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High Country News

For people who care about the West

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Pay for Prey

Inside Oregon's troubled wolf payouts

By Gloria Dickie





Rancher Dennis Sheehy at his Diamond Prairie Ranch in Enterprise, Oregon. Sheehy helped draft the plan the state later adopted for predation compensation in Oregon. TONY SCHICK/OPB AND EARTHFIX

On the cover
Wallowa County rancher Todd Nash moving his cattle in northeastern Oregon, where more than 100 wolves live, according to the latest figures from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.
INTERSECTION PHOTOS/
ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



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FEATURES

- 16 **Pay for Prey**
Inside Oregon's troubled wolf payouts
By Gloria Dickie
- 12 **The Search for Olivia Lone Bear**
Native families grapple with scant support to locate missing loved ones
By Jacqueline Keeler

CURRENTS

- 5 **Owl sighting reopens review** Federal wildlife managers will reassess a southern Arizona mine's impact on Mexican spotted owls
- 6 **In a California race, a confluence of tricky issues** The rural-urban divide is blurring, and a U.S. House race is tightening
- 7 **The latest: California Maidu get their land back**
- 8 **The aftereffects of the Oregon standoff**
In Harney County, collaboration around public land grows
- 9 **The latest: Mountain goats in Olympic National Park**

DEPARTMENTS

- 3 FROM OUR WEBSITE: HCN.ORG
- 4 LETTERS
- 10 THE HCN COMMUNITY Research Fund, Dear Friends
- 20 MARKETPLACE
- 25 ESSAY
A baby born to fires: The menace of a snow-free winter turns into the fear of flames By Krista Langlois
- 26 PERSPECTIVE
Solar's low-income hopes: California brings renewable energy to more residents By Ruxandra Guidi
- 28 HEARD AROUND THE WEST By Betsy Marston

Editor's note

The political power of the cowboy

Earlier this month, President Donald Trump issued pardons for two Oregon ranchers who were serving time for arson on public lands. The plight of the ranchers, Dwight Hammond Jr. and his son, Steven, underpinned the demonstrations in Burns, Oregon, that ultimately sparked the 2016 occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. That occupation was, of course, related to the 2014 standoff in Bunkerville, Nevada, between supporters of rancher (and melon farmer) Cliven Bundy and federal agents. Readers will recall from HCN's coverage that few substantial convictions resulted from the Nevada standoff or the Oregon occupation. These facts demonstrate the political power of one of the West's most romanticized icons: the cowboy.



That power influences conservation policies across the region, especially where ranchers' livelihoods are concerned. No issue had proven itself more stubborn than the reintroduction of wolves into lands where they have long been hated, hunted and extirpated. The reintroduction of gray wolves into the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem was hard-won by conservationists and deeply opposed by ranchers — until the idea of predation compensation was finally accepted. The idea was to pay ranchers for livestock lost to wolves. But as writer Gloria Dickie reports in this issue's cover story, a compensation program in Oregon may be breaking down, potentially undermining the idea. Only the most dedicated idealist would think that wolves will come out better off than ranchers in whatever follows.

Our society has deep sympathy for and allegiance to the cowboy. (Picture Ronald Reagan in a cowboy hat, presenting himself as an indelible expression of American can-do-ism.) But we haven't learned to extend such sympathies to other groups. Also in this issue you'll find reporting from writer Jacqueline Keeler, who describes the lack of sympathy in our system for Native women who go missing or are murdered. Given a broken, antagonistic system, neither federal nor tribal authorities seem equipped to deal with a major issue in Indian Country. Keeler describes the ordeal of trying to find a woman named Olivia Lone Bear, who went missing in the fall of 2017 from the Fort Berthold Reservation, in North Dakota. Lone Bear became one of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Indigenous women who have disappeared and remain unaccounted for.

The lack of effort to find such women underscores a dark reality in American politics: the power of the winners over "losers." Suffice it to say that Trump has never touched down in Indian Country. The White House statement announcing the pardon of the Oregon ranchers tells us what we need to know about our current values: "The Hammonds are devoted family men, respected contributors to their local community, and have widespread support from their neighbors, local law enforcement, and farmers and ranchers across the West." Without those things, in other words, good luck out there.

—Brian Calvert, editor-in-chief

How Scott Pruitt repressed science

Scott Pruitt, the former administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, resigned in early July amid numerous scandals and lawsuits. Pruitt leaves a legacy of suppressing the role of science at the agency. In March, he proposed that policies must be based on public data, but scientists say that could exclude important findings. Pruitt removed 21 members of the agency's advisory board, mostly academics, and largely replaced them with experts with ties to industries regulated by the agency. Pruitt repeatedly cast doubt on the

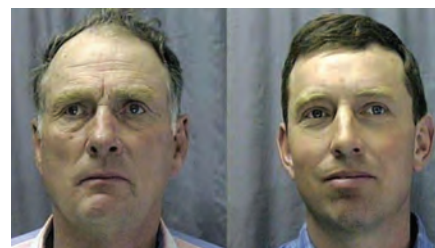
scientific consensus that human activities are the primary cause of climate change and even renamed an EPA program – the Climate and Energy Resources for State, Local, and Tribal Governments – “Energy Resources for State, Local, and Tribal Governments.” Pruitt’s hostility toward science has also fueled a brain drain at the EPA: Out of 700 employees who left the agency in 2017, more than 200 were scientists.

