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High Country News

For people who care about the West

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The Changing Face of Woods Work

Guest workers and economic realities mean the end of an era for local forest workers

By Hal Herring

An H-2B visa holder, Miguel, who didn't give his last name but said he's from a small town south of Mexico City, works a thinning project in the North Fork Thompson Creek in Montana's Lolo National Forest. TONY BYNUM

On the cover

Members of the Hoedads cooperative, which operated in the Pacific Northwest in the 1970s and early '80s, replant an Oregon forest after a logging project. BACKGROUND PHOTO OF LOLO NATIONAL FOREST BY TONY BYNUM; HISTORIC PHOTO BY BRUCE PIEPENBURG, COURTESY OF JENNIFER NELSON

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Editor's note

Whither the restoration economy?

In the early 1990s, as overcutting and the endangered northern spotted owl put the kibosh on the West's timber bonanza, forest managers began to dream of a more modest woods-based economy. Though jobs cutting old growth-trees and replanting clear-cuts were vanishing, perhaps workers could restore forests that had grown dense and flammable due to fire suppression, bugs and drought. A vibrant forest-restoration economy, based on thinning and controlled burning, could spring up around public lands, providing good blue-collar jobs and fiber for mills that would otherwise close.

Unfortunately, that vision has never been fully realized. As Montana writer Hal Herring, a veteran of the timber boom, explains in his cover essay, the budget of the U.S. Forest Service, which manages 191 million acres, has never been big enough to support more than a small stream of restoration work. In recent years, it's been consumed by spiraling firefighting costs and starved by Republican-led Congresses eager to weaken federal agencies.

Herring, whose last feature profiled the armed occupiers of Oregon's Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, has a knack for telling uncomfortable stories that challenge the assumptions of both liberals and conservatives. This one is no different.

He takes conservative Western lawmakers to task for blaming environmentalists for this year's destructive fire season (nearly 9 million acres burned nationwide in 2017, as of this writing), and reviving the idea that we need to greatly accelerate logging in order to save national forests and the towns along their borders. Even if we had the money to carry out large-scale logging, we lack the infrastructure to do it — the number of mills in the West has plummeted, and those that remain struggle to find markets for their products. It's also unclear whether it would work: The warmer temperatures and deep droughts of this era of climate change — denied or ignored by some of those same lawmakers — fuel fires so intense that they burn right through recently treated areas.

Herring agrees with forest managers that we need to put people to work in the woods. What if this year's horrific conflagrations spurred Congress to work with the Forest Service, local governments, loggers and environmentalists to thin and burn lands around vulnerable communities? Could it jumpstart the restoration economy, providing meaningful jobs for struggling Americans? Herring says no, especially if labor laws aren't changed. Ultimately, he says, it comes down to money: The budget-starved agency will always turn to large private contractors eager to make a good profit. So any jobs will go, as they have for decades, to immigrant laborers brought in under the H-2B guestworker program, who have no option but to work for far less money than Herring's crews did years ago.

The politics of forest management, labor, immigration and rural economies are dense and fraught with painful contradictions. We hope this issue spurs some difficult conversations around your dinner table.

—Paul Larmer, executive director/publisher

Dispatch from California wildfires

A woman walks through the Sonoma County Fairgrounds in Santa Rosa, California, on Oct. 11, where hundreds of people evacuated from the fire took refuge. ROBYN BECK/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The massive wildfires in Northern California in mid-October forced thousands to quickly evacuate their homes as the fires advanced on neighborhoods and wineries. The American Red Cross set up makeshift evacuation centers in veterans' halls, churches and schools to accommodate the hundreds seeking refuge, some who had lost everything.

Firefighters from other states and as far away as Australia came to fight the blazes, whose cause is still unclear, and President Donald Trump approved emergency disaster relief funds to help fight the blaze that spanned hundreds of thousands of acres. Over 40 people lost their lives.

Donations poured in from all over the country to places like the Grace Pavilion at Sonoma County Fairgrounds in Santa Rosa, where 700 people slept one night in October. One woman who was staying at the shelter, Toni Anderson, had been awoken at 4 a.m. and given five minutes to evacuate. "They were worried the ammunition store nearby was going to blow," she said.

Many of the volunteers at the ad hoc shelters were affected by the fires themselves. Jodi Alton, normally an administrative assistant with the city of Santa Rosa, was helping run an evacuation facility. "Yesterday morning I could see flames from my house and could hear propane tanks (at people's houses) blowing up," she said. "It sounded like a war zone." Alton's sister in-law, a deputy sheriff, had been called to patrol evacuated neighborhoods to deter looting.

Red Cross shelter site manager Roy Pitts, also a local resident, oversaw the Grace Pavilion shelter, helping direct new arrivals and handing out donations. "The number-one question for people," he said, "is, 'When do I get to go home?'" **TAY WILES** MORE: hcne.ws/fireevacuees

Tribes flee massive fires

Large-scale October wildfires forced tribal members in Northern California to evacuate. "The fire was on both sides of the road, and we could feel the heat," said Robert Geary, a member of the Elem Indian Colony of Pomo Indians. After leading a convoy of tribal members, including elders and small children, through the smoke, Geary and others returned to aid firefighters and begin cleanup. Some tribes were not directly hit, like the Middletown Rancheria of Pomo Indians, who sheltered people affected by the fires in their casino resort in partnership with the Red Cross. "We'll be here as long as it's needed," said Chairman Jose "Moke" Simon III. **DEBRA UTACIA KROL** MORE: hcne.ws/firerefuge

Other news

40 Percent of permanent National Park Service employees who reported some form of harassment in their jobs over 12 months, a new survey found. **LYNDSEY GILPIN** MORE: hcne.ws/parkservicesurvey

1 in 30 groundwater wells in the West went dry between 2013 and 2015, according to a new study. **EMILY BENSON** MORE: hcne.ws/dryingup

20 billion barrels of oil lie below the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's coastal plain, and it should be drilled to reduce the national debt, according to Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska, who helped convince his House colleagues to include a push for drilling in a new budget resolution they passed in October. **REBECCA WORBY** MORE: hcne.ws/refugedrilling

LOUISE JOHNS

"This family's search for balance in a landscape is both courageous and uplifting, leaving me with hope for a future that values working with the wild."

—Louise Johns, who has photographed Hilary Zaranek-Anderson and her range-riding family in Montana's Tom Miner Basin over the last four years. See a selection of her photographs: hcne.ws/familyranch

Some of the 58 crosses set up to memorialize victims who died in the mass shooting on the Las Vegas Strip in early October. ROBYN BECK/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

In the aftermath of Las Vegas

On the night of Oct. 1, a gunman opened fire from the Mandalay Bay Resort onto a crowd gathered at the Harvest Music Festival in Las Vegas. By the nights end, 59 people had died, including the gunman, and 546 were injured. The victims and survivors of the deadliest shooting in recent American history spanned ages and demographics. They included students, police officers, teachers, tribal members and veterans. To share your thoughts with us about how the shooting affected you as a Westerner, go to: hcne.ws/shootingresponse

Our readers reflect:

"We need a system to do better background checks. I think the momentum has started to do this. Regretfully, it's too late for the victims of past shootings." —***Fritz Kindberg***

"For those of us that choose to make Las Vegas home, it is comforting to see how we have banded together during and after this terrible tragedy. We are a small island of private land surrounded by an ocean of public land, and we care deeply about our community and the people that make it special. Sadly, it has taken an event like this to help others recognize the same thing." —***Mike Ford***

"I know people who were there and escaped. I used to live nearby in Las Vegas, but after Sandy Hook, and so many others, it all gets too relentless to feel. As a country, we do not need to feel distanced and apart from these tragedies; we need to own what is happening." —***Anonymous***

In memory of those who died in Las Vegas, from around the West and beyond

Hannah Lassette Ahlers, Beaumont, California | Heather Lorraine Alvarado, Cedar City, Utah | Dorene Anderson, Anchorage, Alaska
Carrie Rae Barnette, Riverside, California | Jack Reginald Beaton, Bakersfield, California | Stephen Richard Berger, Minnesota
Candice Ryan Bowers, Garden Grove, California | Denise Burditus, West Virginia | Sandra Casey, Redondo Beach, California
Andrea Lee Anna Castilla, Huntington Beach, California | Denise Cohen, Carpinteria, California | Austin William Davis, Riverside, California
Thomas Day Jr., Corona, California | Christiana Duarte, Torrance, California | Stacee Ann Etcheber, Novato, California | Brian S. Fraser, La Palma, California
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Charleston Hartfield, Las Vegas, Nevada | Christopher Hazencomb, Camarillo, California | Jennifer Topaz Irvine, San Diego, California
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Send letters to editor@hcn.org or
Editor, HCN, P.O. Box 1090, Paonia, CO 81428.

GEOGRAPHY NEEDS CARTOGRAPHY

I am a former archaeologist and currently a professional geographer, so I especially enjoyed the recent feature article "Following Ancient Footsteps" (*HCN*, 10/2/17). Among the many highlights was the small but effective map that put the whole story into a geographic perspective.

Unfortunately, I have found that maps in feature stories are the exception. I have read numerous features that don't include a map of the area, most recently "A Weird and Perfect Wilderness," "Los Promotores" and "The Elwha, Unleashed." As Westerners, we are defined by our geography, and our geography is illustrated in maps. Every one of *HCN*'s excellent stories is rooted in a place, whether small or large. Why not include a map for each one? The photography of people and places is always powerful, but even a small map can add context to an already engaging story. Maps tell and distill stories. When you add a map to a story, it paints a picture and helps put the reader in that (or those) places.

Chris Wayne
Chiloquin, Oregon

GAME OF TRIALS?

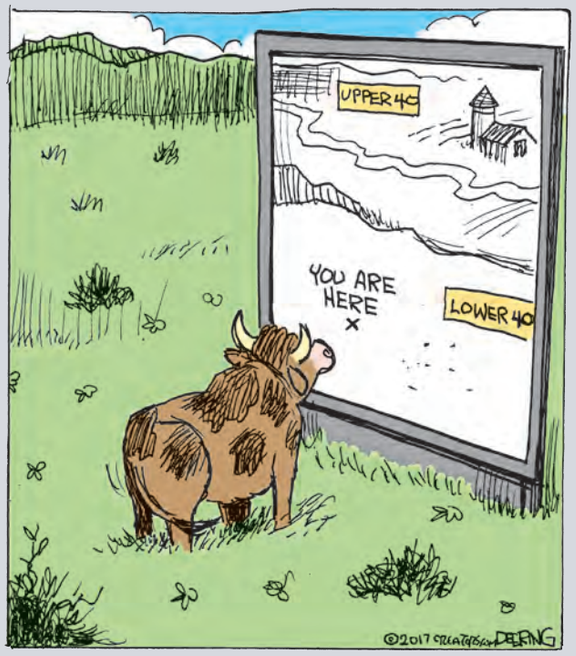
In your short article, "Why the Bundy crew keeps winning in court," you stated that some of the trial attenders felt that the judge was prejudiced against the defense (*HCN*, 9/18/17).

I attended much, although not all, of the Bundy trials here in Portland, Oregon, and had an opportunity to overhear some conversations among defense supporters, and occasionally to talk with them directly. I think that some of those perceptions come from their misunderstandings of how court proceedings work. For example, they thought that Judge Anna J. Brown was unfair to them because she overruled more objections from defense attorneys than those from the prosecution attorneys. They seemed to think that the trial was some sort of game, where you keep score for each side.

Yet the reality is that, although they were technically right — the judge did overrule more objections from defense attorneys than from prosecution attorneys — that is because the defense's objections were frequently without merit under the law. Although I am not legally trained, I could see that: Many of the defense objections were simply objections to negative evidence being presented about the defendants. Well, that is how a trial works: Each side tries to present its own witnesses in the best possible light, and the opponents in the worst, although their evidence does need to be hard evidence — facts, not opinions.

