areas.

Though it's still early in the process, hopes are high that Wyoming's approach could provide a useful blueprint. Other states are already watching: In Montana, where a recent House resolution called upon Congress to release seven wilderness study areas to multiple use, some pointed to Wyoming's bottom-up plan as a more reasonable alternative. Critics of Montana's resolution complained that it would cut the public out, and suggested a more collaborative process.

In the late 1970s and early '80s, the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service identified more than 800 wilderness study areas on Western lands. This was supposed to be temporary: Once

the responsible agency studied an area's wilderness potential, Congress would either designate it or release the land to other uses. That inventory was completed in the early '90s, but widespread opposition to wilderness created roadblocks. While areas have been resolved piecemeal since that time, no broader process has been developed.

In Wyoming, advisory committees in the eight participating counties will meet regularly through the end of the year to develop recommendations for the future of wilderness study areas and other public lands with wilderness potential in their county. Because Wyoming is exempt from the Antiquities Act, stakeholders can deliberate without what some see as the threat of monument designation.

Once approved by the county commission, each committee's recommendations will be included in a statewide bill to be introduced by Wyoming's congressional delegation. Republican Sens. Mike Enzi and John Barrasso and then-Rep. Cynthia Lummis expressed their support for the initiative in a 2015 letter to Wyoming's boards of county commissioners, describing it as “a reasonable approach for legislative success.”

Teton County's 21 advisory committee members, who range from wilderness advocates to motorized recreationists, began meeting last fall. The county is home to Grand Teton National Park, part of Yellowstone and three wilderness areas; it also holds portions of the Palisades and Shoal Creek wilderness study areas. The committee largely agrees on the basics, such as keeping public lands public and protecting wilderness study areas from



Alaska's Bristol Bay Watershed. EPA

THE LATEST

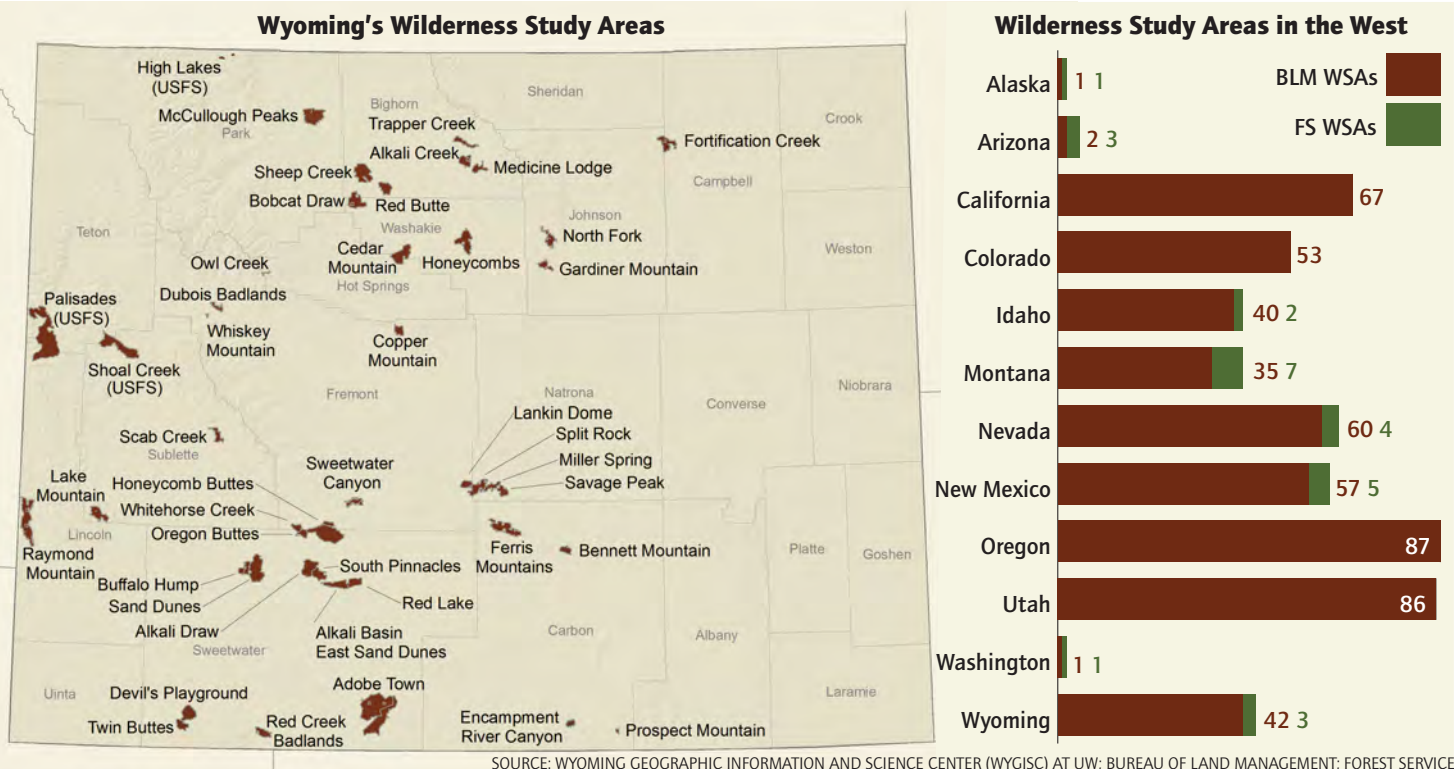
Backstory

Southwest Alaska's Bristol Bay hosts the largest sockeye salmon run in the world, supporting substantial fisheries and cultural traditions. **The proposed Pebble Mine would extract gold, copper and molybdenum from the bay's headwaters, but the resulting habitat destruction and potential spills of toxic mine waste could devastate salmon** (“Worst place for a major mine?” *HCN*, 11/25/13). In 2014, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed restricting mining within the watershed, citing environmental risks; that prompted mining company Pebble Limited Partnership to sue the agency.

Followup

In May, President Trump's EPA settled the suits, reversing Obama-era efforts to prevent development. Parent company Northern Dynasty Minerals plans to apply for a federal mining permit, a process that will likely take years. **Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R, supports allowing permitting to proceed, but stressed the importance of salmon:** “If the company can't prove the mine will be safe,” a spokeswoman told the *Alaska Dispatch News*, “the mine shouldn't be built.”

EMILY BENSON



SOURCE: WYOMING GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION AND SCIENCE CENTER (WYGISC) AT UW; BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT; FOREST SERVICE



A fish-friendly culvert is built under a state highway near Seattle.

WASH. STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

THE LATEST

Backstory

In 2001, 20 Native American tribes sued the state of Washington, claiming that road culverts imperiled salmon and thereby violated tribes' treaty fishing rights ("Tribes fight to clear the roads for salmon," *HCN*, 7/2/01). Culverts help prevent flooding, but Washington's poorly designed and maintained ones also keep dwindling salmon populations from their spawning grounds. In 2007, the 9th Circuit Court ruled that the state was responsible for protecting salmon streams — including fish passage through road culverts. That decision was upheld in 2013.

Followup

This spring, the 9th Circuit denied Washington's request to re-hear the case. **Within the next 15 years, the state must reopen 90 percent of the salmon habitat blocked by culverts.** The estimated cost could reach \$1.88 billion. Lorraine Loomis, chair of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, said in a press release, "This is a win for salmon, treaty rights and everyone who lives here."

MAYA L. KAPOOR

development. "In general, people want this landscape to look and feel the same in the future as it does now," says committee member Pat Kearney, Wyoming conservation coordinator for the Greater Yellowstone Coalition.

They disagree, however, on the details. In the Palisades, the 1984 Wyoming Wilderness Act allowed snowmobiling and heli-skiing to continue to the extent that they occurred before wilderness study area designation. But as Teton County Commissioner Paul Vogelheim points out, considerable "creep" has occurred over the years, with use extending beyond the historic precedent. Releasing the Palisades to multiple use would allow that use to continue, which the motorized contingent wants. Wilderness advocates, however, would like to see motorized use reined in — and congressionally designated wilderness status would achieve that goal.

But to advocate only for wilderness would go against the collaborative spirit of the initiative, says Kearney. If the committee reaches a solution, it will likely lie somewhere in the middle. Other public lands with wilderness potential could serve as bargaining chips, increasing the likelihood that each group will get at least a piece of what they want.

Beyond in-county user-group conflicts lies another wrinkle: conflicts *between* counties. The Palisades lies partly

in Teton County and partly in Lincoln County. While Teton County relies upon public lands for its recreation-heavy economy, Lincoln County remains reliant upon mining and ranching. Lincoln declined to participate in the initiative, recommending, in a letter to Wyoming's congressional delegation, the full release of the Palisades for multiple use. Any legislation resulting from the initiative will affect only the participating counties, so Teton's recommendations will have no bearing on Lincoln's portion of the Palisades. Teton shares its other wilderness study area, Shoal Creek, with Sublette County, which is participating.

The advisory committees face a complex task: Not only must a wide range of stakeholders come to consensus, but if they want to see a successful bill, they'll have to build their recommendations to withstand scrutiny at the national level. Utah's Public Lands Initiative, which attempted to end the controversy surrounding the state's potential and current wilderness through a negotiated compromise, failed because, in its later stages, what was meant to be a bottom-up approach "became kind of top-down," says Peter Aengst, Northern Rockies regional director for The Wilderness Society. The state's congressional delegation added provisions, such as energy development

zones, that "did not honor the diverse interests at the county level" that went into the initiative, he explains.

Supporters hope Wyoming has learned from Utah's mistakes, but top-down changes could still become an issue: What the counties decide is in their best interest won't necessarily satisfy the congressional delegation. For an initiative like this to be successful, Aengst says, the delegation must be "absolutely committed to honoring the locally crafted, bottom-up agreements" that the counties reach. He hopes the Wyoming delegation will ensure that the resulting bill maintains broad support. Toward that end, the Wyoming County Commissioners' Association will advocate for whatever recommendations emerge from the county-level negotiations, says Gregory Cowan, the organization's natural resource staff attorney, assuming the counties proceed in good faith.