ELIZABETH SHOGREN/REVEAL

Read more online: hcn.ws/pruitt-ousted



A giant puppet depicting Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt is carried by demonstrators during a People's Climate March in April 2017 in Washington, D.C., to protest President Donald Trump's stance on the environment. MIKE THEILER/REUTERS



Dwight and Steven Hammond, originally arrested in August 1994.

A pardon for the Hammonds, symbols of anti-federalism

In July, President Donald Trump pardoned Oregon father-and-son ranchers, Dwight and Steven Hammond, whose case set off the Malheur Wildlife Refuge occupation. The Hammonds pled guilty to setting fires that spread to public land. Local Rep. Greg Walden, R, has been championing the Hammonds' cause and pitched a pardon to the president. Public-lands advocates and the National Wildlife Refuge Association said the pardons set a dangerous standard of impunity for those who threaten federal employees. The pardon was the latest in a series of high-profile wins for the anti-federal government Sagebrush Rebellion. “Pardoning the Hammonds sends a dangerous message to America’s park rangers, wildland firefighters, law enforcement officers and public lands managers,” wrote Jennifer Rokala, the executive director of the Center for Western Priorities, a public-lands advocacy group. “President Trump ... has once again sided with lawless extremists who believe that public land does not belong to all Americans.”

CARL SEGERSTROM Read more online: hcn.ws/hammonds-pardoned

Trending

Trump's bailout for coal

In June, a leaked memo from the Trump administration claimed that the United States faces a “grid emergency” because so many coal and nuclear power plants have shut down. The memo attempts to justify keeping plants open, despite clear information that contradicts the claims. In a recent opinion column, Tom Ribe argues that the memo ignores the abundance of alternative energy sources in the mix. “One might think that free-market conservatives would be delighted to see competitive markets providing abundant, low-cost electricity from diverse sources to American consumers,” Ribe wrote, “but apparently this case is different.”

You say

TOM KUEKES: “The reason we haven’t suffered widespread blackouts for many years now in California is because of tremendous investment in solar plants and rooftop solar.”

PAUL MARSHALL: “Countries worldwide are making effective moves toward renewable energy: Sweden, for example, sits atop, hovering around 50 percent of generated energy coming from renewables. America’s place on the Climate Council’s list may not survive our populist temper tantrum.”

JERRY NOLAN: “Without subsidies, wind and solar would quickly die. That wouldn’t be all bad, since they industrialize natural landscapes.”

Read more online: hcn.ws/political-driver and facebook.com/highcountrynews

“Perhaps the biggest problem for (Justice Anthony) Kennedy’s consent theory is that it’s nonsensical and not grounded in either the Constitution or reality.”

—Matthew Fletcher, in his Perspective, “Justice Anthony Kennedy wasn’t good for Indian Country.”

Read more online: hcn.ws/justice-indiancountry

80 percent of ochre starfish on the West Coast that fell victim to what scientists called “one of the largest marine mass mortality events on record.”

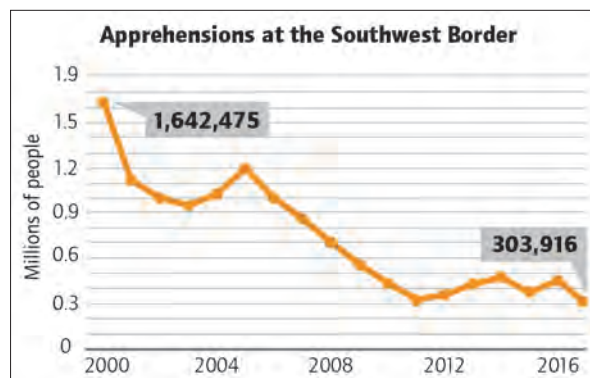
74-fold increase by which juvenile ochres survived, following the peak of the epidemic, in what scientists believe could be evolution in action.

Five years after a mysterious virus wiped out millions of starfish off the West Coast, scientists have announced a remarkable reversal. Ochre stars appear to have evolved genetic resistance to a virus decimating the species. A study concluded that the recovery is a result of rapid evolution: After the peak of the epidemic, there was a 74-fold increase in the number of juveniles surviving among ochre stars, one of the species hardest-hit by the sea star wasting disease. But “if we have too many extreme events in a row,” lead author, Lauren Schiebelhut, said, “that becomes more challenging for species to respond to.” **TAY WILES**

Read more online: hcn.ws/evolve-or-die

Trump's border crisis debunked

Despite President Donald Trump's demand for a border wall, net undocumented migration to the U.S. has been zero or negative for a decade. Administration officials have made much of recent border apprehensions, even though they have trended steadily downward. Undocumented migration from Mexico has waned, and irregular movements from Central America are small by historical standards. In terms of numbers, there is no “crisis” at the border. Misconceptions surround the reality of violence as well. The creation of the infamous MS-13 gang – first formed in Los Angeles among young Salvadorans who were



