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High Country News

For people who care about the West

Down the Dark Mountain

Can a forgotten California poet guide us through the ecocide?

By Brian Calvert

July 24, 2017 | $5 | Vol. 49 No. 12 | www.hcn.org

Chris Apassingok, 16, holds an emperor goose he hunted early one morning near his family's home in Gambell, Alaska, where subsistence hunting and fishing are a way of life. ASH ADAMS

On the cover

***SUBLIME: The L.A. River 5,* 2015, by Elena Dorfman, from her series of photo montages.**

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FEATURES

12 **Death Threats** A young Alaskan hunter confronts the ugliest side of the internet By Julia O'Malley

16 **Down the Dark Mountain** Can a forgotten California poet guide us through the ecocide? By Brian Calvert

CURRENTS

5 **How Trump could reshape the courts** Senate Democrats lack power to block even controversial judicial nominees

5 **The Latest: Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta tunnels**

6 **California's white shark rebound** Four decades of environmental regulation have rebuilt a damaged food web

7 **Tribal nations fight removal of grizzly protections** Leaders worry delisting could invite energy exploration in bear habitat

8 **Rally cries for the far right** Extremists are quickly learning what their shared interests are

9 **The Latest: No corruption charges for Oregon governor**

DEPARTMENTS

3 FROM OUR WEBSITE: HCN.ORG

4 LETTERS

10 THE HCN COMMUNITY Research Fund, Dear Friends

25 MARKETPLACE

29 WRITERS ON THE RANGE
Heading for a cliff By Dave Van Manen

30 BOOKS
Beautifully Grotesque Fish of the American West by Mark Spitzer.
Reviewed by Ben Goldfarb

31 ESSAY The Irrigators' Club By Leath Tonino

32 HEARD AROUND THE WEST By Betsy Marston

Editor's note

Hope in a heartbreaking world

I was a little dubious when *HCN*'s then managing editor, Brian Calvert, asked — after six months on the job — if he could go to Spain for a couple of weeks. My doubts grew when he told me he wanted to join a group of post-industrial environmentalists learning to address the grief created by the planet's ecological collapse.

"It's part of the Dark Mountain project," he said.

"Maybe you just need a vacation on a beach somewhere," I responded.

But after learning more about Dark Mountain and its place in a long line of conservation thought, and — more importantly — after securing Brian's commitment to turn the experience into a feature-length essay, I relented. His story is now in your hands, and I hope it not only helps you get to know our new editor-in-chief, who grew up in Pinedale, Wyoming, and has traveled widely abroad, but also stimulates some deep thinking about the greatest challenge of our time: How can humankind navigate through this self-inflicted wound of an era — the Anthropocene?

As Brian notes, the answer is unclear, not only because of the darkening realities of our changing climate, fueled by relentless population growth, but also because of the psychological toll such forces take on us every day, whether we recognize it or not. The daily barrage of bad news, magnified by addictive social media, is enough to cause low-grade anxiety and sadness in even the most centered of us.

Brian's essay, which revolves around the influential, yet relatively unknown, California poet Robinson Jeffers, explicitly asks the questions that have lurked in the background of *High Country News* since 1970: What is our relationship to the natural world? And how can we be of service to it, and to each other?

Humanity's complicated relationship with the natural world is also explored in this issue's second feature. Anchorage-based writer Julia O'Malley tells the story of a 16-year-old boy from the Siberian Yupik village of Gambell on St. Lawrence Island on the northwest edge of Alaska, who recently killed a bowhead whale. He was greatly honored by his fellow villagers for providing needed food and upholding a 2,000-year-old hunting tradition, only to be attacked as a "murderer" on Facebook by a pod of anti-whaling activists.

Both features raise a similar question: In our deep-seated desire to "save the planet," how do we get beyond the fearful, anxious tribalism that seems to be a fixture of the modern temperament? Part of the answer Brian found in the mountains of Spain, and in the rich leavings of Robinson Jeffers, is to be more present with the eternal mysteries that surround us still, from our backyard gardens to our shrinking glaciers to a bittersweet whale hunt. We all have a role in the unfolding drama of our world; the part we choose to play is what matters the most.

—Paul Larmer, executive director/publisher

Former Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio, outside the federal courthouse in Phoenix, where he was on trial for violating a judge's order banning racial profiling. AP PHOTO/ANGIE WANG

Former Arizona sheriff Joe Arpaio goes on trial

Former Maricopa County, Arizona, Sheriff Joe Arpaio, notorious for his harsh treatment of Latinos and the terrible living conditions at his jail, was hauled into court last month. In 2007, the American Civil Liberties Union and others sued Arpaio for racial profiling; in 2011, a judge ordered him to cease detaining people specifically under the suspicion they were in the country illegally. But the Department of Justice says he continued with his tactics. Now, he awaits a decision from a federal judge in Phoenix on whether he defied a court's order to cease racial profiling. For years, Arpaio has been a symbol of several hot-button issues in today's American West. In 2012, he received a lifetime achievement award from the Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association, an organization that pushes the idea that sheriffs are the supreme law of the land, above federal officers. Last fall, he was voted out of office after six terms.

TAY WILES MORE: hcne.ws/Arpaio-trial

Trending

California's drought goes underground

After a wet winter that filled reservoirs and lakes in California, Gov. Jerry Brown in April declared the drought emergency over. But for rural residents who rely on aquifers, the drought drags on. The problem is dramatic in the San Joaquin Valley, where over-pumping has caused groundwater shortages, and approximately 1,000 wells have run dry. That hits unincorporated rural communities the hardest, because they often lack the resources to maintain or expand community water systems or treat contamination. Despite the dry conditions, farmers continue to plant almond orchards, and new, deeper wells are being drilled.
MARK GROSSI/ NEWS DEEPLY

You say

DEREK RYTER:
"We hydrogeologists have been telling people this for years, but climate and groundwater move slower than the news cycle."

RICHARD BOYLAN:
"We need to adopt modern water protection and harvesting practices, and abandon rob-Peter-to-pay-Paul impoundment boondoggles."

MICHAEL SUROWIEC:
"Why isn't there an effort to recharge the aquifers instead of building dams and reservoirs?"

MORE: hcne.ws/underground-drought and Facebook.com/highcountrynews

2,802

Number of backlogged applications for permits to drill oil and gas on Bureau of Land Management lands.

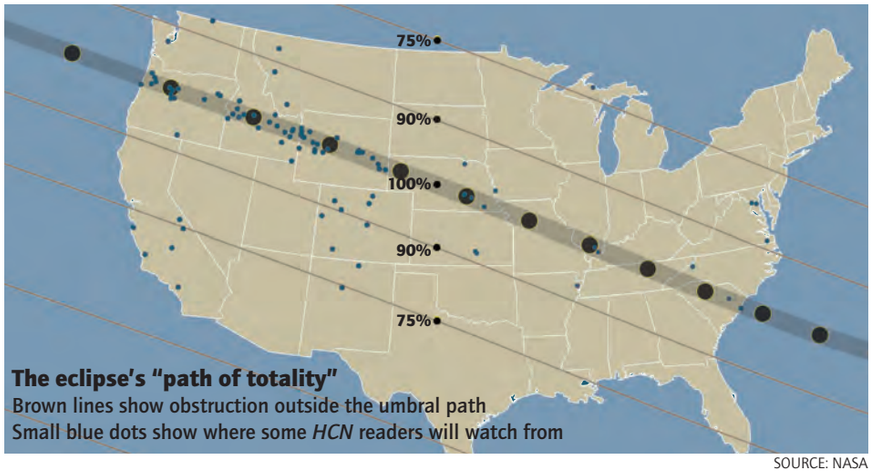
257 Average number of days it takes the agency to approve a permit; the National Energy Policy Act requires it be done in 30.

In line with President Donald Trump's "America First" energy development vision, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke signed a secretarial order in early July to speed up the Bureau of Land Management's oil and gas permitting process. At a hearing for a subcommittee of the House Committee on Natural Resources, Interior staffer Katharine MacGregor said the agency would hire more employees to deal with the backlog. Rep. Alan Lowenthal, D-Calif., testified that the backlog is at its lowest since 2005, and that as of September 2015, there were 7,532 approved permits that industry had yet to use. In 2016, companies bid on less than 39 percent of allowed leases. **TAY WILES**

MORE: hcne.ws/energy-agenda

Where will you view the solar eclipse?

On the morning of Aug. 21, a total solar eclipse will pass over the West through Oregon, Idaho and Wyoming. It's been almost 100 years since a full eclipse swept coast-to-coast within the continental U.S., but you'll have to be in a 70-mile-wide band called the "path of totality"— and wade through hordes of gawkers — to see it. As part of *High Country News*' ongoing eclipse coverage, we're keeping tabs on where our readers will travel to see the moon pass over the sun. Let us know where you're going by filling out our tip form online, and we'll plot your destination on our live map.
MORE: hcne.ws/Eclipse-map



The eclipse's "path of totality"
Brown lines show obstruction outside the umbral path
Small blue dots show where some *HCN* readers will watch from

SOURCE: NASA

Audio

"Trails in most of the West are getting really, really crowded. And in Alaska, there are, (A): not a lot of trails, and (B): not a lot of people on the trails that do exist."

—Krista Langlois, speaking on the "West Obsessed" podcast about an Alaska plan to establish a trail for thru-hikers along the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, and the economic boom that could bring. **BRIAN CALVERT**

MORE: hcne.ws/Alaskan-trails

MEG ROUSSOS

Photographs

"I resupply when I need food, take a shower when I can and leave the rest up to the silence in the nights."

—Photographer and thru-hiker Meg Roussos, one of only 290 people who have completed all three long-distance trails in the U.S. See her photographs from her latest trek on the Oregon Desert Trail (left).

MORE: hcne.ws/Oregon-desert

Send letters to editor@hcn.org or
Editor, HCN, P.O. Box 1090, Paonia, CO 81428.

DAVID FITZSIMMONS, THE ARIZONA STAR/CAGLECARTOONS.COM

TRAIL MIX

As a former "traildog" (six summers in Glacier National Park), I much appreciated your June 26 issue on Western trails. I noted particularly the profile of Loretta McEllhiney, ace trails engineer, and Jacob Sax's "Trailworker Slang," though it should be noted that trail terminology and construction methods vary considerably throughout the West. Rick Bass' essay should remind us that the national fad for long-distance hiking — and the egos that go along with it — can have negative as well as positive repercussions for plant, animal and human communities along the way. I hope that residents of northwestern Montana will study carefully the routing of the Pacific Northwest Scenic Trail to ensure that it has the least possible impact on the environment of the area. Readers interested in the details of trail construction and maintenance will enjoy Christine Byl's fine book *Dirt Work* (Beacon Press, 2013). Byl has spent over 20 years doing trailwork in Glacier, Denali and other parts of Alaska and writes knowledgeably about trails and what it is like to be a woman doing what used to be considered "man's work."

David Stanley, general editor,
The National Park Readers
University of Utah Press
Salt Lake City, Utah

TRAILS VERSUS WILDLIFE

Bravo, Rick Bass! But he didn't go far enough ("A straight line in a contoured world," *HCN*, 6/26/17). Trail construction destroys wildlife habitat — not just in the trail bed, but in a wide swath on both sides of the trail, where animals are inhibited from using their habitat. According to Ed Grumbine in *Ghost Bears*, the grizzly can hear a human from one mile away, and smell one from five miles away.

Mike Vandeman
San Ramon, California

SLIDING INTO OLIGARCHY

The chart in this article ("Who sponsors, who pays," *HCN*, 6/12/17) clearly demonstrates a political system entirely corrupted by financial interests. Citizens have neither the resources, the time nor the expertise to compete against wealthy, well-organized interests that seek short-term economic benefits from the politicians they essentially own. Unless we adopt publicly financed elections, our republic will continue its slide into oligarchy.

Thomas Bliss
Los Angeles, California

PUBLIC LANDS DOWNSIDE

One of the issues that this story didn't include, but should have, is that our communities and school districts have no way of collecting tax revenues on federally owned public lands, but are still expected to provide the same level or quality of services ("Who sponsors, who pays," *HCN*, 6/12/17). Currently, the state and federal governments own about 94 percent of the land in La Paz County, Arizona, which significantly impacts the health, education and job prospects of our residents. Yes, we would like some of those lands in our county transferred and sold to private ownership so we have increased tax revenue. The feds continue to close public lands to the public and we have to fight with them to access "our lands" for recreation. Rep. Paul Gosar, R-Ariz., is trying to help his constituents by supporting bills that would allow the transfer of some of these lands. Don't malign him for doing his job.

Jacque Price
La Paz County School Superintendent
Parker, Arizona

TRADING LIONS FOR BIGHORN

Unfortunately, we do not live in a land of undisturbed habitat where species with specialized habitat needs can live in balance with historical predators ("The cost of a comeback," *HCN*, 5/29/17). The Sierra Nevada bighorn's historical range and DNA profile were already limited, and multiple factors have subsequently further reduced their DNA diversity, habitat and population numbers.

California, many years ago, eliminated mountain lions from the list of game animals that could be hunted via fair chase, and the lion population is consistently increasing. Even in other Western states where hunting is allowed, lion numbers are stable or increasing. Cougars are increasingly following conservation corridors and river corridors eastward across the Great Plains and Midwest, and northward into Georgia from South Florida. Cougars are opportunistic and adaptable to a variety of habitats, from the sawgrass/pine and oak hammocks of South Florida, to well-tended lawns in former winter migration corridors as well as alpine habitat in the Intermountain West. Not so with the Sierra Nevada bighorn.

There must be trade-offs in conservation and population biology. We can't lose any more of these iconic and highly specialized Sierra Nevada bighorns. The cost may be to acknowledge that cougars are a contributing factor to their risk of extirpation, and that "cougar management" will need to remain as an option.

As a parallel and an example of predators re-populating their historic ranges, jaguars are re-entering the Southwestern U.S., being monitored by joint projects of the U.S. and Mexico and the Northern Jaguar Project. We must give the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Project and the Northern Jaguar Project all the protection possible if we hope to see both species again flourishing in their former historic ranges.

Gordon Lyons
Livingston, Montana

High Country News

High Country News is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) independent media organization that covers the issues that define the American West. Its mission is to inform and inspire people to act on behalf of the region's diverse natural and human communities.

(ISSN/0191/5657) is published bi-weekly, 22 times a year, by High Country News, 119 Grand Ave., Paonia, CO 81428. Periodicals, postage paid at Paonia, CO, and other post offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to High Country News, Box 1090, Paonia, CO 81428. Subscriptions to *HCN* are $37 a year, $47 for institutions: **800-905-1155 | hcn.org**

Printed on recycled paper.

Damien Schiff testified last year before the Environment and Public Works Subcommittee about "the extravagance with which the EPA and the Corps view their authority under the Clean Water Act." Now he's nominated for the U.S. Court of Federal Claims. US. SENATE

How Trump could reshape the courts

Senate Democrats lack power to block even controversial judicial nominees

BY ELIZABETH SHOGREN

Damien Schiff, one of President Donald Trump's first federal judge nominees, has said a lot of provocative things in public forums over the years. In a roundtable with other conservative lawyers, Schiff recommended selling Yosemite National Park to the Walt Disney Company. "They'd do a damn better job, I think," said Schiff, a lawyer for the Pacific Legal Foundation, which advocates for private-property rights and against government regulation. In a blog post, he called moderate Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy a "judicial prostitute." And in a televised interview, he accused the Environmental Protection Agency of treating Americans "as if they were just slaves."