Regardless of the outcome, Wyoming's initiative is helping to build relationships among historically opposed groups. It gives stakeholders "an opportunity to sit at the table, spend time together, get to know one another, and try to find a solution that they can all live with," says Steve Smutko of the University of Wyoming's Ruckelshaus Institute, which is helping the advisory committees work more effectively in Teton and Sublette counties. "That in itself is good for Wyoming." □



The Palisades Wilderness Study Area is split between two Wyoming counties that have different ideas about how the land should be used and managed. COURTESY ECOFLIGHT

The West's shrinking water supply

Three new studies show dry times ahead

BY EMILY BENSON



ECOFLIGHT



J. CARL GANTER, CIRCLE OF BLUE



ECOFLIGHT

THE STUDY “Large near-term projected snowpack loss over the western United States,” *Nature Communications*, April 2017.

THE TAKEAWAY The West’s mountain snowpack supplies about two-thirds of the region’s water. But it dropped by 10 to 20 percent between the 1980s and 2000s, and, within the next three decades, it could further shrink, by as much as 60 percent.

WHAT IT MEANS Measurements of the amount of water held within snow from hundreds of stations from Washington to New Mexico revealed the extent of the decline in recent decades. Simulations showed that natural elements alone, like volcanic and solar activity, were not enough to account for the dip. When factors influenced by humans were included — like changes in greenhouse gas concentrations — the models matched historical reality, implicating climate change as the cause.

The study’s predictions range from a drastic drop in snowpack to a possible slight gain by 2040. Climate change alone will likely cause a further decrease of about 30 percent, says co-author John Fyfe, a researcher at Environment and Climate Change Canada. But natural variations in atmospheric conditions above the Pacific could temporarily worsen the decline — or nix it, depending on how they fluctuate. So water managers need to be prepared for both extremes. “It’s a cyclic phenomenon,” Fyfe says. “It’s eventually going to come around and bite you.”

THE STUDY “Depletion and response of deep groundwater to climate-induced pumping variability,” *Nature Geoscience*, January 2017.

THE TAKEAWAY Aquifers have been drawn down in several areas across the country. In parts of California and Nevada, however, groundwater levels have actually risen, perhaps reflecting the success of regulations and recharge projects.

WHAT IT MEANS Aquifer levels declined in about half of the deep groundwater wells monitored nationwide between 1940 and 2015. The lower Mississippi Basin, the High Plains over the Ogallala Aquifer, and California’s Central Valley overall have experienced some of the nation’s highest rates of groundwater depletion in recent years. The study found that during dry periods, water users pump more even as natural recharge diminishes, leading to rapid drawdowns. That can cause dry wells, land subsidence, ecological damage and other problems.

Sometimes, however, those trends can be reversed. Researchers found that groundwater levels rose in about 20 percent of the wells, including around Las Vegas and in limited sections of the Central Valley, while the remainder showed no change. Tess Russo, a hydrologist at Pennsylvania State University and study co-author, cautions that the groundwater level increases could be misleading: Some wells were monitored for as short a time as 10 years, and if those years were particularly rainy, measurements may not represent an area’s long-term history. Still, Russo says, groundwater recharge projects and other management strategies have helped replenish some aquifers.

THE STUDY “The twenty-first century Colorado River hot drought and implications for the future,” *Water Resources Research*, February/March 2017.

THE TAKEAWAY On average, Colorado River flows between 2000 and 2014 were nearly 20 percent lower than the historical norm. Warm weather caused by climate change — not just a lack of precipitation — was the culprit. As the mercury continues to climb, the Colorado could drop by more than half by century’s end.

WHAT IT MEANS The Colorado River Basin has been in a drought since 2000. Warmer-than-normal temperatures were responsible for about a third of the flow declines. More water is lost to the atmosphere through evaporation from soil, streams and other water bodies when it’s hot; plants also use more water, partly because the growing season is longer.

Declining flows will further stress the already over-allocated river, which supplies nearly 40 million people in two countries. The authors note that the basin would need a precipitation spike of 4 to 20 percent to counterbalance the flow-reducing effect of future warmer temperatures — “a major and unprecedented change” compared to the past.

Arizona, California and Nevada have been negotiating to reduce their demands on the Colorado, but haven’t agreed on a final plan. While that agreement would help balance the lower basin, it may not be enough to deal with future declines big enough to impact the entire basin, which also includes parts of Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming. □

Emily Benson is an editorial intern at High Country News. [@erben1](#)

Snapshot

Who sponsors? Who pays?

The interests behind Western lawmakers and their public-lands bills

When President Donald Trump signed an order loosening fossil fuel regulations in March, he proclaimed the dawn of “a new era in American energy production and job creation.” Both his administration and the 115th Congress strongly espouse these goals: Trump has filled his Cabinet with industry darlings like Energy Secretary Rick Perry, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt and Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke. Perry and Pruitt have strong ties to the energy industry in their home states, while Zinke met with more oil and gas lobbyists than representatives of any other interest group during his first months in office. Meanwhile, many Republicans in Congress have received hefty campaign contributions from powerful players in extractive industries, such as Koch Industries and Chevron, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan nonprofit that analyzes money behind elections and policy. These lawmakers have also introduced bills to weaken public-land protections and thereby benefit corporate oil and gas interests by opening up more land to potential development.

In response to backlash from constituents, Rep. Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah, withdrew HR 621, his bill to sell 3.3 million acres of public land. Though Chaffetz backed down — and will soon resign — several other anti-public-lands bills remain active in Congress. Many propose transferring federal lands to state control — a goal long part of the GOP platform — or weakening federal protections on national monuments and other public lands by changing the way they are designated. At right are the eight Western lawmakers most actively driving legislation, ranked by the number of bills they sponsor. This includes all such bills by these lawmakers since 2011, including those introduced by the 115th Congress.

REBECCA WORBY

		Public-lands bills sponsored/ cosponsored from 2011-2017	Oil and gas campaign contributions*		Top corporate donor(s) in 2016
			That weaken federal land protection	That promote land transfer	
Rep. Rob Bishop R-Utah, 1st District		12/18	18	12	\$390,216 over 14 years BP, \$10,000 Exxon Mobil, \$10,000 Chevron Corporation, \$10,000 National Cattlemen's Beef Association, \$10,000
Sen. Mike Lee R-Utah		10/12	12	3	\$285,820 over 6 years Koch Industries, \$40,800
Rep. Don Young R-Alaska, at large		9/18	18	14	\$1,365,368 over 44 years Edison Chouest Offshore, \$28,300
Sen. John Barrasso R-Wyoming		8/5	5	1	\$634,066 over 10 years Alpha Natural Resources, \$52,950
Rep. Raúl Labrador R-Idaho, 1st District		8/15	15	8	\$40,750 over 6 years Koch Industries, \$10,000 Berkshire Hathaway, \$9,500
Rep. Paul Gosar R-Arizona, 4th District		7/25	25	18	\$52,300 over 6 years Freeport McMoRan, \$13,500
Rep. Jason Chaffetz R-Utah, 3rd District *Resigning June 30		6/18	18	12	\$147,650 over 8 years Berkshire Hathaway, \$15,700 Koch Industries, \$10,000
Rep. Mark Amodei R-Nevada, 2nd District		6/18	18	15	\$54,000 over 6 years Barrick Gold Corporation, \$12,000

The danger of urban heat

How built-up cities and higher temperatures threaten human health

BY MOLLY PETERSON

If heat is the enemy, Marcela Herrera thought she was ready for battle last summer at her family's north Los Angeles apartment.

Old air conditioner units chugged away on windows in three rooms. Extension cords snaked into box fans on the floor, positioned along a hallway to push cooler air towards warmer spots. Bamboo shades, bent blinds and curtains beat back the sun.

But none of that prevented her eldest son, Edwin Díaz, from getting a nosebleed each time a heat wave crested over the family's dense working-class neighborhood. And as outdoor temperatures climbed into the 90s, the 17-year-old suffered painful, debilitating migraines. The family doctor recommended that he try to stay cooler for the sake of his health.

Western communities, including Los Angeles, are aware that urban heat is a serious and growing threat to public health, and the warming climate only increases the problem. "It's not as visible as other catastrophes, but the implications can be far reaching," says Elizabeth Rhoades, who works on climate issues in Los Angeles County's Department of Public Health.

Predictions are for longer, more frequent, and more severe heat events throughout the Southwest, especially in Los Angeles and Phoenix. Studies in the last decade suggest that heat especially impacts very old and very young city dwellers, poor neighborhoods, and those without central air conditioning: people like Edwin Díaz and Marcela Herrera. But researchers are still learning about how people are affected by excessive heat in the places where they spend most of their time — inside their homes. Few policies exist to protect the most vulnerable, and doctors say the conditions are poorly tracked.

Heat is sneaky. It worsens pre-existing conditions, such as heart and lung disease, kidney problems, diabetes and asthma, more often than it kills directly. "People end up going to the hospital because heat affects their health, makes



their asthma worse or something worse," says David Eisenman, a professor of medicine and public health at UCLA. "But it's not technically coded as that in the records. It's coded as 'worsening asthma.' So we really undercount the number of cases where heat is a factor."

And urban heat is layered. Los Angeles is as much as 6 degrees hotter than surrounding areas because of what's called the "heat island effect." Sprawl defines not just heat islands but what some call an archipelago of high temperatures across modern urban areas. Geography, wind patterns, tree cover and concrete all work to create hotspots where temperatures are higher and air pollution is worse. In fact, climate models suggest that Herrera's San Fernando Valley neighborhood,

far from ocean breezes, will warm 10 to 20 percent faster than the rest of Los Angeles.

"There's been this assumption that we can all cool off somehow. And in some ways that might have been true 100 years ago," Eisenman says. "We don't have access to the natural cooling environment like we did before."

The landscape's cooling elements disappeared long before Edwin Díaz and his mother arrived in the valley. Their Pacoima neighborhood derives its name from the Native Tongva word for a place of running water. (These days, the now concrete-locked Pacoima Wash, a flood-control channel, is often dry.) After World War II, the neighborhood boomed when

Haze hangs over the San Fernando Valley in Los Angeles, top. With over 1.7 million inhabitants, it is one of California's largest suburban sprawls. Foil covers the windows in the apartment complex where Marcela Herrera lives with her family, bottom. The foil is one way the family attempts to minimize the heat in their home.

DANIA MAXWELL

Molly Peterson covers the environment with a focus on water and climate change. She's based in Los Angeles. 🐦 @Mollydacious

Please see **Urban Heat**, page 22

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WHERE WATER IS GOLD: LIFE AND LIVELIHOOD IN ALASKA'S BRISTOL BAY

By Carl Johnson. 176 pages, softcover: \$24.95.
Braided River/Mountaineers Books, 2016.