Being fair does not mean "keeping score" evenly, but using the same standards to judge each side, and that standard is the law.

Marian Rhys
Portland, Oregon



STRANGE BREW USED WITH THE PERMISSION OF JOHN DEERING AND CREATORS SYNDICATE. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

A POEM FOR COYOTE

Coyote,
the adaptable one.
Never listening
to what you think,
Save to leave
when he can
to avoid danger.
The howler to the moon,
to the train,
the plane,
and most certainly,
the siren.
The longing croon.
The desert,
our home.

Thank you, Julie Lue. I so appreciated your essay on Coyote ("Overheard in Montana," *HCN*, 9/4/17). As we experience this creature, so we discover the spirit of song, and whelping dens that have youth within. The cycle of seasons. Where in the spring? Now have they dispersed.

These are the songs of the rural. Experienced on the edge, but then, not quite. Unless one explores, and finds the places. The spaces of changing patterns. Coyote. The mischievous one.

Todd Teicheira
Bend, Oregon

IS IT *HIGH COUNTRY NEWS* OR JUST *WHITE COUNTRY NEWS*?

I've learned a lot from *HCN* in the last few years, and it's responsible for my year-long detour to Grand Junction, which will always be a life highlight.

But I'm increasingly tired of your magazine's world-weary white man's editorial perspective, and what appears to be a lack of commitment to reflecting and representing the diversity of identity and experience in the West, even the Interior Mountain West.

There's no doubt you publish the occasional solid piece of reporting on communities of color or immigration, but never are you really inside these stories. It's not hard to know why, and the screen capture of the thank-you video I just saw gave me a tremor of regret.

In the next years, I hope to see a few things:

- you wrestle with your own whiteness and complicity as you blame the Trump administration for everything bad
- several new editorial voices, not tokenism
- a hiatus from reviewing/featuring books about middle-aged white people trying to find themselves in nature

I believe in your mission and think a strong *HCN* is good for our society. You have a unique platform — please act with urgency to reflect the times we're in.

Matt King
San Jose, California

High Country News

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People in Mexico gather to watch as the 2014 pulse flow moves across the dry Colorado River Delta. NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Sharing a shrinking Colorado River

The U.S. and Mexico signed an updated water pact to deal with drought

BY EMILY BENSON

On a sunny March morning in 2014, dam operators lifted a gate on Morelos Dam on the Colorado River, at the U.S.-Mexico border. Water gushed toward the river's dry delta at the Gulf of California. This "pulse flow" coursed downstream for several weeks, nourishing cottonwood and willow saplings and boosting bird and other wildlife populations.

Though most of the water soaked through the parched riverbed to aquifers below, enough remained aboveground to allow the river to meet the gulf for the first time since the late 1990s. That reminded people throughout the basin of the Colorado's importance — and how humans have altered it. The 2012 international agreement that made the flow possible and addressed other river-management issues expires at the end of 2017. Officials, however, signed a new pact in late September. That deal, called "Minute 323," extends and expands the previous agreement — and reduce the risk of a catastrophic water shortage that could leave fields and faucets dry.

The Colorado River winds 1,450 miles through the U.S. and Mexico. It's a crucial resource for both countries: Tens of millions of people rely on it for drinking water, and it irrigates millions of acres of farmland. It's managed according to a complex web of laws, treaties and decisions, including a 1944 treaty specifying how much water the U.S. must send downstream to Mexico each year.

The treaty, which left many details vague or unaddressed, has been updated by hundreds of smaller agreements, called "minutes," since it was first signed.

For example, though the treaty permits the U.S. to reduce water deliveries to Mexico if there's an "extraordinary drought," it does not define that phrase. The 2012 U.S.-Mexico agreement was the first to explicitly state how the two countries should share the bounty of a wet year and the shortages of a dry one. That international accord allows the U.S. to curtail water deliveries to Mexico if the surface of Lake Mead drops below 1,075 feet above sea level, the trigger point at which the Lower Basin states of Arizona, Nevada and California would also begin to face restrictions.

Under the new agreement, Mexico would commit to voluntary reductions in water use beyond those specified in 2012 when Mead drops. But those extra restrictions only go into effect if the U.S. Lower Basin states also agree to similar cutbacks, called the "drought contingency plan."

That kind of cooperation is critical for the success of basin-wide plans, says Jennifer Pitt, the director of the National Audubon Society's Colorado River Program and U.S. co-chair of the Minute 323 environmental working group. (*High Country News* board member Osvel Hinojosa serves as the co-chair from Mexico.) "It only works if they all jump in the pool at the same time."

The Lower Basin states are still at least a few months away from taking that leap. While water agencies hope to have the drought contingency plan finished by mid-2018, obstacles abound, including conflicts between Arizona water managers and disagreements over the Salton Sea in California, which is fed by Colorado River water. Still, the conditional agreement from Mexico adds an extra incentive for finalizing the Lower Basin plan. After all, "(Mexico) wouldn't owe any more than they do today if the Lower Basin fails to act," says Chuck Cullom, the Colorado River programs manager at the Central

Emily Benson is an editorial fellow at *High Country News*. @erbenson1

THE LATEST

Backstory

In the 2010s, **U.S. companies, eager to meet Asia's growing demand for coal with exports from Wyoming and Montana's Powder River Basin, proposed six coal terminals in the Northwest.** One in Longview, Washington, would ship about 44 million metric tons per year ("When the locals don't want your coal, sell it overseas," *HCN*, 7/25/11). Anti-fossil-fuel activists protested, and five of the proposals were dropped.

Followup

In late September, the sixth terminal proposal, Longview, was stymied when **the Washington Department of Ecology denied a water quality permit, citing "unavoidable and negative environmental impacts," potential traffic congestion and health hazards.** Proponents of the $650 million project, which would have handled 16 mile-long trains per day, said the regulatory bar was too high. Activists were elated. "While this fight continues in British Columbia, these victories against exporting coal show the world we need to look forward, not backwards," said Eileen Quigley, director of Clean Energy Transition.

JODI PETERSON

Millennium Bulk Terminals at Longview. GOOGLE EARTH

Arizona Water Conservation District. That would leave the U.S. to face additional water shortages on its own.

Other provisions of the new agreement, which will last for 10 years, tackle lingering logistical issues of international river management. Minute 323 maintains Mexico's ability to store water in U.S. reservoirs and addresses concerns like salinity levels and irregular flow, which can damage infrastructure. The new agreement also stipulates that several U.S. water agencies and the federal government pay Mexico $31.5 million for water conservation projects in exchange for almost 230,000 acre-feet of water. (A typical household uses about half an acre-foot of water per year.) Some of that water will stay in the Colorado system to maintain reservoir levels or help the environment.

Minute 323 will also build upon previous environmental work, including the 2014 pulse flow. The new pact doesn't explicitly call for another single large release, allowing scientists flexibility in deciding how best to deliver water to restoration sites (*see map below*).

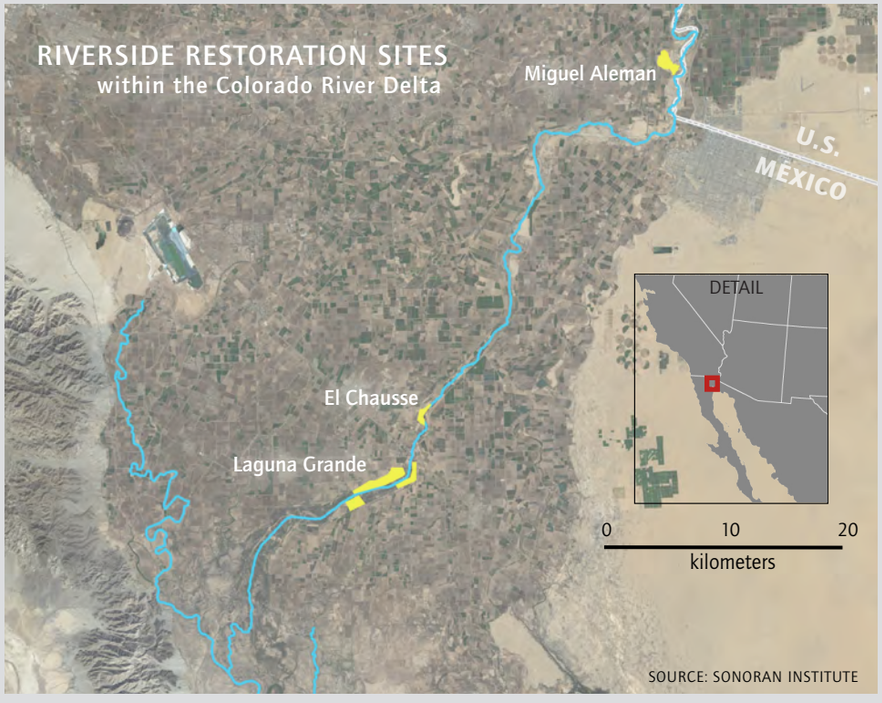
Perhaps the biggest win of the new agreement is that it bolsters transnational cooperation as urgency mounts in the face of climate change. In August, the Bureau of Reclamation announced that there's "no chance" of water cutbacks in the Colorado River Basin in 2018. Yet the Colorado will continue to shrink in the coming decades. Minute 323 could help the basin meet that challenge.

"It's one river," says Tina Shields, a water manager at California's Imperial Irrigation District. "We don't want to operate it separately, and we need to have a common understanding." □

Will the Colorado River again reach the sea?

Smaller targeted flows may do more environmental good than repeating a Delta-wide water release

BY EMILY BENSON



More than 90 percent of the water released during the pulse flow seeped into underlying aquifers.

Human demand for the Colorado River Delta's defining feature — water — has devastated its ecosystem, leaving much of it desiccated. Once, "a verdant wall of mesquite and willow separated the channel from the thorny desert beyond," Aldo Leopold wrote in "The Green Lagoons," describing a 1922 canoe trip in the Delta. "Fleets of cormorants drove their black prows in quest of skittering mullets; avocets, willets, and yellowlegs dozed one-legged on the bars; mallards, widgeons, and teal sprang skyward in alarm."

Today, invasive plants like tamarisk have moved in, and farms have replaced most of the wilderness Leopold explored. Only small and disconnected pockets of wetland and riverside habitat remain. Environmental groups hope to protect and further restore those places by keeping water in the Delta.

A large release of water, known as a "pulse flow," in 2014 (*see main story*), was meant to mimic one of the Basin's historic spring floods. Before Hoover and Glen Canyon dams were built, those deluges were big enough to erode banks and deposit sediment. That cleared the way for new cottonwood and willow seedlings to take root and left the ground wet enough for them to flourish.

The limited amount of water set aside for the 2014 pulse flow meant that it was many times smaller than historic spring floods. It didn't create much of the bare ground that native plants need, so they thrived only in areas that had been previously cleared. "Water is a scarce and very high-priced commodity to have it be doing stuff that you could do mechanically," says Carlos de la Parra, an environmental policy expert at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Tijuana, Mexico.

Changes to the Basin's hydrology also meant that more than 90 percent of the water released during the pulse flow seeped into underlying aquifers. Where groundwater levels were already low, the extra water did little to support continued plant growth. "(Those water-table levels) are so deep that they're beyond the reach of the roots," says Patrick Shafroth, a plant ecologist at the U.S. Geological Survey.

The timing and size of releases under a September update to the U.S.-Mexico treaty that governs Colorado River management are yet to be determined. The agreement includes 210,000 acre-feet of water over nine years for environmental projects. An earlier agreement, signed in 2012, included about 105,000 acre-feet for the pulse flow and more than 50,000 additional acre-feet for smaller releases over five years. Irrigating specific restoration sites with targeted releases is one possibility for the future. That would deliver water to reaches where it can nurture plants and keep it away from areas with deep aquifers — but it wouldn't have the symbolic heft of a large release that wets the entire length of the Colorado.

