

High Country News

For people who care about the West



Caught Between Crises

How one Indigenous family is navigating
two very different housing problems

By Julian Brave NoiseCat



Joe Waukazoo in Oakland, California, outside the Intertribal Friendship House, established in 1955 as one of the country's first urban Indian community centers. JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT

On the cover

Fannie Mae Sandoval and her sister, Grace Pedro, return to one of the two hand-built homes on their family homestead, on the Navajo Nation near Torreon, New Mexico. Sandoval, who speaks only Navajo, has lived and herded sheep here all her life, and has watched her family and community members move from the reservation to the city and back again.

DONOVAN SHORTNEY



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Editor's note

Homeless in the West

The blood-orange January sun is just dipping below the Uncompaghe Plateau as I pull up to a stoplight in Delta, Colorado. On the shoulder, a bearded man about my age dances a little jig in the cold, holding a cardboard sign that reads: "Homeless, anything will help."



He is one of a half-dozen people I've seen panhandling around town today. "We usually see an increase in the homeless and transient population in the winter," says LaDonna Gunn, the regional manager for Delta County Libraries. Many visit the library to get warm, use the restroom and get on the internet while waiting for the town's sole shelter to open for the night.

The library serves everybody who comes in, but its small staff is ill-equipped to deal with the mental and physical health issues of some of its homeless patrons, Gunn says. What Delta really needs is on-call social workers and physicians, but this community — population less than 10,000 — lacks the resources of cities like Denver.

Gunn suspects that the problem is growing in rural areas due to the cost of housing in rapidly gentrifying cities, a theory backed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. HUD — which counted more than half a million homeless in the country in 2017, up nearly 1 percent from 2016 — says there's been a surge in the number of people living on the streets in Los Angeles and other West Coast cities, where rents have soared beyond affordability for many lower-wage workers. The overall homeless population in California, Oregon and Washington has grown by 14 percent over the past two years, and the number of those considered unsheltered climbed 23 percent to 108,000.

The problem is especially acute for our country's more than 5 million Native Americans, 70 percent of whom live in urban areas. As Julian Brave NoiseCat, a member of the Canim Lake Band Tsq'escen, writes in this issue's cover story, the struggle to find adequate housing, whether in Oakland, California, or on the Navajo Nation, is an intergenerational one whose roots go deep into the country's troubled relationship with its Indigenous people.

NoiseCat's intimate portrait of a Navajo family, whose members live in both the urban and rural West, provides a glimpse into a reality most of us rarely consider. And it points to the immense challenges involved in helping the millions who have been sidelined in our brave new wealth-tilted economy.

In Delta, Gunn is trying to pull together a coalition — from the school district and the hospital, to the city and the shelter — to find fresh solutions. Her enthusiasm gives me hope. As I hand the bearded homeless man a few dollars, he smiles and points eastward, where an immense harvest moon has just cleared the West Elk Mountains. "Can you believe that?" he asks. "That's why I love it here." Me, too.

—Paul Larmer, executive director/publisher



MOLLY ADAMS/CC VIA FLICKR

◀ The March for Immigrant Rights last September in Los Angeles.

The West's Dreamers

At 11 months old, Daniela Benitez was brought to the U.S. illegally from Mexico. In high school in Phoenix, Benitez dreamed of college, but couldn't accept any state or federally funded scholarships because she was undocumented. Now 18, she hopes to enroll in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. While not a path to citizenship, DACA would allow her to live and work for two years without fear of deportation, and would qualify her for in-state tuition. DACA was established by then-President Barack Obama in 2012 and has more than 296,100 recipients in the West. As of Sept. 5, the Trump administration stopped accepting new applications and began phasing out the program. Some lawmakers want to pass comprehensive immigration legislation, while others are pushing for a Dream Act that does not include other reforms like border wall funding or immigration restrictions. While the White House, Democrats and Republicans negotiate, the fate of Dreamers like Benitez hangs in the balance. **MAYA L. KAPOOR**

Read more online: hcne.ws/western-dreamers

DACA recipients in the West

Arizona	California	Colorado	Nevada	Oregon	Utah	Washington	U.S.
25,500	197,900	15,500	12,400	10,200	8,900	16,300	689,800

Note: Only Western states with sufficient sample sizes are shown. Source: Migration Policy Institute, Sept. 4, 2017

4 Number of Filipino educators in Montana's Shelby School District, which employs 39 full-time teachers.

2.2 Percent of Montana's labor force who are immigrants.

223,000

Shortfall in number of workers in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, math) the United States will face by 2018.

Employers in Montana are facing a shortage of qualified workers in rural areas, especially in the education and health-care industries. To cope, some schools and hospitals have partnered with organizations to bring qualified professionals in from other countries, as Northern Rockies Medical Center in Cut Bank, Montana, which employs four Filipina nurses, has done. "It could save a hospital hundreds of thousands of dollars, compared to having to use traveling (registered nurse) companies," says CEO Cherie Taylor.

LEANNE KAVANAGH/CUT BANK PIONEER PRESS
Read more online: hcne.ws/worker-shortage

\$1.5 million

Amount the Cherokee Nation spent on substance abuse treatment in 2016. The tribe sued some of the largest drug distributors in the U.S. in an attempt to decrease the flow of opioids into its 14 counties in northeast Oklahoma, but a judge has ruled that the lawsuit can't go forward. **GRAHAM LEE BREWER**
Read more online: hcne.ws/opioid-litigation

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“When you're on permanent hold, at some time you've gotta hang up. ... By nine of us resigning, we felt we'd be able to get the microphone briefly to at least talk to the American people about climate change, about preserving the natural diversity of wildlife, about making sure underrepresented minorities not only come to the parks but are employees there.”

—Tony Knowles, chairman of the National Park System Advisory Board, explaining board members' resignation following months of unsuccessful attempts to meet with Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke. **KRISTA LANGLOIS**
Read more online: hcne.ws/advisory-resignations



GAGE SKIDMORE/CC VIA FLICKR

Podcast

How Trump has affected the region so far

Since President Donald Trump was inaugurated in January 2017, he and his administration have been steadily undoing Obama-era environmental protections, including designations of national monuments and regulations designed to mitigate climate change. More on the latest episode of *West Obsessed*. **BRIAN CALVERT** Listen online: hcne.ws/region-deregulation

“They really understand well what regulations are out there that industry doesn't like, and they are, with incredible precision, going after these rules across many, many agencies.”

—D.C. Correspondent Elizabeth Shogren, speaking about the Trump administration, on *West Obsessed*.

Trending

In Montana, houses are replacing farmland

A coalition of local farmers in Missoula County, Montana, is striving to slow the alarming trend of subdivisions gobbling up rich farmland. Only 8.9 percent of the county's prime agricultural soil is left — out of land that has been farmland since the 1890s — in part due to the growing cost of land in the area. Without clear mechanisms or state policies to save what remains, Montanans are looking to emulate Vermont, which has a thriving small-farm community, assisted by land trust organizations and state policies to keep agricultural land in farmers' hands. **ERIKA FREDRICKSON/MISSOULA INDEPENDENT**

You say

MICHAEL STIEHL: “It would be nice if the developments were on the dense side, but the real impacts are the trophy homes and other dispersed development that affects habitat and environment.”

DICK CREED: “We need an education system, which teaches where our basic needs come from (air, water, food and shelter), so people recognize what is lost when we transition from farms and ranches to subdivisions.”

DALE LOCKWOOD: “Good ranch land, like good farmland with black dirt, should stay that way. It is stupid to take the best land and pave and build houses, which forever will take the best out of production for future generations.”

Read more online: hcne.ws/farmland-supplanted and [Facebook.com/highcountrysnews](https://www.facebook.com/highcountrysnews)

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BUNDY'S 'WILD WEST'

Ryan Bundy thinks that he still lives in the Old West of "make your own laws and bring a gun to enforce them" ("Ryan Bundy's West," *HCN*, 12/25/17). Thank goodness we had level-headed people years ago who decided that in order to have a civil society, we needed some boundaries and guidelines. Bundy said the trial is about property rights, and the Bureau of Land Management should make the same case. Some time ago, these lands were designated public, owned by the federal government. They are cared for with taxes from everyone, and Mr. Bundy should be grateful he can use them for a small fee for his own gain. If he wants to live in the "Wild West," maybe he would like Colombia or El Salvador, where it's easier to be your own lawman. I'm completely baffled by the Bundys and their friends, who don't seem to understand that laws help people get along. The law makes a more level playing field, where each person is afforded some semblance of equality. If they don't like the current legal situation, they can change it by finding enough people who agree with them and having a vote. I don't care for a lot of what goes on in the United States, but I'm grateful we have a system to change things we don't like, so we don't have to resort to guns and violence. I hope the prosecutors do the very best job they can so that we won't have more people taking the law into their own hands. People get killed that way.

*Karen Jaeger
Longmont, Colorado*

WRONG CHARGE

I understand that the case against the Bundys — or any other defendant, for that matter — can be dismissed for prosecutorial misconduct if the judge determines that prosecutors egregiously violated the rights of the defendants, preventing them from being able to conduct his or her defense, ("Cliven Bundy walks," *HCN*, 1/22/18). That is a matter for the U.S. attorney to address with his staff.

What I do not understand, however,



DAVE GRANLUND/CAGLECARTOONS.COM

is why the Bundys have been allowed by the federal authorities to violate the law for years by illegally grazing their cattle on federal land. You don't need to charge them with criminal conspiracy. Whatever happened to simple trespass? I'm pretty sure I know what would happen if I decided to deny the rights of the federal government and brought in a truckload of cattle to graze in the meadows of Yosemite Valley.

*Scott Finley
El Dorado Hills, California*

PAY TO PLAY

While the prospect of higher access fees to public lands — particularly national parks — is a valid concern, as a frequent park visitor, I see the two most pressing concerns as being: (1) The cost of the immense backlog of maintenance to the infrastructure of the parks, and (2) the daily damage being done to the parks and the park experience by more visitors than the parks can handle on any given day ("Who should pay for public lands?" *HCN*, 12/25/17). The popular trails are chock-full of families with screaming kids and adults, which drives off any chance of wildlife encounters, and in parks such as Rocky Mountain and Yosemite, the park-and-ride lots are routinely full before noon on weekends, and visitors are being turned away. It isn't much better on weekdays during high season.

The thought of raising the price of admission, both to control crowd size

and to pay for the maintenance background, is sad, but we are loving our parks to their demise. Congress is not going to give the parks more money — people don't want to pay more in taxes — so raising fees remains the only option, other than doing nothing, which ensures failure. In fairness, the National Park Service could then offer free admission on a couple more dates than they already do.

The Park Service really should consider admission

on a per-person (versus per vehicle) basis. I am a Golden Eagle Passport holder, but I would gladly pay an annual renewal fee and see all the free lifetime passes done away with. The entrance fees to me seem unreasonably low compared to other entertainment options, such as \$200 for one Taylor Swift, Eagles or similar concert ticket.

*John W. Thomas
Fort Collins, Colorado*

CASES TO CONSIDER

In addition to the case at point in Gloria Dickie's article, ("A precedent for species recovery?" *HCN*, 1/22/18), the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals has made two other rulings in the Great Lakes wolf case that deserve mention. First, it ruled that the Fish and Wildlife Service has the authority to delist a distinct population segment. Second, and most important, when it does delist that distinct population, the agency must also consider the effects of that delisting on both the distinct population and on the remaining population that remains listed. This latter point is the one that poses the biggest problem with the delisting of Yellowstone's grizzlies. If the Fish and Wildlife Service were to consider the effect of delisting the Yellowstone population on bears elsewhere, it would have to conclude that it sets back overall grizzly bear recovery.

*Dave Knibb
Bellevue, Washington*

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What tribal nations say about Jordan Cove LNG

The Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians have not taken a position on the project.

The Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians says it has just begun to review the specifics of the pipeline's latest iteration.