LUNA ANNA ARCHY/HIGH COUNTRY NEWS
SOURCE: U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

adrift and jobless without legal status – was a direct result of U.S. intervention. **ANALYSIS BY DOUGLAS MASSEY/THE CONVERSATION** Read more online: hcn.ws/border-misinformation

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A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

I always appreciate Jonathan Thompson's excellent journalism, but I didn't quite get the point of his recent essay on air travel. I just returned from a multi-week cross-country trip myself, which is why I only now got around to reading it. Certainly air travel is uncomfortable and at times dehumanizing, but far from placeless or homogenous. The view of the Cascades is far different from the quiltwork of the farm belt. Instead of isolating us, air travel offers an opportunity for humanization and connection. On this trip I met people from Haiti, Gambia and Kansas City, to name but a few. I would think it to be a journalist's jackpot for stories.

The dark side of air travel isn't the discomfort or the anonymity, but the waste. Not just the massive amounts of fossil fuel used for both the planes and the trip to get to the airport (passengers and employees). It is also the waste of human consumption: I saw bins full of packaging and uneaten food, half-finished drinks, plastic cups used for minutes and then thrown away.

Air travel is indeed one of the double-edged swords of our modern world. It expands our opportunities and our horizons (literally and figuratively), but few opportunities come without cost.

Chris Wayne
Chiloquin, Oregon

MISLEADING COMPARISONS

I find the update on the Kilauea Volcano (*HCN*, 6/11/18) puzzling in the extreme. First of all, it describes the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens as the backstory to Kilauea's current eruption, claiming that "Lessons from Mount St. Helens are proving useful in understanding Hawaii's Kilauea Volcano." The two volcanoes are entirely different with regard to the type of magma they erupt and the character of their eruptions. Even if a pertinent volcano backstory were possible, it would be derived from Kilauea, which has erupted under the eyes of trained volcanologists many, many times since Thomas Jaggar established the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory in 1912. During the same time, Mount St. Helens has erupted once, in 1980.

Then there is the ecological angle, which seems to be the real reason for this piece. The climate and characteristic flora of the Mount St. Helens region are totally different from those



along the eastern rift zone of Kilauea. If *HCN* simply wants to advertise Charlie Crisafulli's recent book about ecological responses at Mount St. Helens since the 1980 eruption, why not just run an ad? The currently active east rift zone of Kilauea has bounced back ecologically many times during the past century, and will do so again when the current eruption stops. There will be lots of rain-fall, a tropical climate and even some new soil.

Wendell Duffield
Greenbank, Washington

HIDDEN COSTS

While the serious potential economic (and other) costs of genetically engineered/genetically modified plants escaping into natural and agricultural landscapes ("Little Weed, Big Problem," *HCN*, 6/25/18) are only beginning to be realized, they as yet pale in comparison to the massive and well-documented costs of the myriad non-genetically engineered/genetically modified plants that have escaped to invade managed and wildland ecosystems, with estimates running into the hundreds of billions of dollars. The West has been particularly hard hit, a topic *HCN* has covered repeatedly. Yet efforts to prevent new arrivals are still few and far between. I am reminded of the couple who fly separate commercial airplanes to avoid orphaning their children in a plane crash, yet drive together in their car, a vastly more risky behavior.

Truman P. Young, professor
and restoration ecologist
Davis, California

NOTHING NEW

Since the acquittal of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge occupiers in October 2016, *HCN* Associate Editor Tay Wiles has suggested that extremists on the radical right — bent on privatizing federal lands in the American West — have made great headway in rallying rural Westerners to their cause. "A Separatist State of Mind" (*HCN*, 1/22/18) argues that right-wing troubadours in "Northstate's" 23 counties were actively moving to form a separate state, while making only passing reference to the region's sizable Indian and Latino populations and many others who view such a move as absurd.

In the same issue, Wiles reported the U. S. District Court's decision in Clark County, Nevada, to dismiss all charges against Cliven Bundy and his armed militia followers for preventing federal agents from rounding up Bundy's cattle. (Bundy had refused to pay grazing fees for 20 years.) The judge cited willful prosecutorial misconduct. Wiles' assessments in the Northstate and Bundy commentaries imply that radical cadres in the rural West are knocking at federal and county gates to introduce the sweeping privatization of public lands.

A more measured and rational judgment, however, suggests that the extremists' histrionics have limited appeal in these regions. The "Wild West" confrontation at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge was very unpopular among the county's conservative people. After the arrest of the occupants, a small group of local sympathizers filed a recall petition against principal County Commissioner Steve Grasty for refusing to let the occupiers hold a public meeting at the county fairgrounds. That June, 73.3 percent of Harney citizens voted to retain Grasty in office.

While the Bundy clan and their compatriots are not to be trifled with, neither do they deserve the media's suggestion that they pose a dire threat to public land in the West. These anti-federal eruptions have occurred in the region since federal lands were withdrawn from settlement in the 1890s.