A few years ago, senators might have blocked such a controversial nominee: The threat of the filibuster meant that nominees needed the support of 60 senators. But in 2013, then-Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D, got rid of it for nominees for lower federal courts because Republicans were using it to block President Barack Obama's judicial candidates. Now it only takes 51 votes to confirm a federal judge, and with the Republicans' 52-48 majority, Schiff and other Trump nominees will likely sail through. The Senate Judiciary Committee in July voted 11-9, along party lines, to recommend him for confirmation by the full Senate.

Trump could significantly transform the judiciary to reflect his conservative, anti-government priorities, not only because of the filibuster's loss but also because he has a large number of vacancies to fill. Senate Republicans blocked so many of Obama's nominees that today there are vacancies for 136 federal judges out of 890 positions. (Obama had 54 vacancies to fill when he was elected in 2008.)

Trump's appointees likely would favor reducing environmental protections and increasing fossil fuel development and other extractive industries on federal public lands — and that could continue long after he's gone, because many federal judges are appointed for lifetime terms. "The West is changing; people are moving to the West for the quality of life, the big open spaces, clean air and clean water," says Todd Tucci, senior attorney at the nonprofit Advocates for the West. "Trump's nominees to the bench are an existential threat to these values."

If the Senate confirms him, Schiff, 38, could be on the U.S. Court of Federal Claims for decades, hearing cases against the federal government and deciding whether and how much compensation the government owes the people and companies involved. Claims judges serve 15-year terms and are routinely reappointed or continue to hear cases as senior judges.

Schiff has spent his career defending landowners against federal and state governments, particularly when environmental laws like the Endangered Species Act or the Clean Water Act curtail what they can do on their property. He consistently has argued that agencies overregulate or that their actions constitute "takings" under the Fifth Amendment, which requires that private property not be taken without just compensation.

When Democratic senators pressed Schiff during his June confirmation hearing, he said his personal views would not impact his decisions as a judge: "I would faithfully apply the law and the facts without any influence whatsoever of any personal views I might have."

Environmental groups, civil liberties organizations and many law professors worry, though, that Schiff would rule in favor of companies and individuals and give them large financial awards, perhaps discouraging agencies from enforcing public and environmental safeguards in the future. "He has been appointed specifically because he will broadly interpret the takings clause and make it much more difficult to regulate in the environmental, health and safety areas," says Daniel Rohlf, a law professor at Lewis and Clark Law School in Oregon, who, with 28 other law professors, wrote a letter urging the Senate to block Schiff's nomination.

Schiff has boosters among conservative legal scholars, who cite his significant experience arguing cases on land use and clean water issues, including before the Supreme Court. "That's precisely the kind of judge that the claims court needs," says Steven J. Eagle, a law professor at George Mason University.

Eagle referenced a case Schiff argued successfully before the Supreme Court, *Sackett vs. EPA*, involving Idaho landowners who filled in a half-acre wetland. The EPA ordered the couple to remove the fill or face steep fines. Schiff won a unanimous decision saying his clients had the right to challenge an EPA order in court. Eagle says this illustrates that Schiff understands the burdens that regulations can impose on individuals: "That's the kind of human dimension that Damien is particularly sensitive to."

With so many openings and no filibuster to deter him from selecting arch-conservatives, Trump is positioned to have a major impact on the judicial system. The only question is whether the continuing crises at the White House will keep him from naming candidates for judges and hundreds of other important federal positions. So far, Trump has sent the Senate 18 nominations for federal judges, and the Senate has approved only two, including Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch. Any other Republican president would run with this opportunity, says Jim Burling of the Pacific Legal Foundation, but with Trump: "It depends on how much he gets distracted. Nobody has ever seen anything like the show that's going on right now." □

Correspondent Elizabeth Shogren writes *HCN*'s DC Dispatches from Washington. @ShogrenE

Juvenile chinook salmon are released into the San Joaquin River. STEVE MARTARANO/USFWS

THE LATEST

Backstory

California's Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta supplies water to 25 million people and 3 million acres of farmland. Irrigators, water districts and environmental groups have fought for years over how much can be pumped from the Delta and how much must be left to protect dwindling salmon and smelt ("California's tangled water politics," *HCN*, 12/20/10). **Under the controversial WaterFix plan, endorsed by Gov. Jerry Brown, D, the state would spend $15 billion to dig two tunnels to secure Delta water for Southern California.**

Followup

In late June, **two federal agencies declared that the project would harm populations of endangered Delta smelt, chinook salmon and steelhead — but probably wouldn't drive them to extinction.** Water districts must now decide if the project will provide enough water to justify the price tag. Meanwhile, environmental and fishing groups filed the first of what promises to be many lawsuits challenging the plan, which they say will degrade fish habitat, reduce water quality and increase salinity and algae blooms.

JODI PETERSON

Snapshot

California's white shark rebound

Four decades of environmental regulation have rebuilt a damaged food web

Most of the millions of beachgoers who flock to Southern California's coast never notice the baby sharks swimming laps just offshore, but that's starting to change. The sharks aren't prowling for sunblock-glazed snacks: The Southern California Bight — the coastal waters from Santa Barbara to the U.S.-Mexico border — is a white shark nursery, where the young predators hide out, stay warm and learn to hunt before joining adults in deeper seas. After a long decline, white sharks here are making a surprising comeback.

Their return is part of a bigger environmental success story: Federal and state regulations stretching back 40 years have curtailed pollution and repaired the marine food web that includes the fish once known as great white sharks. The Bight's baby white sharks declined for a number of reasons: poor water quality, their decimation as gillnetting bycatch, and the near-extirpation of the adult sharks' prey. Likewise, no single environmental law saved them. Instead, a suite of regulations enacted from the 1970s to the mid-1990s helped restore Southern California's coastal ecosystem enough for its white shark nursery to start recovering.

In 1994, California banned white shark fishing and gillnet fishing. Since then, researchers say, baby shark populations have grown in the Bight. The sharks, in turn, shape the Bight's ecosystem. California's seals and sea lions have rebounded so well under the Marine Mammal Protection Act that predators are necessary to cull their populations and keep them healthy, says Chris Lowe, director of the Shark Lab at California State University-Long Beach. Meanwhile, development projects in estuaries such as marinas and residential buildings have pushed stingrays out of their traditional habitats and into coastal waters, where they provide easy food for baby white sharks. In the future, the sharks' appetites might even protect people: Stingrays injure beachgoers far more frequently than white sharks do, Lowe says. "You hear about all the bad things we're doing to the planet, to the ocean: the pollution, overfishing, global climate change," he says. Marine life faces continued threats, but the recovery of the shark is a sign that humans are doing something right. "Maybe at a regional scale, but at least it's a start." MAYA L. KAPOOR

Maya L. Kapoor is an associate editor for *High County News*.

LAWS THAT BROUGHT SHARKS BACK

1971 Clean Water Act

Southern California went from having some of the worst coastal water quality in the country — with primary treated raw sewage released a mere mile from shore — to having some of the world's best wastewater treatment today.

1973 Marine Mammal Protection Act

Marine mammals in U.S. waters have made an astounding recovery from the early 1900s, when most were hunted to near-extinction for food or fur, or to prevent competition with fishermen.

1994 California Proposition 132

The California coastal gillnetting ban, which went into effect in 1994, has saved many animals, including marine mammals and white sharks, thresher sharks, leopard sharks and white sea bass, from dying as bycatch.

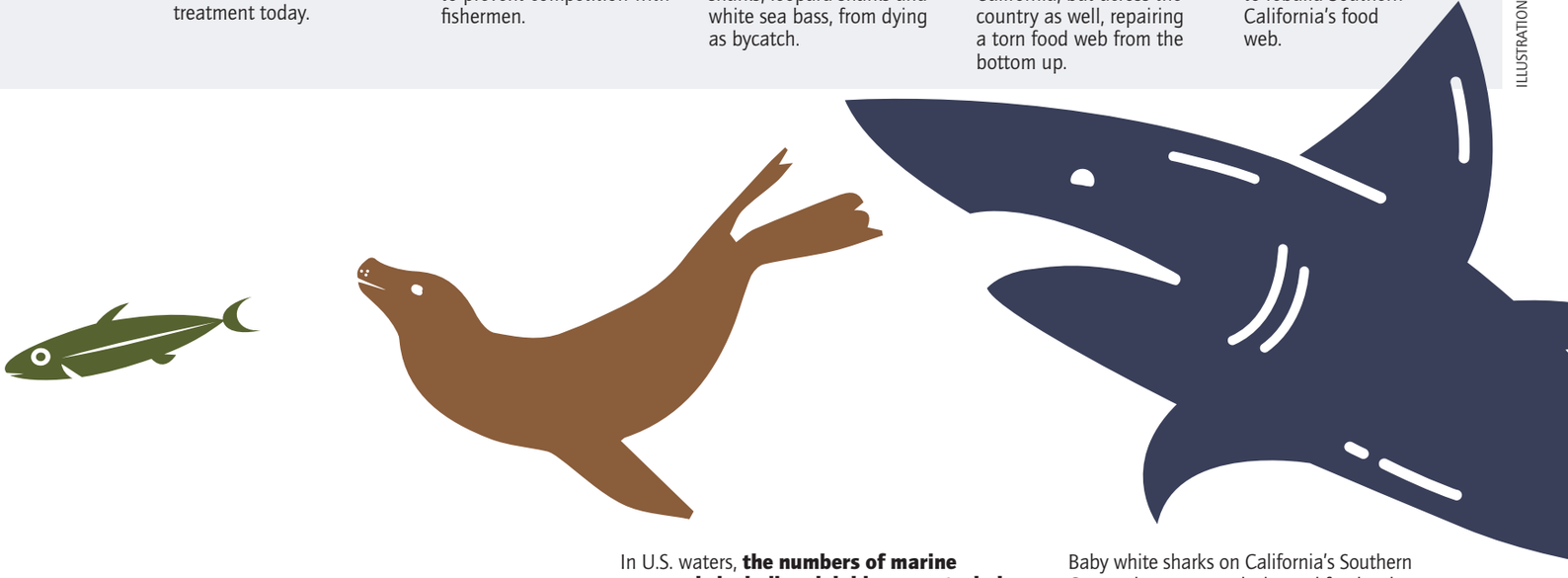
1996 Sustainable Fisheries Act

In an expansion of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, coastal fisheries reduced bycatch and became more sustainable. Fisheries recovered, not just in California, but across the country as well, repairing a torn food web from the bottom up.

1999 Marine Life Protection Act

Today, California's system of marine protected areas functions as a network for conservation, sustainable fisheries, recreation, education — and helps to rebuild Southern California's food web.

ILLUSTRATIONS: NOUN PROJECT



With some of the best wastewater treatment in the world today, **coastal Southern California shelters squid, sardines, anchovies, juvenile fish, and other creatures that marine mammals eat.** Coastal fisheries work to balance livelihoods and sustainability, while California's network of marine protected areas promotes conservation, recreation and education.

In U.S. waters, **the numbers of marine mammals including dolphins, great whales, seals and sea lions have climbed back from near extinction.** Seals and sea lions are adult white sharks' favorite food. White sharks are warm-blooded, making them fast swimmers that dive deep and explore cold climes. Their blubber-rich diet keeps them warm and energized, and they keep California's marine mammal populations fit.

Baby white sharks on California's Southern Coast rely on a once-decimated food web that's become strong enough to support top predators, plus protections that keep them safe from gill nets and fishing lines. **More than 40 years of environmental regulations have repaired this unique ecosystem that marine organisms call home**. Today, baby white sharks eat the area's massive stingray population, which may make human beachgoers safer.

Tribal nations fight removal of grizzly protections

Leaders worry delisting could invite energy exploration in bear habitat

BY GLORIA DICKIE

Last October, members of the Cheyenne, Blackfeet, Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho tribes gathered in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, where a large piece of parchment lay on a wooden table. One by one, tribal representatives approached the table and put their pens to the paper, committing to restore and revitalize the threatened grizzly bear across North America.

Since then, some 125 tribal nations from the United States and Canada have signed the Grizzly Treaty, only the third international agreement of its kind in 150 years. The impetus behind it was the proposed removal of the Yellowstone grizzly from the Endangered Species Act.

Tribal nations contend that the federal government ignored its legal requirement to consult with them, and that removing federal protections could open up core grizzly habitat to energy development. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Yellowstone grizzly population has recovered from around 300 in 1975 to nearly 700. But tribes say that even if Yellowstone's population has grown, other grizzlies in the Lower 48 states are still vulnerable.

Despite a final push by tribes — backed by three U.S. senators and three congressmen — Fish and Wildlife announced that the Yellowstone grizzly would be delisted on July 31. While the bear will still be protected within Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks, outside the parks Montana, Idaho and Wyoming will assume management, and may allow hunting.

Ben Nuvamsa, the former chairman of the Hopi Tribe of Arizona, believes the agency bowed to pressure from ranchers, oil companies and miners. "We speculated that the ulterior motive is to open up ... the habitat for mining and fracking," Nuvamsa says. "The grizzly bear, historically, is a religious icon to virtually all tribal nations in the United States and Canada."

Nuvamsa was part of a tribal delegation that traveled to Washington, D.C., in 2015 to speak with then-Fish and Wildlife Director Dan Ashe about the possible delisting. "We met with them, and we asked for a full consultation and meaningful consultation with all the tribes," Nuvamsa recalled. "They said they would consult with us, but then they didn't do that. They held a conference call and it was really just one-way communication. ... It seemed to be empty promises."

Under Executive Order 13175, implemented by President Bill Clinton in 2000 and reaffirmed by President Barack Obama in 2009, all federal agencies must engage in a "meaningful" consultation with tribal governments when making decisions that may affect them.

In April, Oklahoma Republican Congressmen Markwayne Mullin and Tom Cole sent a letter to Congress urging Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to honor the "meaningful government-to-government consultation with tribes when considering the delisting of the grizzly bear."

Then, in June, Democratic Sens. Bernie Sanders, Tom Udall and Cory Booker sent another letter criticizing the lack of consultation. "Federally recognized tribes are not simply stakeholders who would be affected by delisting, but sovereign governments that must be included in management planning," they wrote.

Lack of consultation between the federal government and tribal nations gained greater attention during the protests over the Dakota Access Pipeline. But while federal law requires consultation, enforcement mechanisms are hazy to nearly nonexistent.

Last year, the Oglala Sioux Tribe petitioned then-Interior Secretary Sally Jewell for a congressional investigation into the conduct of Fish and Wildlife after Matt Hogan, deputy director of the Mountain-Prairie Region, became the tribal contact regarding grizzly delisting. Hogan is a trophy hunter who previously served as the Safari Club International's chief lobbyist to Capitol Hill, and tribes allege that he has ties to Anadarko Petroleum and Gas.