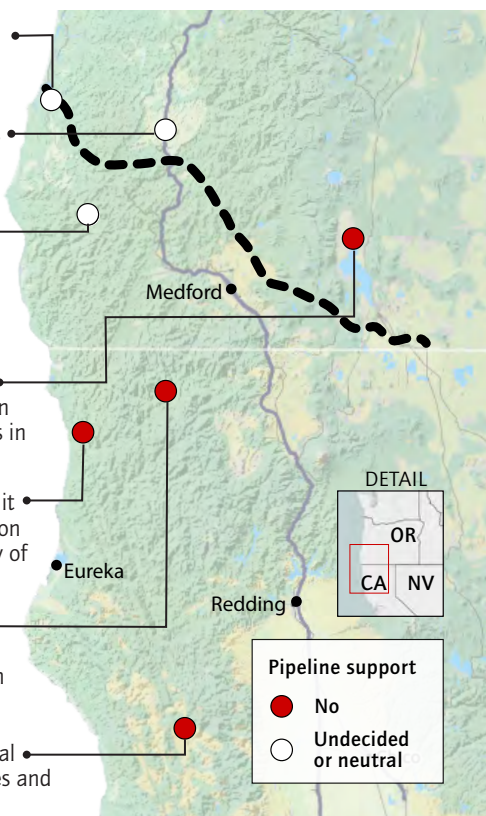
The Coquille Indian Tribe supported a 2009 application to build the pipeline. It's now neutral and acting as a "cooperating agency" to the federal authorities working on permitting the pipeline.

The Klamath Tribes oppose the pipeline because of concerns about global warming and construction impacts on salmon, water quality and cultural sites in the Klamath Basin.

The Yurok Tribe, the largest in California, has said it opposes the pipeline because of negative impacts on fish like chinook salmon and steelhead, a mainstay of the tribe's economy.

The Karuk Tribe sees the project at odds with its goal of restoring depleted Klamath Basin fisheries. Tribal authorities are worried about its contribution to climate change as well as construction impacts.

Round Valley Indian Tribes say the project proposal ignored tribal sovereignty, threatens tribal resources and will affect 400 waterways in southern Oregon.



Snapshot

Pipeline gets a third chance

But tribes worry over its impacts

In 2007, the Canadian company Veresen Inc. applied for a U.S. permit to build a natural gas terminal in Coos Bay, Oregon, and a 229-mile pipeline connecting gas-rich basins in the Interior West to the coast. The proposed pipeline, branching off the existing Ruby Pipeline, raised both job prospects and alarm bells for tribal communities and towns in Oregon, while encouraging export hopes for Colorado, Wyoming and Utah. The Obama administration denied the permit several times, but President Donald Trump's vision of U.S. energy dominance has given the Jordan Cove LNG project another chance. Veresen reapplied last year and is now undergoing the permitting process under a new Federal Energy Regulatory Commission board. This has renewed concerns over the use of eminent domain, as well as construction impacts on ancestral tribal territory, fragile salmon habitat and forestland. While it's unclear whether FERC will approve the application (it denied a proposed Energy Department coal policy earlier this year, partly because of climate change concerns), Pacific Northwest tribes have been vocal and actively involved, setting the stage for future battles if the pipeline is approved. With the exception of coastal Oregon tribes, who have remained neutral, most tribes near the proposed route are opposed to it.

ANNA V. SMITH

'Atmospheric rivers' aid and imperil

Improved storm forecasts could help reservoir managers store more water while avoiding floods

BY EMILY BENSON

Atmospheric rivers are ribbons of moisture-laden air that can ferry water thousands of miles across oceans. While they can cause dangerous deluges — contributing to the mudslides that recently killed more than 20 people in Southern California — they also provide up to half the West Coast's annual precipitation.

When a massive atmospheric-river rainstorm slammed California's Russian River watershed in December 2012, water rushed into Lake Mendocino, a reservoir north of San Francisco. The state was on the brink of drought, but the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had to let the surge run downstream in order to leave storage room in the reservoir, so that if another storm came, there wouldn't be flooding below. But the rainy season essentially ended after that downpour, and water managers estimate that more than \$2 million slipped down the river. The loss might have been prevented if the Corps had known it could safely store the water. "We lose millions

of dollars of water if we don't have better forecasting," says Shirlee Zane of the board of the Sonoma County Water Agency.

Now, researchers are improving forecasts of atmospheric rivers using computer models, weather balloons and instruments dropped from airplanes. This knowledge could help reservoir managers stockpile more water for dry periods without sacrificing the safety of downstream communities. And as climate change intensifies both floods and shortages in the coming decades, meeting that balance will become even more critical.

"We're good at seeing (atmospheric rivers)," says Anna Wilson, a researcher at the Center for Western Weather and Water Extremes, part of U.C. San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography. "But we are not yet good at telling exactly where they're going to land, exactly how strong they'll be, and, in certain instances, whether precipitation is going to fall as rain versus snow." Wilson and a team of researchers plan to drop dozens of parachute-carried sensors measuring moisture, temperature and wind data through



several atmospheric rivers early this year. Working with the National Weather Service, they hope to advance storm-location forecasts and provide other data.

Better forecasts could also help water managers deal with the increasingly intense atmospheric rivers climate change will likely cause. According to the latest National Climate Assessment, because warmer air can hold more moisture, by the end of this century individual atmospheric rivers could drop substantially more precipitation on the West Coast than they already do. □

Atmospheric river storms swelled the American River in January 2017, inundating a footbridge near Sacramento, California.

DALE KOLKE / CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

Emily Benson is an HCN editorial fellow who covers water issues. [@erbenon1](#)

What went wrong at Oroville?

Lessons of the spillway disaster at a California dam

BY EMILY BENSON

After intense rainstorms in February 2017, two spillways at Northern California's Oroville Dam began to disintegrate under the force of the water rushing down them. Officials, concerned that erosion might undermine the side of the reservoir itself, evacuated more than 180,000 people. The reservoir ultimately held, but the spillways required extensive,

Emily Benson is an HCN editorial fellow who covers water issues. [@erben1](#)

ongoing reconstruction.

In early January, an independent group of dam experts tasked with determining what went wrong released its final report. It describes the physical factors that caused the spillways to crumble, problems like unstable rock foundations and cracked concrete that allowed water beneath the main spillway.

The report also highlighted human and organizational errors, including faulty design details, shortsighted inspections and "overconfident and complacent" management by the California Department of Water Resources. The department "take(s) the findings very seriously," said then-director Grant Davis in a statement. "We will ... incorporate the lessons learned going forward."

So what can Western dam owners and regulators learn from Oroville? One lesson, according to the report, is simply to pay more attention to the dangers of deteriorat-

ing spillways, which can be overlooked during dam-centric safety assessments. Dam failures are clearly catastrophic, but other emergencies — like a spillway collapse — can also be dangerous and expensive.

Another lesson is the need for inspections that go beyond mere physical check-ups. For example, reviews of original design records are necessary to help inspectors determine whether spillways are too outdated to be safe. And those reviews should be independent, not cut-and-paste insertions from previous reports. That could help prevent errors from propagating, an issue at Oroville that led officials to underestimate the risks of spillway erosion.

Oroville's spillways failed despite state oversight, regulation by a federal agency and repeated evaluations by outside inspectors. That, the report notes, "is a wake-up call for everyone involved in dam safety."

Here's a look at some of the report's conclusions. □



PHOTO: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

1 Damaging drainpipes

Cracks appeared in the main spillway as early as 1969, just a year after the dam and spillways were completed, forming where concrete was thinned and weakened by drainpipes that protruded into the structure instead of sitting below it. The cracks let too much water leak through, with catastrophic consequences.

2 Weak bedrock

The emergency spillway is a lip of concrete above an earthen slope. Extensive erosion of the hillside — the factor that triggered evacuations — caught officials by surprise. Though mid-century studies showed that sections of bedrock there were weathered and weak, a 1970 report suggested otherwise, a misunderstanding that persisted for decades.

3 Increasing vulnerability

In 1997, the main spillway handled flows much larger than those that broke it apart in 2017. So what changed to make it more vulnerable? Probably a combination of factors, including new concrete damage, corrosion of steel reinforcing bars and growing holes in the earth beneath the spillway.

4 Rejected potential causes

The investigation team ultimately ruled out several potential causes of the main spillway collapse, including earthquakes, drain-plugging tree roots and springs bubbling up from below. There were reports of an abandoned mineshaft, but that turned out to be nothing more than the harmless remains of an old privy pit.

5 Emphasis on water delivery

No single person or organization caused the disaster, the report said, but California's Department of Water Resources "gave insufficient priority to dam safety," and the department had a "well-intentioned desire" to keep water flowing through its canals and reservoirs. Still, "during the incident, our sole focus was protecting public safety," Joel Ledesma, a department deputy director, said.

6 Dam-focused disaster discussions

Formal safety reviews of Oroville Dam conducted every five years included discussions of hypothetical disaster scenarios and how to deal with them. But the sessions focused largely on the dam and its headgates, with little attention paid to the facility's two spillways.

More prime sage grouse habitat is open for drilling

The Trump administration will allow oil and gas leasing in key sagebrush lands

BY ELIZABETH SHOGREN

The Trump administration has been making it easier for oil and gas companies to drill wells in prime habitat for greater sage grouse. At the end of the year, the Bureau of Land Management officially rewrote important guidelines for field staff in charge of leasing parcels of federal land for future oil and gas drilling. But the agency's staff had already gotten that message: Leasing in sage grouse habitat increased dramatically in Wyoming last year and likely will expand further this year.

The BLM plans to offer seven times more acres of sage grouse habitat in its first-quarter lease sale in Wyoming this year than it did in its first-quarter lease sale last year, according to BLM data analyzed by The Nature Conservancy and confirmed by the BLM. "Once the lands are leased, that limits options for protection of this habitat," says Holly Copeland, the conservation scientist who analyzed the data. Last year, in March and September, environmental groups filed protests against leasing in key sage grouse areas in Wyoming. But the BLM rejected them, instead emphasizing President Donald Trump's March executive order on energy and economic growth.

As Trump pushes for greater energy production, his administration is altering the delicate balance between energy development and grouse protections that had been established as a result of an unprecedented 2015 agreement between Western states, conservation groups, industry and the federal government. That collaborative effort had kept greater sage grouse from being listed as an endangered species and thereby requiring much more stringent protections.

But in late December, the BLM rewrote Obama-era instructions for oil and gas leasing in sage grouse habitat. The original instructions prioritized leasing in areas that do not offer good sage grouse habitat. As a result, since 2015, the BLM had refused to offer many leases requested by industry because of concerns for sage grouse. (For example, the first-quarter 2017 lease sale, prepared under the Obama administration, withheld 46 parcels of federal land from future drilling.)

By contrast, the new version of the instructions states: "In effect, the BLM does not need to lease and develop outside

of (greater sage grouse) habitat management areas before considering any leasing and development within (greater sage grouse) habitat." Wyoming has the most and best sagebrush habitat of any state and nearly 40 percent of the remaining birds, but in its December lease sale, BLM Wyoming withheld only three parcels because of sage grouse. Thirty-eight of 41 parcels sold were in sage grouse habitat.

Under the old instructions, energy companies were often frustrated, says Kathleen Sgamma, president of the Western Energy Alliance, an industry trade group. "What's important is the previous instruction memorandum put leases and permits at the bottom of the pile if they were in priority habitat," she says. "This does not."