Bill Robbins
Corvallis, Oregon

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Owl sighting reopens review

Federal wildlife managers will reassess a southern Arizona mine's impact on Mexican spotted owls

BY ELIZABETH MILLER

Two field researchers surveying waterways near a mine in southern Arizona's Patagonia Mountains paused while following a dry wash. Then one glanced into a tree and said, "Uh-oh," and the second echoed the sentiment. They were looking at a Mexican spotted owl, a federally threatened species, near where Arizona Mining Inc. has had lights and between one and 15 drilling rigs running 24 hours a day, chasing a vein of silver, lead and zinc.

"That's not what we were supposed to find," says Karina Hilliard, one of the contractors, "because that's more red tape."

As they hiked away, the owl flew close enough overhead that she could feel the breeze from its wings.

The owl isn't a surprise to the mining company, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or to local birders, who know Mexican spotted owls have roosted in those canyons for decades. But the sighting — and the subsequent phone calls about it that *HCN* made for this story — prompted the federal agency to reassess. Two years ago, the agency decided the mine posed no concern for threatened and endangered species, a list that isn't limited to the owls.

"That was then. We're aware that they've come a lot further than that now," says Jason Douglas, a biologist with the service.

Sky islands like the Patagonia Mountains house a biodiversity almost unparalleled in the Lower 48. A single day of hiking can climb from desert to pine forest, crossing habitat for an equally varied array of species. The 900-person town that shares the range's name was sparked by mining, but after mines shuttered in the 1950s and '60s, it transitioned to using the area's biodiversity to lure tourists. Carolyn Shafer with the Patagonia Area Resource Alliance checked town tax revenues and reports a 450 percent increase since the mines shut down.

"We have transformed ourselves from a mining-based economy to a nature-based economy," she says. So Arizona Mining Inc. operations eight miles south of town prompted concern about how renewed mining might affect the wildlife that draws visitors.

Don Taylor, chief operating officer of Arizona Mining's, has insisted that the company will be a responsible neighbor as it works a deposit projected to produce minerals for 50 years. A 2016 technical report from the mine lists half a dozen en-

dangered, threatened or sensitive species, including the owl, ocelot, jaguar, Sonoran tiger salamander and yellow-billed cuckoo. It notes the possibility of needing Fish and Wildlife Service permits to kill, harm or harass some of those species. Those permits have not been pursued, Taylor says, adding, "We monitor them, we track them, and our operation so far has not affected anything, but we're going to be sensitive to that."

David Cerasale, director of natural resources for WestLand Resources, the mine's contractor for environmental surveys, says a Mexican spotted owl pair has been reported near the mine since the early 2000s and that they have reproduced at least once since 2012.

In 2016, Defenders of Wildlife wrote the Fish and Wildlife Service asking that Mexican spotted owls and yellow-billed cuckoos be spared the disturbance and habitat loss the mine could cause. At that time, Arizona field supervisor Steven Spangle responded that there wasn't sufficient evidence even to investigate the operation. Douglas points to recent images

from the mine's website showing massive tailings storage facilities. Two years ago, he says, "it was characterized as drilling activity along roads and some lights, but they're past that now, so it's piqued our interest."

The mine operates on private, patented claims, so the likely next step for the wildlife agency would be to invite the company to complete voluntary permit applications.

Mexican spotted owl numbers decline alongside loss of mature pine forests to clear-cutting and wildfires. Only a couple of breeding areas remain in the Patagonia Mountains, says Nick Beauregard, who has worked for the non-profit Bird Conservancy of the Rockies as a Mexican spotted owl watcher, and one of them is right by the mine.

"If you destroy habitat for one pair of spotted owls in the Patagonias, you've basically destroyed habitat for half of the spotted owls in the Patagonias," he says. Visiting four years ago, he recalls seeing one drill pad. "Since then, it's become full-on industrial. ... To think how that might be for a neighboring owl to have lights and noise in the drainage next door — it's hard to think that wouldn't be some disturbance." □

Elizabeth Miller is a freelance journalist who covers public lands and wildlife management from New Mexico.



A Mexican spotted owl in Lincoln National Forest, New Mexico.

LINCOLN WILDLIFE CREW/
FLICKR

In a California race, a confluence of tricky issues

In the Central Valley, the rural-urban divide is blurring, and a U.S. House race is tightening

BY CARL SEGERSTROM

As the searing heat of the early summer sun pushes the temperature near triple digits, a tractor kicks up clouds of dust, and a sign welcomes visitors to Oakdale, California, the “Cowboy Capital of the World.” Here, on the east side of California’s 10th Congressional District, where hypnotic rows of almond orchards march up into hilly grassland, agriculture is clearly king.

About 40 miles west, on the other side of the district, the same fertile soil yields a different crop: houses. In Tracy, California, rows of them follow freeway corridors, and developments along plastic-lined ponds are advertised as affordable “waterfront homes.” Fleeing the out-of-reach prices of Bay Area real estate, commuters brave hours of traffic or the disjointed public transportation system to have a home and a little yard of their own.

In this district, amid the rows of orchards and rows of houses, one of the most important midterm races for the U.S. House of Representatives is underway. Its result could hinge on a tricky confluence of issues, including immigration and water.