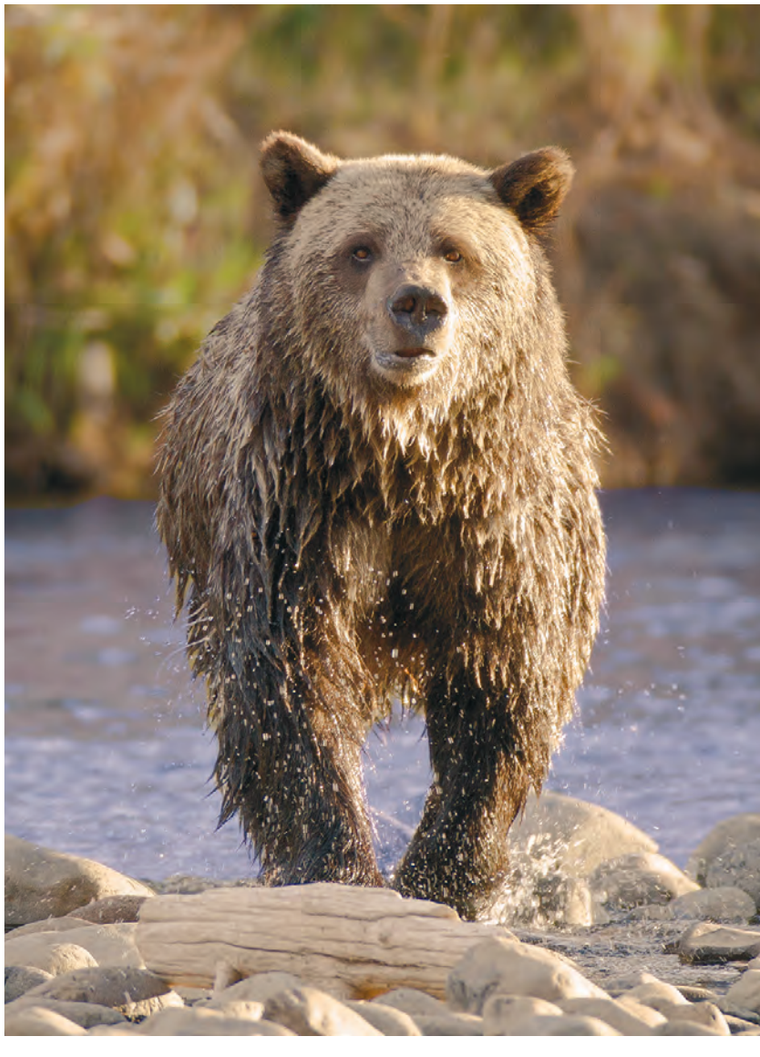
According to the Grizzly Treaty signatories, Greater Yellowstone is home to numerous culturally and historically significant sites, which are safeguarded partly by the bear's protected status. Now, without that protection, the territory could be opened to at least 28 pre-existing mining claims under the 1872 General Mining Act.

"Upon development, those mines will threaten environmental harms to tribal nations' sacred and historic sites, and to treaty lands in the region," says Lee Juan Tyler, councilman of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of Idaho.

One of the issues tribes want to discuss is the relocation of grizzlies onto tribal lands. The Grizzly Treaty recommends restoring grizzlies to suitable habitats on tribal lands within the bear's historic range, including areas within the Wind River, Blackfeet and Flathead reservations.

"There are areas where the Shoshone-Bannock can manage them, and areas where other tribes can manage them," Tyler says, citing places like the Frank Church Wilderness and Gallatin National Forest. But the idea fell on deaf ears, and now, the tribes are likely to appeal the delisting.

"It is no coincidence that the spiritual reawakening of Native people on this continent has coincided with the modest recovery of the grizzly since the 1970s," Crow Creek Sioux Tribe Chairman Brandon Sazue says, "a recovery that will end with delisting and trophy hunting in a return to the frontier mentality of the 1870s." □



A grizzly emerges from the North Fork of the Shoshone River in Wyoming. © RAIN

Gloria Dickie is a freelance science and environmental journalist based in Boulder, Colorado.
@GloriaDickie

Rally cries for the far right

Extremists are quickly learning what their shared interests are

BY TAY WILES

Kate Hurley stood on a street corner in Roseville, California, with a giant American flag wrapped around her like a cape. The flag consumed her petite frame, its edges nearly touching the pavement below. The 52-year-old veterinarian and professor at University of California-Davis bought it at Costco, intending to mount it in her yard. She had never purchased a flag before or considered herself patriotic, but these times called for new measures, she said, when I met her among a crowd of protesters. It was June 10, and she was wrapped in the flag to support Muslim Americans and immigrants, to counteract a right-wing rally by an organization critics describe as anti-Islam.

Anti-Muslim organizations in the U.S. nearly tripled from 2015 to the end of 2016, to over 100 nationwide.

"I want our narrative to own what this flag means," Hurley told me. She was one of hundreds of demonstrators who had come with the nonprofit Indivisible, which was founded several months ago to fight the policies of President Donald Trump. Counter-protesters like Hurley appeared to outnumber the group on the other side of Roseville's busy intersection — one of 29 separate protests that took place that day across the country against the alleged spread of Shariah, or Islamic law, in the U.S.

Several local cops stood on each street corner, keeping demonstrators apart. Cars zoomed by, honking in support of one side or the other. The right-wing crowd stood on the lawn outside BJ's Restaurant & Brewhouse, holding signs decrying Islamic terrorism and guarded by self-styled militia members.

The rallies were organized by an East Coast lobbying group called ACT for America. Hundreds of people descended on Roseville, a town of 132,000 people, just northeast of Sacramento. Thousands more gathered in cities like Seattle, Denver and San Bernardino, signs of a new American extremism, a far-right movement emboldened by Trump's election and now coalescing in street demonstrations nationwide.

In recent months, Trump supporters and ascendant white nationalists have organized or attended what have often been dubbed "free speech" rallies. One in Berkeley, California, degenerated into gnarly street brawls in April, and another threatened to do so in Portland, Oregon, in June. No violence was reported at the anti-Shariah rally in Roseville, but other cities saw scuffles between right-wing demonstrators and left-wing counter-protesters. Militia groups like the Oath Keepers, III% United Patriots and the American Civil Defense Association showed up; ACT had asked the Oath Keepers to provide security. Members of Identity Evropa, a recently formed white-nationalist group, and Proud Boys, whose ideology is steeped in male supremacy, were also present.

A similar rally took place in Denver, where far-right groups and counter-protesters faced off outside the State Capitol. One anti-Shariah protester wearing Carhartts and a bulletproof vest said into a megaphone: "(Shariah) relegates our daughters and our wives to being animals, or worse." The Denver protests, like Roseville's, were mostly nonviolent, though law enforcement intervened when fights appeared imminent. In San Bernardino, California, several pro-Trump demonstrators were arrested on suspicion of vandalism at a rally near the site of a 2015 terror attack. In Seattle, fist fights broke out and police used pepper spray to break up a crowd.

The group that organized the June 10 events — ACT — was founded in 2007 by prominent anti-Islam activist Brigitte Gabriel. An organizer with the group, Scott Presler, was inspired to hold a March Against Shariah after hearing about a Gays Against Shariah march in Manchester, England, planned for the same weekend. ACT for America, which calls itself "the NRA of national security," claims over 1,000 chapters, though the group is not forthcoming about leadership at local outposts. One woman at the Roseville rally told me she was working with ACT to organize the event, but declined to give her name or more information about the group.

The premise of the rallies was the opposition of Shariah, a set of Islamic ethical guidelines whose most extreme interpretations violate human rights. The ACT event was cast as a march for women's rights, which participants say are threatened by Shariah. Yet while demonstrators at the rally denounced female genital mutilation and honor killings, no traditionally feminist issues were apparent.

"I think it's shrewd on the part of Brigitte Gabriel (founder of ACT for America) to point to the extreme views on women that the more conservative elements of Islam hold," says Fred Clarkson, a senior fellow at the Massachusetts-based progressive think tank Political Research Associates and the author of *Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy*. "But it's an empty gesture. Nobody is trying to impose Shariah law (in the U.S.). … This kind of stoking of paranoia and taking a stand against a problem that doesn't exist — it's political theater."

I asked protesters in Roseville whether they feared that Shariah would be implemented in the U.S. Most pointed to the country's first Muslim-majority city, Hamtramck, Michigan, and other Detroit suburbs with Muslim immigrants as possible locations. Those towns are not, in fact, operating under Shariah, but have become a focus of nationwide anti-Islam paranoia in recent years. In truth, Hamtramck has been home to multiple waves of international immigrants, including Polish people who arrived over a century ago; the city's slogan is "The world in two square miles."

Associate Editor Tay Wiles is based in Oakland, California. Assistant Editor Anna V. Smith contributed reporting from Denver.
@taywiles @annavtoriasmith

A man speaks to the crowd during the anti-Shariah protests in Denver on June 10. Twenty-nine similar rallies sprang up across the U.S. to protest Islamic law.
TRISTAN AHTONE

Other protesters conflated Muslim immigration with extremist Islamic terrorism and the complex set of factors that feed it. "I do see what's happening in the world," the local ACT contact told me. "You go to an Ariana Grande concert and get blown to bits. That's what I'm standing against," she said, referring to a recent terror attack in the U.K.

Statistically speaking, the average American is more likely to be killed by an animal attack or an accident involving sharp objects. Yet legislators in 13 states this year have pushed bills to ban the use of foreign law in state courts, in the process, critics say, encouraging Islamophobia. In February, state Rep. Eric Redman, of Kootenai County in northern Idaho, reintroduced an "anti-Shariah" bill, similar to one that failed in the state Legislature last year. Montana Gov. Steve Bullock vetoed a similar bill in April.

The Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks hate groups, found the number of explicitly anti-Muslim organizations in the U.S. nearly tripled from 2015 to the end of 2016, to over 100 nationwide. Within five weeks of Trump's election, 37 percent of 1,100 reported "bias incidents," or acts motivated by prejudice, referenced Trump or his campaign slogans. This May, Jeremy Christian, a man with white-supremacist leanings who had recently attended a "free-speech" rally largely composed of Trump supporters, harassed two women, one wearing a hijab, in Portland, Oregon, and then allegedly stabbed three bystanders who intervened, killing two of them.

The new right-wing movement has not been without infighting among the various groups. Yet a precarious unity among individuals whose beliefs at times seem contradictory has become a movement hallmark. Many demonstrators I spoke to in June seemed to oppose Shariah as a sort of side note. They came out primarily to show solidarity with the broader movement the event represented: the push for age-old conservative values from gun rights to states' rights, in combination with the anti-immigrant nationalism that Trump espouses. An Oath Keeper from the San Francisco Bay Area told me his group didn't actually "take a position" on Shariah. But he came to the rally anyway.

Identity Evropa founder Nathan Damigo, 31, who is famous for his white-nationalist views and for punching a female counter-protester at a Berkeley protest in April, told me that he differed with many of his fellow right-wingers. Some conservatives, for example, defend multiculturalism, while Damigo advocates for a white ethnostate. In April, Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes railed against Identity Evropa for its views on race. "It's been a very uncomfortable process" for right-leaning groups to find common ground in recent months, Damigo said. "But there's starting to be networking between our groups, and we're getting to know each other."

Spencer Sunshine, an associate fellow at Political Research Associates who has been following far-right movements for a decade, calls this new phenomenon "Independent Trumpism." He says it unites Trumpist Republicans, neo-Nazis and members of the Patriot movement, which took off after the 2008 election of President Barack Obama.

The June anti-Shariah rallies showed Independent Trumpism in action. But they were also a rallying point for counter-movements that oppose the president's policies and rhetoric — and the violence they have been linked to. The counter-demonstrators held anti-Trump banners and signs proclaiming "No ban, no wall" and "Make America kind again." In Roseville, members of the anti-racist Answer Coalition, as well as a handful of more extreme leftist groups like Antifa, joined the Indivisible crowd. Refuse Fascism, a group created in December, now has chapters across the country. It is urging people to engage in a "Summer of Struggle," with rallies planned in over a dozen cities for July 15, calling for the Trump administration to "be driven from power."

Kate Hurley, the veterinarian from UC-Davis, first took to the streets after the presidential inauguration in January. "My mom was an activist, but I resisted it all my life," she said. Hurley's mother died a few years ago, but her spirit was at the rally in Roseville: Hurley made a protest sign with an old photo of the Statue of Liberty she found in her mom's papers. She held it in one hand and a loudspeaker in the other. "This is what America stands for!" she yelled. Her American flag cape gleamed in the noon sun, hanging stiffly because it was still brand-new. □

THE LATEST

Backstory

In October 2015, Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber resigned, weeks into his fourth term. **The popular Democrat and his fiancée and energy policy advisor, Cylvia Hayes, (below) were under investigation for violating ethics and public corruption laws.** Hayes, an environmental consultant, allegedly used her position to land contracts on issues on which she advised the governor. Kitzhaber said he was "tried, convicted and sentenced by the media" ("Gov. Kitzhaber's fall from grace," *HCN*, 3/21/15).

Followup

Federal prosecutors announced in mid-June that neither will face charges. **A 2016 U.S. Supreme Court ruling has "set the bar so high that it is now nearly impossible to bring federal charges in political corruption cases,"** Oregon Secretary of State Dennis Richardson told Oregon Public Broadcasting. That case overturned a former Virginia governor's influence-peddling conviction, citing lack of proof that he helped a businessman in return for gifts and loans. Oregon's Ethics Commission will now resume its review of whether Kitzhaber and Hayes used public office for personal gain.

JODI PETERSON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STONES OF THE SUR
Poetry by Robinson Jeffers, photographs by Morley Baer; edited by James Karman. 176 pages, hardcover: $70. Stanford University Press, 2001.

Round-edged knuckles of rock rise from sand. Sunlight slants across the stone, highlighting cracks and pits stretching across its planes. The image, captured by photographer Morley Baer in 1969, is one of several dozen collected in *Stones of the Sur*. Each is matched with a poem, either excerpted or in full, by 20th century American poet Robinson Jeffers.

The rugged, rocky coast of Big Sur, in central California, inspired both poet and photographer during their lives. The beauty of the stones and bedrock that form the landscape's backbone awes both visitors and residents, even as the area is continually transformed by winter storms and landslides. As Jeffers scholar James Karman writes in the book's opening pages, "Rocks can serve as teachers, revealing much about themselves – their own unique personalities – and about the meaning and the mystery of the world." **EMILY BENSON**

Double Surf, 1966. PHOTOGRAPH BY MORLEY BAER. ©2017 THE MORLEY BAER PHOTOGRAPHY TRUST, SANTA FE.

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A heat wave and staffing changes

Paonia, Colorado, home of *High Country News*, celebrated the Fourth of July in style. Floats, ponies and festively clad children were the highlights of our annual Cherry Days parade, and live music, great food and pit-spitting and wood-chopping contests rounded out the day.

Amid June's heat wave, we welcomed many visitors, including readers **Kru Fairey** and **Ty Stewart**, a mother-and-son duo from Hattiesburg, Mississippi. This fall, Ty heads to the University of Missouri for a master's degree in journalism. We like the sound of that!

Texas Tech professor **Carol Flueckiger**, in town for an artist residency, toured the office. Longtime reader **Ron Sievers** and his family drove their Airstream all the way from Long Beach, California, to say hello, and reader and Research Fund donor **Mike Sennett** of Bellingham, Washington, visited on a trip through Oregon, Utah and Colorado. On their way to Bears Ears National Monument, **Ken** and **Donna Bonetti** of Boulder, Colorado, renewed their subscription in person. Subscriber and supporter **Jani Stonington** came by from Louisville, Colorado, before heading for the hot springs in Ridgway and Ouray.