But advocates for the bird's conservation say the Trump administration is ignoring the science that drove the 2015 sage grouse agreement. "That was the biggest landscape-scale conservation plan we've ever done," says Brian Rutledge, a biologist with the National Audubon Society who has worked on sage grouse conservation for 14 years. Although changes should be expected, he says, "the changes

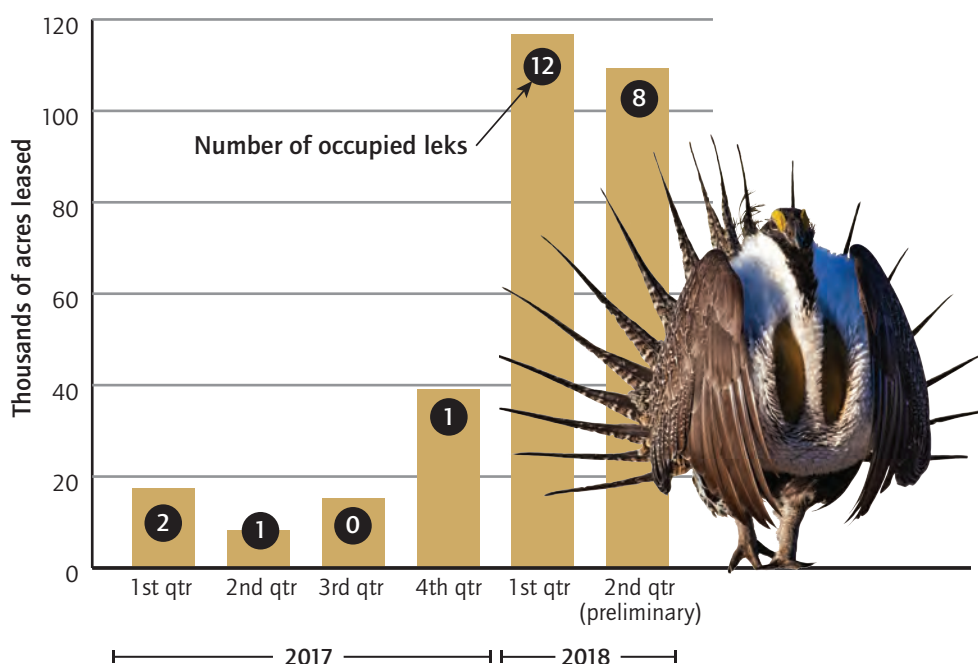
need to be done with science in mind. The Department of Interior is trying to do as little as possible for the land and animals in their care, placing at risk the future of that landscape and that ecosystem."

State officials, however, downplay the new guidance. "We didn't have any issues with it," says John Swartout, energy advisor to Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper, a Democrat. "The change in guidance means little compared to any potential change in the plans."

Oil and gas leases in key sage grouse habitat will still come with protective restrictions, notes Bob Budd, who chairs Wyoming Republican Gov. Matt Mead's sage grouse implementation team. For instance, permits prohibit companies from disturbing the ground on or near a lek, where sage grouse gather for mating displays. "We were leasing in core areas before this," he says. "It's how you do it, not where you do it." Industry officials agree, saying there is no need to limit leasing because modern drilling techniques allow companies to access oil and gas deposits from a mile or two away.

However, scientists are finding many negative impacts on the birds' survival even when companies follow conservation rules, such as building roads at least .6 miles away from leks and refraining from drilling during mating and nesting seasons. In *Energy Development and Wildlife Conservation in Western North America*, a 2011 book, several scientists assert: "It has become apparent that sage-grouse conservation and energy development are incompatible in the same landscapes." □

Bureau of Land Management oil and gas lease sales in Wyoming in sage grouse core areas



Dead fish on the shore of the Salton Sea.

BOB MORRIS/CC FLICKR

THE LATEST

Backstory

California's Salton Sea, a land-locked agricultural drainage, was formed in 1905 and sustained by irrigation waters from the nearby Imperial Valley and Mexico. It has become important habitat for migratory birds, despite increased pollution and salinity. Recent droughts are causing more problems: **As the shrinking water exposes a lakebed of toxic sediment, dust storms threaten public health** ("The People of the Sea," HCN, 3/3/08).

Followup

At the end of 2017, a 15-year-old agreement that brought regular water deliveries to the Salton expired, exacerbating its issues. **California agencies have failed to complete restoration projects, despite the state Legislature allotting \$80.5 million for the sea in 2016.** In mid-January, Riverside County Supervisor Manuel Perez proposed a \$400 million taxpayer-funded solution that involves building a berm and forming a new freshwater lake from the Whitewater River. That would both tamp down toxic dust storms and provide taxes from new recreational opportunities. The commission will vote on the plan in the next few months.

ANNA V. SMITH

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

BROOKE WARREN/HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

SOURCES: THE NATURE CONSERVANCY, WYOMING GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT, BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

How NAFTA built a bustling border city

In southern New Mexico, a dream of a binational community, not a concrete wall

BY SARAH TORY

A good portion of Santa Teresa's success can be credited to the growth in trade between the U.S. and Mexico fostered by NAFTA and the accompanying cross-border cooperation.

From the top of a dry mesa in southern New Mexico, the Chihuahuan Desert looks like an ocean, a vast stretch of sand and mesquite that fades away into hazy light. Southward, the land appears unbroken, as if the border between the U.S. and Mexico does not exist.

When Jerry Pacheco, a 52-year-old business developer from northern New Mexico, first came here almost three decades ago, the town of Santa Teresa was little more than a few buildings surrounded by empty desert. But Pacheco saw opportunity: With a new border crossing, Santa Teresa could link New Mexico with the booming manufacturing industry in nearby Ciudad Juárez, Mexico — and grow into a city spanning the border.

These days, in the wake of President Donald Trump's threats to seal the border and pull out of the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA, Pacheco's vision might seem unrealistic. But since the early '90s, trade between U.S. and Mexico has grown steadily, and cities and towns throughout the border region have grown closer as well, their economies

more dependent on each other than on the geographic line dividing them. This is the future that Pacheco sees for Santa Teresa: a binational community, instead of a concrete wall.

Pacheco was in business school at the University of New Mexico in the late 1980s when a friend told him about the ongoing NAFTA negotiations. The agreement between the U.S., Mexico and Canada would eliminate tariffs on goods shipped among the three North American nations. For the soon-to-be graduates, the horizon filled with the prospect of new business opportunities. "NAFTA is the future," Pacheco remembers a friend telling him.

When Pacheco graduated in 1991, he took a job under then-New Mexico Gov. Bruce King, D, deciding where to build a new border crossing. Santa Teresa, he believed, was the ideal location from which to launch New Mexico's pivot to Mexico: It was the easternmost land connection between the two countries, eliminating the need for expensive bridges over the Rio Grande. And it was mostly undeveloped — a blank slate for new ideas and economic solutions for a state that had long been hampered by its dependence on government spending and the oil and gas industries.

Pacheco was not the first to see potential in Santa Teresa. Three decades earlier, when northern Mexico's *maquila*-dora industry was just taking off, Charles Crowder, a savvy land trader, envisioned a thriving industrial community straddling the U.S. Mexico border with schools, shops, a country club and modern housing for Mexican workers. But when a planned border crossing stalled, Crowder's plans faltered. By the early 1990s, he was courting bankruptcy and *The New York Times* declared the Santa Teresa experiment "a flop."

At least one person still believed in it: Pacheco. After a stint establishing New Mexico's first foreign trade office in Mexico City, he returned to Santa Teresa in 1995. The new port of entry had finally opened, and NAFTA was a year old.

Pacheco started a company called Santa Teresa Real Estate Development Corporation and began to buy the land once owned by Crowder, building warehouses, recruiting new businesses to the border region and lobbying the state Legislature on their behalf. In the beginning, Santa Teresa was a hard sell. Where Pacheco pictured a thriving hub of global trade, others saw sand and a few cattle trails. For many years, Pacheco said, he

Correspondent Sarah Tory writes from Paonia, Colorado. [@tory_sarah](#)



◀ A crane unloads a shipping container from a Union Pacific train at the Santa Teresa Intermodal Ramp.

COURTESY OF JERRY PACHECO

▶ Jerry Pacheco in his office in Santa Teresa, New Mexico. He has brought 82 companies to Santa Teresa in the span of more than 25 years.

JORGE SALGADO/
EL PASO INC.

felt “like this crazy guy in the desert with a camel hair coat.”

But slowly his efforts began to pay off. In 2008, Taiwanese computer manufacturer Foxconn built a new plant adjacent to the Santa Teresa border crossing. Every day, the plant churns out 55,000 Dell computers and HP tablets, assembled from parts delivered by suppliers in Santa Teresa. Pacheco succeeded in negotiating a special overweight truck zone around Santa Teresa so that weight limits would be consistent on both sides of the border. Aligning those standards, Pacheco estimates, brought 12 companies to Santa Teresa — creating 606 jobs. Three years ago, the Union Pacific Railroad opened a sprawling train yard, further expanding the flow of goods from Asia, across the U.S., and south into Mexico, transporting everything from giant wind turbine blades to tiny copper wires and tankers full of glucose and sucrose.

In November, I met Pacheco at his office in one of Santa Teresa’s industrial parks. Colorful maps showing various development plans were taped to the walls. “I love this!” Pacheco said, pointing to a PowerPoint graph showing the growth of trade from New Mexico to Mexico. Since 1999, it has jumped 3,271 percent — the highest increase in the nation.

A good portion of Santa Teresa’s success can be credited to the growth in trade between the U.S. and Mexico fostered by NAFTA and the accompanying cross-border cooperation. The agreement allowed the U.S. and Mexico to build things together through supply chains that crisscross the border, from a factory in the U.S. to an assembly plant in Mexico, combining their comparative advantages into a single regional system.

Over the last decade, all four U.S. border states have increased their trade with

Mexico, especially New Mexico, which now exports almost \$1.5 billion worth of goods to its neighbor, a 350 percent rise. Most of that growth can be traced to the expansion of Santa Teresa, says Christopher Wilson, an expert on the economic relationship between the U.S. and Mexico at the Woodrow Wilson Institute, a D.C.-based think tank. “Lots of places have benefited, but border communities have benefitted more than most,” Wilson says. “They are NAFTA communities. For all four border states, Mexico is their number-one market.”

Still, outside the border region, many Americans are skeptical of NAFTA and blame it for stealing U.S. manufacturing jobs. It’s true that the trade agreement had a negative impact on some communities, says Wilson. But much of the blame is misplaced or overblown. Most economists agree that the majority of job losses were not due to NAFTA, but to technological changes — especially automation — in the manufacturing industry.

Even when companies chose Mexico for their new factories, American businesses still won, according to Wilson. Honda CRV cars, for instance, are assembled in Mexico, but 70 percent of the material going into each car is made in the U.S. Or take ACME mills, a Detroit-based textile maker, which opened a plant in Santa Teresa in 1989 to distribute textiles used in upholstery for cars made in Mexico. Every day, the plant welcomes five or six trucks bringing in materials from U.S. suppliers and managed by U.S. logistics firms. “Most people don’t realize how many U.S. jobs are tied to NAFTA,” Alex Sierra, the plant manager, told me.

Keenly aware of the cross-border benefits of NAFTA, Pacheco was understandably frustrated in August, when Trump tweeted that it was “the worst deal ever made” and threatened to terminate the

agreement. Just before Thanksgiving, negotiators from the U.S., Canada and Mexico finished their fifth round of talks on how to re-tool NAFTA, with another informal round of meetings beginning in December. So far, says Wilson, discussions have not gone well due to U.S. insistence on certain trade measures that are “non-starters” for the other two partners.

For Pacheco, Santa Teresa’s success is a testament to how the president’s “America First” ideology fails to consider the benefits of international collaboration and partnership: “I tend to promote the Mexican side even more because I know that in developing the other side of the border, we get a piece of it here (in the U.S.) as well.”

Elsewhere along the border, the spirit of cooperation has only strengthened in recent years, a phenomenon that Lawrence Herzog, a professor of city planning at San Diego State University, calls the “transfrontier metropolis.”

In March, the mayors of San Diego and Tijuana pledged to collaborate on economic promotion, cultural programming and law enforcement training. And last year, officials in the sister border cities of Nogales, Arizona, and Nogales, Sonora, outlined new joint initiatives to boost local tourism, including a combined Chamber of Commerce. “These cities know now that they will be better off if they think of themselves as part of a single cross-border region,” Herzog says.

Meanwhile, despite all the negative rhetoric, Pacheco has been forging ahead with his dream: a city named Los Santos. In 2013, New Mexico Gov. Susana Martinez, R, signed an agreement with the former governor of Chihuahua, Mexico, Cesar Duarte, to cooperate on water management, energy, and even education and health care for the future city. Every month, Pacheco and a group of Mexican and American partners meet to coordinate planning efforts for Los Santos.

Before I left, Pacheco showed me a video prototype for his border city of the future, designed by Mexican architect Fernando Romero. We zoomed down walkable streets lined with trees and shops converging at a central plaza located right on the border. At one point, Pacheco interrupted the video to explain how the customs clearance would be located outside the plaza, so that in the middle, people could mingle freely.