Republican incumbent Jeff Denham has held the seat since 2012. His challenger, 32-year-old Josh Harder, is a progressive Democrat who grew up in the

district. The race is one of a handful that could tip the balance of national political power. It also echoes the shifting politics of California and much of the West, as liberal, urban population centers spread into conservative rural communities.

Barely a week after the June 5 primaries, a group of about 50 pro-immigrant demonstrators gathered to chastise Denham, who had just the day before announced that he would drop his bid to force a vote on four immigration bills. Outside Denham’s Modesto office, in a small business park across from a nut-processing facility and directly off busy Interstate 99, his opponent, Harder, dressed in blue jeans and a button-up shirt, addressed the crowd. He castigated his opponent for what he described as Denham’s failures regarding Dreamers, the children of undocumented immigrants who were protected by DACA, the Obama administration’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.

“Immigrants are the economic and social fabric of where we live,” Harder told the crowd. “We are not going to get progress on immigration reform with the Congress we have today and with the congressman that we have in this district. ... Our member of Congress, when he is told by his party’s leadership, he stands up and

does exactly what they want him to do.”

Since the start of primary season, Denham’s seat has been a target for Democrats. Previous elections and district demographics indicate that it could be flipped. Denham, a square-jawed veteran who owns a plastics company that produces agricultural supplies like bins and planting trays, had the narrowest margin of victory of his congressional career in 2016.

Here, where Hillary Clinton bested Donald Trump by 3 percentage points, Democrats hope the backlash against the Trump administration will inspire strong turnout from the district’s large Latino community. Latinos represent about 43 percent of the population and about 30 percent of eligible voters in the district. For Democrats, high voter turnout, especially among Latino voters, is key to gaining a seat in the deeply agricultural district.

At the rally, 19-year-old Julissa Ruiz Ramirez, a daughter of immigrants who came to the area when she was 4, said she thinks Denham has let the district down. Ruiz Ramirez is a student at Stanislaus State University in Turlock, California, at the southern end of District 10. She’s active in Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, a student group that advocates

▼ Democratic congressional candidate Josh Harder walks in Modesto’s Fourth of July parade. ► Rep. Jeff Denham with new American citizen Gilberto Nungaray of Merced in 2017 at the conclusion of a naturalization ceremony.



NICOLE NABULSI/HARDER FOR CONGRESS



JOAN BARNETT LEE/ZUMA PRESS



Pro-immigrant demonstrators gather outside Rep. Jeff Denham's Modesto office to express their opposition to his wavering support of Dreamers.

CARL SEGERSTROM/HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

for students of Latino and Mexican descent. “Ever since Trump got elected, I’ve seen members of my community starting to attend protests for the first time,” she said.

In her community, she’s up against the notion that voting doesn’t matter, a sentiment she has felt at times but is working to overcome. “For those of us that have the privilege to vote, we are going to vote and we’re going to do whatever it takes to get (out the Latino vote),” she said.

A few days after the primary, the Republican Party of Stanislaus County met for the first time since the polls closed. The meeting kicked off with a call for the party to rally behind Republican candidates in local elections, where they dominate. But when Denham’s constituent representative addressed the crowd, the tone of the meeting shifted. People’s voices rose, questioning whether the congressman, who has been a moderate voice on immigration within his party, supported what they see as “amnesty for illegals.”

Ted Howze, a local veterinarian who ran to the right of Denham, channeled the frustration of this energized flank of the local Republicans in his primary campaign. In social media posts, Howze called Denham a “pro-amnesty RINO (Republican in name only).” Howze got more than a quarter of the Republican vote and sliced into Denham’s base. The incumbent finished ahead, but down 10 percentage points from the 2016 primary.

Denham’s campaign manager, Josh Whitfield, a local city councilman whose large frame recalls his days playing football at Hughson High School, tried to settle the crowd and remind them that they probably have more in common with Denham than Harder. On social media, the campaign often derisively refers to the Democratic candidate as “Bay Area Harder” — a dig that aims to paint the

young tech entrepreneur as out of touch with the Central Valley. At the conclusion of the meeting, Whitfield reminded the crowd of Ronald Reagan’s aphorism on party unity: “My 80-percent friend is not my 20-percent enemy.”

Local Republicans are well-organized and have built a stable platform that favors Central Valley interests over broader state politics. Central Valley residents feel frustrated by a state political scene they see being driven by the Los Angeles Basin and San Francisco Bay Area, where urban populations dwarf the vote share of every other region.

In the valley’s agricultural economy, few issues are more important than water. And many locals see Republicans as a bulwark against the environmental interests that wield influence in Sacramento. Jim DeMartini, the chair of the Board of Supervisors of Stanislaus County, for example, said a big part of Denham’s appeal is his defense of the valley’s water supply. “Water is just a real big issue here,” said DeMartini, who also heads the local Republican Party organization. DeMartini is such a strong Trump supporter that he doesn’t plan on taking down his yard sign “until (Trump) finishes his second term.”

“We’re dealing with this left-wing Legislature that wants to take the water out of our dam, supposedly for the salmon,” he said. “It’s ridiculous.”