Will there be a repeat pulse flow in the next few years? "I wouldn't write that off yet," says Karen Schlatter, who manages ecological monitoring and restoration programs in the Colorado River Delta for the nonprofit Sonoran Institute. "Connecting the river to the sea is a big achievement." The 2014 release went beyond ecological gains: The flow of long-awaited water highlighted the social benefits of bringing the basin's communities together as their residents swam, worked on restoration projects and otherwise enjoyed the river. □

Gina McCarthy holds out hope on climate policy

The former head of the EPA isn't despairing despite Trump administration rollbacks

BY BRIAN CALVERT

Gina McCarthy, on a visit to Shenandoah National Park, in October 2016.
SHENANDOAH NATIONAL PARK

Gina McCarthy was the head of the Environmental Protection Agency under President Barack Obama, starting in July 2013. Under her leadership, the agency undertook an ambitious climate change agenda, curbing emissions from vehicles and working toward the Clean Power Plan, an effort to further cut U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Many of those regulations are now being undone by her successor, Scott Pruitt, who as attorney general of Oklahoma initiated multiple legal challenges to EPA regulations. High Country News *caught up with McCarthy in September, in Lander, Wyoming, as she prepared to address a crowd at the 50th anniversary of the Wyoming Outdoor Council.*

High Country News In terms of their impact on Western states and Alaska, what accomplishments at the EPA were you most proud of, and which of these are most threatened by the current administration?

Gina McCarthy Well, at this point, I'd say that the current administration is reconsidering just about every decision that's been made under the Obama administration, and I think they've made it clear that they want to rethink all the climate efforts. They're also really going after things like the Clean Water Rule, which is intended to make sure that the millions of people who rely on rivers and streams that are currently unprotected get those rivers and streams protected. They're also going after things like the amount of toxics and effluence that can be emitted into rivers and streams from power plants.

It's pretty clear they haven't really been selective in their thinking, and perhaps that's the most discouraging thing. It's not easy for me to watch, but I'm not despairing in any way. People are stepping up. When the U.S. government in Washington has fallen asleep, the rest of the country tends to wake up big time.

HCN News outlets are reporting that the current EPA administrator, Scott Pruitt, met with Pebble Mine representatives before announcing they could go ahead with a massive mining proposal on Alaska's Bristol Bay. What does this incident tell you about the current EPA, and what kind of danger does this pose to the bay's salmon runs and other ecological values?

GM The entire administration, almost since day one, when President (Donald) Trump started issuing executive orders, made it very clear that the only thing they were interested in looking at with environmental decisions was what the immediate business cost was, instead of looking at the full cost-benefit. What does it mean for people? What does it mean for the larger economy, even?

Bristol Bay was not a cut-and-dried, "We have environmentalists over there and we have the whole business community over there." We actually acted there because there were huge portions of the economy, of not just Alaska, but Oregon and Washington, threatened by Pebble Mine, if that mine could not be constructed in a way that would protect the salmon resource. I mean, it's almost half of the wild salmon population in the world in that area. It was not an easy decision to actually move forward, and it was complicated science. We did a lot of work.

To have this administrator sort of bypass all those issues and simply talk to somebody from the industry — by himself, as far as I know — and then come back and make a decision, was really disrespectful of all of the work that had gone on before. It was an unheard-of step to take and a process that certainly didn't seem to involve any of our career scientists or staff or anybody that actually worked on the issues that would know what we did and why we did it.

HCN Given an administration whose policies are ambivalent or hostile to science, what's the greatest danger to the agency right now?

GM I think a lot of people are continuing to stay at EPA, knowing that they've made a career there. They are the ones that know most, and it's just kind of sad that this administration doesn't realize that the career staff are more than open to different policy inclinations and directions. That's what they're trained to do. It's just that you can't bring politics into science or science into politics.

I think the greatest threat that we face really is twofold. One is the outright attack on science: taking science information off the EPA's web page; Congress trying to change the peer-review process to give more stature to industry. And you have science itself at the agency being proposed to be eliminated by the budget.

So it's really this attack on science

Please see **McCarthy**, *page 23*

> **"You can't bring politics into science or science into politics. "**
>
> *—Gina McCarthy, former head of the Environmental Protection Agency*

Brian Calvert is the editor-in-chief at *High Country News*. @brcalvert

Dead salmon on the Klamath River after the fish die-off in 2002. MICHAEL BELCHICK/ NORTHCOAST JOURNAL

THE LATEST

Backstory

The Klamath River, in southern Oregon and Northern California, once hosted the West Coast's third-largest salmon run, until dams and irrigation disrupted it. **During severe drought in 2001, the feds shut off farmers' water to save endangered fish and uphold tribal water rights. The farmers sued for $29 million plus interest for the federal "taking" of their water.** In 2002, they got to irrigate, but the resulting salmon die-off enraged tribes. Stakeholders eventually negotiated an end to the fighting ("Peace on the Klamath," *HCN*, 6/23/08).

Followup

In late September, Federal Claims Judge Marian Blank Horn ruled that the government's actions did not require compensation. While acknowledging the farmers' hardships, Horn said the water cut-off was forced by senior rights held by the Klamath, Yurok and Hoopa Valley tribes. The decision will help "protect the economies and traditions of tribal and coastal communities that rely on salmon and other fish," said Todd True, an Earthjustice senior attorney, in a statement.

JODI PETERSON

Utah centrists get a new political party

Can United Utah provide a political refuge for the disillusioned?

BY REBECCA WORBY

Jim Bennett, a congressional candidate in the upcoming special election in Utah's 3rd District, always considered himself a loyal Republican. But that began to change in 2010 when his father, three-term Sen. Bob Bennett, lost the party's nomination, blocked by Tea Party Republicans who didn't find him conservative enough. Jim Bennett, who ran his father's final campaign, grew increasingly frustrated with his party's direction. "Right when Donald Trump secured the Republican nomination," he says now, "I decided I didn't want to be a Republican anymore."

Meanwhile, a Utah professor was also feeling politically disillusioned — but with the Democratic Party, which he felt had moved too far to the left, and which has long lacked power in this mostly red state. Richard Davis, who teaches political science at Brigham Young University, contacted Bennett last year about the prospect of creating a centrist party. "For those who are moderates in either party, or just Independents, there was no political home," says Davis. Thus began the United Utah Party, with Davis as party chair and Bennett as executive director.

Calling itself "Practical Not Partisan," United Utah is courting voters who, like Bennett and Davis, have grown disillusioned with the two major parties. The nascent party originally hoped to begin fielding candidates in state and local races in 2018, but its first foray came sooner and at a higher level than expected: It was still collecting signatures to become a qualified party when Rep. Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah, announced plans to step down. The United Utah team lurched into high gear, eager to use the Nov. 7 special election to introduce itself to the state — and particularly to Utah's 3rd Congressional District. Bennett, who thought he'd left politics behind after the tumult of his father's failed re-election bid, knew the party needed a candidate who was "willing to stick their neck out." He volunteered to run.

Some of the planks in United Utah's platform tilt to the right: pro-Second Amendment, anti-abortion with certain exceptions. But others lean left: support for increased funding for public education, a more liberal stance on immigration. According to Bennett, this mix reflects the values of many Utah voters, the majority of whom belong to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. "In terms of what people actually believe, Utah is quite moderate," he says. "We're not in lockstep with the party on issues like immigration or public lands or health care." Mormons typically don't vote Democratic, though, because candidates "take too many positions that are too liberal for the districts in which they are running," says Jeremy Pope, co-director of the Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy at Brigham Young University.

The 2016 presidential election clearly showed that Utah voters wanted another option: Trump's apparent morality did not align with LDS beliefs. A damning speech by 2012 Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney, a Mormon whom many Utahns revere, solidified their opposition: "Donald Trump is a phony, a fraud," Romney said before the primary. Trump earned 46 percent of the vote in the state, with 21 percent going to Evan McMullin, a center-right independent candidate. And McMullin did particularly well in Utah's 3rd District, which includes Provo, Orem and Price as well as Moab and Monticello.

"Usually, the party that is considered the dominant party in national politics stirs up more third-party offshoots," notes James Curry, assistant professor of political science at the University of Utah. The emergence of United Utah is therefore no surprise; a Republican stronghold where Trump performed poorly is a logical place for a centrist movement. "For someone who wants to make noise," says Curry, "it's a signal that this is a good state to do it."

But history has not favored third parties. They tend to be short-lived, and they rarely win major elections. Most voters are staunchly partisan — more so than they think — and those attachments prove hard to break, says Curry. Even when voters express doubt about candidates early on, most revert to familiar party lines on Election Day. The moderate, well-liked Republican candidate, Provo Mayor John Curtis, is favored to win the special election. If a farther-right candidate had won the primary, it might've created more space for Bennett. As it stands, Pope suspects Bennett will take more votes from the Democratic nominee, Kathie Allen.

United Utah is both a symptom and a result of nationwide dissatisfaction with both parties, so what percentage of the vote Bennett receives will be instructive. The party's emergence, according to Curry, indicates that we'll soon see some shifts in the Republican coalition as the GOP grapples with its growing fissures. "It's a sign," says Curry, "that you're going to see some strife and upheaval in the Republican Party in the next four to eight years." □

Rebecca Worby is an editorial fellow at *High Country News*. @beccaworby

Jim Bennett, center, has helped organize a new, moderate party for disillusioned Republicans and Democrats called the United Utah Party. He is also the party's candidate for the special election to replace Rep. Jason Chaffetz. STEVE GRIFFIN /THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

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Tree Ring Counter: **Dendochronologist John King blends in with tree branches on a 1,000-year-old juniper in Yellowstone National Park.** STEVE HORAN

PEOPLE OF YELLOWSTONE

Ruth W. Crocker.

188 pages, hardcover: $29.95. Elm Grove Press, 2017.

A backcountry ranger stands behind a downed log, one hand resting on the wooden handle of a saw. Her thick braid is slung forward over her shoulder, obscuring the badge on her National Park Service uniform. The image is one of 87 contemporary black-and-white photographs by Steve Horan collected in *People of Yellowstone*, which portrays some of the many women and men who have lived and worked in the iconic national park in recent years.

A profile by Ruth W. Crocker accompanies each portrait. The subjects, who include rangers, scientists, artists and others, have studied the wolves and fish of Yellowstone, gazed at its geysers, shoveled snow off the rooftops of its buildings, and wrangled horses for trail rides. But above all, they have shared their love of the park's natural landscape with its many visitors. As one backcountry ranger in says, "People have no idea how wild Yellowstone really is." **EMILY BENSON**

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Congratulations to staff members, old and new

Autumn colors have lit up the aspen and scrub oak around Paonia, *High Country News*' home, but snow dusting the mountaintops above town reminds us that winter is on its way. Before it got too cold, our board and several staff members convened in Boulder, Colorado, for a productive board meeting. Meanwhile, more than a few leaf-peepers stopped in to see us in Paonia.

In mid-September, **Anne** and **Mike Crowley**, who live outside nearby Crested Butte, and **Janice** and **Rich Shaughnessy** of Whidbey Island, Washington, came to call. Subscribers **Emery Cowan** and **Campbell Morrissy** from Flagstaff, Arizona, also stopped by — while on their honeymoon, no less. Congratulations, you two!

Longtime reader **John Andrick** of Buena Vista, Colorado, visited while in town for "vegetables and leaf peeping." **Tim Welch** from Littleton, Colorado, dropped by on a sunny September day. Tim says he enjoys reading the magazine cover to cover and to "keep up the good work." We're trying!