In some ways, it seemed impossibly futuristic, a utopia dreamt up by a bunch of idealists in a design studio. Yet the concept behind Los Santos is actually quite old, rooted in the long history of cities where cultures meet and the boundaries between them blend together — places beyond borders. It might take 10 years or more, but one day, says Pacheco, a binational city will happen. “It makes too much sense not to.” □



A gray flycatcher, a type of bird that is affected by industrial sound pollution. BETTINA ARRIGONI/CC WIKIMEDIA

THE LATEST

Backstory

In 2009, bird researcher Clint Francis found that natural gas well pads and compressors in Rattlesnake Canyon Wildlife Area in northern New Mexico were affecting the way birds nested.

Thirty-two species chose to nest away from the constant hum of compressors, though 21 others nested near the noise. Some, like house finches, apparently used it as a cover to keep away predators that could not withstand the sounds. “Noise alone changes avian communities,” Francis said. “That’s definitive” (“Sound Science,” *HCN*, 8/18/10).

Followup

Now, new noise-pollution research in Rattlesnake Canyon has found that, as researcher Rob Guralnick told the *Washington Post*, “acoustic degradation of the environment” has a clear physical impact on birds. The study, published in January, is the first to link noise pollution with stress hormone levels and survival rates for birds. **Stress physiologist Christopher Lowry said that a bluebird nesting near a well pad “showed the same physiological symptoms as a human suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.”**

ANNA V. SMITH



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The *Spiral Jetty*, made from basalt rocks and earth found onsite on the Great Salt Lake in Utah. ROBERT SMITHSON, COLLECTION MUSÉE NATIONAL D'ART MODERNE

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THE SPIRAL JETTY ENCYCLO

By Hikmet Sidney Loe.
384 pages, softcover: \$34.95.
The University of Utah Press and
The Tanner Trust Fund, 2017.

A coil of earth and rock 1,500 feet long juts out from the northeastern shore of Utah's Great Salt Lake, its stones visible only when the lake is low enough to expose them. *Spiral Jetty*, created in 1970 by Robert Smithson, is an iconic example of the Land Art movement, which rejected traditional art materials, venues and commodification. In *The Spiral Jetty Encyclo*, hundreds of vignettes, photographs and sketches, some by Smithson himself, provide context for the artwork and detail the people, places and natural forces that inspired it.

The collection includes an entry on Nancy Holt, Smithson's spouse and another influential Land Art sculptor, as well as photographs of the rocky landscape around Rozel Point, the remote, carefully selected site of Spiral Jetty. As author Hikmet Sidney Loe writes in the introduction, "Although the Spiral Jetty occupies a very singular place, innumerable places from Smithson's past, and ours, intersect there." EMILY BENSON

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A new venue and a bittersweet goodbye

We have some exciting news to share: In July, *High Country News* will open a provisional satellite office in Gunnison, Colorado, in collaboration with Western State Colorado University. Our headquarters will remain in Paonia, where we've been since 1983, but a handful of staffers will move to Gunnison for a yearlong experiment. This partnership will allow us to work with and learn from students and professors at Western's School of Environment and Sustainability, as our organizations grow and grapple with the West's defining issues.

The winter months usually keep visitors at home, but this unseasonably warm January brought a number of guests to our Paonia office. We offered a tour to a local women's club, which counts among its members our own **Betsy Marston**, Writers on the Range editor. The Neighborly Neighbors of Lamborn Mesa was formed during World War II and has welcomed newcomers to the mesa ever since. The group raises money for nonprofits and hosts excursions to local points of interest — in addition to *HCN*, they've also visited community radio station KVNF, area wineries and an artist's foundry. "We like to find out where we live," Betsy says.

The neighbors swung by the same week we hosted an undergraduate student guest, **Claire Brase**. Claire "shadowed" us for several days, observing the magazine production process and learning how our writers, editors and other staffers got to where we are now. Claire came to us from Reed College in Portland, Oregon, where she's majoring in environmental studies and biology. "I've always been a nature kid," she says, happy poking around in Oregon's tide pools and fascinated by science and nature. So are most of us, Claire — we enjoyed showing you a professional path that welcomes such interests.

Late in January, **Marie Bourgeois** and **Ross Nelson**, both from Helena, Montana, stopped by and remarked on the lack of snow here. An engineer for the U.S. Environmental Protection

Agency until 2015, Marie is currently steeped in the world of biomimicry — creating human systems by co-opting nature's designs. Ross, a playwright, is committed to "wild and whirling words."

Finally, some bittersweet news: At the end of January we bid a fond farewell to **Elizabeth Shogren**, our Washington, D.C., correspondent since 2015. This month, she joins *Reveal*, from the Center for Investigative Reporting, as a science reporter. In addition to her strong news sense and razor-sharp writing skills, Elizabeth brought a sense of professionalism and camaraderie to the magazine that we will sorely miss. She is also an unfailing supporter of our interns, fellows and other young journalists, offering advice and encouragement at every step of the story (and career) process. "I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to work with such a creative, warm and talented group of people," she says. "I have learned so much from each of my colleagues and grown as journalist and person because of them." We wish you the best of luck, Elizabeth, and we can't wait to see what new stories you dig up.

—Emily Benson, for the staff



Claire Brase, a student from Reed College, who came to learn about the magazine production process.

BROOKE WARREN

Caught Between Crises

How one Indigenous family is navigating two very different housing problems

FEATURE BY
JULIAN BRAVE
NOISECAT

On a July afternoon in 2017, Joe Waukazoo, a tall and athletic 62-year-old, jaywalked across 31st Avenue in Oakland's Fruitvale neighborhood. He paused before the skeleton of the Ghost Ship, a warehouse-turned-artist collective, burned hollow in a blaze that took 36 lives on a December night in 2016. He stops here often to pay homage to the victims, mostly artists. "This is like a collision of two kinds of forces," Waukazoo told me. "You got the gentrification, and you got the community."

No American place offers a clearer vantage point on that conflict than Oakland. The city is caught in a boxing match between the invisible hand of Silicon Valley capitalism and the defiant fist of Bay Area radicalism. As Ivy League-educated Millennials brandishing computer science degrees move in, rents shoot up. Investors looking to cash in on the latest California gold rush are developing properties throughout the city. Speculators want to brand West Oakland, former headquarters of the Black Panther Party, #WeOak. In East Oakland's historically Latino Fruitvale neighborhood, the trajectory is the same. Every few blocks, a bar or restaurant has popped up to tap the wallets of the new techie settlers.

In this zero-sum game, where new residents and businesses move in and old ones are displaced, Waukazoo lost his home. "I was just priced out of the market. I didn't have money for rent, and that's the bottom line," he told me, somewhat oversimplifying things. Now, he spends his days hanging out at a bus shelter, just across the street from the Ghost Ship.

His story echoes many across the city. As the workers, artists and hustlers who made Oakland its gritty self are priced out, homelessness has shot up. At the same time Joe lost his home, an estimated 5,629 people were sleeping in doorways and empty lots in Oakland's Alameda County, up 39 percent from two years earlier. Slow-food eateries and artisanal boutiques appeared in old neighborhoods, while tent camps sprouted under BART tracks and freeway overpasses.

Waukazoo is even less visible than his fellow street folk because he is Native American — Lakota and Odawa. He is an urban Indian — a demographic that has no place in the public imagination. Native people are generally relegated to history books or remote reservations, not row houses and apartment complexes. They fight cowboys and pipelines, not landlords and rents. But according to the U.S. Census Bureau, seven out of 10 Native Americans — or 3.7 million people — reside in cities. More than 66,000 urban Indians live in the Bay Area alone.

I used to be one of them. As a traditional powwow dancer, I learned many of my original moves watching Waukazoo high-step through Thursday night drum and dance practice at Oakland's Friendship House.

With nearly one in four Bay Area Indians living in poverty, Native people are the region's most impoverished racial group, according to PolicyLink. As Silicon Valley transforms the Bay Area into a boundless Google campus, the urban Native population is shrinking, down by 19 percent from 2000 to 2010.

But Native Americans cannot escape the housing crisis by fleeing cities. On the reservations and in the border towns of Indian Country, the problem is equally acute. In the twilight of the Obama administration, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimated that these communities urgently needed 68,000 new units — 33,000 to eliminate overcrowding and 35,000 to replace deteriorated stock.

The Waukazoo family — Joe and Marlene, their eldest daughter Phyllis and eldest son Joseph Jr. — has been stretched to the breaking point by two housing crises. Joe and Phyllis live in rapidly gentrifying Oakland. Marlene Waukazoo, née Sandoval, divorced Joe two decades ago. She lives with Joseph Jr. and her extended family in Torreon, New Mexico, where quality shelter, electricity and running water are hard to come by.

The housing crisis is one of the most-discussed global political, economic and social problems of our time. Yet people like the Waukazoos rarely feature in any

of its narratives. The politicians, pundits and professors focused on the urban housing crisis overlook or omit urban Indians. Meanwhile, housing problems on reservations are equally out of the frame. In an era of inequality, the Waukazoos — struggling for visibility, dignity and basic housing security — represent some of the most forgotten of our nation's forgotten people.

From the earliest days of white settlement, fortunes have been made and dynasties built on land taken from Native Americans, this continent's first victims of gentrification. Over the coming decade, 2.1 million people will settle in the Bay Area. By 2040, in a story as old as America, this space-constrained, affluent megalopolis of 9.3 million will displace our nation's forgotten, including untold numbers of Native families like the Waukazoos.





Joe Waukazoo, above, came to the Bay Area as a child as part of the federal Urban Indian Relocation Program. He is among the more than 66,000 Native Americans who live there today. At left, Waukazoo pauses by a memorial at the Ghost Ship, a former artist's collective and makeshift home for some, where 36 people died in a fire.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT

Joe
Waukazoo
feels at home
here in what
some call the
“urban rez.”
He has no
plans to go
anywhere.

JOE WAUKAZOO, like many Native people, considers Oakland home. He came to the Bay Area in 1964, when he was just a child, with his mother, Muriel, his sister, Sally, and his brother, Martin. Muriel, who died in 2005, was a legendary matriarch in Oakland’s Native community; everyone called her “Grandma Waukazoo” or just “Grandma.” Her family remains prominent here. Martin runs the Native American Health Center, kitty-corner from the Ghost Ship, and his wife, Helen, is CEO of the Association of American Indians of San Francisco.

The Waukazoos were part of the first generation of Native people relocated to the Bay Area under the federal Urban Indian Relocation Program. The program, established in 1952, encouraged Native Americans to leave reservations for cities and assimilate into the laboring classes. Many who were part of this socially engineered diaspora settled in Oakland, where, in 1955, they established the Intertribal Friendship House (IFH), one of the first urban Indian community centers in the country. IFH, which lies a couple miles northwest of the Ghost Ship, has served as the political, social and cultural heart of Oakland’s Native community ever since.

IFH played a central role in organizing and supporting the dramatic Native occupation of Alcatraz from 1969 to 1971, which brought national attention to broken treaties and the cause of Indigenous rights. The occupation of Alcatraz was the Indigenous rights movement’s equivalent of the Montgomery bus boycott, and IFH was the communal fortress where the real planning and community building of the movement went down.

Joe Waukazoo was raised in this world. His mother helped organize the 1971 occupation of Mount Rushmore and played a supporting role in the 1973 standoff at Wounded Knee. Joe tagged along to protests and became a traditional dancer on the local powwow circuit. But his real passion was another, perhaps even more hallowed Native tradition: basketball.

Long-legged and nimble, Waukazoo was a killer on the court who could out-manuever and out-shoot almost anyone. In the game’s 84-by-50-foot rectangles, he found the opportunity to escape the broader, restrictive geometry of a society that stifles so many young Native men. After graduating from Oakland’s Dewey High School, Waukazoo played at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas, in 1973.

Waukazoo’s hoop dreams ended there, but he held onto his athletic physique and handsome features. Even on the afternoon I met up with him, days after his last shower, whiskered and missing more than a few teeth, his good looks shone through the hardships etched into his aging body. More than a few women have taken interest over the years.

“You know I have an associate’s degree, but I don’t have no big career job.



So I’m kind of a — I hate to say it, but I’m kind of, well, a showy husband,” Joe told me, laughing. “Even my mom used to call me a gigolo and all of that.”