Longtime subscribers **Gary** and **Molly Beverly** from Prescott, Arizona, paused on their trek through the Colorado mountains, as did **Jane** and **Dan Hall** of Yreka, California, subscribers since 1986. **Melissa Early** from Salt Lake brought land conservation news, and local-food fans **Heron Stombock** and **Mary Wright** stopped by from Boulder. **Doug** and **Jean Halford** of Idaho Falls also braved the heat to visit. **Leslie Madsen**, here visiting her son, was happy to find a few of us around on July 3. **Glynn** and **Helen Cress** from Quemado, New Mexico, dropped by, as did **Brad Frank** of Hesperus, Colorado, who thanked us for "staying tough on the issues." We'll do our best to keep at it!

Writers, editors and board members gathered during our recent issue break to reflect on recent work and chart a course for the days ahead. We have a few staffing changes: Former interns **Rebecca Worby** and **Emily Benson** are staying on for another six months as editorial fellows. **Anna V. Smith**, who joined *HCN* in July 2016 as an intern and recently finished a fellowship, is now an assistant editor; she'll be focusing on tribal affairs and helping us run the magazine's digital side.

A few corrections: In "Trail Blazing" (6/26/17) we incorrectly noted the total mileage of trails nationwide; there are 236,000 miles of trail on state and federal land. We also misidentified the highest point on the National Trails System in "Thru and thru," in the same issue. At 14,270 feet, it's Grays Peak. We would also like to clarify how the system is managed: It's overseen by a number of federal agencies, not solely the National Park Service. We regret the errors.

—Emily Benson, for the staff

Brad Frank, brought his dog, Berry, to the *HCN* office, where she got a lot of attention. BROOKE WARREN

DEATH THREATS

A young Alaskan hunter confronts the ugliest side of the internet

FEATURE BY JULIA O'MALLEY
PHOTOS BY ASH ADAMS

Before his story made the Anchorage paper, before the first death threat arrived from across the world, before his elders began to worry and his mother cried over the things she read on Facebook, Chris Apassingok, 16, caught a whale.

It happened at the end of April, which for generations has been whaling season in the Siberian Yupik village of Gambell on St. Lawrence Island on the northwest edge of Alaska. More than 30 crews from the community of 700 were trawling the sea for bowhead whales, cetaceans that can grow over 50 feet long, weigh over 50 tons and live more than 100 years. A few animals taken each year bring thousands of pounds of meat to the village, offsetting the impossibly high cost of imported store-bought food.

A hundred years ago — even 20 years ago, when Gambell was an isolated point on the map, protected part of the year by a wall of sea ice — catching the whale would have been a dream accomplishment for a teenage hunter, a sign of Chris' passage into adulthood and a story that people would still be telling when he was old. But today, in a world shrunk by social media, where fragments of stories travel like light and there is no protection from anonymous outrage, his achievement has been eclipsed by an endless wave of online harassment. Six weeks after his epic hunt, his mood was dark. He'd quit going to school. His parents, his siblings, everybody worried about him.

IN MID-JUNE, AS HIS FAMILY CROWDED into their small kitchen at dinnertime, Chris stood by the stove, eyes on the plate in his hands. Behind him, childhood photographs collaged the wall, basketball games and hunting trip selfies, certificates from school. Lots of village boys are quiet, but Chris is one of the quietest. He usually speaks to elders and other hunters in Yupik. His English sentences come out short and deliberate. His siblings are used to speaking for him.

"I can't get anything out of him," his mother said.

His sister, Danielle, 17, heads to University of Alaska Fairbanks in the fall, where she hopes to play basketball. She pulled a square of meat from a pot and set it on a cutting board on the table, slicing it thin with a moon-shaped ulu. Chris drug a piece through a pile of Lawry's Seasoned Salt and dunked it in soy sauce. *Mangtak*. Whale. Soul food of the Arctic.

Soon conversation turned, once again, to what happened. It's hard to escape the story in Chris' village, or in any village in the region that relies on whaling. People are disturbed by it. It stirs old pain and anxieties about the pressures on rural Alaska. Always, the name Paul Watson is at the center of it.

"We struggle to buy gas, food, they risk their lives out there to feed us, while this Paul Watson will never have to suffer a day in his life," Susan Apassingok, Chris' mother, said, voice full of tears. "Why is he going after a child such as my son?"

ON THE DAY THEY TOOK THE WHALE, Chris and his father, Daniel Apassingok, were cleaning a bearded seal on the gravel beach when they heard a cousin shouting. A black back cut the waves a few miles offshore. The three of them scrambled to their skiff.

Every whale is different, Daniel had told his son many times. An experienced crew captain knows to watch how each one moves and to calculate where it will surface. If they get it right, the boat will be 5 to 10 feet from the animal when it comes up. Then everything rests on the acuity of the striker in the bow, who holds a darting gun loaded with an exploding harpoon.

Daniel works as the maintenance man at the village school, supporting Susan, Chris, Danielle and Chase, 13. Daniel is a decent hunter, but Chris is something else. The boy was born with a sense for the direction of the wind, an eye for birds flashing out of the grass and animals bobbing in the surf, Daniel said. He could aim and shoot a rifle at the age of 5. By 11, he'd trained

Chris Apassingok, 16, holds the darting gun he used to harpoon a whale this spring outside his family's home in Gambell, Alaska.

Six weeks after his epic hunt, his mood was dark. He'd quit going to school. His parents, his siblings, everybody worried about him.

himself to strike whales, standing steady in the front of the skiff with the gun, riding Bering Sea swells like a snowboarder.

"He started out very young," Daniel said. "Chris kind of advanced a little bit faster than most people, even for me. He's got a gift."

From the boat, Chris and Daniel's village appeared in miniature, rows of weather-bleached houses staked in the gravel, four-wheelers parked out front, meat racks full of walrus and seal, cut in strips and hung to dry. Across the water the other direction, mountains on the Russian coast shaped the horizon. Chris removed his hat to pray and scanned the glittering chop, his compact frame taut, his expression slack as always. Daniel nudged the tiller.

When Daniel was a child, the village hunted in skin sailboats, chasing the whale in silence. Then as now, a boy started young, mastering one job, then another, until, if he was talented, he could try to make a strike. Daniel started as a striker at 19. He'd taken two whales so far.

The weather seemed to have changed permanently since he was a boy. He believed it was climate change. The ice didn't stay as long and wasn't the same quality. Whales passed at a different time. There were fewer calm days and more ferocious storms. The village was still recovering from one in 2016 that damaged 60 structures on the island, including their house.

Along with whale, the village relies on bearded seal and walrus for food. In 2013, hunting conditions were so bad, the village required emergency food aid to get through the winter. Subsequent harvests have been below expectations.

"It's always hard," Daniel said. "But it's getting harder."

They were a few miles offshore when the dark oblong of the whale passed their boat. Adrenaline lit up Chris. Just a few feet off the bow, the bowhead's back split the sea. Chris raised the darting gun, a heavy combination of shotgun and spear. He aimed.

"Please let us get it," he asked God.

He squeezed the trigger. The harpoon sailed, trailing rope.

Alaska Natives have been hunting bowhead in the Western Arctic for at least 2,000 years. The animals were hunted commercially by Yankee whalers from the mid-19th century until the beginning of the 20th century, decimating the population. Since then, whale numbers have recovered, and their population is growing. In 2015, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration estimated there were 16,000 animals, three times the population in 1985.

Alaska Native communities in the region each take a few

whales a year, following a quota system managed by the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC). The total annual take is roughly 50 animals, yielding between 600 and 1,000 tons of food, according to the commission.

Subsistence hunting of marine mammals is essential for villages where cash economies are weak. The average household income in Gambell, for example, is $5,000 to $10,000 below the federal poverty level. Kids rely on free breakfast and lunch at school. Families sell walrus ivory carvings and suffer when there isn't enough walrus.

Store-bought food can be two to three times as expensive as it is in Anchorage, depending on weight. In the village grocery, where shelves are often empty, a bag of Doritos is $11, a large laundry detergent is more than $20, water is more expensive per ounce than soda. No one puts a price on whale, but without it, without walrus, without bearded seal, no one could afford to live here.

The harpoon struck, but the wounded whale swam on. A second boat took another shot. The great animal lost power. It heaved over, belly to sky.

Soon Chris had congratulations in his ears and fresh belly meat in his mouth, a sacrament shared by successful hunters on the water as they prayed in thanks to the whale for giving itself. He had been the first to strike the whale, so the hunters decided it belonged to his father's crew. They would take the head back to the village and let the great cradle of the jawbone cure in the wind outside their house.

They towed the whale in and hauled it ashore using a block and tackle. Women and elders came to the beach to get their share. Every crew got meat. Whale is densely caloric, full of protein, omega-3s and vitamins. People eat it boiled, baked, raw and frozen. Its flavor is mild, marine and herbal like seaweed.

People packed it away in their freezers for special occasions. They carried it with them when they flew out of the village, to Nome and Anchorage and places down south to share with relatives. Everyone told and retold the story of the teenage striker. Then the radio station in Nome picked it up: "Gambell Teenager Leads Successful Whale Hunt, Brings Home 57-Foot Bowhead." The *Alaska Dispatch News*, the state's largest paper, republished that story.

"I don't give a damn for the bullshit politically correct attitude that certain groups of people have a 'right' to murder a whale."

—Paul Watson, founder of Sea Shepherd, whose Facebook post incited more online bullying

IT USED TO BE THAT RURAL ALASKA communicated mainly by VHF and by listening to messages passed over daily FM radio broadcasts, but now Facebook has become a central platform for communication, plugging many remote communities into the world of comment flame wars, cat memes and reality television celebrity pages.

That is how Paul Watson, an activist and founder of Sea Shepherd, an environmental organization based in Washington state, encountered Chris' story. Watson, an early member of Greenpeace, is famous for taking a hard line against whaling. On the reality television show, *Whale Wars* on *Animal Planet*, he confronted Japanese whalers at sea. His social media connections span the globe.

Watson posted the story about Chris on his personal Facebook page, accompanied by a long rant. Chris' mother may have been the first in the family to see it, she said.

"WTF, You 16-Year Old Murdering Little Bastard!," Watson's post read. "... some 16-year old kid is a frigging 'hero' for snuffing out the life of this unique self-aware, intelligent, social, sentient being, but hey, it's okay because murdering whales is a part of his culture, part of his tradition. … I don't give a damn for the bullshit politically correct attitude that certain groups of people have a 'right' to murder a whale."

Until then, Facebook had been a place Chris went occasionally to post pictures of sneakers and chat with his aunties. He heard about the post at school. By evening, messages arrived in his Facebook inbox.

"He said, 'Mom, come,' and he showed me his messages in his phone, calling him names like, 'You little cunt,' and 'I hope you choke on blubber,' 'You deserve to die' and 'You need to harpoon your mom,' " Susan said. A deluge of venomous messages followed, many wishing him dead.

Cleaning up after dinner, Danielle said she tried to keep count. She got to 400 and they kept coming, from across the country and from Europe. Chris has only been out of Alaska once, to a church conference in Indianapolis, she said.

"There was this one message saying that, I read on his phone, that they hope that our whole community dies," Danielle said.

"It was pretty cruel," said his brother, Chase.

Chris said he tried to ignore the messages, to laugh them off. When he heard his parents and siblings talking about them, his eyes grew wet and he clenched his jaw.

"It never stops," he said.

Across the Arctic, people responded to Watson's post with comments, petitions and private messages in opposition. The

Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission reported it to Facebook. Eventually, it was removed. Across the region, whaling captains reminded hunters not to put pictures on social media.

Watson wrote another post, refusing to apologize.

"This has been my position of 50 years and it will always be my position until the day I die," he wrote.

Watson and Sea Shepherd declined to be interviewed for this story but sent a statement.

"Paul Watson did not encourage nor request anyone to threaten anyone. Paul Watson also received numerous death threats and hate messages," it read. "It is our position that the killing of any intelligent, self-aware, sentient cetacean is the equivalent of murder."

Villagers have been familiar with Watson's opinions for many years. They have seen him on cable, and many remember 2005, when Sea Shepherd sent out a press release blaming villagers for the deaths of two children in a boating accident during whaling season.

Many environmentalists who object to subsistence whaling have a worldview that sees hunting as optional and recreational, said Jessica Lefevre, an attorney for the whaling commission based in Washington, D.C.

"The NGOs we deal with are ideologically driven; this is what they do, they save stuff. The collateral damage to communities doesn't factor into their thinking," she said. "To get them to understand there are people on this planet who remain embedded in the natural world, culturally and by physical and economic necessity, is extremely difficult."

The organizations are interested in conservation, but fail to take into account that Alaska Natives have a large stake in the whale population being healthy and have never overharvested it, she said. Some NGOs also benefit financially from sensation and outrage, she said, especially in the age of social media.

IN THE SUMMERTIME, VILLAGE TEENAGERS live in a different time zone in the forever light of the Arctic. At 1 a.m. in June, their four-wheelers buzz down to a large wooden platform basketball court in the gravel by the school, where Drake pulses out of cellphone speakers. The girls wear polar fleece jackets, sparkle jeans and aviator frames. All the boys have Jordan sneakers. A half-dozen fidget spinners blur.

On a recent night, Chris stood on the sidelines of a pick-up game. There was a girl with him. They didn't talk, but they stood close. Occasionally, someone threw him a ball and he made a basket.

It is hard to be alone in a village. Even if the adults are inside, someone is always keeping track. Between blood relations, adoptions and marriages, Chris' family is huge, with relatives in many houses. Many are paying extra attention to him now.

Chris' grandfather, Mike Apatiki, lives just down from the basketball court. He has a freezer full of meat his grandson brought. He worries less about Chris leaving school — hunting seasons have put him behind for years — than he does about him feeling shamed.

"These people do not understand and know our need for food over here," he said. "Like the rest of Americans need to have a chicken and a cow to eat out there from a farm, we need our whale and seal and walrus. Makes us healthy and live long."

"*Neqeniighta*," the Siberian Yupik word for "hunter," doesn't have a perfect equivalent in English, said Merle Apassingok, Chris' uncle, who lives across the road from his grandfather. It means something broader even than the word "provider," and is tied to a role men have played for generations that ensures survival and adaptation. When a boy is a good hunter, he is poised to be a leader, Merle said.

"Hunting is more than getting a permit and fulfilling that permit with a grizzly bear or a Dall sheep or whatever," he said. "There is happiness when a boy gets his first seal, there is joy. There is sadness when we have a tragedy. How can we isolate the word?"

He wishes that Chris' story never left the island. He worries his nephew has not lived long enough to process all that's happened.

"As far as day-to-day dinner on the table, hunters are everything in the village," he said.

After basketball, when most of the village is asleep, Chris sometimes packs his backpack with ammunition, slips on his dirty camouflage jacket and pumps up the leaky four-wheeler tire. Hunting, he told his mother once, is like a story: Suspense, conflict, resolution. He always prays the ending will be the animals showing themselves so he can take them back home, she said. As twilight edges into sunrise, he heads out alone down the coast, his rifle slung on his back. After a long ride, he crawls into a seal blind tucked behind driftwood on the beach, where he can stay for hours with only the birds and the smell of grass and the racket of the sea. □

Chase Apassingok, 13, Chris' brother, prepares to go out hunting for seal and birds while Chris sleeps after a successful morning hunt, left. An article from *The Nome Nugget* about Chris' whale catch is pasted up on the wall with other family mementos. Chris watches his sister, Danielle, 17, cut *mangtak* with an *ulaaq* in the kitchen of their home, middle. The whale meat sustains the community and is eaten as a snack and a main course, sweetened and salted. A clothesline hangs between homes in Gambell, Alaska, which is isolated on St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea, right.