Subscribers **Taylor** and **Bill Goforth** of Olympia, Washington, stopped by with friends from Crested Butte. From Centerville, Utah, came **Sheldon** and **Elaine Wood**, subscribers for at least 10 years. **Beth Bartel** and **Rebecca Haacker** of Boulder, Colorado, said howdy during a late September visit to the area to admire the leaves and sample our local wine. **Kathleen Capels** and **Terence Yorks** of Smithfield, Utah, also came through, sporting "original" *HCN* T-shirts and deep ties with the magazine. In early October, **Laura Getts** of Pueblo, Colorado, dropped in to say hello.

Now for some congratulations: Former *HCN* contributing editor **Glenn Nelson** won second place in the Society of Environmental Journalists' annual awards, in the "outstanding beat reporting, small market" category, for a series of *HCN* stories on race and diversity in the outdoors. Former editorial fellow **Lyndsey Gilpin** was recently elected to the society's board. Well done, Glenn and Lyndsey!

We're also happy to welcome our newest staff member, **Laura Dixon**, who will help us with advertising, sponsorships and event planning as our new events and business partner coordinator. Laura moved here from Seattle, but she's no stranger to Colorado's Western Slope, having lived in nearby Basalt for several years before decamping for Portland, Maine, then Seattle. Laura says she loves *HCN* because it keeps her connected to the West and "takes me on journeys to places I haven't been." Welcome, Laura!

Finally, we have a few corrections. In "Buying Time" (*HCN*, 9/18/17) we incorrectly identified Ramón Gallego as a student at the University of Washington; he is a postdoctoral fellow. We also described climate change as being a contributor to ocean acidification; climate change and ocean acidification are both the result of excessive greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. In "Following Ancient Footsteps" (*HCN*, 10/2/17), Isaiah Viarrial of Pojoaque Pueblo, not Jake Viarrial, was pictured at an archaeological site. And an Aug. 7 Heard Around the West item about a canny crow researcher misspelled the researcher's last name. It is Kaeli Swift, not Smith.

—Emily Benson, for the staff

Kathleen Capels and Terence Yorks sport their retro *HCN* shirts.
BROOKE WARREN/ HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

The Changing Face of

Guest workers and economic realities mean the end of an era for local forest workers

We were somewhere in Benewah County, Idaho, on a resplendent late April afternoon in 1993. I had planted the last of my trees for the day, shouldered my hoedad and was walking down a skid trail, eyes on the fertile valleys spread out below us, the coil of blue silver river, the great yawn of gentle mountains, patched with clear-cuts like the one we'd been working in, but still possessed of a surpassing beauty, rich, rain-drenched forests of a thousand shades of green shimmering in the sunlight and shadows of passing clouds.

I was singing, happy in the way of things then, with a hard day's work behind me, near the end of a month of swinging my hoedad — a flat-bladed tool designed for tree-planting — on steep slash-strewn ground. I'd be home soon, with money to burn, adventures planned, a bed to sleep in and a wife to share it with. A couple of fellow planters boot-slid down the cutbank and joined me. Miguel, a wiry planter from Michoacán, Mexico, asked me, *"Te gusta mucho trabajar, no?" "Claro que si,"* I answered. Yes, indeed. I love to work.

Of my many seasons of working in the woods of the West, I remember that one best. My work partner, Barry Davis, and I were the only English speakers on that crew. Neither of us minded, since everybody's wages were more than decent. We were pulling down $500 to $700 a week at a time when the minimum wage was $4.25 an hour, and that crew, run by a company called Evergreen Forestry of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, was an uncommonly good one: a band of uncomplaining, hard-working, hard-partying and often very funny *obreros* — workers. I had some good times in Mexico when I was younger (I majored in Latin American studies in college), and I was working hard on regaining my Spanish. Davis, a wild-haired, wild-bearded man of about 40 who lived in his truck in Montana's Bitterroot Valley when he wasn't working, was an anarchist and rabble-rouser who believed in the international brotherhood of laborers, and he fell right in with the *obreros*, although he didn't speak Spanish.

After five weeks planting in Idaho and Washington, some of the crew came to my house in the Bitterroot Valley to celebrate the good season, drinking and shooting pool at the Rainbow Bar in Hamilton and hanging out on the river.

None of us knew it then, but we were witnessing the end of a long era of Western woods-work, the end of tree-planting, timber-thinning and most other manual labor on the public lands, at least by American citizens like Davis and me. We had gotten on that crew by responding to an ad for planters in a Montana newspaper, driving almost four hours in my gas-hog 1977 Ford 150, loaded with camping gear, hoedads, and groceries. But when we arrived at Evergreen's offices, the white American man we spoke with grinned and said, "We don't actually hire Americans for these jobs, you know. The ad was just there because the law says we have to place it." I was dumbfounded. Davis, who came of age working on the big tree-planting co-ops where every planter was a part-owner and dissent and the power of the rabble were celebrated, looked the man dead in the eye. With an almost gleeful smile, he threatened to report him to the local Better Business Bureau. We were hired immediately.

But no rabble-rouser could stop the trend, and it became clear that no Better Business Bureau or government agency would try. By the time I quit forestry in the late 1990s, after nearly 20 seasons, few U.S. citizens of any ethnicity were working forestry jobs in the West. A new narrative had entered the

Woods Work

FEATURE ESSAY BY HAL HERRING

A crew of H-2B visa holders works a thinning project in the North Fork Thompson Creek in Montana's Lolo National Forest. Clockwise from left: Miguel, who didn't give his last name but said he's from a small town south of Mexico City, sharpens his chainsaw. Sawyers fuel chainsaws and put on safety equipment, then load tool belts with oil, fuel and tools; the crew chief, Eduardo, who didn't give his last name, fells a fir tree. When the crew he manages for Imperial Forestry Inc. of Medford, Oregon, is working smoothly, he fills in as an extra sawyer. TONY BYNUM

Facing page: The Hoedads crew takes a break from tree planting during the boom times.
BRUCE PIEPENBURG PHOTO COURTESY OF JENNIFER NELSON

American conversation: Tree-planting, like thinning timber, picking cherries or peaches, milking cows, tending strawberries in pesticide-laden fields, and so on, were all declared jobs Americans won't do. Manual labor, even skilled manual labor, has become the province of desperate men and women imported from foreign lands.

The narrative reveals hypocrisy in our national politics on both the left and the right. As I write this, the smoke has just cleared from one of Montana's worst fire seasons. The state's new congressman, Republican Greg Gianforte, is planning a "Forest Jobs Tour" to promote the idea that the fires resulted from a combination of U.S. Forest Service inaction and environmental litigation that has shut down public-lands logging and thinning. Absent is any discussion of the Republican Party's relentless efforts to strangle the budget of that same Forest Service. No one mentions the fact that, should a vast renaissance in thinning timber occur, none of the jobs would go to locals, since the H-2B guest-worker program — which President Donald Trump and Republican congressmen want to expand — already boasts 9,434 forestry workers, many of whom work on public lands adjacent to Western communities with soaring unemployment rates.

On the left, the concern with the rights of immigrants, documented and undocumented, contrasts with an apparent indifference to the fate of native-born Americans in places like Clearwater County, Idaho, or Superior, Montana. Disappearing are the debates environmentalists once had about immigration and the impacts of overpopulation. There is not enough discussion of how the millions of marginalized, hungry people in the labor market suppress wages and displace American workers. Some of the staunchest advocates for the public lands seem relatively uninterested in the future management of those lands. And two important questions go almost unasked: Why are so many rural Westerners, surrounded by public lands, some of the harshest critics of the Forest Service? And why are they among the loudest voices calling for transfer of federal lands to the states, or for their outright privatization?

HAL HARTZELL NOT ONLY LIVED IN THE GOLDEN AGE of Western forestry contracting; he helped create it by co-founding, in 1972, the legendary crew known as the Hoedads. Now the co-owner — with his wife, former tree-planter Betsy Hartzell — of Kalapuya Books in Cottage Grove, Oregon, Hartzell chronicled his time in the forests in the book, *Birth of a Co-Operative: Hoedads, Inc., A Worker Owned Forest Labor Co-Op*.

Reforesting logged-over lands was once the province of drifters, drunkards looking for day-labor cash, and migrant workers unable to get better work. They often did a poor job, but nobody really cared. At least not until 1971, when the Oregon Forest Practices Act mandated effective reforestation of logged areas. That was followed by the National Forest Management Act of 1976, which required that cut-over federal lands be replanted within five years. That opened up an abundance of work that appealed to a new generation of Oregonians with strong backs and a love of the outdoors. Planting trees is the "hardest physical work known to this office," read a notice posted by the Oregon State Employment Office back then. "It actually is a good job for some."

In the summer of 1972, Hartzell was home from a two-year Peace Corps stint in West Africa. And, as he writes in his book,

Hal Hartzell and Jerry Rust with their hoedads, circa 1974.

BRUCE PIEPENBURG PHOTO HOEDADS COOPERATIVE INC. RECORDS, COLLECTION #322; BOX 9, FOLDER 7; SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES, UNIVERSITY OF OREGON LIBRARIES, EUGENE, OREGON

he was "wandering around town trying to get used to the fast pace of Eugene," Oregon, when he met Jerry Rust and John Sundquist. They had learned hoedad tree-planting in the winter of 1969, working for a contractor on private timberland. It was while working that job that they realized that not only was the work being done poorly; the contractor was taking home the vast majority of the money. Their plan, as Hartzell later wrote, was to assemble a group of workers committed to planting trees that would survive to become forests, and to conduct business as a worker-owned cooperative, where every member was paid according to how much he could produce. The small crew started with federal Bureau of Land Management contracts and soon moved up to larger contracts on the Umpqua National Forest. They called themselves the Hoedads.

"There were 10 of us when we started out," Hartzell told me, "and wages were not OK then. We changed that, by having a cooperative of worker-owners who were getting the work done, and were totally empowered to say yes or no to the jobs." By 1976, the Hoedads were each making an average of $100 (or $400 to $500 in 2017 dollars) per day. "We started expanding to everything you can do in the woods," he said, "thinning timber, firelining, firefighting, all done cooperative-style."

The business' growth was, if not explosive, still extraordinary. By 1978, 18 crews were working in eight states. They set their own working times and conditions, and decided whether they'd be paid by the number of trees planted, by the hour, or some combination of the two. There were all-female crews, and mixed male and female crews, tree-planting competitions, rancor, conflicts and epic parties. "We had a lot of college grads," Hartzell said, "a lot of people who just wanted to work for themselves, be outside, and have fun."

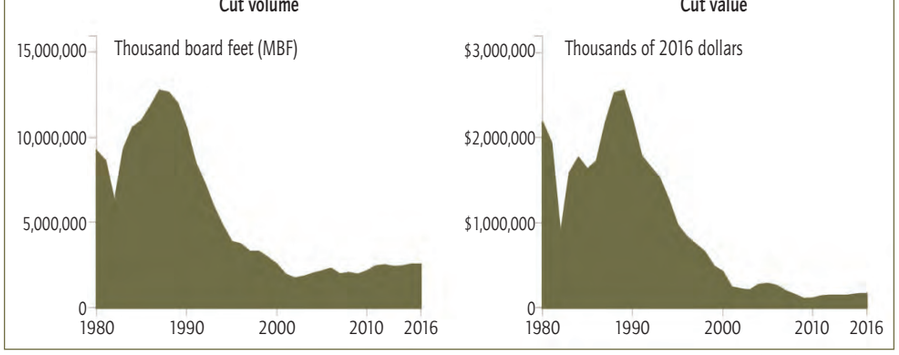
At its height, Hoedads Inc. had about 600 core members, and an estimated 3,000 people worked for it over the years. "We kept it going for 10 or 15 years, and we brought all of our money home, spent it all locally," Hartzell explains. "We weren't sending it off to Mexico or wherever. And it was damn good money." The

Top 10 occupations for H-2B visa (temporary non-agricultural) workers

Position	Number certified	Percent of total
Landscaping and groundskeeping workers	44,981	37.7
Forest and conservation workers	9,434	7.9
Maids and housekeeping cleaners	7,751	6.5
Amusement and recreation attendants	6,992	5.9
Meat, poultry and fish cutters and trimmers	5,447	4.6
Construction laborers	5,237	4.4
Waiters and waitresses	3,426	2.9
Cooks, restaurant	2,161	1.8
Helpers (production workers)	1,974	1.7
Non-farm animal caretakers	1,636	1.4

SOURCE: FIGURES FOR FY 2016 FROM OFFICE OF FOREIGN LABOR CERITIFICATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

National forest timber sales and timber cuts, 1980-2016



HEADWATERS ECONOMICS

Scenes from the early days of the Hoedads, a worker cooperative that grew to 600 core members, with up to 18 crews working in eight states, top left and right. Another Oregon crew, Rock Creek Reforestation, lower left, run by the Stokes, circa 1986-'87. Lower right, forest worker Doreen Stokes in her van or "crummy," in forest-worker lingo.