Where Water is Gold celebrates the natural bounty of Southwest Alaska's Bristol Bay. Images and essays highlight the splendor of the area's mountains, waterways and wildlife, and the lives of the people who live and work there. The bay hosts the biggest sockeye salmon run in the world, and fish figure prominently in photographer Carl Johnson's images. In one, a rainbow trout camouflages itself against a streambed; in another, sunlight turns ruby strips of drying sockeye translucent.

The book offers a vivid reminder of what is at stake should developers build Pebble Mine, a massive copper and gold mine proposed for Bristol Bay's headwaters. Former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor writes in the book's foreword that pristine habitats hold an "immeasurable" value of their own: "Turn these pages," she writes, "and you, too, will understand why in Bristol Bay, it is water that is the true gold."

If you want to learn how to shoot like Carl Johnson, you can join him at the Sundance Mountain Resort this fall, where he and fellow Braided River authors will be leading a conservation photography workshop. For more info about the workshop, visit www.braidedriver.org. **EMILY BENSON**

A fishing crew lets out a net. CARL JOHNSON

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On summer and reading the old-fashioned way

It's official: Summer's on the way. It's hot as heck and we've turned on the swamp cooler at the *High Country News* office in Paonia, Colorado.

Beating the heat, **Charles** and **Elisha Conant** dropped in with their 17-month-old daughter, **Elanor**, a redhead who — amazingly — can already indicate the square root of two, via a couple of fingers held up in the air. The family came from Longmont, Colorado, for some fishing, but they're also considering moving to Paonia. Charles, a stay-at-home dad, and Elisha, a parent-infant psychologist, are good friends of **Roger Echohawk**, a historian for the Pawnee Nation who has also written for *High Country News*.

Longtime reader **Baz Stevens** stopped in from Freeland, Washington, to tell us stories from the late 1970s — the "old days" of *HCN* — when he first subscribed. Back then, Baz was a loyal reader but he didn't always receive his copies of the magazine, then a black-and-white tabloid, because of his "no-address, vagabond ways," he said. "My fault, not yours." When he did get it, though, the then-Outward Bound summer program instructor would fold it up and "throw it in a duffel" for his frequent river trips. We can't think of a better way to read the magazine. Thanks for sticking with us, Baz.

In fundraising news, around 70 *HCN*ers gathered in Albuquerque, New Mexico, to meet up and discuss the American West. Current and former board members, *HCN* intern alumni, local politicians and new readers all coalesced at the home of longtime reader **Sandy Buffett**. **Mark Rudd**, husband of *HCN* board member **Marla Painter**, took Executive Director **Paul Larmer** and Major Gift Adviser **Alyssa Pinkerton** on a tour of the nearby Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge. Thanks, all, for your continued support.

We have exciting news from contributor **Michael Branch**, who wrote the "Rants from the Hill" column for us, which he has now transformed into

a full-fledged book. (Read an excerpt on page 26.) Michael recently won the Ellen Meloy Fund for Desert Writers to support his current book-in-progress, *Jackalope!: The Complete Natural and Cultural History*. The book will be his fourth, a close look at the lore of the legendary antlered jackrabbit. Congratulations Michael!

Unfortunately, our review of Jordan Fisher Smith's book *Engineering Eden* ("Bear interventions: The good, the bad and the ugly," *HCN*, 5/15/17) contained several errors. Grizzly advocate Martha Shell did not file the Walker lawsuit; the dead man's parents did. Yellowstone Chief Research Biologist Glen Cole did not order the Trout Creek Dump closed in 1967; the park's superintendent did so in 1969. Galen Rowell did not discover the Park Service's secret bear-body dump at Yosemite; a climbing partner of his, Chris Vandiver, did, and told him about it. Rowell was not an "activist," but rather a serious big-wall rock climber and photojournalist. *HCN* regrets the errors.

— Anna V. Smith for the staff



Publisher Paul Larmer and Deb French, *HCN*'s first Outreach Director from 2003-2005, on a recent visit to the office in Paonia.

BROOKE WARREN



The Big Swing



*How one Colorado county
went from blue to red*

A

FEATURE BY
LEAH TODD

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
BROOKE WARREN

respectful hush falls over the living room of this large house just outside Walsenburg, Colorado. Members of the Huerfano County Republican Party have gathered here to celebrate President Donald Trump's Inauguration, while a recording of the day's events is projected on a tall wall. In the kitchen, a tiny jar of caviar sits among cheese platters and steaming crockpots on the granite countertop.

Debi Sporleder, the party's chairwoman, bows her head and prays.

"Father, we just thank you for this day," Sporleder says, her voice echoing down the long, museum-like hall. "All of us just stand in awe of how you've worked in our America. We love you. We praise you. In the name of your son, Jesus — and bless this food — Amen."

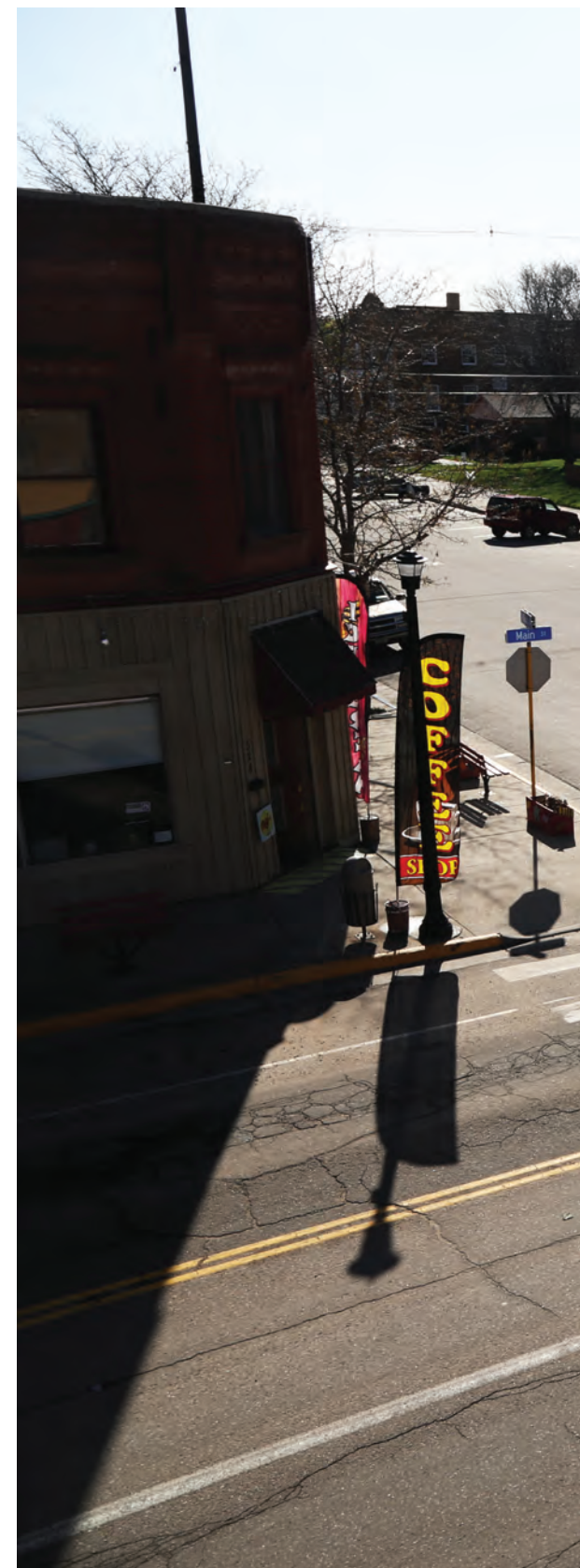
A chorus of "Amens" follows. Chairs scrape the floor as people rise for the Pledge of Allegiance. Though the mood of this mostly older crowd is quiet and far

from jubilant, tonight is a celebration.

Bolstered by transplants and new recruits, a resurgent local Republican Party mounted a formidable opposition last year to the Democrats, who had for decades enjoyed wide support in this former coal town. Local Republicans, led by Sporleder, mobilized voters, worked the phones, and manned Republican Party headquarters — the first in town in recent memory. Their efforts contributed to a surprising political about-face: Huerfano County voted red in the 2016 presidential election, departing from its long Democratic history to support Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton by a margin of about 10 points. Whether the flip is a fluke or a harbinger of long-term change is more than just a political question for Huerfano County: It's a reflection of the community's past and, perhaps, its future.

In some ways, the story of Huerfano County mirrors national trends. As in other rural places, Trump's rhetoric

tapped into frustration with the slow pace of economic recovery in Walsenburg — at 3,000 people, the county's biggest town — and appealed to people's fear of law-breaking or welfare-dependent immigrants. But the county's embrace of Trump is also due to fervent local organizing and the demographic changes that have quietly remade Huerfano County and dozens of Western communities over the past few decades. What began as a trickle of retirees and second-home-owners seeking cheap land has become a powerful force here, making the place more retirement destination than working-class haven, more drive-through gas stop than self-powering economic engine.





Now, six months after the election, the community is still grappling with the potential implications of Trump's policies and the ripple effects of the political shift on local elections. The way Walsenburg handles its changing identity — whether the locals succeed or fail to understand each other in a political environment that is more heated and more vicious than ever before — may offer a forecast, of sorts, for other communities dealing with the same thing.

And though the county's swing for Trump surprised many, the embers of this political transformation have been below the surface for decades, steadily burning like coal.

Phyllis Cordova grips a mug of coffee on the laminate counter in the café she has owned in downtown Walsenburg for four decades. A television news program prattles on about a pending snowstorm on this January morning, but inside the Alpine Rose Café, it's warm, brightly lit and nearly empty. Just one person sits alone at a table in the back.

"I had a booming business when I started here," Cordova says, as her son DJ refills her cup from behind the counter. "Now, all the old-timers are gone. These young people don't patronize these kinds of restaurants. If they eat, it's fast food."

Cordova, a Democrat, is the daughter of a coal miner, and she talks wistfully about how life once was in her native Walsenburg. In 1940, 6,000 people lived in town, and another 10,000 in the surrounding county. Now, there are only 6,000 people in the entire county. Cordova counts off the car dealerships and bars that once lined the busy streets. People were miners or ranchers, or they drove to Pueblo, an hour away, to work in a steel mill. Jobs paid good wages and required just a high school degree.