Julia O'Malley is a freelance writer and third-generation Alaskan who lives in Anchorage. Find her work at juliaomalley.media.
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WEB EXTRA See more photos and a video about Chris at **hcn.org**.

"If anything can save the world,

Down the Dark Mountain

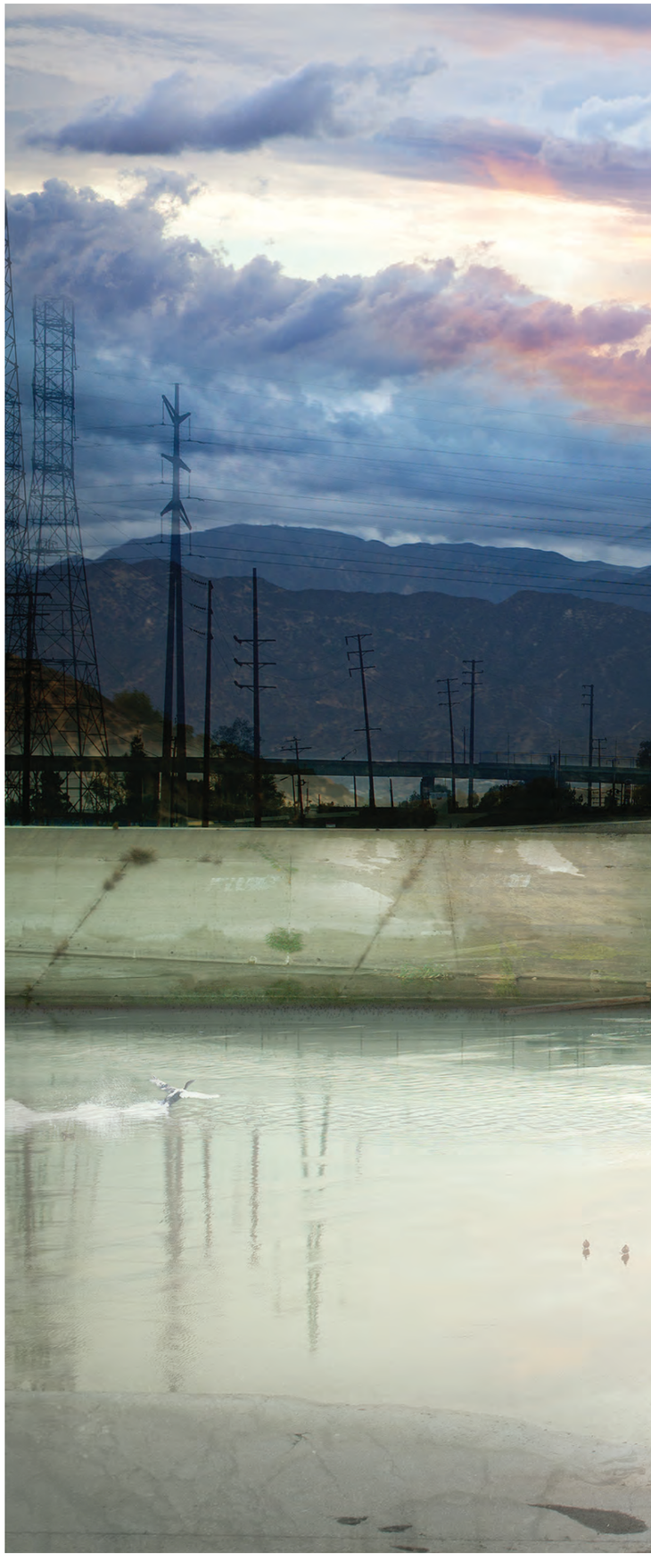
Can a forgotten California poet guide us through the ecocide?

FEATURE ESSAY BY BRIAN CALVERT

In the winter of 2013, I drove up California's Central Valley to Stockton, to interview Cambodian parents who'd lost children in one of the nation's many mass school shootings. A local man named Patrick Purdy had parked his station wagon behind an elementary school, set it on fire with a Molotov cocktail, and, as curious children ran toward him, shot them with an assault rifle. Purdy killed five children and wounded nearly 30. All of the dead were Cambodian or Vietnamese. The parents had survived war, genocide and refugee camps, only to have their children murdered in America.

The shooting took place in 1989, 24 years before I visited, but one mother wept so hard during her interview, it seemed no time had passed for her. I had spent much of my early career as a foreign correspondent, speaking to men, women and children in places torn up by war or political violence. And though I'd left the last of these assignments, in Afghanistan, more than a year earlier, the stark irony of the Stockton shooting brought back a familiar, low-register pain. I wrapped up the interviews and headed back to Orange County, south of Los Angeles, dragging the day behind me like a chain. I had a small apartment near the coast, and in the mornings I would run along the Bolsa Chica wetlands, where a pumpjack groaned in its lonesome, eternal way and a pair of kestrels hunted the brush from a cluster of palm trees. Some mornings, a pair of Blackhawk helicopters would fly by, thundering over the surf. *We're still at war,* they'd whisper. *Do not doubt it.*

In this state of mind, a few days after the Stockton trip, I came across the work of Paul Kingsnorth, a British writer who called himself a "recovering environmentalist." He was one of the founders of The Dark Mountain Project, a movement of philosophers, writers and artists that had emerged from the 2008 economic crisis, and he believed the planet was experiencing an "ecocide that nobody seems able to prevent." Ecocide — the total destruction of our home — seemed inevitable to them, and to me, given the things I'd seen and any number of ongoing catastrophes: mass extinction, climate chaos, flooded coasts, mega-drought; oceans turning to acid, permafrost to muck. We humans are a disastrous species, as bad for the Earth as a meteor strike, and the realization of this had established in me a new kind of sadness, a mixture of guilt and mourning for a loss yet to come. Kingsnorth was one of the few people who seemed to voice a similar pain, and I began following his writing. I eventually moved to Colorado, and, not long after, saw that Kingsnorth was hosting a retreat in the Spanish Pyrenees, for "grief in the age of ecocide." I immediately signed up. Now that my pain had been named, I wanted to understand what to do with it.



SUBLIME: The L.A. River 1, 2015, by Elena Dorfman

I'd put my money on beauty."

– DOUGLAS TOMPKINS

SUBLIME: The L.A. River 4, 2015, by Elena Dorfman

ABOUT THE ART

"Some friends from the Westside see the (L.A. River) as a glorified sewer," photographer Elena Dorfman told the *L.A. Times*. "For me, it's a conundrum, a sanctuary and place of great sadness. A mystical and beautiful place that kept calling me back."

These photographs are from her series, "Sublime: The L.A. River." Images are composed of dozens — even hundreds — of Dorfman's own photographs, taken along the 51-mile-long concrete-channeled river over the course of two years, and layered with historic images.

"The river is presented as metaphor," Dorfman writes, "highlighting the ebb and flow between civilization and savagery, the cycle of social and cultural development, and the descent into ruin and back again."

THE RETREAT WAS CALLED "SHADOWS IN THE WILD." The idea behind it was to learn meditation methods, eat healthy food, hike — and discuss the ecocide. A short week of this would conclude with a 24-hour solo in the "wilderness." There were about a dozen participants, mostly from Europe: journalists, professors, musicians, programmers, civil servants. On the first day, we hiked to an old stone farmhouse in the Alta Garrotxa, a folding, forested range of steep canyons and limestone crags in the eastern Pyrenees. We pitched our tents among the pine trees surrounding the house, then gathered in the main room to join Kingsnorth and our guides for dinner. A fire roared in the hearth, and we sat around two heavy wooden tables, drinking the last wine we'd see for the week.

Kingsnorth, then 44, was tall, with shaggy brown hair, ruddy cheeks and a soft-spoken manner, polished no doubt by the numerous gatherings he'd hosted since the inception of the Dark Mountain Project. Over the next few days, he told us, we would engage in a kind of therapy designed for people who believe the end of civilization is upon us. "Simply by paying attention to the darker things in the world — it gives people permission to have a conversation with people that they've been having a hard time having," he said. "Dark Mountain is a rolling conversation about how to live in the age that we're living in without falling into the abyss."

His outlook had not always been so grim. He grew up wandering England's mountains and moors with his father, "a compulsive long-distance walker." This led him toward environmental activism, as did a formative trip, at the age of 21, to Borneo's rainforest, with its moonlit rivers, fruit bats, hornbills and hooting gibbons. Back home, he saw his society as "atomized" and inward-looking, a place of streetlights and asphalt and advertisements, "screaming for my attention, trying to sell me something, tell me who to be, what to desire and to need." He set out to save "nature from people," first fighting road development in England, then organizing protests against globalization. Over time, though, he became disillusioned. Environmentalism had left the wild behind in favor of "sustainability," he thought, "an

entirely human-centered piece of politicking, disguised as concern for 'the planet.' "

"Something inside me broke somehow," he said. "I thought, 'This isn't working. We're totally fucked. The machine will go on until it's killed everything or collapses or both. But the wild world, justice — I still believe in that. What can I do with that?' "

And so he had gone looking for another way of being. He started writing and publishing fiction, poetry and essays. Along the way, he came across the work of a forgotten 20th century poet named Robinson Jeffers, and there found an intellectual moorings. Jeffers thought humans unable to understand themselves as a part of nature, and therefore doomed to destroy it. He wrote from the Northern Coast of California, putting landscape and animals above humans and their delusions, through two world wars and the onslaught of the modern industrial age. His writing had a grim resolve to it that matched Kingsnorth's, a sense of tragedy best captured in the poem from which Dark Mountain draws its name, "Rearmament." Jeffers wrote the poem in 1935, the year Hitler became führer and a windstorm swept 12 million pounds of dirt from the Great Plains into Chicago. Jeffers describes humanity as a slow-moving glacier "bound to plow down a forest," headed for a future only fools believe they can change: "The beauty of modern / Man is not in the persons but in the / Disastrous rhythm, the heavy and mobile masses, / the dance of the / Dream-led masses down the dark mountain."

Kingsnorth felt a kinship with Jeffers, he said, "standing like a hawk on these wild cliffs, watching a process he clearly thinks is doomed, and just watches it, even though it causes him grief." Relying in part on Jeffers' work, Kingsnorth built an idea he called "dark ecology." In the *Orion* essay where he coined the term, he offered five answers to the ecological crisis, most of them suggestions for reconnecting to the wilder world: preserving nonhuman life; rooting oneself in the work of land or place; insisting that nature has intrinsic value; and "building refuges" where non-human life can flourish. "Withdraw," Kingsnorth advised, "so that you can allow yourself to sit back quietly and feel, intuit, work out what is right for you and what nature might need from you. Withdraw because refusing to help the machine advance — refusing to tighten the ratchet further — is a deeply moral position."

Withdraw? I could almost hear the groans from activists around the world — protesters, lobbyists, lawyers, half of California, every editor at *Grist.* Indeed, writing for *Grist* in 2012, Wen Stephenson warned against Kingsnorth's "defeatist" approach, saying that without serious action to address climate change, "the consequences will be a whole lot more 'unthinkable' than darning socks and growing carrots," especially for "those non-rich, non-Western folks Kingsnorth cares about." He had a fair point, but not a helpful one. Without concerted action, the world was probably headed for a new Dark Age, one of heat and hurricanes and sun-blasted barbarism. I simply wasn't convinced humans could prevent it. Spain, then, was a way to examine that belief, to figure out what to do with it.

Later that night, I walked out of the farmhouse and into the darkness, following the beam of my headlamp along a stone wall and down a dirt path to my tent. The air had a spring bite, and my breath came in puffs that drifted through the trees. I paused to watch the stars. Some of what Kingsnorth said made sense, but I found it hard to reconcile the idea of withdrawing with simultaneously seeking justice. His message articulated a kind of common despair, or resignation, as though the human race were a cancer patient given six months to live. But that kind of thinking can only assuage grief, not turn it into something useful.

Perhaps there were more answers in Jeffers' work, beyond Dark Mountain doom and catharsis. After all, the poet profoundly influenced environmental thought throughout the 20th century. Ansel Adams was a friend, whose famous black-and-white landscapes bear Jeffers' metaphysical fingerprints. John Steinbeck would pore over his poems alongside his friends, Joseph Campbell, the mythologist, and Ed Ricketts, a marine ecologist. David Brower, the former head of the Sierra Club, called Jeffers' relationship to the California Coast, "one of the most uncanny and complete relationships between a man and his natural background known in literature." Edward Abbey has conversations with Jeffers throughout *Desert Solitaire*, though he never mentions his name. In a poem called "Hurt Hawks," Jeffers describes a wounded redtail that he must put down. "I'd sooner, except the penalties, kill a man than a hawk," he writes. Abbey's version: "I'd rather kill a man than a snake."

These men were drawn to Jeffers' work in part because of his philosophy of "inhumanism" — a deliberate attack on the human exceptionalism that Kingsnorth so derides. At its center is a perspective of deep time and humanity's insignificance in the cosmos. And yet Jeffers also saw humans as an integral part of an interconnected whole: "There is not an atom in all the universes / But feels every other atom; gravitation, electromagnetism, light, heat, and the other / Flamings, the nerves in the night's black flesh, flow them together; the stars, the winds and the people: one energy, One existence, one music, one organism, one life, one God: star-fire and rock-strength, the sea's cold flow / And man's dark soul."

I crawled into my sleeping bag, as an owl hooted somewhere in the woods. There was a clear connection between Jeffers and the environmental movement — a bright shining line of well-meaning white guys that stretches from Abbey to Muir to Thoreau and on back to the Romantics. Their influence runs now through slick REI ads and "cabin porn" websites, and I must admit the fantasy tempts me: drop off the grid, chop wood in warm flannel, ease back each night by the fire with a couple of tuckered dogs, a book and a shimmering tumbler of whiskey. But even if it were realistic, could that actually be a morally defensible position? What about everyone else?

"Dark Mountain is a rolling conversation about how to live in the age that we're living in without falling into the abyss."

—Paul Kingsnorth, "recovering environmentalist"

Rearmament

These grand and fatal movements toward death: the grandeur of the mass
Makes pity a fool, the tearing pity
For the atoms of the mass, the persons, the victims, makes it seem
    monstrous
To admire the tragic beauty they build.
It is beautiful as a river flowing or a slowly gathering
Glacier on a high mountain rock-face,
Bound to plow down a forest, or as frost in November,
The gold and flaming death-dance for leaves,
Or a girl in the night of her spent maidenhood, bleeding and kissing.
I would burn my right hand in a slow fire
To change the future ... I should do foolishly. The beauty of modern
Man is not in the persons but in the
Disastrous rhythm, the heavy and mobile masses, the dance of the
Dream-led masses down the dark mountain.