BRUCE PIEPENBURG PHOTOS, TOP, COURTESY OF JENNIFER NELSON. BOTTOM PHOTOS COURTESY OF DOREEN STOKES

money the crews brought into the rural economies where the work was done, and to Eugene, where the co-op was based, made Hoedads a potent political force. Jerry Rust was elected Lane County commissioner in 1980, a position he held for 20 years. Robert Leo Heilman, in a 2011 essay about the Hoedads in the *Oregon Quarterly*, wrote: "Beneath the beards, beads, long hair, and odd forms of dress and speech, the hippies were merely young people who wanted to live according to the sorts of things they'd been brought up to cherish: freedom, equality, kindness, honesty — all the noble Sunday school and scouting values that, as children, they'd been taught to believe in, and which, they later discovered, were so very often either ignored or routinely violated in the conduct of our nation's governance and business practices."

The Hoedads' successful 20-year run was never without strife. The co-op almost dissolved as early as 1983, and there were annual issues with unwise bids and cash flow. Bookkeeping, given the co-op model, was always a nightmare, especially in the face of an increasing thicket of state and federal regulations regarding labor and wages.

By 1994, Hartzell said, "We decided to call it quits. The foreign crews had started showing up in the 1980s, and it had been getting harder and harder to compete with them." Further hastening the co-op's demise was a series of lawsuits from a group called the Associated Reforestation Contractors (ARC), created specifically to challenge the worker-owned business model. ARC claimed the co-ops had an unfair advantage because they were exempt from workers' compensation and other expenses. "A lot of brouhaha started when the ARC sued us," Hartzell said. ARC won the suit, and then disbanded in 1985, "having fulfilled its mandate of contesting the threat of tree-planting cooperatives on public lands," according to Brinda Sarathy's book *Pineros*.

Other factors also contributed to the fall of the co-ops. The Knutson-Vandenberg Act of 1930 had mandated that revenues from public-lands logging be set aside for a range of reforestation operations. The model was successful while the timber industry boomed, but when logging declined on public lands during the 1980s and '90s, the funds slowed to a trickle, leaving less money to pay for forestry and for anything else that the Forest Service needed to do. That, and the unwillingness of Congress to fully fund the agency to make up the difference, opened the doors to contractors who would work more cheaply.

And the "brouhaha" that Hartzell describes? It was the smoke from what was becoming a raging battle for the future of forestry contracting. It was a take-no-prisoners war that would eventually take down the local planters and sawyers in rural communities as well as the hippie co-ops. It also destroyed the chances of migrant forestry workers to command anywhere near the wages and working conditions that the co-op workers achieved.

As soon as the Hoedads and other pioneering co-ops opened the doors to a new way of forestry contracting and working, they were followed by a flood of hungry competitors determined to take over the niche they'd created. For decades, migrant workers were an integral part of agriculture in western Washington and Oregon. As tree-planting and other forestry work increased, it was natural for these workers, accustomed to hard outdoor labor and often lacking winter employment, to seek out those forestry jobs and frequently excel at them. But they soon found themselves in the same position as the co-op workers, as unscrupulous forestry contractors swamped the market with undocumented workers who were far less capable of negotiating for higher wages or better working conditions, or much of anything else.

According to documents posted online by the organization Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste, or PCUN, an Oregon-based group that advocates for the rights of Latino immigrant laborers, the same labor contractors that supplied Oregon's farmers with migrant workers began to bid on government reforestation contracts in the 1970s. Since they paid immigrants lower wages, they could intentionally underbid other contractors — specifically those with Anglo crews — with some of the bids dropping by as

"We kept (the Hoedads) going for ten or fifteen years and we brought all of our money home, spent it all locally."

—Hal Hartzell, one of the founders of the Hoedads worker cooperative

much as 50 percent. PCUN president Ramón Ramírez stated in the documents that these new "Russian … and Tejano contractors … were hiring undocumented workers and they were violating not only minimum wage laws, but all kinds of labor laws."

Thom Sadoski of Sandpoint, Idaho, was an early member of Small Change Inc., a forestry co-op that followed the Hoedads model. Now 68, he has a small organic truck farm and still works as a tree-planting inspector for the private timber company Potlatch. He has been involved in almost every evolution of forestry contracting for over three decades. Sadoski loved the work, and the lifestyle: "I answered an ad in the paper for tree-planters, got that job, and never looked back — even though I had a degree in marine biology. Thirty years later, I think I've planted a million trees, seven or eight square miles of forest. I'm proud of that."

But in the early 1980s, loving the work was a lot easier. "We were pulling down $1,500 a week, $300 a day, easy." Even on tougher contracts, with harder terrain or bad site prep, the money was still better than on almost any other labor job. "We were a small, tight-knit crew, and we knew how to work our asses off for that 45-day season. … (It was) the best time of my life."

"We were pulling down $1,500 a week, $300 a day, easy. We were a small, tight-knit crew, and we knew how to work our asses off for that 45-day season. … (It was) the best time of my life."

—Thom Sadoski of Sandpoint, Idaho, an early member of Small Change Inc.

And then cutting corners and falling wages became the norm. "The white workers just stopped coming," he told me. "I was working as an inspector in the late 1980s, and by that time most of the workers were illegal. I remember once, in Bonner's Ferry, we lost an entire crew to an immigration raid, and that crew was the lowest of the low, making a couple of cents per tree, with their motel bill coming out of their pay. And even then, on that crew, there was one guy (from Mexico) who was an agronomist, with a college degree, up here planting trees to support his whole family."

A desperate workforce is a vulnerable one. My partner and I saw nothing amiss while we were working for Evergreen Forestry Inc., a white-owned business. Yet the company would be found responsible for the deaths of 14 *pineros* or "men of the pines" in a September 2002 van crash in Maine. Tom Knudsen and Hector Amezcua, in their 2005 exposé of the forestry industry for *The Sacramento Bee*, reported that the U.S. Department of Labor fined Evergreen $17,000 for violations related to the accident. Van crashes were one of the leading causes of death for forestry workers at the time, according to the reporters: "They are the byproducts of fatigue, poorly maintained vehicles, ineffective state and federal laws, inexperienced drivers and poverty-stricken workers hungry for jobs."

JEFF PENNICK STARTED WORKING in the woods for the Forest Service in 1973 as a tree-planter, brush piler and sawyer. "In those days, all our work was done in-house," he told me. "We were government employees, and proud of that."

As the model shifted, and the jobs increasingly went to contractors, Pennick — now retired — became a contracting officer, and worked first with the Hoedads and Small Change, and then with migrant crews. The early years of that transition were extremely rough, Pennick said. "The big contract guys that came in, running 20 man crews or more, with a lot of them never getting paid, not being taken care of. We had Immigration (enforcement agents) come in and the whole crew would just take off, the contract go into default, the work not getting done. It was terrible."

Over and over, I heard stories about "the transition," mostly from retired Forest Service employees like Pennick. Roger Thomas, a retired Forest Service contracting officer living in Missoula (and an agency historian), said one catalyst was the budget cuts resulting from the logging decline, making the lower bids offered by contractors running migrant crews even more attractive to an agency trying to get the work done as cheaply as possible. "Those budgets have been reduced pretty much every year since 1985, and I retired in 1994, and it's still going down," Thomas said. "We tried to work closely with the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) to make sure everything was legal, and they'd haul whole crews off to the jail in Kalispell."

The lawlessness and the outright abuse of migrant workers eventually attracted the attention of an alphabet soup of regulating agencies. But it would be years before those agencies, and their regulations, began to have an effect on the industry, and those were some of the most eventful years, as far as labor markets and the movement of workers were concerned, in U.S. history.

In 1986, President Ronald Reagan signed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (the famed "Reagan Amnesty" still decried by anti-immigration activists), which legalized almost 3.2 million migrant workers living in the U.S., most of them from Mexico. The act also led to the creation of the H-2B Visa program, which allowed for a maximum of 66,000 non-agricultural laborers to be imported for seasonal work in the U.S. (The Trump administration has lifted that cap to 81,000, a blow to the nativist voters critical to Trump's election.) By 1991, the forestry contracting industry was using 21 percent of all H-2B visas.

The H-2B program was supposed to rein in some of the lawlessness of the era when crews were made up almost entirely of undocumented migrant workers. And in some ways the situation did improve, for a while. By 2005, said Pennick, "The Border Patrol had cracked down, and the Forest Service had a better line on all of it, everybody had pretty much cleaned it up." Still, the economics were the same as before. The H-2B workers were willing to work for less money, and so the bigger contractors could outbid the smaller, more local ones.

And with forest fires devouring over half of the Forest Service's annual budget, the agency has little choice but to go with the cheapest option. "We're robbing Paul to pay Peter every year with these budgets," said Pennick. "With the H-2B crews, it is true that gas, food, lodging, is the only money that is coming into the community — it is like Wal-Mart in that way, there are people working there, but the profits are going elsewhere. But for the resource, for getting the work done, after the main troubles were worked out, these big crews have benefitted the forest.

"Let's be honest, a lot of the H-2B crews come from that culture — don't complain, work hard in a tough world, get it done. The white crews were always negotiating, always complaining. The only time I've ever been threatened in the field was with a white crew that couldn't pass inspection — one guy came at me with a tire iron and smashed out the windows in my truck. That would never happen with a Hispanic crew."

But as anyone who has ever been involved in a struggle for higher wages or better working conditions can attest, the inability to complain, whether because of fear or language barriers, does not make for a secure work situation. Employers have exploited H-2B workers since the program began. In 2007, the Southern Poverty Law Center's *Close to Slavery: Guestworker Programs in the United States* outlines a multitude of abuses. The SPLC filed a 2005 lawsuit on behalf of 4,000 H-2B tree-planters from Guatemala and Mexico, that, in 2012, produced a record-breaking judgment of $11.8 million against forestry contractors Eller and Sons Trees Inc. of Franklin, Georgia, with the judge ruling that the workers had been systematically cheated out of their wages for years.

A 2015 Government Accountability Office report on the H-2A (agricultural) and H-2B (non-agricultural) visa programs documented a number of abuses, such as third-party recruiters charging prohibited fees to prospective visa holders, and employers providing inadequate or false information about jobs, working conditions and wages. From 2011 through 2013, according to the report, the National Human Trafficking Resource Center received over 1,400 complaints from H-2A or H-2B workers alleging labor violations.