Marlene Sandoval first noticed Waukazoo dominating a pick-up basketball game in an Albuquerque gymnasium in 1979. She, in turn, caught and held his attention. The two stayed together for the better part of two decades. In 1980, they had Phyllis. After a short stint in the Bay Area with their newborn daughter, the young couple moved back to Torreon on the Navajo Nation, where they had five more children: Joseph Jr., Sally, Wakin-yon, Sage and Tate.

Eventually, Waukazoo grew restless. Without explanation, in 1997, he left Marlene and the family in Torreon. Maybe he fell out of love; maybe he was homesick for his other home, Oakland. Maybe something happened between all those protests, powwows and moves that he doesn’t want to talk about. Maybe he was chasing after the same dreams he once chased on the basketball court — freedom, opportunity, escape.

Waukazoo returned to the Bay Area and has remained here ever since. In Oakland, he met a woman named Jennifer Kehoe, with whom he lived for years. The two of them — Joe wearing basketball shorts, Jennifer sporting comically tall platform shoes — were often among

the crowd at IFH on Thursday nights.

Cancer ended Kehoe’s life in 2011, and Waukazoo fell into depression. “We were 24/7,” he says. Now a widower, he lived with his daughter Phyllis at the Seven Directions Apartment complex, but he had no income and struggled to find work. Phyllis, meanwhile, was navigating a breakup with the father of her special-needs baby son, Luciano. Home life was tumultuous. Waukazoo had been a far-from-perfect dad, and there was conflict on multiple fronts.

He couldn’t cover his share of the rent — just \$250. He didn’t want to be a burden. His daughter needed her space, and he needed his as he grieved for his longtime partner. Despite deep roots and a prominent family, he became homeless in October 2016.

Most days now, he hangs out on the west side of 30th Avenue, a few blocks from Phyllis and just one block from the Ghost Ship. There’s a bus shelter on the corner next to a Wendy’s. It’s one of two spots where Oakland’s homeless Native folks hang out.

Among this community, a fluctuating cast of a few dozen characters, Waukazoo inherited his mother’s mantle and tries to look out for his people. “We are all friends,” he told me. “We all have different needs, and we all help.” This is essential. It can get wild in East Oak-



Phyllis Waukazoo, left, feeds baby Luciano at their home in Fruitvale, California, where her dad, Joseph, also used to live. Now that he's moved out, she no longer qualifies for the Section 8 housing unit. Below, Joe Waukazoo and friends at the bus shelter where he and other Native American homeless people hang out. JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT



land, especially late at night. “You have to constantly be alert or at your wits,” he said, pointing across the street to the site of a recent robbery, and toward the intersection, where a recent beating occurred. Prostitutes work the corners in Fruitvale. Norteños, a prominent Northern California gang, claim the neighborhood as their territory. Waukazoo has tried to stay out of trouble. Fortunately, crime rates have dropped here in recent years — a possible side effect of gentrification.

The day I met up with Waukazoo, he took me to his bus-shelter hangout, where we found a few other homeless Native folks: Georgina Yazzie, Yolanda Ellenwood and Fern Martin. Martin used to sleep at the Ghost Ship once in a while.

I took their photo while they joked that they were going to be on the cover of *Esquire* and *People* magazine. They asked if I knew some of their nephews around Oakland. I knew a few — childhood friends whose names conjured up memories from years past. They asked if I was available for any of their nieces. I laughed.

We talked about where each of us “come from” — a phrase that, in the Native world, means, “My people are X nation and come from Y community or reservation.” I thought about my own nations, the Secwepemc and St’at’imc, and my own communities, the Tsq’escenemc

and Lil’wat — proud strongholds that defy Native invisibility. Waukazoo and Georgina Yazzie, who is Navajo, started in about clans.

“There’s four of them,” Yazzie explained. “Two from your mother and two from your dad.”

“Right, right,” Waukazoo said. “You have to know how to introduce yourself in a certain way.”

“Exactly, exactly,” Yazzie responded. “You don’t want to get lost in that part because you have to know your clan for when you go back home. It’s very sacred — you have to know.”

Later, I drove Waukazoo down to IFH for the dinner that is served every Thursday before drum and dance practice. “It’s changed since I came here for the third time in 1997,” he said, as we ate fry bread and buffalo stew. “We still had, at that time, an Indian basketball league and all that. ... That shows you the number of Indians around then, but there’s nothing like that now.” He continued, “A lot of people go back to the reservation. That’s always been a thing.” But Waukazoo felt at home here in what some call the “urban rez.” He had no plans to go anywhere.

FOUR BLOCKS AWAY, Phyllis Waukazoo, 37, buzzed me into the faux-adobe Seven Directions apartment complex just down the street from her father’s bus shelter

hangout. The complex is home to 36 low-income families. Built with funding from the city of Oakland and private sources by the East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation in collaboration with the Native American Health Center in 2008, it is the first combined housing, health clinic and cultural center in the nation designed to serve urban Indians. The building, which features a courtyard ceremonial space, stained concrete medicine wheel and two totem poles, is home to just three Native families. The rest of its residents are other low-income people of color.

I took the elevator up. Phyllis, her daughter, Kayden, her baby son, Luciano, and I sat in her combined living room and kitchen and caught up over tacos from a truck down the street.

“It’s nice, the lady across the way is like an auntie,” Phyllis, her long black hair tied into a neat bun, said. “I go over sometimes and talk to her. Or if I need her to watch my son for five minutes, she’ll watch him.”

Phyllis and Joe won a lottery to live here when the building first went up. If their number hadn’t been called, Phyllis would have moved back to Torreon. “We almost didn’t make it in,” she recalled. “At the very last minute they told us we didn’t qualify, so we kind of had to make a little fuss and then they fixed it up.” That was just the first time Phyllis would

have to argue her case to avoid losing her Section 8 home.

Established by the Housing Act of 1937, Section 8 is administered through vouchers that provide rental assistance to low-income tenants. Qualifying residents spend 30 percent of their income on rent and receive a federally subsidized voucher to cover the rest. The voucher is capped at the “fair market rent,” calculated annually for each metro area by HUD.

In the decades since the 1970s, cities turned away from public housing projects, making Section 8 essential for keeping poor residents off the streets. Today, more than 2.2 million low-income families rely on the program.

Phyllis has “project-specific” Section 8. Unlike the more common housing choice vouchers, which can be used on the open market, her vouchers are attached to the Seven Directions project. Her rent was set at \$685, based on her income when she moved in.

Phyllis had steady employment for a decade, but she recently lost her job. Section 8 is designed to cope with that kind of financial shift, but the sluggish bureaucracy did not adjust her rent, which should be \$420, based on her current income.

Then she gave birth to Luciano, who has Down syndrome. The extra economic

and emotional expense added to the strain on the household, and shortly thereafter, Luciano’s parents split up. By the time Joe Waukazoo moved out, things were falling apart.

“Right now, I get TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) for Kayden, I get unemployment and then I also get SSI (Supplementary Security Income) for him (Luciano),” Phyllis explained. “So, that’s about \$1,400. And then about half of that goes to rent,” she added, calculating her income. The scant remainder — supplemented by food stamps — has to cover everything else they need, from groceries to the phone bill to clothes and school supplies.

Waukazoo’s departure left his daughter in violation of a strict Section 8 rule regarding the number of occupants in her unit. Management told her that if she didn’t find a family member to move into his room, she would be forced to move out. There is a long waitlist of families eager to take her spot.

Suddenly, the bureaucracy built into Section 8 — a program designed to shelter the most vulnerable — turned into yet another attack on a household facing heart-twisting hardship. It’s easy to imagine the weight of forces stacked against you collapsing your last pock-

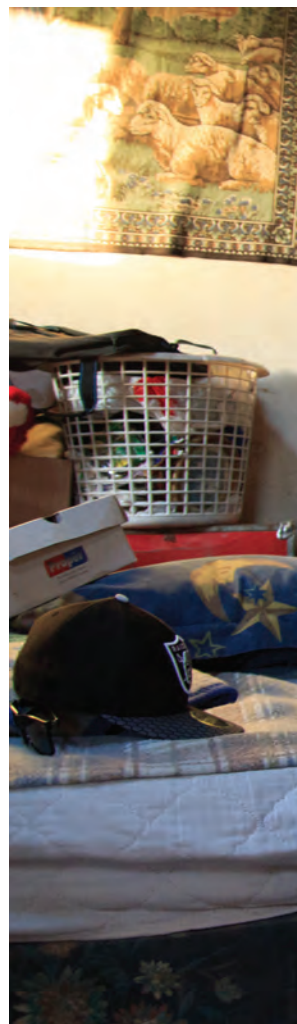
ets of hope, scantily collected, carefully counted and delicately preserved.

“Lately, my son has been helping me deal with everything — he’s just like a little clearer of stuff because he’s so happy and smiley ... and Kayden too, she is a lot better teenager than I was, which I’m so thankful for.”

Kayden is a straight-A student who played varsity basketball last season, as a freshman. She dreams about playing college ball like her grandfather and maybe becoming a doctor for special-needs children like Luciano. “But other than that, I don’t know how I deal with it,” Phyllis sighed. “I go to Zumba when I can.”

At least once a year, she tries to escape to Torreon — a home filled with relatives far away from the hard-knock life in Oakland. “If I had a choice, when I grow old, that’s where I want to be,” she said. “I know how to survive out there.”

A DUSTY WHITE LAMB gamboled through the front door of the Sandoval homestead in Torreon, New Mexico, across the dirt floor of the kitchen and into the expectant arms of its adoptive mother, Fannie Mae Sandoval. Sandoval, a hardy elder whose white hair is tied back with a headscarf, bottle-fed the castaway, abandoned by its mother. Without this lamb, the Sandovals’



dwindling herd would have diminished chances for survival. A chicken followed, also in hot pursuit of food, but Fannie shooed it away.

The Sandoval homestead consists of two hand-built homes, 18 sheep, three chickens, two dogs, an unknown number of cats, and a small crop of squash and corn. It sits at the bottom of a canyon beside a shallow arroyo in the Torreon Chapter of the Navajo Nation. Fannie, 72, who speaks only Navajo, has lived and herded sheep here all her life.

Fannie is the last of her generation. As fluent Navajo speakers pass on, she grows lonely. But she loves her animals and never wants to leave. I asked her why. Her answer, translated by her daughter, Marlene Waukazoo, is elegant and simple: “I was born here.” Watching her family and community emigrate from reservation to city and back again, Fannie took solace in her family home — a place that has been unequivocally theirs for generations.

Her grandnephew, Joseph Waukazoo Jr., 30, moved back two years ago to escape the Bay Area’s meth scene. He helps his great aunt tend the sheep, which they herd into a small pen separating their two houses. I had imagined sheepherding to be humble and spiritual work, but Jo-

seph assured me that it can be quite entertaining. That morning, he lost track of the sheep and tramped all over the high desert behind the homestead in search of his wayward flock (and familial inheritance), only to find them waiting for him back home under a shade tree. “Sheep are awesome,” he told me, chuckling.

Joseph lives next door to Fannie in a gray brick home built by his father when the family lived together in Torreon. His sister, Sage, scrawled the family name on the back of the house when she was a kid. As we walked the Sandoval plot and talked, Joseph paused in front of the faded white lettering: Waukazoo.

“Going back and forth makes you appreciate all the small things like water, you know ... having access to groceries,” Joseph told me. “In Oakland, you can walk right down to the food bank — you have food right then and there, you know — but out here you have to go to Cuba, Crownpoint, or to the store miles away. That’s one thing about being out here — if you don’t have no ride, you’re stuck.”

Marlene, who lives just down the road from the homestead in teachers’ housing, pays \$700 in rent, remarkably high for this area. She stays nearby to look out for her aging aunt and recovering son. She’s their support and their ride. “That’s how

I grew up,” she told me. “We never say I love you or anything, we never hug or anything, but there was a sense of being loved there.”

Torreon is part of the “checkerboard” area of the Navajo Nation. Land on this eastern edge of the reservation was subdivided and allotted to individual Navajos under the Dawes Act of 1887, leaving it a patchwork of allotment lands held by individual tribal members, trust lands held by the federal government on behalf of the Navajo, fee lands owned by Navajo and non-Navajo as well as commons held under various tribal, federal and state jurisdictions. This particular allotment, a perfect place for sheep, has been home to Sandovals for generations.