That animus toward Democrats in Sacramento has fortified Republicans’ waning demographic hold in the district. Pamphlets and road signs for the “state of Jefferson” movement, which preaches secession from California, are making their way from the Sierra foothills to Central Valley. As one Oakdale voter said, “Keep it simple, man: Friends don’t let friends vote Democrat.”

Meanwhile, Harder must walk a fine line between the agricultural interests of the district and the environmental priorities of the state’s Democratic establish-

ment. He supports building more water storage, which is generally at odds with environmental health, but also proposes incentives for farmers to adopt water-saving irrigation systems. His most ambitious suggestion involves building inland desalinization plants in the valley, a proposal that would raise a host of environmental concerns in terms of energy use and the additional infrastructure necessary to build the plants.

Harder is trying to appeal to the agricultural community at the east end of the district, while mobilizing the growing bedroom communities to the west.

At the protest in Modesto, Manuel Zapata, who has a goatee and was wearing a black baseball hat, warned the crowd of the impacts of Republican immigration policies. Zapata, a local organizer, is trying to tap into the energy of resistance and rouse a politically inert base.

Democrats hold the edge in voter registration in the district, but have a history of low turnout, especially in midterm elections. Like many in the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, Zapata was moved to political engagement during the 2016 election and served as a primary delegate for Bernie Sanders. As he canvasses on the streets of Tracy, Zapata says he hears over and over: “I didn’t know there were any Democrats in Tracy.”

Turning this disconnected community of Democrats into an engaged voting bloc could help bring on the blue wave Democrats are hoping for in November. And Zapata said Harder has already made inroads by campaigning in an often-overlooked community and hearing out local concerns. “We’re trying to flip a district, but we need to care about a pothole,” Zapata said. His message to voters: “Maybe Josh Harder can’t fix your pothole, but he can do different things that do affect your pothole. There’s a disconnect between local problems and congressional and national problems, but we’re all suffering from the same issues.” □

THE LATEST

Backstory

About 150 years ago, white settlers claimed a 2,300-acre Northern Sierra valley that had long been home to the Mountain Maidu. Eventually, the parcel was granted to the Pacific Gas and Electric Company.

When the utility went bankrupt in 2001, a search began for a new owner to conserve the valley’s forests and streams “in perpetuity for public purposes.”

The Maidu, a tribe of about 2,000 that is not federally recognized, competed with California’s Department of Fish and Wildlife for ownership (“California tribe competes with the state to restore its homeland,” HCN, 9/7/11).

Followup

In May, the **Maidu Summit Consortium, which represents nine groups of Maidu, was named the owner of Humbug Valley** (which they call Tasman Koyom). The first time in California that a non-recognized tribe has had its homeland returned, the action sets an important precedent. The Maidu will partner with a regional land trust and the state wildlife department to develop cultural and visitor centers and trails, and implement traditional ecological practices like burning and pruning.

JODI PETERSON



LINDSAY WOOD

Carl Segerstrom is an editorial fellow at High Country News. [@carlschirps](#)

The aftereffects of the Oregon standoff

In Harney County, collaboration around public lands grows

BY TAY WILES

On the night of Jan. 26, 2016, Brenda Smith was nearing the end of a six-hour drive home from the Portland area to Burns, in Harney County, Oregon, basking in the knowledge that her scrappy nonprofit had just won a \$6 million grant. The High Desert Partnership helps locals collaborate on natural resource management, and this was by far the biggest grant it had ever received. It meant that she could finally rent a real office and hire other full-time employees. Smith was exhausted from the long day, but things were looking up.

Around 10 p.m. on Highway 20, a solid line of police cars with flashing lights sped by, traveling in the opposite direction. Smith assumed they had something to do with the occupation of the nearby Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, now in its fourth week. Self-described militia from across the country had been driving around Burns since December, many demanding that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service somehow turn the refuge land over to locals. The leader of the occupation — Ammon Bundy of Idaho — claimed he was making a stand against government “tyranny.”

After seeing the police cars, Smith pulled over, flipped on the radio, and learned that law enforcement had shot and killed one of the inner circle of occupiers, a man named LaVoy Finicum, in a roadside confrontation. For weeks, her

town had been wrapped in chaos, and now this — a violent death. “It was pretty surreal,” she told me during an interview in May, referring to the coincidental timing of the shooting and her grant funding. Finicum’s death would mean more division, even as the grant would bolster her efforts to build bridges for years to come.

The occupation had been hard on Burns, a small town in a huge county, pitting friends and family against one another. Yet High Desert Partnership seemed to represent an alternative to the extremists’ way. Where the Bundys, whose occupation ultimately lasted six weeks, sowed discord, Smith and her partners sought communication, compromise and collaboration. The community has, in many ways, successfully withstood one of the stranger moments in modern Western history, and it could hold further lessons for other counties where public-lands extremists seek to bring division. Put another way: High Desert Partnership’s methods were “what inoculated us from the Bundy disease,” as one local rancher said.