Walsenburg has an important chapter in the labor history of the U.S. In the 1860s, the community was called La Plaza de los Leones, a regional hub for

A bustling downtown Walsenburg, c. 1960s, above left, as seen in a photograph in the Huerfano Heritage Center. Above, the town today, where population has dropped by about half and businesses are struggling.



The Alpine Rose Café, top, was a booming business in downtown Walsenburg when Phyllis Cordova bought it in the 1970s. “Now, all the old-timers are gone,” she says. Above, Carolyn Newman recounts the history of the Ludlow Massacre at the Walsenburg Mining Museum.

Spanish-American ranchers and farmers. Fred Walsen, an early settler and the town’s namesake, established a trading post in the area in 1870, and the town was incorporated in 1873. Later that decade, the first coal mine opened. As immigrants flooded the Eastern U.S. in the late 1800s, hundreds of them boarded trains headed west and landed here. “They were the start of the middle class,” says Bob Butero, Western regional director for the United Mine Workers of America.

Labor leader Mary “Mother” Jones famously spent time in the Huerfano

County jail after she tried to help striking miners in the early 1900s; local Democrats still re-enact her dramatic arrest at a dinner held in her honor each year. Steeped in the town’s collective memory is the 1914 Ludlow Massacre, which erupted when members of the Colorado National Guard opened fire on striking coal miners on the prairie outside Walsenburg. At least 19 people, including 11 children, died in the resulting chaos, and the daylong shootout ended with the strikers’ tent colony being burned to the ground.

For several generations, mine workers protested the horrific working conditions; GOP-leaning mine bosses fought back. The cycle bred a sense of contempt that still makes some old-timers cringe when they hear that their granddaughters are marrying Republicans. Voting Democrat is part of the DNA of Huerfano County, where locals supported Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, Al Gore and Barack Obama, twice. Since 1944, the county has voted for just two Republican presidents: Richard Nixon in 1972 and George W. Bush in 2004, by a margin of 45 votes. But machines replaced workers, demand for Huerfano County coal declined, and the mines left one by one; the last one closed around 1973. As coal left, much of what made Huerfano County blue left, too, setting off the first cracks in the Democratic machine and changing the culture of the county.

Despite her nostalgia, Cordova

doesn’t mind the slow days at the Alpine Rose Café, she says. She’ll linger to chat with customers, or feed a family member who stops by after school. She keeps a table stocked with free clothes for those who need it.

She’s been doing this so long, she says, that “if (customers) come, they come. If they don’t, they don’t.”

Walsenburg is a quiet place now, a grid of old houses stuck stubbornly to wind-swept land between Interstate 25 and the Spanish Peaks, twin mountaintops that rise like church towers south of town. Main Street is just a few wide blocks, trains stop traffic and tumbleweeds gather in the doorways of vacant buildings. A new coffee shop sticks out, one of the few places where tourists mingle with locals and the young sit with the old. The outskirts of town quickly give way to open space, where mobile homes and mansions cling to the sloping foothills.

Like many small Western communities, Huerfano County has lost many of its kids and working-aged adults; young people tend to move away for jobs and college and not come back. Schools have consistently shrunk in the last decade. At a recent community meeting, in hopes of improving the county’s teacher turnover rate, the school district superintendent urged local businesses to offer incentives for local teachers — maybe coupons for pizza or a few free rounds of golf.

But there is one bright spot in the otherwise depressing data: Retirees love Huerfano County. Though population overall has plummeted nearly 20 percent since 2000, the 65-and-older age group has grown by more than 500 people or 10 percent. One in three people in Huerfano County are baby boomers, compared to one in five nationally. Across the Mountain West, retirees are flocking to communities like Walsenburg, according to research from the Bozeman, Montana-based Headwaters Economics.

They come in their trucks and RVs, buying old fixer-uppers and building solar-powered houses and, in some cases, mansions. Retirees like Stanley Mann, the retired law professor and Trump supporter who hosted the inauguration dinner at the home he built on a hill outside town, find what they want in Huerfano County: cheap property taxes, a quiet lifestyle and mountain views. Dennis Hoyt, a former Alaska school administrator and Huerfano County Republican Party chairman, moved to Walsenburg to be closer to his kids. For Sam Haun, the 89-year-old newly elected president of the resident council at the local nursing home, Walsenburg is his second retirement destination; he first retired to a farm outside Trinidad. Haun, a Trump supporter, campaigned for nursing home council president on the slogan: “Make This Joint Great Again.”

To be sure, retirees are not the only demographic force reshaping the rural West. Tourism and the boom in remote employment are transforming local economies, too, with different political implications. Think Jackson, Wyoming, where the dearth of affordable housing means teachers and cops commute from 30 minutes away, and Bozeman, Montana, where tech firms are hiring scores of workers and manicured subdivisions are swallowing farmland on the outskirts of town.

In Huerfano County, retirees are making a new kind of economy, with caretaking as its primary industry; there are more jobs here in health care and social assistance than in any other sector except government. The city has embraced this shift in some ways, including changing zoning regulations to allow tiny homes in hopes of attracting retirees who want to live cheaply in 600 square feet or less.

Their arrival is also reshaping the politics of Walsenburg and nearby towns. Today, there are more registered Republicans in Huerfano County than in any presidential election year for which data are available since 1968. Democrats still outnumber Republicans almost two-to-one, but the gap is narrowing; there are three times as many registered Republicans now than there were in the late '80s, and a third fewer Democrats.

That statistic sneaked up on the town. “I didn’t see it coming,” Carolyn Newman, a Democrat in her 80s, says of Trump’s win. Newman, a retired school-teacher and mother of the local sheriff,

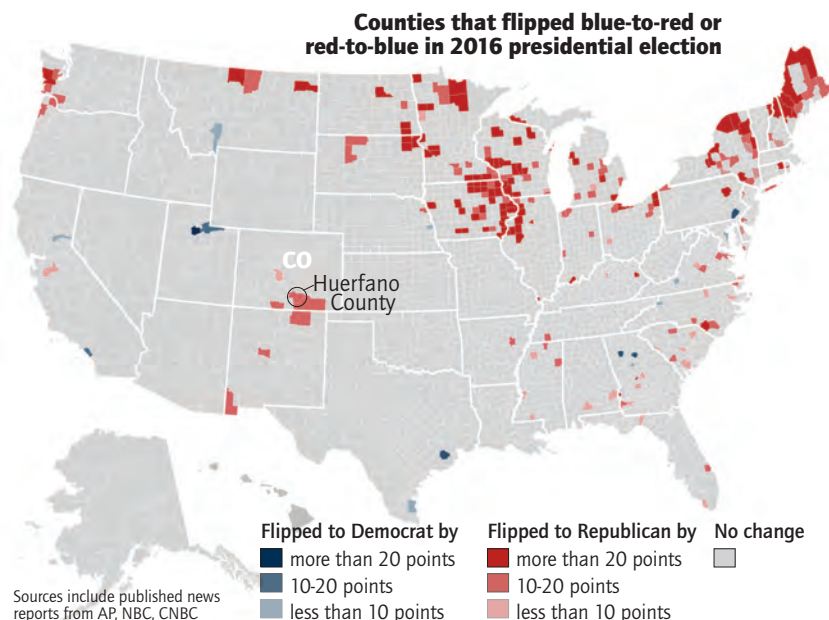
moved to Walsenburg in 1957.

To Newman, two things seemed different about this election: People were more opinionated and bitter, she says, and the local Republicans were more active than ever before.

Debi Sporleder wraps her arms around her lanky 11-year-old grandson, Elijah.

“I need you to practice for a half hour,” Sporleder, 57, says in his ear. Elijah nods, knowing, as Sporleder does, that he hasn’t rehearsed enough for the next day’s clarinet lesson. The family’s terrier, Kody, trots around the living room, whose walls are adorned with multiple crosses.

Debi, a Kansas native with bright blue eyes and wavy graying hair, married into the Sporleder family, whose roots in Walsenburg go back four generations and include this tan stucco house a stone’s throw from downtown. She met her



The Spanish Peaks are a backdrop to the 12,500-square-foot home of retiree Stanley Mann outside Walsenburg.

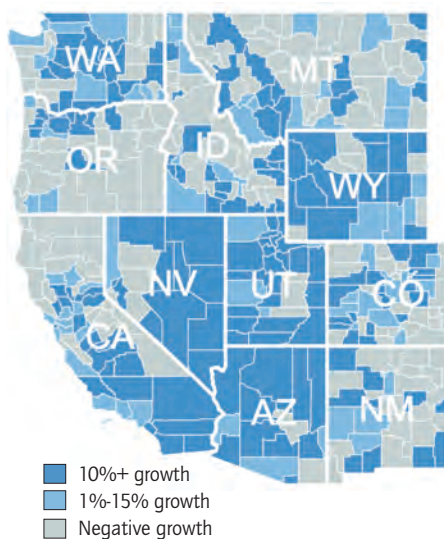
husband, Karl, at a gun-smithing school in Colorado.

Sporleder never expected to be a mother again, not after raising kids of her own. But when her daughter ran into hard times, Sporleder didn’t think twice about taking in her grandson. Her days are split between her job as sales manager for the local newspaper, the tasks of motherhood and her newest pursuit, also a surprise to her: chairwoman of the Huerfano County Republican Party.

“I’ve hated politics all my life,” Sporleder says. “I hate the nastiness that comes with it.”

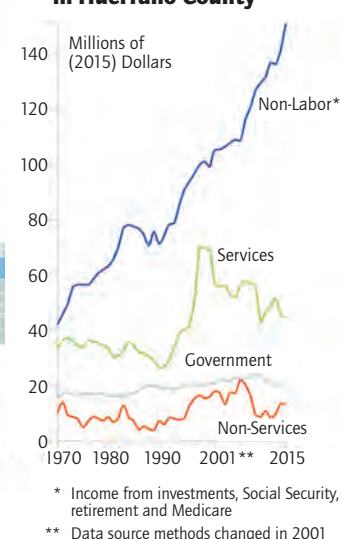
Between her disdain for professional politicians and her frustration with what she saw as the corrosion of conservative values, she was fed up with the Republican Party. But Sporleder, the daughter of two entrepreneurs, was raised to do more

Job growth in the West, 2005-2015



SOURCE: HEADWATERS ECONOMICS

Sources of income in Huerfano County



than just complain when she dislikes something; she believes in working to change things. So when the former party chairman stepped down, she volunteered to take his place.