Such abuses are prevalent in the West's forests, where H-2B workers are cowed into not reporting bad conditions or even injuries, Carl Wilmsen, executive director of the California- and Oregon-based Northwest Forest Workers' Center and co-author of the 2015 study *Working in the Shadows: Safety and Health in Forestry Services in Southern Oregon*, told me. About one-third of the workers sampled by the center were afraid to report workplace injuries, Wilmsen said, and seven out of 51 workers who were injured were later fired. "It is about threat, retaliation,

Thom Sadoski, left, a retired tree planter who was part of the Small Change forestry cooperative in the 1980s, holds the tool of the tree-planter trade — a hickory handled, steel-bladed, hoedad — on his farm in Sandpoint, Idaho. Below, Doreen and Jim Stokes, who owned a tree-planting contracting company during the boom days, continue to work in the forests any way they can, despite the lower pay and reduced opportunities. On their property near Thompson Falls, Montana, is one of the vans known as a "crummy" they used to haul workers in their early forest contracting days.
TONY BYNUM

Along the once-bustling streets of Superior, Montana, men who hold H-2B visas for contract work for Imperial Forestry of Medford, Oregon, walk back to their hotel after a quick trip to the grocery store.
TONY BYNUM

fear, and the bosses really use that."

"These (low-bid) contracts would be barely profitable if they were done right," he says. "They have to cut so many corners to make any money — no protective equipment, no training, all kinds of violations going on all the time. The H-2B program replicates the power relationships of indentured servitude. Break your contract, and don't leave the country, you become a criminal. … You can't have a program where workers are held like that. They have to be able to compete in a free labor market if you want higher wages."

In 2012, fresh outrage erupted when the Department of Labor's Inspector General revealed that at least $7 million of federal stimulus money had gone to pay the wages of 254 H-2B forestry workers in parts of rural Oregon where the unemployment rate was around 20 percent. According to Charles Pope in *The Oregonian*, the companies using the H-2B workers technically complied with the law by advertising job openings, but did so by placing ads only in small-town California newspapers.

Deb Hawkinson of the Forest Resources Association Inc., a Washington, D.C.-based lobbying group that represents loggers and other forestry-related industries, refused to go on the record for this story. But her organization's stance is summed up on its website, where one of its top priorities for 2017 is: "Overregulated: H-2B Guest Workers in Reforestation." During a short interview, she told me that the kind of labor for which H-2B workers are recruited does not appeal to American workers, and that there is no way that businesses who need this kind of labor can rely on American workers.

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—Carl Wilmsen, executive director of the California- and Oregon-based Northwest Forest Workers' Center

Hawkinson's assertion that manual labor such as tree-planting, thinning timber and fuel-reduction logging is the kind of work that no modern Americans want to do comes up over and over again. There is, of course, a built-in conundrum in the question: As long as we have thousands of poor migrants, willing to plant our trees for $13.85 per hour or less, and as long as local Americans are actively discouraged from taking such jobs, we'll never know the answer. But I do know that at one time, when wages were comparatively high, I preferred woods-work over any other employment, and I knew plenty of people across the West, and in the South, who felt the same way.

I DROVE TO PLAINS, MONTANA, to visit Jim and Doreen Stokes, whom I'd last seen a quarter-century ago, in the pouring rain on a tree-planting contract in the Bitterroot Mountains. I worked as a sawyer for their company in 1993, cutting yew trees for the cancer drug Taxol on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest near Pierce, Idaho. For about $15 per hour, our team would go in to the cutting units and fall and buck enough yew trees to keep a band of 20 or so bark peelers, also making $100 or more per day, busy.

The Stokeses live on their Eagle Creek Farm about 20 miles from Plains, with a comfortable home they built themselves, fruit orchards, barns, hayfields and gardens, close to the Clark Fork River. They've been there 33 years, and they've been a team, contracting tree-planting and thinning, and working at whatever would pay the bills, for a lot longer than that. Jim is a farrier and a contract horse logger, and the couple still contracts reforestation and restoration work on state and private lands. When I worked for them, they were always headed to somewhere exotic at the end of every forestry season — Zanzibar, Costa Rica. Doreen has been travelling to Tanzania for tree-planting and rural water supply projects in recent years, taking students from the U.S. and showing them how to plant trees and introducing them to the Maasai people. Their SUV sports bumper stickers declaring a preference for organic farms and an unequivocal distrust of our current president.

Jim has missed only one year of planting trees since 1980. He and Doreen, at the height of their contracting work, planted about 1 million trees per year, running crews of 16-18 people, all U.S. citizens or documented foreign workers. They both planted on the big Oregon-based tree-planting crews of the late 1970s and early '80s, and Doreen started contracting for herself and her crews very early on. Like the rest of the contractors I interviewed for this story, the Stokeses left most federal public-land contracting around 1994. (I doggedly stayed on as a freelance woods-worker, working for less and less money each year, even as the cost of housing in the Bitterroot Valley, where I lived, was soaring. I gave up, too, in the late 1990s.)

"We were so successful for so long," Doreen told me. Then, in 1991, the competition from foreign labor kicked in and it all went away. Doreen said their company did everything by the book, but it didn't matter. The Forest Service never checked, so other contractors could cut corners and sometimes even report their own crews to immigration officials — deported workers don't need to be paid. "They broke every rule there was. How could anybody compete with that?"

Since there's no way contractors like the Stokeses could ever bid low enough to get a Forest Service contract, it's impossible to test Hawkinson's assertion that Americans refuse to do these jobs. "As long as we have these visa programs, bringing in these workers, we'll never find out," Doreen said. "The bids on tree-planting now are ridiculous. There is no way to make any money on them."

"I don't personally know anybody who

wants this kind of work for the wages that it pays now," Jim told me. He worries about how using cheap imported labor affects communities like Plains, where there is already a serious lack of jobs. A couple of years ago, Jim asked a Forest Service official if the agency would use local labor for a nearby project. The official wouldn't answer. Jim added: "And then a woman stood up and said, 'Well, we'll have to take the lowest bidder, but there will be more work here for waitresses at the cafes, and for the gas station.' I mean, how do you respond to that?"

Perhaps the best hope for a response is in Missoula at the University of Montana's Forest Industry Research Program at the Bureau of Business and Economic Research. Chelsea McIver, a research specialist there, is Jeff Pennick's daughter and a veteran of 13 seasons' working for the Forest Service on trails and other labor jobs. She grew up around Hope, Idaho, as a self-described "Forest Service brat" who planned a career in the same agency. But it didn't work out, in large part because the Forest Service is not the robust, forward-looking agency that it once was.

McIver has spent years now outside the agency, "getting deep into the weeds" of public-lands contracting and the kind of rural economics that she knew from her own experience, but that she found lacking in contemporary discussions and conflicts over public-land management. "I think part of my interest in all of this came from my disappointment over not finding the career I'd planned on in the Forest Service," she said, "and I think part of what has driven me since is that I grew up in a timber community, in a Forest Service family, with a father who was both a former logger and a member of Greenpeace." Her former husband was, and remains, a forestry contractor. "I've seen firsthand how many sacrifices people will make to do what they love, working in the woods, living in these rural communities."

McIver echoed the point that the Forest Service, starved by budget cuts and firefighting costs, typically awards multi-year contracts to bigger, out-of-state, low-bid contractors that use the H-2B workers because it has little choice. The agency does not give preference to local crews. That may be more efficient, she said. "But efficiency was only one factor in the equation — what do you tell the people in Mineral County, Montana, about jobs and schools, where it is 93 percent public land, and what work is getting done on those lands isn't available to anybody who lives there?"

McIver and I toured the Marshall Woods Project, over half of which is on Lolo National Forest land north of Missoula, including the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area, one of the city's most popular playgrounds. It's a 13,000-acre project, with 4,000 acres of thinning, planting, weed control, brush-piling and controlled burning. There are years of work here. The project originally was designed with options to award contracts to local workers. There was also a commercial logging component on about 225 acres, where the timber needed thinning, but the trees were too large for workers to cut up, pile and burn. The sale of that timber would have brought in some money to help pay for the project, and allow for flexibility in awarding the bids to locals. But some local environmentalists vigorously objected to commercial logging on the project. "There had already been so many delays," McIver said. "The Forest Service just had to take the easiest path." By the time work began in 2016, the commercial logging aspect of the project had been dropped. So had any attempts to award contracts to local workers. Imperial Forestry of Medford, Oregon, got the main $1.75 million contract. This year, the company received 114 H-2B visas for forestry work with a $10.23 per hour base pay rate, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

At least one local contractor, using locally sourced crews, would have liked a piece of the project: Mark Alber, of Miller Creek Reforestation, an old-school thinning and firefighting contractor with a dedicated crew based out of the Bitterroot Valley.

I called Alber this summer, and he told me to come out and meet him: "You can't miss us: a bunch of Stihls, gas jugs, bunch of crazy-looking people — you know, a thinning crew!" I found them at 5 a.m. at a truckstop near Missoula, and followed the line of trucks east an hour or so, then up into the Flint Creek Range to where they were "brushing" a road on the Beaverhead/Deer Lodge National Forest. The Forest Service had made a small timber sale, and the mill that was going to log it was paying Alber's crew to clear the sides of the road. "The Forest Service doesn't have any money for this," he said. "I was just reading where fire was taking 58 percent of all their funding. No thinning, no planting, no fuels reduction. So then it burns."

Alber, a hyper-fit 51-year-old, is still sawing long days, "although I have to break away from the crew, tell them I have phone calls to make, business to take care of, so I can rest without looking bad." He has a degree from the University of Montana in recreation management, but started thinning timber and planting trees when he was in his 20s. "Once I learned the job, I was making $35 an hour in the '80s, or working on a logging job, bumping knots for $130 a day," he said. "This was when you could buy a house in Missoula for $45,000. Now that house has gone up 700 percent and the wages for that job are, what? $14 an hour? "

Alber's crew raced forward, six or seven saws going full out, a small team following them and throwing the brush off the road. Every once in a while, someone broke off, water bottle in hand, and bumped up the pickup trucks to keep up with the crew. Alber clearly itched to keep up with them, holding his saw blade down, tip in the dirt, like a walking cane or a broadsword, and rocking it back and forth as he talked. "I think about what it would be like to be a kid in Darby (a town in the Bitterroot). He's living there, all that land around it, he can't buy a job. There's something like $3 million in thinning contracts on the Darby Ranger District these past years, he can't even bid on it, and nobody will hire him to work on it. … None of that money stays in Darby — these guys won't even buy a set of tires there."

Now Alber has given up on public-land contracts. "I pay my guys $17 an hour, and I pay workman's comp, insurance, all of it. I believe that if you are working, you should be able to buy tires for your truck, have a beer or two, go to a dentist and get your teeth fixed if you need it. So, we can't compete. Not on the bids. On the work, we'll compete with any crew, anywhere. That's just the truth."

Chelsea McIver, who grew up as a "Forest Service brat" and planned a career with the agency, looks for new ways to help foresters and their communities in her job for the Forest Industry Research Program at the University of Montana's Bureau of Business and Economic Research.
TONY BYNUM

When I asked him if he thought that most U.S. citizens didn't really want these jobs anymore, he responded with disgust. "Nothing pisses me off more than hearing that BS. It is insulting, and it is not true. Look at these guys. … This is what they want to do. We feel sorry for people who have to work in town in some office."

Alber said that, a few years ago, long before the Marshall Woods project, he'd decided to make a fight of it. "I couldn't stand it anymore. I was going to change it." He contacted Montana Sen. Jon Tester, the Forest Service and all of his local legislators. "We're in Ravalli County, right? Very conservative, build that wall, all of that," he says. He told them about the millions of dollars spent on the forests nearby, and about how all of it just went right back out. "Our own tax money. They didn't care anything about it."