High Desert Partnership began about 15 years ago, as a conversation between Chad Karges, who was then deputy manager for the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, and a cattle rancher named Gary Marshall. Relations between local ranchers and refuge employees had been volatile for decades, as the two sides butted

heads over livestock and wildlife. The bad blood extended beyond the Fish and Wildlife Service, to the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service, whose management decisions were tied up in litigation. Karges knew something had to change. The refuge was supposed to create a new 15-year plan in a few years. “If we didn’t do something different,” he told me, “we shouldn’t expect a different outcome than what the BLM and Forest Service were experiencing.”

So Karges and Marshall started looking around the West for communities that had forged lasting solutions to thorny disagreements. They reached out to the Blackfoot Challenge in Montana, the Quivira Coalition in New Mexico, and the Malpai Borderlands Group in Arizona, all of which created successful partnerships between federal agencies, locals and conservation groups. Two things became clear: Natural resource projects needed to come as much from the community as the federal government, and they needed a nonprofit to provide a safe, neutral forum for conversation around tough issues, like cattle grazing in a bird sanctuary.

In the early 2000s, Karges and Marshall started assembling local adversaries to talk about land management, determined to bring community members into land-use planning from the beginning, rather than waiting for a federal draft

Forest Service personnel join members of the Harney County Restoration Collaborative and Harney Basin Wetlands Initiative for two days of eradicating carp from Malheur Lake and its tributaries in fall 2016.

COURTESY OF HIGH DESERT PARTNERSHIP



plan and a public comment period. “We met for two years, just building relationships,” Karges says. By 2005, they had enough buy-in to establish the nonprofit.

High Desert Partnership’s first real test began immediately, with the refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan. The group provided a meeting space and facilitators and gathered about 30 participants to share ideas. At first, environmentalists and ranchers fell into their traditional roles, arguing about livestock’s impacts on the land. But as the meetings went on, the two sides found something in common: invasive carp. For decades, common carp had filled Malheur Lake and nearby waterways, squeezing out other species and throwing the ecosystem off balance. Migrating bird populations were declining more as a result of carp than cows. So rather than argue over livestock, the two sides made carp a cornerstone of the plan. In the five years since it was finished, the Malheur plan has never been litigated. The refuge still allows grazing in some areas, and the collaborative group is collecting data to better understand livestock’s impacts on the ecosystem.

Other successes followed. A BLM district manager co-founded the Harney County Wildfire Collaborative to improve relationships between his agency and local fire associations and conduct more effective fire suppression. The Harney Basin Wetland Initiative was launched to improve over 500,000 acres of wetlands on public and private lands. The Harney County Restoration Collaborative helps plan forest management projects for the Malheur National Forest north of Burns.

By the time the Bundys decided to take over the refuge, on Jan. 2, 2016, the county had over a decade of collaboration under its belt. “Bundy picked the wrong place,” Steve Grasty, a former county judge and co-founder of High Desert Partnership’s forest collaborative, told me during an interview at his home outside Burns in May. “He didn’t know about us.”

Grant County, by comparison, just to the north, at the time seemed more sympathetic to the Malheur occupation. The *Blue Mountain Eagle*, a local newspaper, reported that Sheriff Glenn Palmer met with central figures in the occupation and called them “patriots.” Finicum and several others were allegedly on their way to meet with Palmer when the fatal roadside confrontation occurred. State and federal law enforcement deliberately stopped the occupiers before they entered Grant County because officials said more people there, including the sheriff, were sympathetic to their cause. In November 2016, voters re-elected Palmer for a fifth term.

Looking back, Karges thinks the Bundys’ ideology could have swayed Harney

County, had the culture of collaboration not taken root in recent years. “If it had been before 1999, the whole community could have gone to the Bundys,” he said.

Four months after the occupation, Bundy supporters tried to recall Grasty, who had vigorously opposed the occupation, but an overwhelming 70 percent of voters opted to keep him in his seat. That year, several pro-Bundy county commission candidates lost by wide margins. “As a metric of support for the Bundy ideology, I think that was a pretty clear rejection,” says Peter Walker, a professor of geography and environmental studies at the University of Oregon and author of a forthcoming book about Harney County.



Harney County Restoration Collaboration facilitator Jack Southworth talks about the need for fire-tolerant and ecologically diverse forest ecosystems in Crooked Creek Meadow.

COURTESY OF HIGH DESERT PARTNERSHIP

Meanwhile, High Desert Partnership’s work has continued. The wetlands initiative has grown with the \$6 million grant, and High Desert Partnership recently launched a new initiative to engage local youth. In May, the group held its first “Harney County Way” summit to bring together dozens of stakeholders working on economic and natural resource issues, to exchange ideas and build relationships. Smith called it a celebration of collaborative work since 2005.

Joan Davies, a former city administrator at the time of the occupation, has moved away after spending most of her 63 years in Harney County. During the occupation, she received emails, phone calls and texts for weeks on end from a stranger who pressured her to run for county commission on a pro-Bundy platform. Davies

tion,” says Peter Walker, a professor of geography and environmental studies at the University of Oregon and author of a forthcoming book about Harney County.