As is true for many local Republicans, Trump wasn't Sporleder's first choice. She preferred Ben Carson, Sporleder says, though Ted Cruz was the favorite among local Republicans. But she liked Trump's opposition to undocumented immigrants and the Affordable Care Act, which she despised, although her own coverage comes through a private religious agency. "I was so offended to think that I have to have the type of insurance that they want me to have," she says.

In the end, Sporleder's decision to vote for Trump involved more of a moral calculus than the political kind. A devout Christian whose religion is a guiding factor in her life, she wanted a candidate with strong conservative values.

"I believe (Trump) was put in place because he sought after God," Sporleder says. "And I believe Hillary was the exact opposite of that."

Sporleder became a driving force behind Huerfano County's unlikely support of Trump last year: a Republican Party more organized than ever before. Her success shows the influence that even a few motivated people can have in small towns like Walsenburg. She recruited volunteers to staff the campaign headquarters, whose storefront windows were plastered with signs for Trump and local Republican candidates. Sporleder says that tourists from as far away as California stopped in for a free hat or bumper sticker as they passed through town. Marcy Freeburg, a former local party secretary and Republican candidate for the Colorado House of Representatives, got hold of 100 Trump yard signs to give away at headquarters, first come, first served.

Sporleder and others revived the Republicans' sleepy Facebook page, posting daily updates on early voting turnout. The party's social media messaging scoured Clinton as much as it hailed Trump: One photo on its Facebook page shows Freeburg wearing a Hillary Clinton mask and bright orange prison jumpsuit, in front of a "Make America Great Again" sign. Sporleder organized a showing of the controversial documentary *Hillary's America: A Secret History of the Democratic Party* at the local theater; about 100 people showed up. Ads for the event promised free entry for Democrats, though Sporleder doesn't think anyone took advantage of that offer.

The messaging swayed voters, and motivated some who hadn't voted in years.

But all that organizing worked partly because the once-steady economic ground in Walsenburg had shifted underfoot. Trump's grim picture of America — decaying infrastructure, failing schools, an economy that can't create full-time, high-paying jobs — resembled Huerfano County enough that, despite Trump's lack of a detailed plan, plenty of people in Huerfano County agreed with his arguments.

Marianne Smithey, 62, a Trump supporter who owns an antique store downtown, was downright suspicious of recent employment data that showed strong economic growth. Where, she asks, is that growth in her own town?

"I didn't trust any numbers that (Obama) ever spoke about, because I lived in a place where I didn't see it happening," Smithey says from behind the counter at her store one Friday afternoon in January. No customers mill the aisles.

Smithey has a point: Recovery from the Great Recession has been slower in rural places. Jobs in small towns have been growing at less than half the rate of cities. Growth in Huerfano County has been similarly grim: The number of jobs outside the public sector and health care has dwindled in the last decade. A couple industries — a private prison, a firesuit manufacturer — have come and gone since coal's exodus, but nothing has brought the same prosperity as mining.

Compared to Denver, about 160 miles north, where the population has soared 17 percent since 2000, many in Walsenburg feel left behind.

"I'm looking at this American flag, and it represents opportunity," Sporleder says. "And that is why we put Trump into place, because he is willing to stand for that opportunity, for the rural America that has been breaking under the last many administrations, of people who have gotten into office and they forget about the little guy."

Walsenburg city councilman and tow-truck operator Greg Daniels is a lifelong Democrat whose property has in the past hosted the party's headquarters. But last year, Daniels turned down the Democrats' request to

Debi Sporleder watches coverage of the Trump Inauguration at her day job at the local newspaper. As chairwoman of Huerfano County GOP, she helped turn her county from blue to red. Below, the group celebrates on Inauguration Day.



do so again. He thought Clinton was too friendly toward the Wall Street investors who contributed to her campaign, and he didn't want Clinton signs on his land.

"We have no confidence in professional politicians anymore," Daniels says. "Trump said a lot of bad things, but I think he's going to be a fresh face."

Huerfano County Sheriff Bruce Newman, also a lifelong Democrat, was so disenchanted with politics last year that he didn't support either major party candidate. Among a series of cartoons pasted on his office door — some praising the Second Amendment, one ridiculing Sarah Palin — is a cartoon of an infant preparing to punch Clinton. It was put there long before she ran for president. "Our big joke was, 'I'm just going to write in my own name,'" says Newman.

He is not the only voter in Huerfano County who despised Clinton more than he feared Trump; some analysts say that disaffected Democrats like Daniels played a huge role in Trump's win. One political firm blamed Clinton's loss nearly entirely on voters who backed Obama in 2012 but supported Trump four years later; a *New York Times* analysis estimates that almost one in four of Obama's white working-class supporters ditched Clinton to vote for Trump or a third-party candidate in 2016.

On Nov. 8, 2016, Sporleder cast her vote for Donald Trump, along with 1,882 other Huerfano County residents. The results demonstrate the extent to which the Democrats have lost ground here: Even if all 1,234 registered Huerfano County Republicans voted for Trump, about 600 Trump votes must have come from outside the party, from Independent or Democratic voters.

Trump's margin of victory grew as voting populations got smaller: Nearby Las Animas and Conejos counties, like Huerfano, flipped from backing Obama in 2012 to voting for Trump last year. Exit polls show that rural voters across the country tended to vote Republican even more in 2016 than they did in 2012 and 2008.

Many local Democrats are now asking: Was the county's support for Trump just a blip, or a sign of more lasting change? The shift from blue to red was far from unanimous. Huerfano County voters supported Democratic Sen. Michael Bennet by about 300 votes, for example, and they voted to increase the state's minimum wage.

But registered Republicans are on the rise and are beginning to flex their muscle. Huerfano County voted for Scott Tipton, the Republican candidate for the U.S. House, and supported a Republican for state senator. Since 2012, two of the three Huerfano County commissioners have been Republicans. Both Max Vezani, a descendent of Italian immigrant coal miners, and Ray Garcia, a fifth-generation Huerfano County resident, were re-elected last fall, and received



Children play outside the new library, above, in a former school that was renovated with help from the federal Community Development block grant — a program that may be cut under the Trump administration. At left, newspaper editor Brian Orr walks into the *World Journal* office, where, he says, "When we talk, we talk about the work, our families, the weather, but not politics."

more votes than before. Prior to Garcia's election, he says, there hadn't been a Republican commissioner in his district for 75 years.

From its office in an old downtown storefront, the Huerfano County *World Journal* dutifully chronicles local life. Few on the outside, however, know how the presidential election played out inside the newsroom, among a staff that spans the political spectrum. On one end lies Sporleder, the Republican Party chairwoman, and on the other lie Gretchen and Brian Orr, the newspaper's publishers and Sporleder's sister- and brother-in-law.

The staff has one rule, which reflects how the town seems to be handling its changing political landscape: They do not talk about politics.

Everyone knows how the others feel and that they aren't going to change anyone else's mind, says Brian Orr, who voted for Clinton. "We are here to do business," he said. "When we talk, we talk about the work, our families, the weather, but not politics."

Just as Republicans, thrilled by their newfound political power, are working to sustain momentum, local Democrats are scrambling to find it. Orr sat in on one of the Democrats' first meetings after the election, where local Democrat Mark Craddock tried to reel in a scattered conversation about the group's new mission statement, and discussed how to bridge the growing political divide.

The group, Craddock says, is soul-searching. He urged those in the room to think about how they talk to their neighbors. "When was the first time you stood



Trucks at a Shell truck stop in Farista, just outside Walsenburg.

up on the playground, and you fought for someone else's rights?" he asked them. "Then that's your personal story. That's what you can really take to anyone, and it's going to be genuine, and they're going to listen, and you can start breaking through."

Local Democrats are also studying the Tea Party's strategy for effecting policy change, including bringing more people to city and county meetings, especially Independents, and increasing their social media activity.

Permeating it all is a sense of not recognizing the town. Cordova, the Alpine Rose Café owner, says she didn't know anyone who voted for Trump. "Everybody was against him," she says. "We were shocked when he won."

Even during the election, local conversation about national politics seemed exasperated. One newspaper ad for a political forum in October read: "Addressing local ballot issues, and local and state candidates for office only; Hillary and Donald were not invited, so we're not gonna talk about them." Republicans advertised their election night watch party by saying: "We will be celebrating wins, and the fact that the election season is OVER!"

After the election, Orr, the newspaper editor, wrestled with how politically involved he can be as a journalist. He eventually agreed to run the Democrats' social media accounts. He hopes that Huerfano County's support for Trump was an anomaly. "Things will be different in two years," Orr says. "And very different in four years."

Huerfano County Republicans, meanwhile, like what they see so far, despite the rocky progress on Trump's health-care bill, the turmoil and turnover among White House leadership, and now the appointment of a special counsel to investigate Russian efforts to influence

Trump's election and the extent of the Trump campaign's involvement with it.

"He's doing exactly what he said he would do," says Mann, who regularly hosts political and Christian gatherings in his 12,500-square-foot house outside Walsenburg. "I'm so distrustful of most politicians, usually. They say almost anything. At least this administration is doing something. Whether it's too fast, or outside of already in-place procedures, I really don't know."

Mann said in January he hadn't heard that Trump's controversial immigrant and refugee travel ban left out several Muslim-majority countries where Trump does business — Saudi Arabia, for instance, home of 15 of the 19 hijackers involved in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. "It would depend on who said it, if I believed it," he said.

Sporleder isn't discouraged, either, even though Trump has yet to make good on his campaign promise to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act. "I believe he's trying," she says. As for Trump's ties to Russia? Sporleder says there's nothing there, that the special counsel appointed to look into the issue is more evidence that politicians are trying to thwart Trump any way they can.

"I just trust that he will do the right thing," she says.

Walsenburg Republicans differ over what, exactly, they hope Trump will accomplish. None could say how they think he should restore jobs. One said she hoped Trump would give money to the elderly, to help fix their homes.