—Robinson Jeffers
Such Counsels You Gave to Me *(1935-'38)*

THE NEXT DAY, WE HEADED OUT FOR A HIKE and an exercise in storytelling. The hills behind the farmhouse were steep, like everything in the Alta Garrotxa, which was wilder than I'd expected. We marched single-file up the trail, through holm oak and beech, past vines and brambles and patches of earth churned by wild pigs. I stepped over a salamander, bright yellow and black, as an Australian named John, a professional gambler, hiked ahead of me. John, a lanky, buzz-cut 40-something, had come to see most people around him as wasteful and oblivious. He'd look out from his place in the city and see offices empty, lights on, row after row, and despair. "I'm a person who has lost almost all hope," he told us. Now, though, John took the lead, his long legs carrying him at a brisk pace. I felt lighter, too, in this strange column of dark-mountaineers. At the end of an arduous section of trail, we stopped to catch our breath. John was smiling now, sweating. "I think we're doing something right," he said. "I think so," I replied.

At a clearing, we separated into smaller groups. Our guide, a bright-smiling German named Korbi, told us to hike into the woods alone, find objects that spoke to us, and assemble them in a way that would answer the question: "What brought you here?" I followed a game trail through a thicket of holly, where an ancient dead pine stood. It was massive and gray and twisted, and reminded me of trees I climbed as a boy. After a sheepish look around, I heaved myself up, settled into its branches, and thought about home.

I grew up in Pinedale, Wyoming, a ranch town divided by Pine Creek, the outlet of Fremont Lake, named for an "explorer" and carved by glaciers. My family's trailer wasn't far from the creek, which was flanked on each side by woods — pine, aspen and willow. As children, my sister and I spent most of our time there. Carrie and I were born 13 months apart, "Irish twins" and best friends, and when the creek ran high from snowmelt, we would strip to our underwear and float it through town. The water and woods were our summer home, which we shared with duck and moose, marten and osprey, fox and deer.

One afternoon, I went to the creek alone, exploring the bottomlands until I found a rise of sagebrush and potentilla I'd never noticed. As I started to cross, a killdeer appeared, shrieking and feigning a broken wing. She kept up her dance until I backed away. I chose another angle to walk, noting again when she began to feign injury. We had this conversation until I triangulated where her nest must be. I scanned the ground, inch by inch, until I found it, three speckled eggs in a tight grass bowl. It was a moment of communion: the mountains, ground by glaciers, flowed into the lake, whose water built my bones, and these eggs and the chicks within — all of us connected, the peaks, the lake, the creek, the birds, the boy. A feeling of great responsibility came over me. Their secret uncovered, the fate of the eggs was up to me. I rose and left them safely hidden. This is one of my last good memories of childhood.

Pinedale sits in the basin of the Upper Green River Basin, once rich in beaver and mink. In the late 1800s, it was a gathering place for trappers and bands of Shoshone, who would come out of their mountain hideaways each summer to revel and trade. For many years, Pinedale celebrated this "Rendezvous" with an annual pageant, billing it as "a must-see" reenactment of "the most romantic era of Wyoming history." It included a fur trader wagon train; a pipe ceremony; a sun priest and pony dancers; the purchase of a Shoshone woman named Sweetgrass; and a horse race for blankets. Rendezvous weekend meant a lot of tourists, and a lot of drinking at the three bars in town, which all drew their names from our more cattled history: the Corral, the Cowboy and Stockman's.

In the pageant, Carrie and I played Shoshone children, our hair spray-painted black, our skin colored a burnt umber. No one could do anything about our eyes, however, so those stayed bright blue behind the paint. Our job was to play around the teepees, where our mother and other women, similarly costumed, scraped hides in the sun. My mother's new husband, Dave, played a mountain man. Dave was a short-tempered veteran of the Vietnam War, a chest-poker unamused by stepchildren. He took his trapper role seriously, grew his beard and hair out, wore beaded buckskin and a fur hat, carried a muzzleloader, a hatchet and a jug of whiskey. He rode through town wild-eyed on a dun horse, awesome and frightening, a man stuck in a myth. At the end of one of those drunken Rendezvous nights, Dave came home late to the trailer, stumbled down the hall — and turned into the room where Carrie slept.

I come from a culture of takers. No white male, certainly not from the American West, can claim otherwise.

I COME FROM A CULTURE OF TAKERS. No white male, certainly not from the American West, can claim otherwise. The takers flowed out of the Bronze Age, from riders of the Carpathian steppes of Eastern Europe, who put together the unbeatable combination of horse and wheel, who buried their warriors with their steeds, their chariots and their javelins. The takers spread as far as India, Europe and Scandinavia, to Vikings and the "Northmen" of what is now France. In 1066, these Normans invaded England and usurped the Anglo-Saxons, raiders named for their swords, who had ousted the Celts.

One sleepless night, I found online an old reference to my family name, from 1203 — a knight of the Norman Conquest. The first Calvert to settle in America sailed from England with two ships full of Catholics to found the state of Maryland, in 1634. He planted a cross and claimed the land in the name of his father, Lord Baltimore. When their descendent, my great-great-grandfather, came to Wyoming as a scout for the Army and the Union Pacific Railroad, he was the sharpened tip of that culture of conquest, the same culture that colonized and subjugated places I found myself in, decades later, as a journalist.

These takers are Marlow's "conquerors" in *Heart of Darkness*: "The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much." Indigenous people of South America call them "termites." In *Between the World and Me,* Ta-Nehisi Coates calls them Dreamers: "Once, the Dreamers' parameters were caged by technology and by the limits of horsepower and wind. But the Dreamers have improved themselves, and the damming of seas for voltage, the extraction of coal, the transmuting of oil into food, have enabled an expansion, a plunder with no known precedent."

Carrie's abuse lasted years, until she left home, at the age of 14. Our family fell apart, a splintering that took decades to mend. Determined to become a different kind of man, I ran as far away as I could — to Cambodia and wars and sorrow that echoed my own. Carrie eventually made peace with things, but I held onto a deep sense of shame and anger.

What brought you here? This culture, these takers. My life's history is tied to their system of plunder and its superstructure: a culture of greed and power; locomotives, interstates and Manifest Destiny; pavement and parking lots; extirpation and extinction; genocide, slavery, racism; combustion, warheads, oligarchs. The takers' mentality runs through the environmental debate, too, and now we face the prospect of their bright-green vision, a dying world where humans have mastered, godlike, the technologies of dominion: massive solar arrays, geo-engineered shade, gleaming hydroponic cities and sweeping fields of monocultured soy — the output of a cultural algorithm that has been running thousands of years, a system of consumption and motion that will do anything to keep its wheels turning.

I descended the pine tree, saddened. But then I noticed the fresh green needles of the younger pines, which seemed to be the progeny of the giant. I picked up a dead branch, stripped a living one, bound them together with a sprig of holly, and returned to the group. I'm here, I told them, because I want to find a way to bring all that I've seen to bear on the ecological crisis. I just don't know how.

SUBLIME: The L.A. River 2, 2015, by Elena Dorfman

ON THE THIRD MORNING of the retreat, we gathered on a grassy terrace below the farmhouse for a lesson in qigong. Qigong is a practice of movement and meditation that comes through Taoism and includes ideas of balance for well-being, between opposites, as symbolized by yin and yang, or between five elements: fire, earth, metal, water, wood. I had seen many practitioners of qigong over the years, in Beijing's parks or along the Phnom Penh riverfront, as I stumbled home from a night of drinking. I had never tried it, the idea of power meridians and chakras being too much for me. Here in the mountains, though, barefoot on the dewy grass, sweeping my arms from side to side, I felt the pain of the previous day dissipate, replaced with calm.

There was something in the way the week was going, with its emphasis on quiet and connection, that I found helpful. But I was still having a hard time squaring my thoughts with Kingsnorth's message and the Dark Mountain rationale. It wasn't that I thought they were wrong; it just seemed like they were missing something, especially in Jeffers. A few weeks earlier, I'd called a Jeffers scholar at Minot State in North Dakota, ShaunAnn Tangney, who also studies the American West and apocalyptic literature. "I don't see a good 'but' in the Dark Mountain Project, quite frankly," she told me. "Jeffers played with the rise and fall of cultures, but there's always something else that comes after for him. Humanity will fall, but nature is still here. From beginning to end, earliest to last, Jeffers has one constant, and that's beauty."

That thought stuck to me like a bur, all the way to Spain. If I was initially intrigued by the darkness in Jeffers' poetry, I was coming around to his ideas on beauty. Helpful now, following my pine-tree reveries, was the realization that Jeffers' art was a product of grief.

Jeffers had watched both his newborn daughter and his father die in 1914, the same year the Great War began. Not long after, he and his wife, Una, moved from Los Angeles to Northern California. In 1919, the couple bought land near Carmel, a place of pine and fog north of the roaring coast of Big Sur. They lived first in a drafty cabin, where they cut and burned eucalyptus and oak, redwood and pine, and which they filled with books on flowers, shells, birds and stars. The Jeffers liked their promontory, where cormorants and pelicans kept them company, along with the hawks that would become a central symbol in Jeffers' work — marsh- and sparrow-, redtail, Cooper's.

Despite the idyllic setting and the birth of twin boys in 1916, Jeffers remained in a state of despair. His poetry, he thought, was unoriginal, "doomed to go on imitating dead men," even as a new movement of writers seemed to be "divorcing poetry from

SUBLIME: The L.A. River 3, 2015, by Elena Dorfman

reason and ideas." At the birth of the Modern Age, Jeffers was contemplating suicide.

The couple, meanwhile, had plans for a house made of granite and hired a stonemason to build it. A despairing Jeffers offered to help. Day by day, he hauled stones from the oceanfront and mixed mortar, slowly learning to fit each piece together. He found solace in the stones, in the waves and tides, in the work. At night, he walked to watch the stars. His younger brother, Hamilton, was an astronomer at the nearby Lick Observatory, and Jeffers liked to think about the earth and sea amid the swells of deep time, a universe of moons and planets, galaxies and novas.

By the time the house was done, along with a tower Jeffers built himself, he had transformed into an original artist and thinker. With the California Coast as a backdrop, Jeffers wrote poems that were compared to the works of Walt Whitman and Homer. One critic called his verse "as primitively American as the flintlock and the Maypole."

By 1932, he was celebrated on the cover of *Time*, for elegant achievements in verse-craft and honest thought. He was popular for a time, but as his sons reached fighting age, Jeffers spoke out against World War II. His darker views of humanity earned him few fans, given the tide of American jingoism and the threat of Nazi Germany. The publisher of his 1948 collection, *The Double Axe,* included an objection to its "unpatriotic" content. His work lost favor with academic critics and faded from public view. He was left out of university anthologies. Jeffers died in 1962, aged 75, and somewhat forgotten — though not by everyone.

Jeffers' works had an impact on Doug Tompkins, the billionaire conservationist and founder of North Face. In the early 1990s, Tompkins left the commercial world behind to live in Chile, at the Southern tip of the world, using his wealth to establish massive conservation programs. Tompkins died in a kayaking accident in December 2015, paddling a section of General Carrera Lake, high in the Andes. At the time of his death, he and his wife, Kris, had managed to preserve 2.2 million acres of land — a sanctuary across coastal fjords and endangered forests, supporting rare deer and wild pigs, pumas and jaguars, anteaters and macaws. His death was a huge loss not only to friends and family but to the wild places of the world. Tompkins had been a reader of Jeffers and was long been inspired by beauty, Jerry Mander, his friend and fellow co-founder of the Foundation for Deep Ecology, told me. "He would talk about beauty all the time." Tompkins considered beauty itself a natural resource in need of legal protection, and beauty had been a primary force in his life beginning from his teenage years. "A lot of people talk about beauty, but he would talk about it as a cause itself," Mander said. "That was his primary guiding force, to tell you the truth."

I'd been thinking a lot about that conversation, and the idea of beauty in general, in Spain. Tompkins, who also knew Kingsnorth, was the epitome of Jeffers' ethos. But was his work meaningful? And if so, was that only because of its scale? Or was dedication to that kind of beauty merely glorified withdrawal? Where does the establishment of a nature preserve in Patagonia fit with the murder of Michael Brown by police in Ferguson, Missouri, or the drowning of Syrian refugees in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, or the collateral damage of U.S. drone strikes?

At night in Kabul, awakened by nightmares, I'd stand on the roof and smoke, Scorpio shimmering over the dusty city. I'd try to put myself somewhere else in the world in relation to the stars, the mountains of Wyoming maybe. I could never do it. I was always overwhelmed, disoriented. When I'd had enough, I moved to California. I would surf in the mornings, watching the waves come in, undulating, gunmetal-gray, dolphins slipping beneath me like shades. I felt at peace there — and useless. I thought I should try environmental writing and a healthier way of living, but what I found was a new kind of grief. I'd run out of places to go. In taking a step back in Spain, however, I was starting to see a way through. Kingsnorth embraced Jeffers' inhumanism, and Tompkins his ideas on beauty. But the immensity of the ecocide demands more. Our grief comes from the takers and their modern machine, which is one of violence and injury. If our sanity is to survive the ecocide, we must address these two pains in tandem: grief for the loss of things to come *and* the injustices that surround us.

We can do this through beauty and justice, which are closer together than they first appear.