The homestead has no electricity. Just two years ago, Indian Health Services retrofitted homes in the area with running water. “We got all kinds of problems,” Marlene Waukazoo told me. “But not as bad as some people in some areas who don’t got no electricity and no running water.”

Indian housing is administered through HUD’s Office of Public and Indian Housing. Federally recognized tribes are largely dependent on Indian Housing Block Grant funding to house their citizens. The grants have remained nominally constant at around \$650 million per year since they were established through the 1996 Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act. In real terms, inflation cut that funding by a full third over the intervening two decades. At the same time, the Indigenous population became one of the fastest-growing in the United States. Remarkably, many tribal governments managed to build just as much housing with reduced block grants as they did with full funding. Many observers take hope from this, even as the Trump administration slashes \$150 million from Indian Housing Block Grant funding — more than 20 percent of HUD’s Native housing budget.

The Navajo Nation, however, is not one of these success stories. The tribe urgently needs to build or repair as many as 50,000 homes to shelter its 175,000 on-reservation members. According to a multi-part investigation by the *Arizona Republic*, Navajo households continue to suffer from poor quality or inadequate housing, while the Navajo Housing Authority (NHA) does little. The Housing Authority has received \$1.66 billion in federal funding since 1998, but built just 1,110 units. None at all were built between 2008 and 2011. The *Republic*’s series prompted Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., to launch his own investigation into alleged NHA mismanagement.

(The housing authority’s CEO, Aneva Yazzie, resigned pursuant to the investigations and did not respond to requests for an interview. Meanwhile, the NHA board released a statement disputing some of the investigations’ most egregious findings, while acknowledging blunders and committing to transparency

“If I had a choice, when I grow old that’s where I want to be. I know how to survive out there.”

—Phyllis Waukazoo, Oakland resident, speaking of Torreon, New Mexico, her ancestral homeland



Fannie Mae Sandoval, left, tends sheep on the family homestead near Torreon, New Mexico, where she’s lived her whole life. Grand-nephew Joseph Waukazoo Jr., above, moved here two years ago to escape the Bay Area’s meth scene. DONOVAN SHORTEY

Fannie Mae Sandoval, right, and her sister, Grace Pedro, enter the hand-built adobe home on land where their family has lived for generations, on the Navajo Reservation near Torreon, New Mexico.
DONOVAN SHORTEY



and accountability in the future.)

Despite all these problems, those residents who make it off the waitlist are grateful for the agency, which provides homes unavailable anywhere else.

I sat in on an NHA resident meeting in Torreon. People brought home-cooked food to eat potluck-style while they talked about normal community things — fixing broken utilities and making sure the neighborhood was a healthy place to raise kids. After the meeting, an NHA employee showed me the rent roll for a 20-unit subdivision. The highest rent paid was just \$125; the majority stayed for free.

Outside the Navajo Housing Authority, Navajo people have little choice but to buy mobile homes or build their own shelters. But both require land. Navajo citizens who want to live on tribal trust land must apply for a home-site lease from the Navajo Land Department. The waitlist runs for years. As allottees, the Waukazoos and Sandovals were one step ahead, since they already had a plot.

Still, building and maintaining quality homes with limited resources is a challenge. Communities need planners, contractors and skilled laborers. They need a government with the capacity to aggregate capital for infrastructure like utilities and roads. These resources — the kind of resources most Americans take for granted — are few and far between on the reservation. The Waukazoo and Sandoval dwellings, like more than half of the households on the Navajo Nation, are substandard. No matter how many

sheep they herd, how hard they work, or how remarkably (and ironically) well they embody the Western ideal of the rugged American individual, Navajo families simply cannot build themselves out of the housing crisis. Yet that is precisely what they have been left to do.

PEOPLE LIKE THE WAUKAZOOS give a human face to the housing crisis, reminding us that it is not just about housing, but about the concept of home. The Waukazoos may seem unlucky, but their story is not an uncommon one for Indigenous people in the United States and across the Anglo-colonized world — in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. To be poor and Indigenous in a city or on a reservation is to live with the constant threat of displacement. It is not so much a choice about where to live as it is a trade-off between modes of survival. To move toward justice and equity, policymakers and the people who put them in power cannot think just about econometric values. We have to consider human values, too.

“There’s a lot of families that don’t have nowhere to stay,” Phyllis Waukazoo told me in her living room. “I’ve met so many people out here that’s going through the same struggle.”

The story of Indigenous displacement and survival is America’s origin story. Centuries ago, Indigenous people fought to protect their territories from invading settlers. Today, long after the cowboys, wagon trains and railroads have vanished, the daily fight to defend

Indigenous dignity and hold on to what is ours continues. For Indigenous people, the crisis of the home is intergenerational. This is what scholars, policymakers and even activists too often misunderstand about the housing crisis: Today’s problems do not represent momentary inequities. They are structural constants, deeply rooted in the system. They cut into Indigenous families over generations, not just economic and political cycles.

How else to explain the origin of this country than as continent-sized gentrification, entailing the deliberate displacement of Indigenous homes? How else to view the socially engineered postwar diaspora of Native families to cities like Oakland? How else to tell the story of the Waukazoo family and so many others around the world today?

Stretched to the breaking point by urban and reservation housing crises, Native families face limited and tough choices. Why? Some blame economics, others government. I myself wonder if there is something radically challenging — even fundamentally unsettling — about respecting the Indigenous home in a nation premised on its theft.

After one of our interviews, Joe Waukazoo sent me a note titled “My Gentrification Process.” In it, he wrote: “What I showed you yesterday is the remaining bottom rung of the economic ladder who nevertheless are still human beings despite their own personal problems. I help them because it helps me, and so that is how the love goes around.” □



Julian Brave NoiseCat is the 2017 recipient of The HCN/PLAYA Diverse Western Voices Award. He was formerly an Urban Fellow in the NYC Department of Housing, Preservation & Development. A proud member of the Canim Lake Band Tsq’escen and a descendant of the Lil’Wat Nation of Mount Currie, he writes from Washington, D.C. Reporting for this story was supported by the HCN/PLAYA Diverse Western Voices Award.

A hope for housing

How a private company is bringing affordable houses to Indian Country

Last year, in Yreka, California, a town of 8,000 in Northern California's Shasta Valley, Sarah Abono, a member of the Karuk Tribe, moved into a four-bedroom house in a new development on tribal land. She, her husband and three children, who had been living in a modest unit nearby, are enthusiastic about their new dwelling. "This house was a blessing, really," she said.

"Everybody gets their own room. ... We have a beautiful view," she said. "It's nice that there's a lot of young families moving in. Everybody seems to be happy." Abono's husband had been laid off, so the new house is especially welcome now.

In recent years, affordable housing creation in Indian Country has been languishing due to the decreased buying power of tribes' federal housing assistance. But one company is helping alleviate some of those woes for people like Abono and her family. One for-profit consultant — Travois, based in Kansas City, Missouri — has helped build more than 5,000 homes on tribal homelands, most of them in 17 states in the West, including the one Abono moved into. Over the past two decades, the company has raised \$650 million for affordable Indian housing by leveraging the federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit, created in 1986 during the Reagan administration. (That credit remains unchanged in the new tax legislation signed into law this January by President Donald Trump.) Travois works to get investors onto reservations through the grant and, in turn, gets tax credits for investments in Indian housing.

SINCE ITS INCORPORATION in 1995, Travois has helped facilitate nearly 200 housing projects and 5,301 homes for Native Americans, Alaskan Natives and Native Hawaiians. It works as an intermediary between tribes and private funders, teaching tribes about the tax credit program and teaching the funders what they need to know about Indian Country. "We have to break down the barriers and obtain financing," said Elizabeth Bland Glynn, a Travois chief executive. Travois also educates its capital market partners on the realities of working in Indian Country. "We make sure they understand tribal sovereignty and other issues."

Housing construction in Indian Country has been dominated by the federal government for decades, with assistance first authorized by the Housing Act of 1937 and then augmented by the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act in 1996. But over the past 20 years, the buying power of Indian

Housing Block Grant funds has fallen by a third. Today, because of inflation and an increased emphasis on fixing older houses, fewer houses are being built in Indian Country. "New unit construction has dropped in recent years, with only 2,000 new units (built) between 2011 and 2014," said Tony Walters, executive director of the National American Indian Housing Council and a member of the Cherokee Nation. "(The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) is estimating less than 1,000 new units in future years as tribes maintain existing housing stock."

Travois has been able to fill in some of that gap. In Arizona alone, the company has worked on projects with nine tribal housing entities and completed 32 developments with more than a thousand homes at a cost of \$219 million. In desert locations like Arizona, the builders benefit from a year-round season. "It's a good continual market for construction workers," Bland Glynn said. With the warm climate, projects feature touches

like outdoor patios and solar panels.

Bland Glynn said her father, David Bland, who started the company, first brought the financing program to reservations while working for the Minneapolis Federal Reserve. Once he traveled to reservations in Minnesota and saw the great housing need there, Bland realized credits could work in Indian Country. "He started very small," she said. "Now we have almost 50 employees."

The firm guides Indian housing entities through the Low Income Housing Tax Credit process, which involves getting tax credits awarded by state housing finance agencies, and then selling them to equity investors through capital market firms. The tribal groups use Travois because of its track record in getting equity to build thousands of homes. Tribes get paid the developer's fee allowed by the housing tax credits, and Travois gets paid by the tribes as a consultant. "We help our clients plan the entire construction," Bland Glynn said. "We take our instructions from the tribes." MARK FOGARTY



Sarah Abono, center back, a member of the Karuk Tribe, and her family — husband, Paul, and their children Alyssa, right, Sophia, left, and Vinny, front — at their new home on Karuk tribal land in Yreka, California. The home was built with the help of a private company that uses a federal program to attract investors for projects in Indian Country. COURTESY OF TRAVOIS

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At the Stephen's Creek facility inside Yellowstone National Park, rangers overlook holding pens for bison awaiting shipment to slaughterhouses in Montana.

MICHELLE MCCARRON



We have better options than killing bison



OPINION BY
JEANINE PFEIFFER

This winter, hundreds of bison will be slaughtered in Yellowstone and Grand Canyon national parks — again — and we shouldn't let it happen.

We owe a lot to the American bison (*Bison bison*), the West's original engineers. When herds of these 1,000- to 2,000-pound animals graze, paw the ground, take dust baths or wallow in the mud, they help create fertile prairie mosaics.

In the winter, snow trails made by bison open up grazing areas for their fellow herbivores. In spring, bison wallows host migrating waterfowl and amphibians. In summer, the foraging that bison do helps prevent catastrophic fires and encourages the growth of shrubs, favored nesting sites for prairie chicken and sparrows. And in the fall, their dried-up wallows shelter prairie dogs and plovers.

For the First Peoples, bison are considered spiritual family members. Their existence on the land shapes memory and speech, song, ceremony and prayer. Bison-centric words and sayings and an encyclopedic understanding of the animal are represented in hundreds of Native languages. Before modern supermarkets, every scrap and smidgen of bison killed by tribal hunters was eaten, drunk, smoked, dried, pounded, carved, scraped, stitched, woven or worn.

There was no American creature with greater ecological and cultural significance — until we exterminated 99.999997 percent of them. Seven generations later, the killings continue.

Of the 600,000 so-called buffalo extant in North America, most are “beefalo,” an artificial mix of wild bison with domesticated cattle.

The Yellowstone National Park herd — around 4,800 animals — is the largest remnant of genetically pure bison, the final guardians of ancient DNA and environmental memories stretching back for millennia. These animals know how and where to migrate, how to communicate with each other and search for food, and how to withstand adverse conditions and care for one another.

The wholesale slaughter of bison to deprive the Plains tribes of sustenance is well documented. Less well known is the National Park Service's annual winter culling of Yellowstone bison the moment the animals step outside park boundaries and onto national forest lands — lands that are held in trust by the federal government for the sake of all U.S. citizens. The Park Service does this despite the agency's clearly stated mandate to “preserve, unimpaired, the natural and cultural resources and values of the park system ... for current and future generations.”