Vezzani, one of the two Republican county commissioners, is skeptical that Trump will change anything in Huerfano County. After all, it was market forces that shuttered the mines in Huerfano County. Federal data show mining has been shedding jobs for decades, under

presidents of both parties. And despite Trump's pulpit-thumping about how he'll rescue manufacturing jobs lost to cheaper labor overseas, research suggests that Trump's favorite villains — globalization and immigrant labor — are not the biggest factors behind the loss of manufacturing jobs. In fact, as many as 88 percent of those jobs have been lost to automation. U.S. factories are producing more than ever before, simply using fewer people.

And in Walsenburg, those jobs were never the backbone of the economy, anyway. "We're not the Rust Belt," Vezzani says.

In fact, much of Trump's current agenda could do more to harm than help the rural communities like Walsenburg that elected him. Trump wants to eliminate the federal grant program that helped pay to convert the first story of a historic school building into the town's only library. He proposed cutting a federal airline program that keeps flights to rural places, including nearby Alamosa, affordable, and suggested a 20 percent cut in discretionary funding for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a bedrock of support for many rural communities.

But the retirees who are making Huerfano County red are still buying real estate, and the Pew Research Center says 10,000 baby boomers will reach retirement age every day until 2030. The demographic shift and resulting political tension in Huerfano County hint at the uncomfortable questions in store for other rural places: How do people relate to those who disagree with them? How well do we understand our neighbors? If Huerfano County is any guide, the chasm between left and right in a town of 3,000 can be as vast as in a city of millions, and close proximity doesn't equal understanding.

Late one March evening, Sporleder lingered after a music rehearsal at the industrial-looking Feed Store Church in nearby La Veta, where she sings and plays piano every Sunday. An Israeli flag hangs next to an American one on the wall. The spirit after the election here was jubilant, Sporleder says; much of the congregation supported Trump.

Mickey Schmidt, 62, the graying local post office master, sits quietly. He grew up in La Veta and has watched retirees and second-homers flock to the Spanish Peaks' foothills, even as the nearby steel mill shed jobs. He sidesteps national politics, but observes that the tight-knit social bonds he knew as a kid have weakened over the years, leaving a community divided by more than just who voted for Trump. Different factions of people get involved in what interests them, he says, but there's no central rallying point. Once, that rallying point was the school, where enrollment has shrunk to 219 in 2015 from nearly 300 in 2007. That's not true any longer, and the community spirit it embodied has shrunk, too.

"The 'take one for the team' is not so much anymore," Schmidt says. □



Leah Todd is a freelance reporter living in Taos, New Mexico. She has covered education for *The Seattle Times* and *Casper Star-Tribune*.

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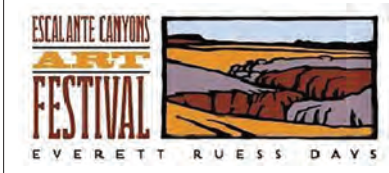
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Urban Heat *continued from page 9*

developers marketed boxy homes to African-Americans shut out of other parts of the valley by racial covenants.

Today, Pacoima is overwhelmingly Latino. And its single-family homes have produced a complex urban density, says Max Podemski, planning director for the community advocacy group Pacoima Beautiful. Lawns have given way to paved-over yards. Second-dwelling units, divisions within ranch homes, and modified garages can house several families together.

“That’s just totally ubiquitous here,” Podemski says. And these converted dwellings, uncounted and unpermitted, may or may not have insulation or air conditioners or even windows to catch a breeze: “The city just doesn’t have data about it.”

To understand more about how heat moves through Pacoima’s housing, last summer I built small electronic sensors to record dozens of heat and humidity measurements per hour, during parts of Au-

gust, September and October: the hottest months in Los Angeles. One sensor went in Edwin’s bedroom.

In early afternoon, that sensor recorded temperatures equal to those recorded outside, at the weather station at Van Nuys Airport. Evening temperatures in Edwin’s room were up to 9 degrees higher than outside.

Those results tell a similar story to what a group of researchers, community activists and scientists found in about 30 homes equipped with similar sensors in New York’s Harlem last year. “Buildings have a memory for heat,” says Adam Glenn, the founder of AdaptNY and a member of the community climate change observation project, iSeeChange. In New York, old stone buildings hold onto thermal radiation, especially on higher floors, late into the night. “So the danger to people continues even when the heat wave is over.”

But the ways buildings respond to climate vary. In Herrera’s apartment, a lack of insulation, common in older California houses, may be the key factor. In the evening, she says, “we can feel the warmth in the walls.”

The blanket of heat smothering LA hasn’t escaped City Hall’s notice. Mayor Eric Garcetti has set an ambitious goal to lower the city’s overall temperature 3 degrees in 20 years. LA’s Office of

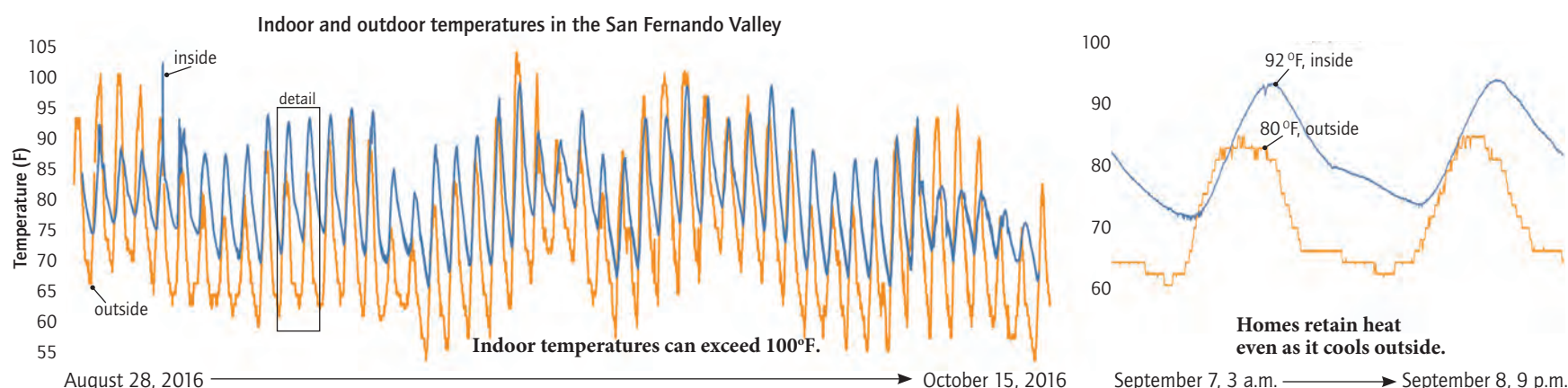
Edwin Díaz, left, suffers from heat-related nosebleeds and migraines, which are correlated with heat waves. DANIA MAXWELL

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Photo by Ron Wolf



Sustainability is studying where and how to deploy landscape-level cooling strategies, such as planting trees and developing cooler pavements. But it will take years to even know whether the goal is achievable.

In the meantime, renters like Herrera's family battle excessive heat mostly alone. According to the Census Bureau's National Housing Survey, half as many rental properties in Los Angeles have central air as do owner-occupied units. Coping costs money. In summer, Herrera's power bill can be as high as \$200 a month.

As temperatures rise in the Southwest, so do the stakes for city dwellers. In Phoenix, the Maricopa County Health Department has closely tracked heat-related

death for more than a decade, producing an exhaustive report each year breaking down cases by age, ethnicity, economic background and other risk factors.

Arizona State University researchers are working with Maricopa and Los Angeles counties to better understand how heat causes sickness and death, and how to counteract it.

"Many of us believe that no one should die prematurely because of heat, and there are significant public costs associated with heat just in the health-care sector alone," says David Hondula, an ASU climatologist who studies heat impacts. Heat-associated deaths are climbing in Phoenix, but the reasons remain unclear. "If we

can't even answer that question, figuring out the best strategy to keep Phoenixians safe, or residents of Los Angeles safe, in a future that is expected to be warmer than it is today, would seem almost impossible," Hondula says.

With summer coming, the Díaz-Herrera family has made some changes, insulating the ceiling of Edwin's room and adding more air conditioners.

Paying for this has meant skipping elsewhere: fewer outings, no new clothes. Herrera worries that tight finances will force them to turn the air conditioners off. Still, "all the changes we've made are helping us," she says. "It's better to invest a bit more because health comes first." □

This story was made possible with support from the Center for Health Journalism at The University of Southern California, while iSeeChange contributed heat sensor data.



Marcela Herrera, second from right, with her kids, from left, Jenine Díaz, Yaretzi Díaz, Abigail Díaz and Amir Díaz, in their home in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles. The family recently made changes to their apartment to battle the heat, including painting the walls, installing tile flooring and putting up curtains.

DANIA MAXWELL

This Glock belongs to a friend

What's the protocol for holding onto a depressed person's gun?



OPINION BY
FRED HAEFELE

The pistol arrives at my house in a padded tote, the size you'd pack a picnic lunch in. It's a 9mm Glock 26, a "sub-compact" concealable semi-automatic. Diminutive, hammerless and made of polymer, to my eye, it's a true exotic. It's accompanied by two clips and a box of 115 grain ammo, missing one round. I think, *How about that?* I zip the tote back up, squirrel it away in my desk.

This Glock belongs to a friend. After suffering a major depressive "episode," as he called it, he's made me the weapon's custodian in perpetuity. Beyond keeping it out of his hands, I'm not sure of my responsibilities: Is there registration protocol to observe? What happens if he abruptly changes his mind? Is it OK for me to shoot this gun?

For all its Western bravado, or maybe because of it, Montana's suicide rate is twice the national average: 24 per 100,000, compared to 12 per 100,000 nationwide. Meanwhile, Missoula County, where I live, has the highest suicide rate in the state, up an incredible 70 percent from last year. Two-thirds of these deaths were "gun assisted." Few gun owners want to hear these stats, but the 2012 FBI Supplemental Homicide Report states that the ratio nationwide of gun deaths by suicide compared to self-defense gun deaths is almost 40 to one.

As a hunter, I own two rifles and a shotgun. I've not kept a handgun for 20 years. It was just coincidence that I had one at all: A tradesman friend had offered me a pistol in exchange for felling a large tree for him. The gun was a Ruger

"Security Six." I agreed to the trade on a whim: With my 12 gauge, aught-six and 30-30, a big-bore revolver made a classic Western ensemble.