There is a reason for that lack of caring, and like the complex ecology of labor markets and their effect upon human lives, it is not immediately obvious. For

Mark Alber uses a gas-powered pole saw, right, to trim branches along a road in the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, Montana, clearing the way for a scheduled timber harvest. Alber, who owns a forest-contracting firm in Montana's Bitterroot Valley, says that since he's committed to paying his workers a living wage, his bids for projects can't compete with those from big, outside firms that use H-2B visa workers and other low-wage laborers. Below, Chit Wood and Andrew Dziadosz catch a ride on the tailgate of the crummy after clearing brush with Alber's crew. Irish setter Maria is a fixture on the crew.
TONY BYNUM

the last 20 years, I've been a reporter and writer focused on our public lands, particularly efforts to transfer Forest Service and BLM lands to states or into private hands. The Republican Party's platform includes a long-term goal of privatizing public lands. The short-term goal is for the system of public lands not to work; to strangle the budgets and diminish the role of once-proud agencies like the Forest Service, make sure that Western communities do not profit from or engage with the public lands that surround them, ensure a constant level of conflict and uncertainty, and import laborers in areas of high local unemployment. These goals may not be part of a vast right-wing conspiracy, but they serve the goal of eventual privatization just as surely as if they were.

Strangely enough, we Americans have made the decision to embrace a libertarian, devil-take-the-hindmost capitalist approach to labor and contracting on our public lands, the same lands that are perhaps our best remaining example of a shared national vision, a vision that defies the raw and bloody arithmetic of markets and bald statements of profit and loss. It's a profound contradiction, one that has resulted in fewer and fewer American citizens working on our own public lands.

We can argue about whether a poor man from Honduras or Mexico, lured here to work on our public lands, is being exploited or being given opportunity, or both, but we cannot escape the fact that the model we have embraced has resulted in lower wages and far fewer opportunities for all the people — of whatever origin or ethnicity — who actually live in the West. We can shrug it off as the global free market at work, but there is little doubt that it is hollowing out communities like Pierce, Idaho, and Darby, Montana, and no doubt at all that it is fueling the booming anti-public-lands movement. Lost are generations of young people who take pride in their own strength and abilities, drawing decent wages from the use of muscle and common sense to solve problems and improve their own public lands. Swept into this vortex is the economic connection that small communities once had to the federally managed public lands that surround them, and that, increasingly, are seen as hampering, rather than encouraging, economic prosperity and quality of life in the West. □

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Hal Herring, a contributing editor at *Field and Stream*, wrote his first story for *HCN* in 1998. He covers environment, guns, conservation and public-lands issues for a variety of publications. halherring.com.

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McCarthy, *continued from page 7*

that could have more legs as well as the budget of the agency. The president's budget cut EPA by 31 percent. It was the highest percentage by far of any agency. It really was specifically directed at reducing the staff to levels that were not seen since the 1980s. So the EPA itself is at risk.

HCN Many of Obama's climate change policies were executed without the support of the Legislature, and many are being rolled back by his successor. Given this, what would you advise future presidents on policy-making?

GM We came close in the first half of the administration to getting a climate bill through the Legislature. We missed by two senators. We were still under obligation by interpretation of the Clean Air Act by the Supreme Court, who told us that climate change is resulting from greenhouse gas emissions, and those emissions should be regulated under the Clean Air Act if they posed a hazard. So we wanted to move forward on climate change, because we understood its implications and how important it was to work fast. But the courts also understood that.

We regulated the vehicles in the first half of the administration, and we moved onto the utilities after. And so the lesson is, you've got to follow the science and the law. Congress needs to step up, as well. One of the things that was so disappointing about abandoning the U.S. involvement in the Paris agreement, where the whole world is fully behind it, is that it really makes us an outlier in what should be a tremendous economic opportunity for us — not just a defense mechanism, but an offense. We know that clean energy is inexpensive; it is competitive against fossil fuels. We're not asking people to sacrifice or to spend more money anymore. We're all trying to race to the finish line to figure out how you can innovate and grow jobs like we're doing now in clean energy and turn it into a future that we can all embrace and not just think we have to sacrifice and sacrifice. That's not what it's about. It's about investing in the future.

HCN The EPA is one of the most contentious agencies in the federal government, prompting very emotional, sometimes vitriolic, responses to its work. Why do you think that is, and what can the agency do to mitigate that kind of response in the future and even work toward reclaiming a legacy of bipartisanship?

GM EPA needs to keep continuing on an aggressive path to really align closely with our state counterparts and the counterparts in our cities and counties, meaning all of the environmental regulators, because it is a robust enterprise. It has to happen at all levels. We worked hand-in-hand with the car industry and with utilities to come to a really reasonable decision that every state and every city could get behind. And I think it shows in how these rules were laid out. They did not get an immediate gut reaction of "crazy EPA, there they go again," because we worked it.

The disappointing thing is that that does not seem to be recognized by this administration. They don't really care whether it was well received. It's part of their party platform. Now it's part of their promises. But I feel very confident that because this administration has taken these issues, in such a dramatic fashion, backwards, that you are going to see quite an effort in the near future to keep that progress moving forward. We'll regroup; we'll rally. We just have to not despair, and we have to start acting. Comment on rules that come in, be a citizen of science, find out what's going on in your own community, get active in your own life — and we'll be OK. □

Why do white writers keep making films about Indian Country?

Try as they might, two new films can't escape old tropes

Neither Wolf nor Dog
Director: Steven Lewis Simpson
Roaring Fire Films, 2017

Wind River
Director: Taylor Sheridan
The Weinstein Company, 2017

The road to Indian Country is littered with the crumpled bodies of white men who have attempted to make their Native film pet projects. Johnny Depp's deadpan performance as Tonto in the 2013 version of *The Lone Ranger* did not endear him to the Indigenous crowd at large (though he was embraced by the Comanche Nation). Adam Sandler's Netflix original movie, *Ridiculous 6*, was largely ridiculed and declared flat-out racist in some circles. The popular animated film *Pocahontas* is pure fiction; the real Pocahontas was arguably kidnapped by white men and raped in captivity. There have been some partial successes; Kevin Costner made a decent, financially successful, critically acclaimed film set on Lakota lands, *Dances with Wolves*. And then there's James Cameron's *Avatar*. Yes, it's a sci-fi picture, but you don't get to recruit Cherokee actor Wes Studi to be a blue chieftain in your film without some passing reference to Indians. These are textbook examples of "white savior" films. Costner out-Indians the Indians and in the case of *Avatar*, Sam Worthington out-Na'vi's the Na'vi. Both save the day.

"Anglos" get in trouble writing about Native Americans when they focus on their own agenda and projections and disregard the old adage, "Write what you know." How can you really know a thing when you are not a part of it? This is an enormous challenge to non-Natives striving to create such work. Somehow, though, it never stops them from trying, and this year, we have two films that aptly demonstrate this principle.

Steven Lewis Simpson opens his well-intentioned film, *Neither Wolf Nor Dog*, with sepia-toned images of the Northern Plains, which dissolve into teepees, which further cross-fade into a rundown shack on a rez. Right off the bat, you know you are going to be knee-deep in historical trauma.

Simpson, who is Scottish, essentially doubles down on white men writing about Indians by adapting his screenplay from the biography of another white man writing about Indians, Kent Nerburn. The title of the film comes from a phrase ascribed to Sitting Bull, referring to "agency Indians," or those who have lost their status as warriors and surrendered to the U.S. government.

Neither Wolf Nor Dog is a modern-day captivity narrative. Nerburn is invited to Lakota Country by the sweet and seemingly harmless wise "elder," Dan, played by Dave Bald Eagle, who asks the white writer to tell his stories. Dan is actually a trickster figure who sets the film in motion. Nerburn, played by the agreeable Christopher Sweeney, has his own issues, including the recent passing of his father. He is unsure whether to help Dan until he sees a vision while unpacking his father's box of possessions: an old Army bag emblazoned with the words "Service before Self." And so, with fate practically knocking him over the head, Nerburn leaves Minnesota for Indian Country.

Once he gets there, Dan more or less kidnaps him, with the help of Grover, played by Richard Ray Whitman, a darling of indie Native cinema. There is a chemistry between these two Native actors, who play off each other well. They drive Nerburn into the deep rez, forcing him to see firsthand the post-colonial problems of modern Lakota life.

The film means well. Unfortunately, even if you are tired of "white savior" narratives (à la Costner), an anti-white-savior film like this one is not necessarily any better. Simpson's film puts all of America's injustices squarely on poor Nerburn's medium-build shoulders. After all, he's just a writer trying to tell a Native elder's story. Yet for the entire second half of the film, Nerburn wears a permanent grimace. It's odd to watch and not entirely as satisfying as you might think. I'd prefer that my white friends choose to be decent people and learn about these things on their own accord. It's a hell of a thing to be tricked into the back of a car — and asked to buy the gas, to boot.

Wind River, meanwhile, has garnered many accolades, was screened at Sundance and Cannes, and was basically hailed as a great achievement for the successful writer and now director, Taylor Sheridan. Sheridan, who is also white, is on a hot streak with 2015's superb *Sicario*, the following year's *Hell or High Water*, and now *Wind River*. He deserves every bit of praise coming his way. The man can write a screenplay.

Sicario was set in the great American Southwest and Mexico, *Hell or High Water* in the flatlands of Texas. Sheridan decided to set *Wind River*, his directorial debut, in the frigid high country of Wyoming. All three films feature men of strength who struggle through adversity, and the last two heavily reference Native American culture. Sheridan seems genuinely interested in the contradictions of contemporary Native life and all of the harsh realities that go along with it. While this is admirable, his dialogue can sometimes tumble into cornball territory, or be flat-out unrealistic. In *Hell or High Water*, an ex-con and would-be bank robber sits at a poker table and asks a Comanche if he is still "Lord of the Plains." The Comanche replies "Lords of Nothing." That's a lot to swallow. No Comanche (and I am one) would ever utter such a defeatist thing. Comanche are way too proud.

Wind River is just as exciting as Sheridan's other two films. The story opens with a young, bloodied Native woman running for her life in the moonlit snow. Who, or what, is she running from? This question drives the film, as does U.S. Fish and Wildlife agent Cory Lambert (Jeremy Renner). Lambert, who has a poker face like no other, is a determined tracker in every sense. He begins the hunt for the killer, with the assistance of rookie FBI agent Jane Banner (Elizabeth Olsen). Together, the two must brave the stark lands of the Wind River Reservation, home to Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho. The snowy landscape acts as one complicated character among many. Wyoming is a harsh land where the residents know how to survive and if they don't, they will quickly find out the hard way. As Lambert says to a beat-up Banner, "Luck don't live out here."

The stalwart actor Graham Greene makes a welcome appearance as a tribal cop, Ben, a role he is not unfamiliar with, having played a similar part in *Thunder-*

Jason Asenap is a Comanche/Muscogee Creek writer and filmmaker based in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Dan (Dave Bald Eagle) and Grover (Richard Ray Whitman) take author Kent Nerburn (Christopher Sweeney) on a road trip around tribal land in South Dakota in *Neither Wolf Nor Dog*. NEITHER WOLF NOR DOG TRAILER

heart in 1992. Greene, who also played Kicking Bird in *Dances with Wolves*, practically utters the phrase "been there, done that" with the slouch in his face alone. Ben has the thankless task of patrolling a reservation the size of Rhode Island, with six cops.

The film is a thriller, but it's a thinking person's thriller. *Wind River* does its best to avoid clichés and say something new. Yet while it's great to see Native people portrayed with some depth, they are, for the most part, incredibly sad and, in the case of some, dead. Most everyone wants to leave the reservation. Those who work there hate it. And one character laments that there was no one around to teach him his culture.

From the standpoint of content and politics, Sheridan is on the right side. His interest in writing and directing a film about the problem of missing Native women is admirable, and he is putting his platform as a heavy-hitter in Hollywood to good use. Sheridan is also clearly interested in the ridiculousness of how federal, tribal and state agencies work with, against and among each other. It is a fascinating subject to those unfamiliar with it, which is basically anyone without an Indian law degree.