Stray bison not killed outright by hunters are captured by the Park Service and then sent off to slaughter. The agency's rationale is both complex and simple — complex because of contradictory state and federal policies, and simple because we allow it.

During the Great Depression, the U.S. government leased national

forest lands surrounding Yellowstone as inexpensive feeding allotments to help ranchers survive economically. Almost a century later, U.S. taxpayers continue to subsidize private ranchers on these publicly owned lands. Cattle ranchers leasing those lands argue that brucellosis — an exotic disease that can cause spontaneous abortions in cows — is spread by bison, despite the lack of any scientific proof. Elk, deer, moose and bear populations also carry brucellosis and range freely throughout cattle lands. Yet no similar killing campaigns are waged against those animals.

When ecologists justify the culling by pointing to the limited carrying capacity of Yellowstone ecosystems, they ignore basic genetics. Countless generations must occur for beneficial traits to be fixed in a genome. For bison to persist as a species, their genetic diversity needs to remain intact, or we risk inbreeding. When bison subpopulations with crucial traits are indiscriminately killed, it's the equivalent of tearing out and obliterating entire chapters of the bison's survival manual.

Goodshield Aguilar, a Lakota activist with the nonprofit Buffalo Field Campaign, has tried to halt the Yellowstone bison culls for two decades.

“I want my grandkids to be able to see buffalo, to eat buffalo, to be with buffalo,” Aguilar says. “The Lakota and the buffalo have a symbiotic relationship. At the turn of the century, when 99 percent of the buffalo died, 99 percent of the Lakota died as well. We belong together, on this path, right now.”

We have better options than slaughter. We can ban the culls in favor of transporting all excess, disease-free Yellowstone bison onto tribal lands. This will make it easier for the 63 tribes that comprise the InterTribal Buffalo Council to restore buffalo culture in their communities. We can offer incentives to ranchers to encourage them to accept bison grazing on cattle lands. We could also gradually eliminate subsidies like the ones in the current grazing system, which privilege a small number of businesses over our irreplaceable heritage.

With climate change, bison — and the enormous range of species and habitats they support — will face longer droughts, extra-cold winters and other extreme weather events. Our national mammals deserve all the help they can get. □

Jeanine Pfeiffer is an author and ethnologist affiliated with San José State University in California.

WEB EXTRA

To see all the current Writers on the Range columns, and archives, visit HCN's Web site, www.hcn.org

Writers on the Range is a syndicated service of High Country News, providing three opinion columns each week to more than 70 newspapers around the West. For more information, contact Betsy Marston, betsym@hcn.org, 970-527-4898.



Delmi Ruiz works in the kitchen area of her RV, in front of an apartment building where the monthly rent for a one-bedroom unit is more than \$3,000, in Mountain View, California. Ruiz and her husband have been living in the RV for more than two years with their four children because they can no longer afford to pay rent.

JAE C. HONG/AP PHOTO

Blaming the poor



LETTER FROM
CALIFORNIA
RUXANDRA GUIDI

“Don’t blame Wall Street, don’t blame the big banks” if you’re unemployed and poor, Herman Cain, a Republican presidential candidate and Tea Party favorite, told the *Wall Street Journal* back in 2011.

As protests against bank bailouts erupted across the country, Cain showed little empathy for the millions of people losing their jobs and homes. The Occupy Wall Street demonstrations, Cain declared, struck him as “anti-capitalism.”

His words came to mind recently when President Donald Trump signed the final version of a Republican tax bill that will not only cut taxes for large corporations and America’s wealthiest, but do so primarily by slashing trillions of dollars over the next decade from programs that serve low-income and middle-class families. The law puts at risk Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security, income assistance and nutrition assistance programs, college tuition and job-training aid, and environmental protections. If Occupy Wall Street was considered anti-capitalist, then the new tax law is a love song to social Darwinism in its purest form, shamelessly pitting the 1 percent against the 99 percent.

In California, the divide is particularly stark. The state is home to Silicon Valley with its huge tech fortunes, and it boasts some of the nation’s most expensive housing markets. And yet, once the cost of living is factored in, it also has the highest poverty rate — at 20.6 percent. In Los Angeles alone, nearly 60,000 people live in makeshift camps or inside their cars on the streets and under the overpasses.

The state’s rich-poor gap affects all of us, particularly people like Vickie Cobbin. Many supporters of the tax bill

would caricature the Los Angeles native as someone who refuses to work in order to cash in on welfare benefits and food stamps.

A few weeks ago, I heard Cobbin speak inside a church in downtown Los Angeles. A crowd of at least 100 people had gathered there as part of the Poor People’s Campaign, an economic and social justice movement originally led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and recently revived by Rev. William J. Barber II, a Protestant minister from North Carolina.

A tall and elegantly dressed black woman in her 50s, Cobbin started by saying she felt nervous speaking in public about personal matters, such as her past dependence on welfare. “Politicians make it sound like welfare recipients are lazy,” she said. “But I never sat around waiting for help. I just couldn’t come up with enough income to support us.”

Her words reflect a common reality: During the tax debate in early December, Utah Republican Sen. Orrin Hatch said the government couldn’t come up with the funds to support the popular and essential Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), a 20-year-old federal-state program that provides health care for children in low-income families. Hatch claimed people were trying to game the system. “I have a rough time wanting to spend billions and billions and trillions of dollars to help people who won’t help themselves, who won’t lift a finger, and expect the federal government to do everything,” Hatch said.

But Cobbin, like many who rely on assistance to get by, has always done all she could to help herself. She raised three daughters completely on her own; the youngest of them, she told the crowd,

just finished her graduate degree, following in her older sisters’ footsteps. Today, Cobbin no longer depends on government assistance or temporary minimum wage jobs. She works with Hunger Action LA to address hunger and poor nutrition among Los Angeles’ low-income residents. But she fears that the funding for programs like CalFresh and food stamps — \$1.9 billion during the last fiscal year, almost half of which comes from the federal government — could disappear along with Medicare and Medicaid as a result of tax reform.

On April 4, 1967, exactly a year before his assassination, Martin Luther King Jr. said, “We as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. ... True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.” Today, we are witnessing how the government is indeed restructuring — but by robbing the poor in order to pay the rich, taking policy steps that will only deepen poverty and hunger across the country. Dr. King’s cautionary words have become painfully relevant once again.

Ten years after the financial crisis, Hatch and Cain’s sentiments are widely echoed by conservative lawmakers. What’s worse, I fear — as I look around my middle-class Los Angeles neighborhood, where people who are exhausted, anxious and broke escape by binge-watching Netflix — too many of the rest of us have also accepted the politicians’ judgment. If the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, that is simply the price of living in a capitalist society. □

Contributing editor Ruxandra Guidi writes from Los Angeles, California.

Uncompromising environmentalist and PR mastermind

In June 1966, a full-page advertisement appeared in *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*, warning readers: “Now Only You Can Save Grand Canyon From Being Flooded ... For Profit.” David Brower, Sierra Club executive director, was blasting two proposed dams that would have backed up the Colorado River into Grand Canyon National Park. The attack sounds tame in our vitriolic era, but it triggered such an unprecedented wave of anti-dam letters to Congress that the Internal Revenue Service revoked the club’s tax-exempt status as a non-political organization. When dam backers argued that a reservoir would make it easier to admire the canyon, Brower’s next ad notoriously asked, “Should We Also Flood The Sistine Chapel So Tourists Can Get Nearer The Ceiling?” By summer’s end, his public relations barage had killed the huge project.

In *The Man Who Built the Sierra Club*, Robert Wyss details how Brower transformed the club from a modest Pacific Coast hiking network into America’s most prominent environmental organization, in the process elevating the conservation movement into a national political force. Wyss portrays a true believer who fought relentlessly to protect the natural world. He succeeded, Wyss says, “because he made people care.” And he did so by becoming a deft public-relations pioneer.

Born in 1912 in Berkeley, California, Brower discovered the Sierra Club through mountain climbing. (He made 130 first ascents.) He honed his rhetorical skills leading the club’s popular 1930s backcountry outings, playing his accordion and telling campfire stories.

After serving in the U.S. Army’s 10th Mountain Division during World War II, Brower became the Sierra Club’s first-ever executive director. His tenure, from 1952 through 1969, marked the country’s most successful environmental protection achievements, and Brower’s outreach was essential, starting with his campaign against a proposed dam in Dinosaur National Monument in the 1950s. Brower inspired supporters through short films and an oversized book of panoramic photographs. At a time when color TV and interstate highways were novelties, Brower presented vivid and breathtaking scenes of remote natural landscapes few had visited, countering claims the region was a wasteland.

The films, screened from garden clubs to the Capitol, were “the most important thing we did in offsetting the Bureau of Reclamation’s propaganda,” Brower said. The book, edited by Wallace Stegner, launched Sierra Club’s signature coffee-

table book series. “(Brower) had created a new genre, an expensive, sprawling book that openly touted an environmental message,” Wyss writes. His films, books and ads not only boosted membership; they helped protect Redwoods and North Cascades national parks and pass the 1964 Wilderness Act.

Those campaigns, Wyss writes, showed how environmental and advocacy groups could use media and public relations “in a way never seen before to win over sympathizers and outrage opponents.” Brower, however, always regretted the compromise that spared Dinosaur, since it led to the damming of the Colorado River and the creation of Lake Powell. Eventually, he opposed nearly all development.

His no-compromise message and natural charisma made Brower a hero on 1960s and 1970s college campuses. He gave what he called “The Sermon” hundreds of times, asking listeners to imagine the Earth’s 4-billion-year geologic history as an abbreviated six-day creation tale. If humans arrived on Earth just minutes before the end of the sixth day, he said, then the Industrial Revolution started one-fortieth of a second before midnight, vividly symbolizing our brief but massive impact on the planet. “Brower was the evangelist, the apostle, the messiah,” Wyss writes, “drawing the young, who would become pilgrims to the cause.”

Brower’s fiery stubbornness would also be his undoing. As director, Brower publicly contradicted the Sierra Club’s

support for California’s Diablo Canyon nuclear plant, and later published new books without board approval. In 1969, Sierra Club leaders forced his resignation. Brower started other environmental groups and later reconciled with the Sierra Club, but he never again wielded the same power. He died in 2000, age 88. Wyss laments Brower’s downfall, and argues the conservation movement still suffers from “a leadership vacuum.”

Today, cable news and social media allow people to instantaneously spread information and communicate with officials. Environmentalists still buy newspaper ads, give campus presentations and publish photography books. They also Snapchat, fire off email blasts and give TED talks. This past spring, Patagonia Inc. launched a virtual-reality-enabled multimedia website to defend Bears Ears National Monument in Utah, which the Trump administration has since slated for a massive reduction. The website allows a visitor to listen to a Hopi archaeologist talk about Bears Ears’ cultural significance while scrolling around 360-degree views of slot canyons and rock art, as if on a hike. It’s a novel and evocative online experience, even without VR glasses, and the site is still gaining nationwide attention and support for the monument. As you click through the scenes, you see the digital legacy of David Brower’s PR successes — a sermon still being preached.

BY JOSHUA ZAFFOS



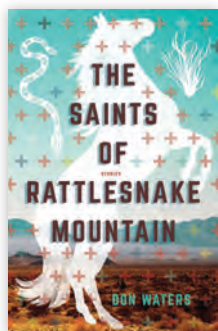
The Man Who Built the Sierra Club: A Life of David Brower

By Robert Wyss
410 pages, hardcover: \$35.
Columbia University Press, 2016.



David Brower, center, leads a successful protest against the proposed construction of dams on the Colorado River in Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona, in 1966.
ARTHUR SCHATZ/THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES

Lost in a sinners' paradise



The Saints of Rattlesnake Mountain: Stories
by Don Waters
206 pages, hardcover:
\$25.95.
University of Nevada
Press, 2017.

Perhaps the most influential image of the Southwest in recent years was created by popular culture in *Breaking Bad*, the immensely popular HBO series that ran from 2008 to 2013, and its current spin-off, *Better Call Saul*. Both shows portray an Albuquerque of dusty deserts and barren asphalt, filled with grifters, addicts, drug pushers, deadbeat dads, desperate losers and kingpins, who exist alongside mostly decent and yet corruptible citizens. These shows evoke a measure of sympathy for the rule-breakers they portray.