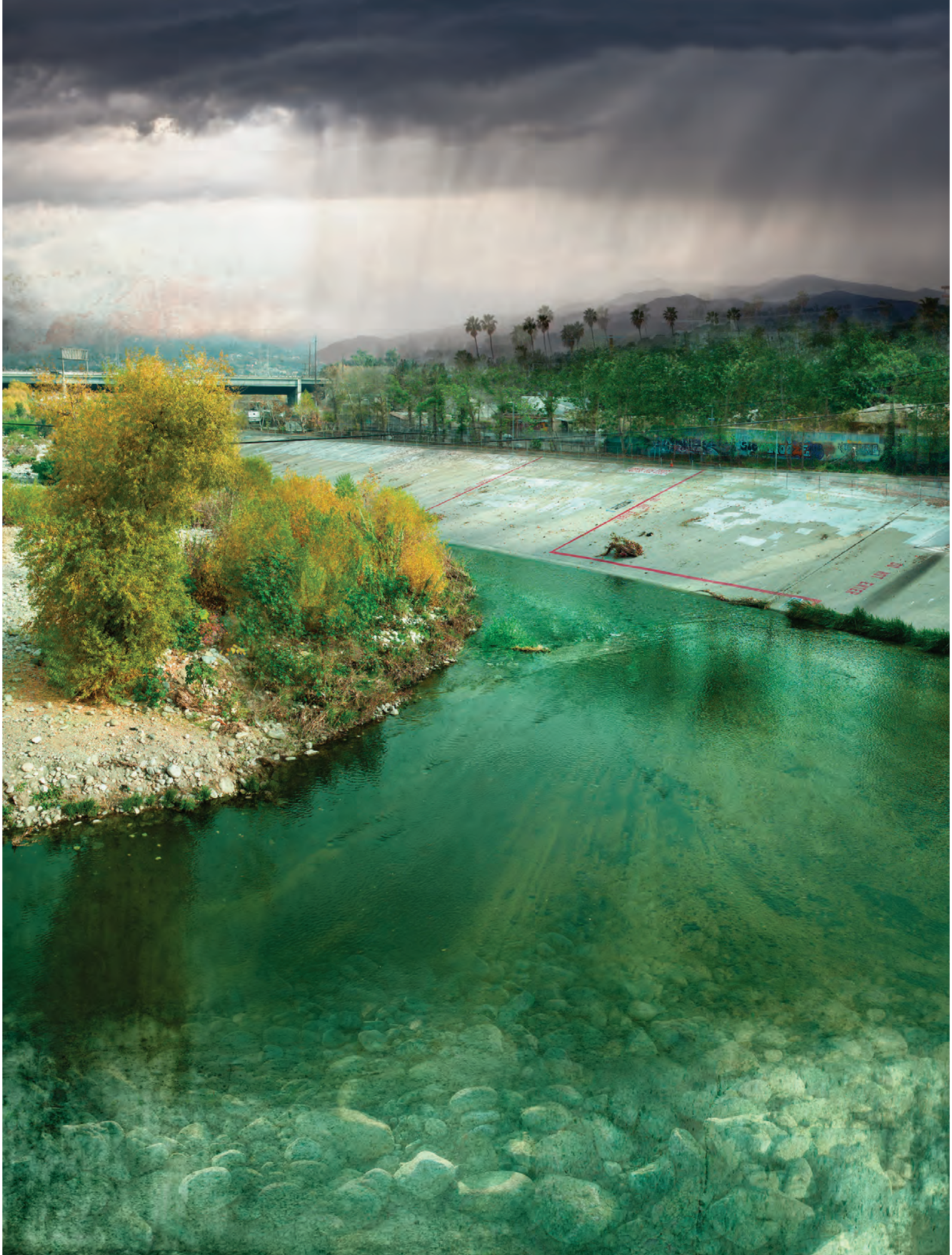
Consider the portrait series by photographer Nick Bowers, "Scared Scientists." In it, Bowers takes portraits of researchers as they are interviewed about their greatest fears. The result is a collection of images that captures the low-grade trauma many of us are experiencing. The greatest fear for Shauna Murray, a biological scientist at the University of Technology Sydney, for example, is "reaching four degrees (Celsius) of warming." "At the moment, we've at least 10,000 different papers, completed over 20 years, each using different data sets, and they are all coming to the same climate change conclusions," she says. "We've a weight of evidence that the average person is simply not aware of — and this frightens me. I'd like to think that we're not going to reach the projected four degrees of warming this century; because I can't even imagine what that would look like. Eighty years is not that long, and unless we act soon, my seven-year-old daughter will probably have to live through that." Her portrait looks like something out of war photography: hair mussed, eyes wide in shock, mouth grimacing — a new class of soldier, one traumatized by computer models and visions of a frontline future unknown to most of us.

Bowers' work bears witness to injury, not only to the

Hope Is Not for the Wise

Hope is not for the wise, fear is for fools;
Change and the world, we think, are racing to a fall,
Open-eyed and helpless, in every newscast that is the news:
The time's events would seem mere chaos but all
Drift the one deadly direction. But this is only
The August thunder of the age, not the November.
Wise men hope nothing, the wise are naturally lonely
And think November as good as April, the wise remember
That Caesar and even final Augustulus had heirs,
And men lived on; rich unplanned life on earth
After the foreign wars and the civil wars, the border wars
And the barbarians: music and religion, honor and mirth
Renewed life's lost enchantments. But if life even
Had perished utterly, Oh perfect loveliness of earth and heaven.

—Robinson Jeffers
1937



The Answer

Then what is the answer? — Not to be deluded by dreams.
To know the great civilizations have broken down into violence, and their tyrants come, many times before.
When open violence appears, to avoid it with honor or choose the least ugly faction; these evils are essential.
To keep one's own integrity, be merciful and uncorrupted and not wish for evil; and not be duped
By dreams of universal justice or happiness. These dreams will not be fulfilled.
To know this, and know that however ugly the parts appear the whole remains beautiful. A severed hand
Is an ugly thing, and man dissevered from the earth and stars and his history ... for contemplation or in fact ...
Often appears atrociously ugly. Integrity is wholeness, the greatest beauty is
Organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty of the universe. Love that, not man
Apart from that, or else you will share man's pitiful confusions, or drown in despair when his days darken.

—Robinson Jeffers
Such Counsels You Gave to Me *(1935-'38)*

Brian Calvert is the editor-in-chief of *High Country News.*

This coverage is supported by contributors to the High Country News Enterprise Journalism Fund.

scientists but to future generations. The series is a work of art that bends beauty toward justice, addressing grief with both. Likewise, when Coates establishes a relationship between injustice and exploitation of both people and nature, he is arguing for justice. However, he is also arguing for integrity, which is close to Jeffers' ideal of beauty: "However ugly the parts appear the whole remains beautiful. A severed hand / Is an ugly thing, and man dissevered from the earth and stars and his history ... for contemplation or in fact ... / Often appears atrociously ugly. Integrity is wholeness, the greatest beauty is / Organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty of the universe."

Perhaps, then, the way through the ecocide is through the pursuit of integrity, a duty toward rebalancing the whole, toward fairness, in both senses of the word. Elaine Scarry, a professor of aesthetics at Harvard University, describes this relationship in her book-length essay, *On Beauty and Being Just.* The word fair comes to us through Old English, *fæger*, which meant both pleasing to the sight and morally good. This is because beautiful things serve a specific purpose. They "give rise to the notion of distribution," Scarry says, "to a lifesaving reciprocity, to fairness not just in the sense of loveliness of aspect but in the sense of 'a symmetry of everyone's relationship to one another.' " Beautiful things "act like small tears in the surface of the world that pull us through to some vaster space … letting the ground rotate beneath us several inches, so that when we land, we find we are standing in a different relation to the world than we were a moment before."

The pursuit of beauty can create a form of justice, a healing of injury. When I allow my backyard to grow unchecked, when the un-mown lawn becomes a tangle of blade and seed, the garden a mess of roses, grapes and hollyhocks, I have created a refuge and put something to right, returning wild to the world that has been taken away elsewhere by violence, trespass or dominion. The benefactors are the sparrows and buntings, hummingbirds and butterflies, the praying mantises, hornets and bees, the black widow in the shed, the garter snake in the flowerbed. Conversely, the creation of beauty can come from advocates of justice. A human rights lawyer, a sanctuary church, protesters for women's rights or science or both, demonstrations against police violence — these heal injury also, rebalance the whole, adding beauty to the world.

I am a decade shy of the age at which my mother died, less than a year after my grandfather's suicide. One day my ashes will be scattered in the eroding mountains, and our civilization, like that of Ozymandias, crumble, and the Earth be swallowed by our dying red star. This is no cause for despair; it is a reminder to be meaningful, to be makers instead of takers, to be of service to something — beauty, justice, loved ones, strangers, lilacs, worms. This is what Jeffers, the poet laureate of the ecocide, has to teach us. He points the way, but we must go further, and we must do so while keeping a sense of perspective. In Spain I carried with me a handwritten note from James Karman, a Jeffers scholar and author who helped me greatly in my reporting. On it are the final lines of a poem called "Credo" and a favorite Jeffers' insight: "The beauty of things was born before eyes and sufficient to itself; the heartbreaking beauty / Will remain when there is no heart to break for it."

THE FINAL DAY OF THE RETREAT promised to be dismal. It had rained all night and through the dawn, sagging the tents and soaking the fields. This was our finale, the "wilderness solo," and it was shaping up to be a sufferfest. In some sunnier moment, I and two other men had decided to range far from the farmhouse to a nearby crag. We slogged down old roads and footpaths, through muddy valleys and drizzling woods, as raindrops pounded our parka hoods. Climbing through brambles and mist, we broke at last from a stand of mountain pine at tree line. Just then the sun came out. Still silent, as instructed, we grinned and laughed and hugged.

My companions found their way to solo sites nearby. I scrambled a bit higher, to a flat section near the crag's peak, where I found a soft, grassy spot between two boulders. I rigged my tarp, fluffed my bag and removed my wet shoes and socks. I sat back against a rock and stretched my toes and let the sun dry my face. I watched a crow for a while, and two hawks wheeling above a derelict stone keep. I took deep breaths, turned a smooth stone in my hand. From the valley came clamorous birdsong, from the mountains a chilly wind and wisps of fog. I took a swig of water, then closed my eyes and leaned my head back, feeling for the first time in a long time an emotion that might have been joy.

Which is probably why I didn't notice the storm blow in — not until the first flash-bang of lightning and thunder. I jumped up to see dark clouds sweeping down valley, a thick, determined thunderstorm. From below the cliff rose the panicked bleating of wild goats. I considered going down. But this was the last day, and I wanted to make it count.

Fuck it, I thought at last. *I'm doing qigong.* I found a flat, smooth spot and stood there with my bare feet apart. I took a soft breath, sweeping my arms over my head and down. Rain lashed the mountaintop and spattered my face and lighting flashed in purple, splintered arcs. Sometimes it sparked sideways, sometimes straight down, flash after flash, followed by thunder. To the east, the moon rose over the wine-dark sea, breaking through the clouds as a giant bolt of lighting flashed below it. I laughed out loud. No one would believe this; no one would care. This moment was mine alone. I stood transfixed in the darkness, watching the storm and grinning like a lunatic, a tiny living part of a beautiful, heartbreaking world. □

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COMMUNITY

Notice of Availability and Public Meeting for the Draft Watershed Plan and Environmental Assessment for the Lower Gunnison Project. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has provided funding to the Colorado River Water Conservation District for a project to modernize agricultural water management within several Lower Gunnison River subwatersheds. The purposes of the Lower Gunnison Project are to comprehensively improve water-use efficiency by converting existing flood irrigation systems to pressurized irrigation systems and to improve water quality by reducing salinity and selenium concentrations in the Colorado River Basin. NRCS has reviewed the potential impacts of the Lower Gunnison Project in a Draft Watershed Plan-Environmental Assessment (Draft Plan-EA). An electronic version of the Draft Plan-EA is available on the project website: www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/co/programs/farmbill/rcpp/?cid=nrcseprd1326262. Additionally, hard copies of the Draft Plan-EA are available at: Montrose Regional Library, 320 S. 2nd Street, Montrose, CO 81401 and Paonia Public Library, 80 Samuel Wade Road, Paonia, CO 81428. NRCS invites all interested parties to learn about the project and the Draft Plan-EA, as well as provide comments and suggestions in regard to the content of the Final Plan-EA. Written comments will be accepted via U.S. Mail to NRCS Colorado State Office Denver Federal Center Building 56, Room 2604, Attention: Randy Randall, P.O. Box 25486 DFC, Denver, CO 80225 or to randy.randall@co.usda.gov. The comment period will be open from Wednesday, July 5, 2017, to Monday, Aug. 7, 2017. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.

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Conservation Director for Grand Canyon Trust – For a full job description and how to apply, please visit our website at www.grandcanyontrust.org/conservation-director.

Director of Finance and Administration at Idaho Conservation League to direct finances, operations, human resources: idahoconservation.org/about_us/job openings.

Events and Business Partner Coordinator *High Country News* seeks to hire an Events and Business Partner Coordinator for events management, sponsorship and advertising acquisition. *HCN* is an award-winning news magazine in Paonia, Colo. Strong candidates will have experience in sales, marketing, business and/or development. This is a full-time position with benefits. For details, visit: hcn.org/about/jobs. To apply, send a cover letter and résumé to gretchenk@hcn.org. EOE.

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Executive Director – The Madison River Foundation in Ennis, Mont., is seeking a full-time executive director. Our mission here at the MRF is to preserve, protect and enhance the Madison River ecosystem. We seek an enthusiastic director with excellent communication and networking skills to join us in our mission. The successful applicant will have a passion for conservation and for implementing projects related to natural resources. Please send a cover letter and résumé to the Madison River Foundation at mrfennismt@gmail.com. No phone calls, please. 406-682-3148 www.madisonriverfoundation.org.

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Executive Director – Friends of Verde River Greenway, located in Arizona's beautiful Verde Valley, is seeking an Executive Director who is an entrepreneurial leader with solid nonprofit management skills, fundraising expertise, and demonstrated ability to successfully manage dynamic, collaborative and partner-driven programs. Conservation experience required. www.VerdeRiverGreenway.org/Employment.

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Heading for a cliff

OPINION BY DAVE VAN MANEN

A large plume of smoke rises over Highway 78 east of Beulah, Colorado, during a wildfire that forced hundreds of evacuations and destroyed eight homes. BRYAN KELSEN/ THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN VIA AP

I am living in the "in-between." Last October, a major wind-driven wildfire raced through a part of my small southern Colorado community. The town's several hundred households were evacuated. Eight families lost their homes.

Just days after that fire was contained, another windstorm knocked over an electrical transformer, igniting a second major wildfire. The 19,000-acre burn threatened but ultimately spared my town of Beulah, 25 miles southwest of Pueblo.

These two fires were a repeat of a fire a decade ago. Called the Mason Gulch Fire, it was making a beeline for the town when almost all of us — 900 residents — were evacuated. A shift in the winds saved the day, and the town. We got to return to our untouched homes, but we were warned. This past October, the pattern, and the warning, repeated itself. For those who lost their homes, it was more than a warning.

The months leading up to October's fires were dry, after a string of mostly drier-than-average years. The months that followed have been as dry as any winter I've seen in the 40-plus years I've lived in this foothills town in what are called, ironically, the Wet Mountains. It's been not only drier but warmer as well.

It used to be that we could count on at least a couple of cold spells each winter, when cars wouldn't start, water pipes froze and the woodstove cranked hard day and night. Getting much below zero is now a rarity. Not that long ago, summers never saw temps get above 90 degrees. The thermometer now flirts with 100 degrees Fahrenheit here every summer.

I live in a little cabin on a couple of acres of Gambel oak and ponderosa pine that have dodged the wildfire bullet several times. Now it feels like I am living in the in-between — between fires that almost swept through my property and the next fire that just might reach it. Saying if it will happen no longer seems as accurate as saying when it will happen.

This isn't the only in-between I'm living in. The threat of wildfire seems a clear manifestation of global climate change. Bill McKibben's prophetic 1989 book, *The End of Nature*, which I read shortly after it was first published, was one of the first to sound the alarm about global warming to the general public. Writers hoped that if they tried to make us aware of the catastrophic outcomes of staying on the fossil fuel path, we would decide to be rational — to change our ways and keep greenhouse gas levels from increasing to dangerous levels.

And now, here I am, as we all are, still being made aware of the dangers of global warming, but doing little to stop the dangerous accumulation of atmospheric greenhouse gases. It's like being on a train and finding out that it's a runaway locomotive — out of control and heading for a cliff. We know a cliff is somewhere up ahead and getting closer, but we can't seem to get the engineer to stop the train. It seems crazy. We know that the train needs to slow down and change course, but the engine seems to be picking up speed with the just-elected, climate-change-denying president and a climate-change-denying majority Congress now at the controls.

My sense of living in the in-between, an ambiguous state, has me wondering where that racing train is on its tracks: Am I closer to the start, with lots of miles ahead, about halfway, or am I nearing the end? The recent wildfires, and the recent election results, have me feeling I am much closer to a cliff.

Climate scientists agree that the maximum safe level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is 350 parts per million, a level that will limit global warming to a degree that won't destabilize the climate. The year our country was born, carbon dioxide levels were about 280 parts per million. They were 314 ppm in 1958, the year my wife was born. Today, they are 406 ppm. Unfortunately, the numbers support my sense that I am — we all are — well beyond the halfway point of the climate-change acceleration.