The Ruger came in handy just once, when my wife and I attended the Miles City bucking horse sale. We stayed at an especially nasty motel. As we unlocked our door, our shirtless neighbor popped out, chugging an IceHouse beer.

"Lucky you!" he giggled. "You get the room next to me!" I walked to my pickup, brought the Ruger inside and slept peacefully. Maybe our neighbor was harmless, maybe not. I certainly felt safer; let's leave it at that.

But a few years later, after a troubled night of my own, I understood clearly that the Ruger had to go. So the next day, I traded it for an antelope rifle. It wasn't a big deal. There was no "episode." I just thought I'd feel safer with the Ruger gone, and I was right.

The presidential election, for some reason, renewed my interest in self-defense, and I grew curious about my friend's concealable. The 9mm Glock is the world's most popular handgun, and I wondered what all the fuss was all about. I headed out to the gun range to find out.

With its ultra-light-weight, shortened barrel and bobbed grip, the Glock felt both flighty and hyper. In fact, the pistol felt downright goosey and emphatically void of any character at all, Western or otherwise. In the right hands, it's probably a terrific gun, but the pistol flat-out gave me the yips. While I've fired more powerful guns with considerable accuracy,

with the Glock I barely hit the paper.

A week later, I told my friend, Scott, about my experience shooting the Glock.

"Get rid of it," he said without hesitation.

"Really? Why's that?"

"It's a bad horse and you two got crossways. Don't screw around."

"I shouldn't just learn to shoot it?"

"Get rid of it," he repeated.

It was sound enough advice, but of course it's not my pistol. For the sake of confidentiality, I didn't tell Scott the gun's history. I certainly haven't told him about the rifles I garage-stashed for another friend, three years ago. Scott might get the idea that most of the people I know are disturbed.

I'm starting to think that might be right. While it's flattering that my friends have this much faith in me, it presumes I have discretionary sense that I simply don't possess. For example: How do I decide that it's OK for the owner to take back his guns? More pressing, by what standard do I tell him he's not OK? And what if I ever have an "episode" myself and need to get rid of my own guns? What kind of guy takes custodianship of what's clearly an arsenal of despair? □

Fred Haeefe, the author of Rebuilding the Indian and Extremophilia, lives in Montana.

Writers on the Range is a syndicated service of High Country News, providing three opinion columns each week to more than 200 media outlets around the West. For more information, contact Betsy Marston, betsym@hcn.org, 970-527-4898.

WEB EXTRA

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ALAMY

Monterey Bay's

CANNERY ROW

Six Decades of Transformation

If a city's planners are savvy, they'll adapt to the ebb and flow of natural resources with entrepreneurial vision. When the logging industry collapsed in Oakridge, Oregon, the town reinvented itself as a haven for mountain bikers. Downtown Tacoma, Washington — once shattered by depression and crime — now revolves around the Museum of Glass made famous by artist Dale Chihuly, who was born in the city.

Monterey, California, represents one of the most successful examples of the resuscitation of a struggling city. The rough-and-tumble fish-processing town made famous by John Steinbeck's 1945 novel *Cannery Row* is all but unrecognizable today as a glitzy tourist destination — a transformation that Lindsey Hatton explores in her debut novel, *Monterey Bay*. In a story that begins in 1940 and concludes in 1998, she chronicles the process of gentrification and its various losses and gains, both

economic and social.

Her aged protagonist, Margot Fiske, looks back on the Cannery Row of her youth: "And here in the weeds and ice plants, in the rusty metal that smells salty in the sun and bloody in the fog, she dreams of everything that has slipped away."

Hatton's story begins when the 15-year-old Margot arrives in Monterey at the start of World War II with her father, an entrepreneur who specializes in "industrial transformations." He purchases the largest cannery in town, with intentions that his daughter believes to be nefarious, and he orders her to assist an influential marine biologist with his tidepool collections.

The biologist in question, Ed Ricketts, plays a pivotal role in both Steinbeck and Hatton's books. "He dug himself into Cannery Row to an extent not even he suspected. He became the fountain of philosophy and science and art," Steinbeck writes of the real-life Ricketts, an expert on intertidal ecology. His lab and marine biology supply house on the Row hosted salon-style debates with the likes of writer Henry Miller, mythologist Joseph Campbell and composer John Cage.

In Hatton's book, Ricketts functions primarily as Margot's love interest. He stitches up her head wound after a fall and then proceeds to seduce her on the single bed in his lab.

But he also becomes the inspiration for Margot's later coming of age as an environmental entrepreneur. When her father dies, leaving her the old cannery along with his fortune, the adult Margot decides to transform it into the Monterey Bay Aquarium. "If she gave enough of herself, this town would love her even more than it loved its own children," Hatton writes, hinting that Margot built the aquarium largely in homage to Ricketts, who died in 1948.

In *Cannery Row*, Steinbeck portrayed the region in all its dingy, scrappy charm. Hatton blends Steinbeck's nostalgia with a contemporary sensibility regarding her city, examining its quirks as astutely as Ricketts once studied marine life under his microscope. In her novel, Cannery Row itself becomes a protagonist, by turns vibrant and lethargic, seedy practicality struggling up over decades to flower into international renown.

Those who know their Steinbeck will imagine the author fleeing Cannery Row long before construction workers raised the steel supporting beams and acrylic viewing walls of the aquarium. He had no love for gentrification, and he'd likely view the avant-garde landmark with sardonic horror. But Hatton embraces the city's transformation with her own protagonist's enthusiasm, a business sense enlivened by the author's own experiences as an aquarium volunteer. In the end, she inspires us to look beyond the four-star hotels and restaurants and spas that now line Cannery Row to the reason the landmark exists at all — the vast stretch of the Pacific it overlooks, still glorious despite all the many changes.

"At first, she thinks it's sickness; the ocean is sore and inflamed and lumpy with pus," she writes of her protagonist. "But then there's an unexpected blast of vitality — reds and purples — which is when she knows it isn't sickness. It's squid. A huge, vibrant shoal of them, a kaleidoscopic swarm squirming and flashing, tentacles weaving as they rise toward the light."

In Hatton's novel, the changes that befall one's hometown are never simply good or bad; rather, they are just inevitable. To survive them, Westerners will have to learn to find wonder where they can — and to roll with the tides.

BY MELISSA HART



Monterey Bay
Lindsay Hatton
320 pages,
softcover: \$16.
Penguin, 2017.

TRAPPING THE BEES

ESSAY BY
MICHAEL
BRANCH

ILLUSTRATION
BY EMILY POOLE

A few years ago, at just this lovely, springtime season of the year, I had to go back East for a few months of work. When I returned to Ranting Hill, my family's home in the remote foothills of Nevada's western Great Basin Desert, I noticed plenty of changes. Great horned owls had taken up hunting perches on the peaks of our roof and had knocked back the local population of packrats. My native shrubs had survived, though they had been cropped by black-tailed jackrabbits. But the most obvious difference was that a thousand honeybees were buzzing around the eaves at the southwestern corner of the house.

Honeybees are unusual here in the high desert. Although we do have some forage plants — including snowberry, rabbitbrush, balsamroot and a few wild mustards — we simply do not have enough year-round forage to make this severe desert environment very appealing to your average honeybee. I had not seen a thousand bees total in a decade up here on Ranting Hill, so it was clear that something was out of the ordinary.

Upon closer inspection, the bees were going in and out of a small hole in the eaves. When I called the local extension agent, she immediately asked, "Did you spray them yet?" When I replied that I had not, she sounded relieved. She then asked, "Are they still swarming? I mean, are they in a big clump? A swarm can be nabbed and moved pretty easily." I explained that the bees were, instead, flying in and out of the house. "Well, you're talking structural removal, then. Hopefully, you can do a cut out, but you might have to do a trap out. Pest-control guys are clueless on this stuff, and most beekeepers don't want the hassle unless they can get an easy score on a swarm. Big Dan's your man on this."

Next, I called Big Dan — apparently a legend among local bee freaks — who patiently posed a number of astute questions and finally agreed to come out that afternoon to see if he could help. I pictured Big Dan as a dude who would step down from a shiny white F-350 looking like an astronaut in his fancy bee-fighting gear. Instead, a tiny, ancient, sun-faded, powder-blue hatchback Honda Civic rolled up, and out of it rose a man who was not only tall and large, but also graced with an immense, bushy red beard and a long braid of red hair. He was costumed in Birkenstocks, baggy brown cargo shorts, and a brightly tie-dyed T-shirt. He wore small, black-rimmed glasses, and looked like a red-haired version of Grateful Dead guitarist Jerry Garcia, but only if Garcia had also been your kindergarten teacher. When my younger daughter Caroline asked innocently if she could call him "Dan, Dan, the Big Bee Man," Dan responded gently and sincerely, "I'd be honored."

Big Dan was a mild giant who clearly had a deep feeling for the miracle that is the honeybee. He had the sensibility of a teacher, and he taught me a hundred things about bees while

going calmly about his work. Wearing no bee-battling gear whatsoever, Dan first climbed my ladder right up into the cloud of bees, where he used a stethoscope to listen to various spots on the eaves and walls of the house. From this he diagnosed that the bees were not hived up in the eaves, where he could have done a "cut out" by sawing open the soffit and physically removing the nest. Instead, they were somewhere deep inside the interior walls of the house and thus would require a full-blown "trap out." When I asked for an explanation, Big Dan agreed to trade one for a good beer.

"A trap out takes eight weeks, sometimes more," he began. I think he noticed my grimace. "Or, you can poison the bees, risk spreading disease to other hives, and leave 50,000 dead bees in your wall. The rotting smell won't last more than a month, but the comb and honey left behind will attract ants, wax moths, and mice. When July rolls around, you may notice honey seeping through your walls.