In both films, alas, we return to the point that, at least in Hollywood, the Indians die. To this day, the Indians die, and not just physically, but culturally. Simpson and Sheridan are invested in making us see how America has screwed Native people, even to the point of rubbing it in our faces. Is it so terrible to live in one's own homeland? It may be hard to get out, but it certainly feels condescending for a non-Native to write as much. And so both films raise the same questions: Is it so bad to be Indigenous in the 21st century? Does a positive message redeem poor narrative? Does having a good cause free you from obligations to the culture you are telling stories about? And finally: When do the Indians win? □

BY JASON ASENAP

FBI Agent Jane Banner (Elizabeth Olsen) examines the body of a young Native American woman (Kelsey Asbille), as part of a crime investigation at the center of the plot of *Wind River*. WIND RIVER TRAILER

Wild Allegiance

ESSAY BY
GENEEN MARIE
HAUGEN

When I stopped standing for the national anthem and Pledge of Allegiance, no one noticed. Not only was I not famous, I wasn't even popular. But it was already clear to me — almost 50 years ago — that I was primarily a citizen of a planet, not of a nation, especially not one using young people as fodder in a baffling war, a nation that diminished women and demonized people of color, although I would not have had that language then, only images from the cauldron of civil rights courtesy of television and *Life* magazine.

My lack of small-town fame or adolescent popularity guaranteed invisibility when I didn't rise at assemblies for what I saw as the perplexing Pledge of Allegiance. I didn't get the ritual of allying with, or idolizing, a flag. And though the idea of "liberty and justice for all," was noble, in practice it was a farce — the words just subtle propaganda that, if they were repeated enough, people might believe had been achieved. Maybe knowing that I was basically invisible gave me the courage to resist the flag-waving agenda. Perhaps I was slightly odder than other 16- or 17-year-olds. I'd grown up a little wild and a little dreamy, by a lake in the remnant forest of Washington state, and so I felt allied with the earth, with land and creatures. I felt allied with the planet — not its political boundaries — well before the first Earth Day in 1970, and long before the language and concepts of biodiversity and ecology became widespread.

In recent months, sports players, protesting racial injustice, have made headlines for "taking a knee" during the national anthem. I admire the courage of risking a career in public dissent. Sometimes I feel like a privileged coward. I don't attend events that include the national anthem or flag allegiance these days, so I have no occasion to demonstrate my opposition to them. But there are plenty of atrocities that have been enacted in our names without my visible protest: torture, drone assassinations — even of children and other innocents — institutionalized intolerance and fear of people unlike "our own kind," poisoned water, desecrated land, and more. I write letters to government officials; I sign petitions; I make modest donations. For years now, though, my opposition to the politics and policies that undermine our life-support system has shape-shifted into a different kind of participation in the world — a kind of deep listening to the wild earth, practices of sacred reciprocity, and the lived exploration of our capacity to bring forth a new human/earth relationship.

While wandering in wildish places, I often play a wood flute or sing, as if simple music — offered intentionally to the ears of earth and water, chickadee and unseen cougar — matters, as if the manner in which I participate with my fellow creatures, including human beings, makes its own difference. At the least, it's a way of participating that changes my own awareness, brings keener perception and greater intimacy to my experience: My body notices the sudden silence of song sparrows as the raptor's shadow cruises overhead. Sometimes my imagination ignites, or I find myself awash in palpable waves of vitality, or awe, or grief.

Since the breakdown of civil discourse and rise of anonymous internet bullying (and worse), it's risky to be regarded as "unpatriotic" — a word with multiple interpretations. For some, patriotism involves protecting water or the integrity of wild ecosystems, or creating resilient communities; for others, it means strip-mining or clear-cutting to create jobs. For some, patriotism is entrenched with religion, politics or borders. Some patriots focus on the common good; for others, self-interest may be primary. In the rural West, patriotism may run in the Bundy direction.

Disparate views and voices clash with intent to dominate, intimidate or silence the less powerful. Respectful listening is no longer a high priority, if it ever was. Yet democracy depends on the flourishing of a spectrum of voices. Biodiversity, as well, is robustly expressed by an orchestra of wild voices.

Over decades, the bio-acoustic engineer Bernie Krause has recorded natural sound habitats all over the world. His careful listening led to the discovery that creatures vocalize in relationship to one another, in a specific frequency and timeframe — or acoustic bandwidth — in which their voices can be heard. Krause proposed the once-radical idea that, if a species' particular vocal niche is lost, the creature can no longer survive in that ecosystem, and will move on, or die out. Today, many of the once-thriving wild habitats that Krause has recorded have gone mute, overcome by human activity, including a changing climate with its companion events of extreme weather and drought.

In our tweet-infested social media maelstrom, dominant voices are often mistaken for those that contribute meaningfully to the cultural conversation, mistaken for offerings that nourish our collective ecosystem. Numbers of likes and followers are mistaken for genuine significance. And too many voices are absent, disregarded, or so soft that few hear them: the impoverished, exiled, elders, children and more — including the voices of the wild earth.

In divisive times, it's challenging to refrain from demonizing those with different views. But one who accepts the subjectivity and intelligence of stone and water and aspen plummets into a philosophical quandary when refusing to accept the diversity of human perspectives. It's easy to regard others as uninformed or somehow deficient. Easy, and about as fruitful as adding motor oil to compost.

Healthy ecosystems include predators and prey, grass and grass-eaters, bacteria and hosts. Ecosystems self-organize, or attempt to self-organize, in response to disturbances in the field. Does any species but our own engage in such divisive conduct and yet remain a single species? Is there is a more ecologically coherent response to our moment than bludgeoning one another with opinions, shouting over the shy ones, cordoning off those whose views disagree with our own?

I want to honor the quiet speech of the most vulnerable. I want, especially, to honor and offer wild prayers for the continued howls, creaks, grunts, chitters and caws of the Others. In the early days of the new American regime, I go out on skis to sing to riparian conifers and willow, to hidden moose and coyote. I sing praises to creek waters; I praise snow and glaciated granite peaks hidden in the clouds. I call out devotions as if the wild ones lean forward, listening, willing to participate in conversation from which I am ever the learner. I ski through the bottomland forest with unspeakable gratitude for all that remains of the world's wild intelligence, even now.

Somehow, nearly 50 years ago, I recognized that my primary allegiance was to a planet, to the land, to the wild Earth — not to a nation-state or flag. I did not have Gary Snyder's poet-philosopher sensibilities, or even his poem "For All," which may not have been written yet. But when I came across the poem decades later, I resonated, and still do, with Snyder's vow:

I pledge allegiance to the soil
of Turtle Island,
and to the beings who thereon dwell
one ecosystem
in diversity
under the sun
With joyful interpenetration for all.

When the trail disappears in rubble, or when there are a thousand plotlines to choose from, or when the conditions are divisive and the dominant voices are clashing, it's essential to have some kind of compass, some allegiance, to steer by. □

Geneen Marie Haugen's writing appears in Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth *and in various other publications; she guides for Animas Valley Institute (www.animas.org).*

Too many voices are absent, disregarded, or so soft that few hear them: the impoverished, exiled, elders, children and more — including the voices of the wild earth.

PHOTOS: K DANKO/CC WIKIMEDIA, TOP; JIM PATTERSON, BOTTOM

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HEARD AROUND THE WEST | BY BETSY MARSTON

SOUTH DAKOTA

It's hard not to wax rhapsodic about the poet and essayist Linda M. Hasselstrom, whose 17th book, *Dakota: Bones, Grass and Sky*, was published this year. Her mostly short poems are frank yet lyrical, and their subjects range from the appearance of her own aging body to reprising the worth of an old cow found frozen stiff on the range. Nothing about her life — which, to an outsider, seems close to a never-ending slog — is sentimentalized. In an essay about learning ranching from her father, she said he told her that a life spent working the land imposed stark choices. For example, he said she could watch all the barn kittens freeze to death in the harsh South Dakota winter, or she could take responsibility. A feminist and a conservationist, Hasselstrom made her choice. Here's the end of her poem, "Spring":

It's spring;
Time to kill the kittens.
Their mewing blends with the meadowlark song.
I tried drowning them once;
It was slow, painful.
Now I bash each with a wrench,
Once, hard.

Each death makes a dull sound,
Going deep in the ground
Without
Reverberations.

The poem "Handbook to Ranching," which is dedicated to her father, offers more of his spare approach to raising cattle: "Don't spend any money," "Don't get caught in a storm," "Get the calves fed and watered before noon," "Never call a veterinarian if you can avoid it," and finally, a warning: "You can never tell what a bobtail cow will do."

UTAH

In an announcement sprinkled with puns, 83-year-old Republican Utah Sen. Orrin Hatch said it was "high time" to back medical-marijuana research. And because Washington is so much at war with itself, he had "high hopes" that his bipartisan bill could be a "kumbaya moment for both parties." Hatch's bill has support from Delaware Democrat Sen. Chris Coons as well as Republican Sens. Cory Gardner, Colo., and Thom Tillis, N.C., reports the *Huffington Post*. Hatch spoke about a friend in Utah with seizures who must take 17 pills a day. Marijuana could "significantly help my friend," Hatch said, "and help him lead a regular life."

UTAH **Where seldom is heard a discouraging word, and the deer and diplodocus play.**
THOMAS C. BUNN

WEB EXTRA This was among the entries in the *HCN* photo contest. See a gallery with more of our favorites at **hcne.ws/photos-17**.

THE WEST

Flying a small, single-engine plane, Todd Rudberg had just touched down at Nehalem Bay State Park in Oregon near the Pacific Coast, when an obstacle came into view: It was an elk running in front of his still-moving plane. According to the Oregon State Police, Rudberg could not avoid hitting the animal. To add to the pilot's landing difficulties, another elk appeared and ran into the plane's left wing. The collision spun the plane around until it stopped, totaled, although Rudberg and his passenger were unharmed. Both elk were killed, but the police report ends on a positive note, since wildlife officials were able to salvage "a large quantity of elk meat."

And in Estes Park, Colorado, a video cam at Antonio's Real New York Pizza caught a bear and two cubs looking very much at home in the night kitchen, reports the *Denver Post*. After ripping a window out of a wall, the bears moved to the refrigerator, opened the door, and began eating pizza dough. They followed that feast with plates of salami and a visit to a trash can. The next day, the restaurant's owners had a surprising message for wildlife officers: "If bears break into our stores, please don't shoot them. Every dumpster in town is now bear-proof. … I believe it would have been much better to have left the old dumpster tops in place because they wouldn't become desperate enough to break into houses or businesses."

THE WEST

Caroline Slater, a retired California professor who worked for decades in multicultural education, made news recently by acting to right a historic wrong. She gave $250,000 to the Ute Indian Tribe in Utah in an attempt to compensate for land belonging to the tribe near Craig, Colorado, that was stolen by white settlers in 1881. After the Utes were forced at gunpoint to move to Utah, some of the land they'd occupied in Colorado ended up in the hands of Slater's great grandparents. The property was sold decades later, reports The Associated Press, with the profit going to Slater and her siblings. Now, Slater's check will help pay for construction of a new tribal high school.

THE NATION

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has what you might call an interesting view of history, as reported in the *Washington Times*. When asked on Fox News whether Confederate-era monuments should be removed, he said that none should be destroyed: "Since we don't put up statues of Jesus, everyone is going to fall morally short. I think reflecting on our history, both good and bad, is a powerful statement and part of our DNA."

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.

"Westerners don't fear these restrictions, even when their right to bear fishing poles isn't secured for eternity in the Constitution. **But when it comes to the right to bear arms, the reasonable limitations of fishing are swept downstream with sanity.**"

Marty Jones, in his essay, "In the West, fishing is more regulated than buying a gun," from Writers on the Range, hcn.org/wotr