Maybe this in-between state is not between learning about global warming and changing our ways to stop it. Maybe we are between learning of it and actually experiencing catastrophic climate change. I hate to think that the train cannot change course before it reaches the cliff. What do you think?

Dave Van Manen lives in Beulah, Colorado, and works as a nature educator for the Mountain Park Environmental Center.

WEB EXTRA
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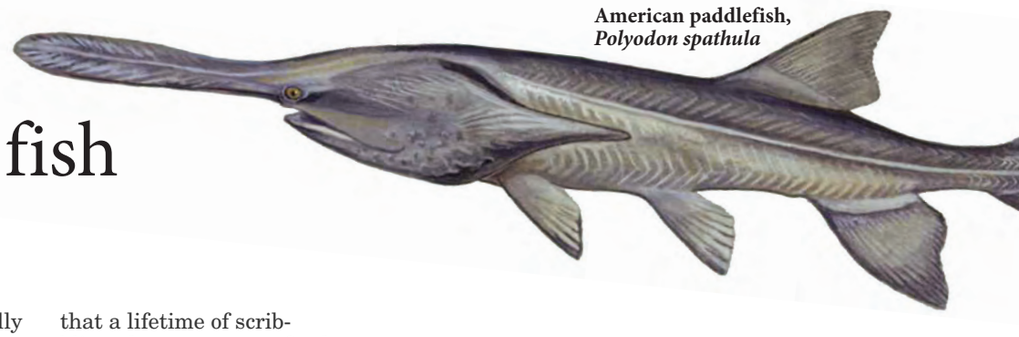
Celebrating the unlovely fish



American paddlefish,
Polyodon spathula

Beautifully Grotesque Fish of the American West
Mark Spitzer
222 pages: $24.95.
University of Nebraska Press, 2017.

Listen up, water-loving Westerners: We've got a problem. A trout problem. For decades, anglers have fetishized these silvery stream-dwellers, maniacally pursuing rainbows, browns and brookies to the neglect of other underwater life. Every year, obliging fish managers pump America's waterways full of millions of hatchery-born trout, diluting gene pools and overwhelming native species. We fishermen consider ourselves enlightened stewards, but our trout myopia reveals our true self-centeredness. And let's not even get started on bass.

Fortunately, there are plenty more fish in the sea — to say nothing of rivers, creeks and lakes. For anyone seeking a deeper understanding of what lies beneath the surface of Western waterways, *Beautifully Grotesque Fish of the American West* offers a lively primer to the region's aquatic biodiversity. Over the course of 11 chapters, Mark Spitzer, a writing professor at the University of Central Arkansas and a certified angling addict, travels the country seeking the kinds of experiences that you're unlikely to find valorized in the pages of *Field & Stream*: ice-fishing for burbot in Utah's Flaming Gorge Reservoir, bounty-hunting for pikeminnow in the Columbia River in Washington, snagging paddlefish in Missouri. (Spitzer has a decidedly liberal geographic definition of the West.) "Give me your wretched, your maligned, your demonized — this has always been my motto," he writes.

Spitzer's shtick is to love the unlovely, to venerate the homely stalwarts that make up in resilience what they lack in conventional beauty. This is a writer whose master's thesis was a novel about a "misunderstood, man-eating catfish," and whose first two nonfiction books profiled the alligator gar, a gargantuan primitive fish with a crocodilian smile. You might think that a lifetime of scribbling about gruesome freshwater monsters would have scratched that particular itch, yet Spitzer's ardor for the ugly remains powerful. He rhapsodizes about the razorback sucker, a "quasi-Quasimodo with an elongated horsey head"; the paddlefish and its "crazy flat spatulated nose"; and the way American eels swim together in "spermy formation." Granted, not all the fish he targets truly deserve the grotesque label: You get the distinct feeling that he includes a chapter on muskellunge — a sleek, tiger-striped predator that's gorgeous by anyone's definition — simply because he yearns to catch one.

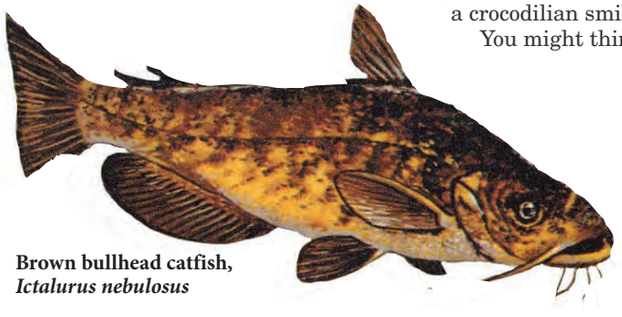
Just as Spitzer revels in homely fish, he delights in less-than-scenic landscapes, especially ones dominated by human activity. He does his best fishing in reservoirs, below dams, and along what he dubs the Industrial Edge, "ecotones of smokestacks and cinderblocks and rusty pipes and climbing ivies" where the built and natural environments collide. On Oregon's Willamette River, across the channel from railroad tracks and homeless camps, he lands dinosaur-like sturgeon, ancient fish that were swimming Western rivers back when hominids were just a glint in evolution's eye.

Spitzer has a soft spot for invasive species, too. After netting non-native carp, he opines, perhaps optimistically, "that we can strike a balance with non-indigenous species and incorporate them into our cultures." Slathered in teriyaki sauce and curry paste, he discovers, carp and hideous snakehead fish aren't half bad. If you can't beat 'em, eat 'em.

Occasionally, the author turns the lens inward, to the grotesqueries of his own life. Spitzer makes passing reference to an acrimonious divorce, the death of his mother, and, finally, a winsome new partner. In one passage, landing 6-foot-long gar in Texas soothes his bitterness about the dissolution of his marriage, providing a redemptive connection to "that youthful capacity for wondering and marveling at what this world has to offer." During such moments, you can glimpse the contours of a more personal — and emotionally richer — book lurking just beneath the surface: a fisherman's version of *Wild*, with, say, the Missouri River standing in for the Pacific Crest Trail. Spitzer angles half the rivers in the West, but he never satisfyingly plumbs his own depths.

What *Beautifully Grotesque Fish* lacks in soul-searching, though, it makes up in soul: It's a paean to the ignored, an homage to the uncelebrated. It's about embracing the nature we have, whatever it looks like, wherever it swims. (There's also plenty of technical advice for fishermen hoping to duplicate Spitzer's quirky exploits: The best lure on which to catch pikeminnow, we learn, is "either a rubber tube or a grub" deployed using a "plunking action.") In the end, Spitzer's book offers a fishing manifesto for a human-dominated planet — call it "Angling in the Anthropocene." May trout have company in our hearts, and on our lines.

BY BEN GOLDFARB



Brown bullhead catfish,
Ictalurus nebulosus

American eel,
Anguilla rostrata

ILLUSTRATIONS: COURTESY NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION/GREAT LAKES ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH LABORATORY (CATFISH); NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION (EEL); U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE/DUANE RAVER (PADDLEFISH)

The Irrigators' Club

My friend in Wyoming wrote me, saying one guy quit the ranch and they could use a sub. OK, why not? It was summer and my laptop was fast becoming an enemy of all things fresh, outdoorsy, healthy and inspired. I stowed the cursed machine, drove across two and a half states, suited up in old jeans and leaky waders, and got to work.

About that: Flood irrigating is a dirty job, a boring job, a thankless job. Grow grass to grow cattle to grow humans. Dam ditches. Shunt water left and right. Six days a week you're out in the fields at sunup, sloshing around, heaving on tarps, taking your crowbar to a recalcitrant piece of plywood jammed tight in some culvert. Maybe your four-wheeler breaks down three miles from the barn. Maybe you splinter a thumb. Maybe you run out of smokes.

And there's also the shit, of course. Grow grass to grow cattle to make shit, you think, not exactly chuckling at the joke, not exactly confident, after another nine-hour shift, that it is a joke. For the hundredth time you step in a mushy pile. For the thousandth time. You're an irrigator. Welcome to the club.

Don't get me wrong, though: It's also a job of texture and rhythm, big skies and deep surprises. The ranch is wild. Black bears between cottonwoods. Elk snorting and bugling. Any morning you might see two bald eagles, a prairie falcon, a great blue heron, a yellow warbler and some 700 Canada geese. You might see a coyote pup. You might see a curious frog. You might encounter the real world, the elemental world, the world your laptop only offers in pretend. On rare occasions, if you're lucky, you just might feel it, too.

I did, during my third week. Massive field. Sweaty afternoon. Sort of dazed, sort of tired, sort of happy in that dazed, tired way that doesn't register as happiness until after the fact, when you're cracking a beer on the porch at dusk. I hopped off my wheeler and headed for a cluster of aspens on the far side of a barbed-wire fence. Ah, nothing like a lunch of peanut butter sandwiches, tobacco and trembling shade.

But about 50 paces out — what the hell? I stopped, squinted. Hanging from the fence's top strand was a brown shape, a brown strangeness, a brown question mark. Perhaps a paper bag pinned there by wind? A parched cow pie posted as a joke?

Surely you're familiar with this floaty moment between knowing and not-knowing, this drifty moment between certainty and uncertainty. Or maybe it's more of a slide, a smooth, slow, subtle slide from pure perception — without name, without thought — to the nouns of the earth, every weird vision landed in its rightful place by the categorizing brain. Such confused openness never lasts long, but it renders time meaningless, so what's the difference? Oh, to be in limbo, approaching on silent feet, with silent breath, a fence you've passed repeatedly but never really noticed. Oh, to inch toward that regular humdrum fence as if it were a bomb, a god, a force.

Turns out the mystery-thing was all of the above. Crazy yellow eyes. Curved beak pasted with dried blood and torn bits of feather. Before me was a long-eared owl, caught by a barb, dangling from the thin flesh of its back, wings spread. Alive. Assuming the collision occurred at dawn, the owl had been exposed to baking sun for 10 straight hours. Not good, I thought, coming in close, retreating, coming in close again. Clock is ticking. How to help?

With pliers I cut free a section of the fence, the depleted, desperate bird struggling to fly from this nightmare of daylight and pain and humankind, struggling to turn and bite the metal on her back. With my shirt I wrapped the depleted, desperate bird and set her gently in the plastic crate strapped to the wheeler's hood, set her there along with the five feet of fence that wouldn't release. With softness in my voice I entreated the depleted, desperate bird, said hold on little buddy, hold on little pal, hold on.

But she couldn't. That evening, at a raptor rehab center, she was euthanized. Just as the season had to roll forward and the nights had to lengthen and eventually the grass had to stop growing — which meant the work was through — the owl had to let go. Come September, I took off my old jeans, abandoned my leaky waders, started my car, waved goodbye to my friend. Drove away from Wyoming and that dirty, boring, thankless job, that beautiful, powerful, opposite-of-pretend job — away from those fields, those yellow eyes. Drove away thinking about the real, the elemental. Drove away thinking, yes, an irrigator, welcome to the club. □

Before turning full-time to writing, Leath Tonino worked in Arizona on the world's longest-running study of northern goshawks.

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HEARD AROUND THE WEST | BY BETSY MARSTON

COLORADO

What if the federal government declares you dead before your, um, time? That happened to John Mattingly, a columnist for *Colorado Central Magazine*. His pharmacist informed him that his Medicare Part D was "terminated" because records showed that he'd been terminated — in the literal sense of the word. An easy mistake to fix? Wrong. "This happens; our system makes mistakes," explained a staffer with the Social Security Administration. What's more, Mattingly's identity might have been stolen by someone else, "who then died." Establishing his personal undeadness became increasingly complicated as Mattingly realized that the burden of proof was on him. So, armed with his birth certificate and two photo IDs — though he had trouble finding more than one — he went to talk to people at another government office. Meanwhile, he realized, if all else failed, there was at least one bright side to being dead: His wife could collect death benefits. And should Mattingly give up and turn to crime, he would have the perfect defense: "I could not have been there at the time of the robbery because I was dead. Imagine the posters: Wanted: DEAD and ALIVE."

WYOMING

A reader of *Wyoming Wildlife* found it hard to believe a magazine story stating that "jackrabbits are classified as predators under Wyoming law." "Really?" questioned Eric Rush, an Oregon resident. "Upon what, pray tell, do they prey?" Not on other animals, it turns out. But as state wildlife staffer Doug Brimeyer explains, jackrabbits are voracious eaters of forage, chewing through as much as a pound a day. And when their populations are high, they often "group up" in the hundreds, attacking and devouring defenseless haystacks in winter. If these lawless lagomorphs are classified as predators, landowners have "more options for population control," which apparently means that they can shoot the critters.

ARIZONA **Hazards of desert cycling.** MAREN HOPKINS

MONTANA

Just as hay bales lure hungry jackrabbits, beehives attract bears with a sweet tooth, reports *Montana Public Radio*. As Winnie the Pooh once wisely observed, "Isn't it funny / How a bear likes honey?" Bears love honey so much, says Jamie Jonkel, bear manager for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, that placing a beehive on the ground is like "putting a dead horse in the back pasture and not expecting bears to feed on that dead horse." State law encourages beekeepers to protect their hives with electric fencing to deter bears. But one beekeeper with 800 hives said he had to kill a bear last year because he "could not put a hotwire around that many bees." It was unfortunate, he said, but "imagine a rancher and something killing all his sheep." And in Montana, it is true, bees are taxed as livestock. In the last five years, black bears have damaged more than 600 hives across the state, costing beekeepers nearly $150,000.

THE NATION

The *Washington Post* had a lot of fun exposing "agriculturally illiterate" Americans — for example, the 7 percent, some 16.4 million people, who think chocolate milk comes from brown cows. Then there's the revelation from the USDA that the most popular "fruit" in America is orange juice, and that french fries and potato chips have become our "top vegetables." Now that we're several generations removed from living on the land and growing our own food, it's become an "exposure issue" said Cecily Upton, co-founder of the nonprofit FoodCorps, which brings nutrition education into elementary schools. These days, she says, we're conditioned to think that "if you need food, you go to the store." In some areas of the country, ignorance of farming can be profound. For instance, fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders interviewed by researchers at an urban California school had some major misconceptions: Four in 10 didn't know that hamburgers came from cows, and more than half didn't know that pickles were cucumbers, or that onions and lettuce were even plants. "And three in 10 didn't know that cheese is made from milk." Those who think brown cows produce brown milk are actually doing better: At least they've made the connection between cows and milk.

IDAHO

When a teenage burglar tried to break into Adam Pearl's gun safe in Meridian, Idaho, last winter, a squirrel "came flying out of nowhere and kept attacking him until he left," reports The Associated Press. The erstwhile burglar, his hands pretty scratched up, was soon caught by police. Joey, the crime-fighting squirrel, had been raised by Adam and Carmen Pearl for 10 months after he fell out of the nest and was abandoned by his parents. Now, Joey has been released to the outdoors, scampering up a backyard apple tree and vanishing from sight. "If I had to guess," said his former caretaker, Joey "found a girlfriend and they're off doing their squirrel thing."

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 on Instagram.

"I'm a hunter. I've killed and eaten bears, an act some would say I should be tortured for committing. **But what I saw at Bear World was a fate much crueler than death by arrow or bullet.**"

Matt Martens, in his essay, "Inside Yellowstone's 'drive-thru wildlife park,' " from Writers on the Range, hcn.org/wotr