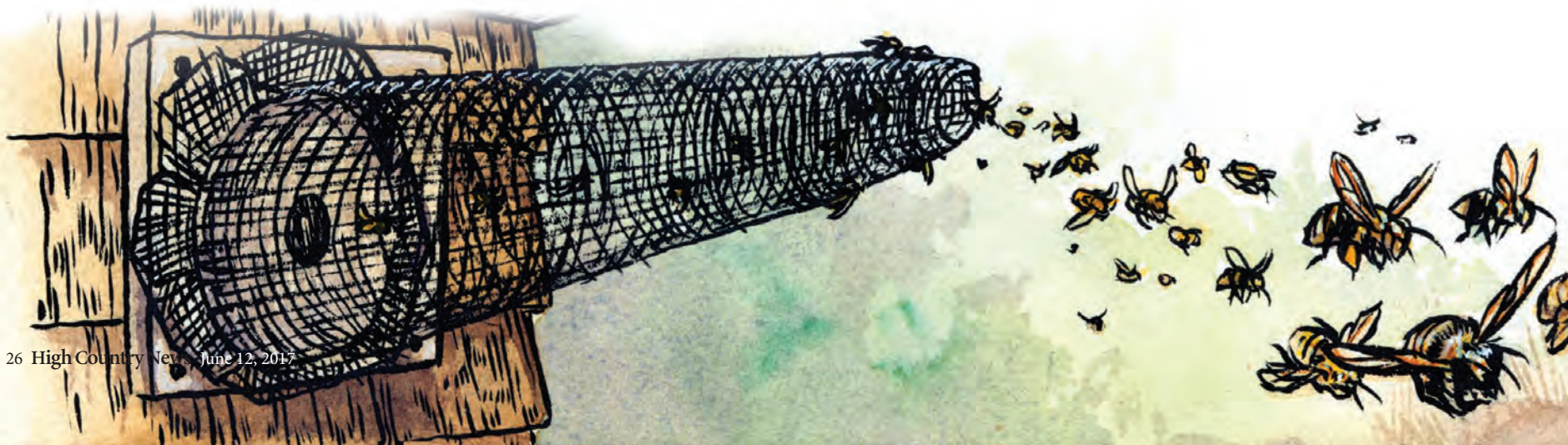
"In a trap out, we first seal all the entrances to the hive except one. Then, we cover that one door with a long, funnel-shaped screen. Bees will come out of the cone to go forage, but, when they come home, they won't be able to find their way back into the tube. Near the small end of the cone we put a Nuc box, which is a secondary hive with a queen and a bunch of bees. When the foragers can't find their way back into the hive inside your house, they'll give up and join the colony in the Nuc box. It takes a long time, because you have to wait until the brood that's already in your wall has hatched and is ready to fly out. Once the colony inside your wall has failed, the bees adopted into the secondary colony will have no loyalty to it. At that point we remove the one-way cone and let the bees go back inside your house!"

I told him I would need another beer to grasp why I'd want to allow what would now be 60,000 or even 80,000 bees free access to the interior walls of our home. But Dan was evangelical about the trap out. "Bees in the Nuc box will fly into your walls and rob out every last bit of wax and honey, transferring it to the new colony. They're thorough! Because there's no telling where inside your house the hive is, this is the only way to leave your place clean. So, what'll it be?"

"Trap out, for sure," I answered. "When can we start?"

Dan cracked a gentle grin and walked over to his little Honda. He lifted out a bright-white hive box, carried it back, and set it down next to my beer. The humming and buzzing emerging from that box was so loud that it seemed to be vibrating. Dan then strapped on a tool belt and ascended the ladder, climbing fifteen feet up into a cloud of bees. He stayed aloft for a half hour, caulking holes and patiently constructing and attaching the cone-shaped screen that would guide the bees out

Adapted from *Rants from the Hill* by Michael P. Branch © 2017 by Michael P. Branch. Reprinted by arrangement with Roost Books, an imprint of Shambhala Publications, Inc. Boulder, Colo. www.roostbooks.com



of the house and then prevent them from reentering it. He also screwed a large hook into the wooden eaves and attached to it a heavy-duty carabiner, then hung the white hive box from it. Next, he stapled the narrow end of the cone to the face of this dangling hive. Finally, he removed the block that had kept the bees bottled up in the Nuc box. When he came down the ladder for the last time, Dan was wearing a wide smile beneath which flowed his flame-red beard, now with at least half a dozen bees crawling through it.

Eryn, the girls, and I soon came to love having the bees around, and we watched their patterns every day for weeks. We would observe the foragers emerge from the cone early in the day, return with their legs laden with pollen in the afternoon, and circle the funnel in an attempt to find a way back in. That failing, they would “beard” on the outside of the cone for an hour or two before giving up and joining the growing secondary colony in the suspended hive box. After some weeks, the traffic subsided, and we knew the brood in the wall colony was maturing and preparing to forage. Eventually, a torrent of exiting bees resumed, and for several more weeks we had the pleasure of observing their daily missions before bees once again ceased emerging from the cone.

After a week of this inactivity, Big Dan came back up to Ranting Hill. We drank some stout before Dan removed the trap cone, and he watched with satisfaction as bees from the dangling hive re-entered the house in masses. After a few more weeks, the bee activity again ceased, and Dan reckoned that the house hive had been robbed clean of honey and that the new colony was established. He came out to the house a third time to seal the bees’ sole entry hole to the house and block the entrance to the now very heavy hive box, which he loaded into the back of his Honda. As he drove away, waving to the girls, I could see him smiling and appearing not to notice — or at least not to mind — the single honeybee that was still attached to his forehead.

The trap out was a wonderful reminder that often the best solution to a confrontation with nature is to work with, rather than against, the problem. Bees in our house was the problem, but it turned out that bees in our house was also the elegant solution to it. Instead of a sagging wall full of pesticide-soaked, rotting bees and rancid honeycomb, I had clean walls and a story to tell. But it was even better than that, because I learned so much about bees and was able to give Hannah and Caroline the wonderful experience of living with their own “pet” colony — even if it was suspended 15 feet in the air. I also had the pleasure of meeting a fine high-desert character in Dan, Dan, the Big Bee Man, who later gifted us a jar of the sweet honey produced within the walls of our own home. □





HEARD AROUND THE WEST | BY BRIAN CALVERT

IDAHO

A thwarted entrepreneur in Coeur d'Alene has removed a watercraft from the lake, after complaints. Clint Kauer's "avante-garde aquatic play piece" was supposed to be a floating island of fun, with two trampolines and waterslides. Kauer called it Hooligan Island; residents called it an eyesore. Hooligan Island weighed 7,500 pounds and could hold up to 75 kids at a time, the *Coeur d'Alene Press* reports. It didn't, however, fit into town ordinances. It was designated a watercraft, but local authorities were stumped about how to handle it. They generally ask for permits for docks and landings, but not boats at anchor. Plus there were questions about lifeguards, ticket sales and fire, police and other inspections. Kauer agreed to remove Hooligan Island, but there are inquiries from other groups for a Tarzan Boat and Treasure Island. Kauer had said he'd move the boat, but that taking that much fun away from kids was "rather cold."

CALIFORNIA

A team of British parkour acrobats has apologized for its mistreatment of the overcrowded and much-abused Joshua Tree National Park, three hours east of Los Angeles. The athletes, who represent the UK-based sport clothing line Storrer Parkour, did more than just bounce off boulders and fling themselves off the park's delicate trees: They sparked a bonfire from wood gathered in the park and flew GoPro-equipped drones, all in violation of park rules, KCET reports. A promotional video they made — accurately titled *It's Illegal To Fly Drones Here!!* — includes footage of their drones being attacked by harassed birds in the Wonderland of Rocks section of the park. Storrer eventually removed the videos from YouTube and posted a lengthy apology on the company's Facebook page, pleading the tree-hoppers had not understood the lengths of protection the park is under (despite the name of their video) and did not mean to hurt the trees, which they called "a new and abstract obstacle."

Meanwhile, members of Chico University's Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity found no obstacle to cutting down or damaging 32 trees at a campground in Northern California's Lassen



COLORADO The sign came too late ... HILARY PENNY

National Forest during an initiation ceremony for pledges, KRCR television reports. But unlike the parkour team, it looks like these boys will be facing charges: for vandalizing a campground, possession of a firearm, and conspiracy to commit offense or defraud the United States. The U.S. Forest Service continues its investigation, and more charges are possible. Both incidents are a reminder, we suppose, that trees still need our protection. After all, they can take many decades to mature, while some folks never do.

NEVADA

Nevada lawmakers hope to smooth out traffic by cracking down on slow drivers clogging up the left-hand lane, according to the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. The Senate Transportation Committee recently passed a bill that would create fines and send repeat offenders to traffic school. Now that Nevada is ready to start recreational cannabis sales, we wonder how many stoners such a law could nab. Potheads behind the wheel will be wise to remember the old maxim: What happens in the slow lane stays in the slow lane, but not all day, dude.

WYOMING

Kanye West, all-star musician and perhaps our future president, was recently secreted away on a Wyoming mountain, seeking inspiration for a new album. West has apparently been spending

a bit of time in the Cowboy State, *TMZ* reports. This has left wife Kim Kardashian to attend several swank events by herself. We can't blame her for staying away. Cabin fever can be rough, as evidenced in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*. Imagine the ax-wielding rapper chopping down a door and growling, à la Jack Nicholson: "Here's Kanye!"

OREGON

Gov. Kate Brown, D, recently granted a diplomatic pardon. A fourth-grader who visited the Oregon State Capitol in Salem made off with a hazelnut candy and a pen during a recent school tour. His guilt then got the best of him — that or his parents' dire warnings of a summer of chores — and he penciled an apology letter. "These things were not mine and it was wrong for me to take them," he wrote. "I hope you and the people of Oregon can forgive me." He returned the purloined pen with a dollar to cover the cost of the candy. Brown accepted the apology on behalf of the people of Oregon, and sent the boy a new pen as a memento.

ARIZONA

Poston Butte High School in San Tan Valley is facing some backlash for cheeky comments published in its 2017 yearbook. References to sex and drugs are found within, inappropriate messages that "will be there forever," one mother tells 12 News. Witness one passage from an apparent pole-vaulter: "You need a good plant to get high." The Florence Unified School District apologized for the oversight and relieved the teacher in charge of the yearbook of her duties. That seems a little extreme. After all, who can resist the occasional pot pun? Certainly not anyone at *High Country News*.

WEB EXTRA For more from Heard around the West, see hcn.org.

Tips and photos of Western oddities are appreciated and often shared in this column. Write betsym@hcn.org or tag photos [#heardaroundthewest](https://www.instagram.com/heardaroundthewest) on Instagram.



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“What’s been largely overlooked is the way
**Trump is boosting the coal industry on the
backs of American taxpayers**, transferring wealth
to coal CEOs and investors in the process.”

Ted Zukoski, in his essay, "Trump's loyalty to coal is bad news for taxpayers," from *Writers on the Range*, hcn.org/wotr