Don Waters sets his fine recent story collection, *The Saints of Rattlesnake Mountain*, in a Southwest somewhere in the neighborhood of *Breaking Bad*'s Albuquerque. Waters' territory features less violence and more spiritual reflection, but its contours are familiar. Waters, the author of two previous books, grew up in Reno, Nevada, and lives in Portland, Oregon. His characters, like those in *Breaking Bad*, have never met a bad idea they didn't love.

In the title story, a convict is transferred to a prison ranch amid sagebrush-choked and arroyo-furrowed country in Nevada, where his work with mustangs

is intended to rehabilitate him. Instead, it spurs him to realize how unprepared he is for life outside of prison.

In other stories, Waters' characters stay on the right side of the law, just barely. In "Española," Waters follows Lucero, a conflicted veteran with the self-discipline of an ascetic who returns home to Española, New Mexico, after serving in Iraq. He discovers a town beset by addiction, where his junkie father has sold his sister to pay off a drug debt, prompting Lucero to engage in a combat-style mission in his own hometown.

In a story with an utterly different protagonist, "La Luz de Jesús," James, a ridiculous low-level actor and wannabe screenwriter from Los Angeles, shows up to New Mexico in costume, wearing illegal cowboy boots "made from sealskin and purchased from a Russian in La Brea with an orange rub-on tan." He's hoping the setting will inspire him to finally finish a screenplay, but instead he's unexpectedly enthralled by a group of local *penitentes*, who meet for religious rites including self-flagellation. Against all odds, the frivolous James, a lapsed Catholic, ends up re-enacting Jesus' long walk to Calvary, dragging a heavy cross

down a dirt lane.

This story and others suggest that the West — through its landscape, culture, wildlife and rituals — exerts a powerful influence on the people who inhabit it, occasionally driving them to madness. In "Deborah," an obsessive Arizona woman shelters rescued animals on her ranch. She so desires to achieve "communion" with a wild animal that she visits a mountain lion at a nearby derelict zoo and offers it her fingers for lunch. Her actions make no sense, but to her they are a kind of holy ritual. "All the Sundays ahead she tried giving herself to the animal, feeding herself to him," Waters writes, "which was the closest she'd ever gotten to saintliness, she providing gifts, her pain blossoming into pleasure, feeling his teeth against bone, his saliva writing scripture on her skin."

"Todos Santos" features another character so enraptured by nature that he becomes unmoored from his obligations to other people. In this case, the protagonist is a middle-aged surf bum named Tom who runs a surfing lesson operation in Baja. Tom cares about nothing except surfing. "He fell in love with a thing, he followed the thing, and before long the thing had its hooks in him and it was the only thing he knew." He neglects to tell his girlfriend that he has a teenage son he abandoned before birth. When the son and his stepdad visit Tom's town, forcing him to reckon with his mistakes and choices, Waters makes clear the deep and lasting scars this kind of person can leave in the lives of others.

One of the strongest stories in the book is "Day of the Dead," about a young man dying of cancer, who decides to kill himself before the disease ravages him. But he doesn't want to do it alone, so he finds a group of other sufferers online who plan to cross the border into Juarez, a violent city that few tourists without a death wish venture to. They plan to commit suicide on El Día de Los Muertos. The subject may sound macabre, but Waters' take on it is darkly comic, lovely and moving.

In many of these stories, Waters writes from the perspective of a character that few readers would have natural sympathy for — the deadbeat dad, the masochistic animal lady, a convict, an anti-abortion zealot. By drawing the reader into their worlds and their beliefs, Waters evokes a grudging respect for their choices and their right to live the way they want to live out in the open West, amid landscapes that make a human being feel "like a loosened molecule without boundary."



A Parade of Souls is part of Day of the Dead celebrations in Merida, Mexico. LORENZO HERNANDEZ/REUTERS

BY JENNY SHANK

Laughter, America, Death Valley

An ode to love in a time of sorrow

I've laughed every day for two years, and that's because I've been dating Kevin for two years, and he's a joyful and funny man, both in words and expression. I was thinking about this as we drove to Death Valley to celebrate our second anniversary: How utterly odd that at middle age, and during a time of world and national sorrows and resultant personal trials (insomnia, stomachaches), that I now found myself laughing. Sometimes the sound of my own laughter makes me laugh. It's just so odd.

Besides being funny, Kevin has another major characteristic: He is a "music obsessive," as he puts it, and every road trip features its own playlist, this trip's being titled "America: An Alternative History Lesson." So as we drove through a non-typical part of America, we listened to songs about our country's dark side: Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit," Steve Earle's "Christmas in Washington," James McMurtry's "We Can't Make it Here No More." We hiked Death Valley, shuffling dust where it seemed there should be water, and we spoke of war, poverty, racism, resource extraction, and the roles that religion and patriotism play in all of them. How it all seems more relevant now than when the songs were written. What despair feels like in the body.

The poet John Keats called our ability to hold opposing thoughts at the same time "negative capability." F. Scott Fitzgerald said it better: "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function." It seemed like a nod to first-rate intelligence, then, to be walking around Death Valley, talking about America's underbelly, and so full of laughter.

While Kevin is adept at laughing and talking, I am not. I'm a quiet writer, stymied by the disconnect between my brain and my tongue. Often, what I do get out of my mouth is ridiculous. Kevin is delighted by my propensity for malapropisms, my ability to get words or phrases slightly off-kilter. "Ice Tray," I once called Ice Cube. As we left Las Vegas for Death Valley, I'd said, "What stays in Vegas happens in Vegas," to which he could only laugh and say, "True, that."

I think of laughter all the time now. I feel amused by its very sound — such an odd, garbly noise that stutters or flows so unexpectedly! I think of the neurology — the limbic system and how there reside feelings of friendship and love. I think of the body, how the epiglottis



half-closes the larynx and heated air causes gasping noises; how stomach and back muscles get a good workout. I'm curious about something so new and prevalent in my life, this unconsciously, neurologically programmed social impulse. As we take a morning hike into cliffs of sheer gold, I turn to Kevin, take his hand, and smile.

Death Valley's delight is that it's so extreme. It's the lowest spot in North America. The driest. The hottest recorded temperature in the world. Volcanic and sedimentary hills of pinks and yellows, meadows of salt. Up close, it's just as odd: salt crystals in intricate bursts; a roadrunner; and one little creature we were determined to see, the pupfish. A tiny endangered fish with ancient roots, it's found nowhere else on the planet. We couldn't find it at the national park, either, so we left to find the one aquamarine pool where the species survives. Unprotected, this area was slated for casinos and development. The park ranger told us the issue was contentious, culminating in dueling bumper stickers that read, "Protect the pupfish," and "Kill the

pupfish." "America distilled, right there," Kevin said. Then added, "Vegas should stay in Vegas." And then, to the imaginary developers, Humphrey-Bogart style: "Your plans for these pupfish, pal, they're hooley."

We spotted the little blue flashes in the deep pool, and I found myself humming another playlist song, Rufus Wainwright's "Going to a Town":

"I'm going to a town that has already been burnt down

I'm going to a place that has already been disgraced

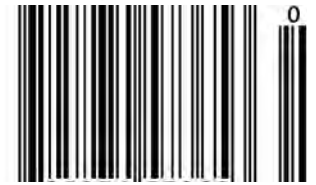
I'm gonna see some folks who have already been let down

I'm so tired of America."

The fish kept darting around.

Driving home through warped mountains and ancient seabeds, we listened to the Eagles' "Last Resort." I thought about the West that's been lost, the great divide that's only grown wider, the mountains lain low. But then Don Henley hit a line I might not have noticed before I met Kevin, about "a place where people were smiling." Kevin was intensely humming, his face lit with passion, and as the rugged and complex geography whizzed by, I knew I was there. □

Laura Pritchett is the author of five novels and the recipient of the PEN USA Award, the WILLA Award, and the High Plains Book Award. More at www.laurapritchett.com



HEARD AROUND THE WEST | BY BETSY MARSTON

NEW MEXICO

New Mexico's Public Education Department

quietly adopted a new science curriculum last fall, but there was just one problem: Key sections that described evolution, analyzed climate change and used evidence to determine the age of the Earth were missing. Alarmed by the tinkering, the Sierra Club's New Mexico chapter organized a coalition and sent more than 700 comments to the department, urging it to adopt the *entire* Next Generation Science Standards that were agreed upon by the National Academy of Sciences, the National Science Teachers Association and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Pressure against the neutered curriculum increased when the state's only public hearing lasted some seven hours and attracted hundreds of protesters, though only a few got a chance to speak. Finally, Education Secretary Christopher Ruszkowski restored the complete science curriculum. The Sierra Club's *Rio Grande Sierran*, which goes to 7,000 members in New Mexico and west Texas, concluded: "All it took was regular people willing to take time out of their day to defend education and our children's future." But then another challenge emerged: For its end-of-the-year history exams, the state removed topics such as civil rights and the story of Rosa Parks' bus boycott. As everyone knows, said the *Sierran*, "What doesn't get tested doesn't get taught. ... Time to snap back into action!"

UTAH

It doesn't seem fair to fire a fifth- and sixth-grade art teacher for showing students pictures of classical paintings that he found in the school's own library. But that's what happened to Mateo Rueda at Lincoln Elementary in Hyrum, Utah. The two controversial reproductions of nudes that he shared with his class were part of a set of educational postcards: *Odalisque*, by the 18th century painter Francois Boucher, and *Iris Tree*, by the 20th century Italian Amedeo Modigliani. Though Rueda explained that painting nudes was part of the world's artistic tradition, some



CALIFORNIA The South will rye again. TAY WILES

students said that the anatomically correct naked ladies made them uncomfortable, reports *Fox News*. Rueda suggested that the students talk to their parents about the paintings, and in some households these conversations did not go well. After the Cache County Sheriff's Office was asked to investigate, it concluded that "the images were not considered pornography," and no charges would be filed. Rueda, however, was out of a job and more than a little bewildered by what happened. "Who knows," he wondered, "if I can be hired back?"

CALIFORNIA

There's nothing like a glass of cool water, and for most of us that means water from the tap or bottled and treated water from almost anywhere in the world. In San Francisco, however, drinking "raw water" — and paying top dollar for it — is the latest craze, reports *The New York Times*. When food-safety expert Bill Marler first read about Silicon Valley residents buying spring water that hadn't been treated, filtered or sterilized, he thought it was a spoof by *The Onion*, he told *Business Insider*. Yet demand for bottles of Fountain of Truth Spring Water and other new pricey brands is real and "skyrocketing." Marler, who's also a lawyer, says we've forgotten about E. coli, cholera and the other diseases that killed our great-grandparents: "Almost everything that

can make you sick can be found in water." The raw-water trend is similar to people's obsession with raw milk or opposition to vaccines, he adds, but "You can't stop consenting adults from being stupid." As if to emphasize that statement, the cost of two-and-a-half gallons of untreated water increased from \$36.99 to \$60.99 after the *Times* story was published.

WYOMING

Congratulations to Robert Kelman, who at 87 became the oldest person to climb Devils Tower, the Wyoming monolith that was famously featured in the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Kelman, who said he was careful and paced himself, noted that he was "in good shape for my age." The previous record-holder was 83, reports the National Parks Conservation Association.

And three cheers for the 25 volunteers who saved 15 cow elk and their calves from drowning at the Palisades Reservoir on the Wyoming-Idaho border. The animals had fallen through two-foot-thick ice and were some 25 yards from shore when Devan Thornock, on his way to lay a tile floor, spotted them and stopped to help. Soon, passersby joined his effort, which involved roping the wet elk and hauling them out of the water, one at a time, reports the *Jackson Hole News&Guide*. "These cows weigh 600, 700 pounds, and it took three or four people to pull them over the ice," said Wyoming Game and Fish biologist Gary Fralick. The struggling elk were not exactly cooperative; more than one man took a hoof to the body and every helper was soaked in ice water. "But we got them all out," Fralick said, "and were able to release them."

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

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



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“Most Americans want to preserve wild horses on the Western range. Their independence and unbridled freedom symbolize the qualities that make our country great.”

Ellie Phipps Price, in her essay, "Wild horses aren't 'overrunning' the West," from *Writers on the Range*, hcn.org/wotr