Certainly, the Malheur occupation has left lasting scars in Harney County, dividing people here along ideological lines — those who support the occupiers’ anti-federal message, versus those who don’t.

Today, many locals simply avoid the subject as much as possible. “How we’re dealing with it is we try to not recognize it,” Pauline Braymen, a rancher and former newspaper reporter, said.

Ammon Bundy, on the other hand, talks about the occupation all the time. In 2016, he was acquitted of charges related to it, and charges against him for participating in a 2014 armed standoff in Nevada were dismissed in January. This year, he has traveled the West, speaking to small audiences about his dislike of the federal government and environmentalists, as well as his fringe belief that the Constitution prohibits federal land ownership outside Washington, D.C.

In May, Ammon spoke in Yreka, California, the seat of the far-right state of Jefferson movement. There, he encouraged people to “stand up” for their water rights, not in the courts but “there at the diversion” — a suggestion that echoed the chainsaws and blowtorches that opened headgates in that region during the drought of 2001. The Yreka crowd welcomed Bundy’s words.

But Harney County is another story. Two years after the occupation, Karges and Smith see the Bundy episode as a mere bump in the road. As for how the refuge and locals are working together to manage the land? “It hasn’t changed at all,” Karges said. □

THE LATEST

Backstory

After hunters introduced mountain goats to Washington’s Olympic Mountains in the 1920s, the animals reproduced rapidly, damaging rare native plants and alpine areas.

Olympic National Park relocated hundreds, but eventually abandoned the effort. A proposal in the 1990s to kill the goats failed, and in 2010, a billy fatally gored a hiker. Officials again debated what to do next (“Can rocks and paintballs help humans and mountain goats coexist?” *HCN*, 11/13/13).

Followup

In June, after four years of study and public comment, **the National Park Service announced plans to relocate about half of the approximately 675 mountain goats in Olympic National Park. Rangers or trained volunteers will shoot the rest.**

The park will begin moving goats this summer to national forests in the North Cascades. Mountain goats are native to the North Cascades, but populations are low, and the U.S. Forest Service and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife hope to restore the species there.

JODI PETERSON



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Angela Dye of Telluride, Colorado, stopped by downtown Paonia with her whole bike trip crew. LUNA ANNA ARCHY/HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

A cheery cherry celebration

Summer brought Paonia very hot temperatures, along with the annual Cherry Days Fourth of July festivities and lots of friends coming by to check out our headquarters. Here are some of the friendly folks who stopped by.

Angela Dye of Telluride, Colorado, and her dog, **Natasha**, breezed through the office on a Friday afternoon after an arduous bike ride over McClure Pass between Carbondale and Paonia.

Christopher Smith of Eldorado Springs, Colorado, also visited on the last Friday in June. As a scientist, Christopher is interested in fracking's impacts on the West.

Ceal Klingler and **Stacey Brown**, from Bishop, California, stopped by with their dog, **Oliver**. Ceal has been reading *HCN* since 1997, and a few years ago, Stacey wrote about groundwater in the Owens River Valley for our syndicated opinion service, Writers on the Range.

Barry Miller, a Hinsdale, New York, anti-fracking activist, and his friend, **John Luse**, were enjoying a motorcycle tour of the West. John, who lives in San Francisco, is concerned over the issues Indigenous people face and appreciated *HCN*'s coverage of Chaco Canyon, New Mexico ("Drilling Chaco," *HCN*, 3/5/18).

Digital subscriber **Matt Herman**, who was also on a motorcycle tour of the West, came to see the office and get out of the sun for a while.

Pat Hutchings and **Don Warder** of Deer Park, Washington, came to visit Development Director Laurie Milford and her

family; they left as new subscribers. Pat is the former director of the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Menlo Park, and Don is a retired university professor.

Lisa Norby and **Dave Shaver** came by from Morrison, Colorado, on the Front Range. Lisa and Dave are both longtime readers who work with federal land-management agencies. Lisa is a friend of Deputy Editor-Digital **Kate Schimel's** family.

We are proud to announce that *HCN* received seven journalism awards from the Native American Journalists Association. Among the winners for the National Native Media Awards were **Debra Utacia Krol**, **Kim Baca**, **Julian Brave NoiseCat**, **Jacqueline Keeler**, **Anna V. Smith** and **Julia O'Malley**. Congratulations to all the hard-working writers and editors at our tribal affairs desk!

And congratulations to former editorial fellow **Lyndsey Gilpin**, who has launched *Southerly Magazine*, a publication dedicated to ecology, justice and culture in the American South. You can learn more at southerlymag.org.

A few corrections from our last issue (*HCN*, 6/25/18): In "Displaced/Erased," the yellow-billed cuckoo was referred to as an endangered species; it is listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. And in "Little Weed, Big Problem," we erred in describing the size of a plastic vial; it was the size of a .22-caliber cartridge, not bullet.

—*Carl Segerstrom,*
for the staff

Fresh water rarely flows to the Gulf of California.
 These are tidal channels near the sea. MURAT EYUBOGLU

THE COLORADO, Christa Sadler
 270 pages, large-format hardcover: \$60. National Sawdust and This Earth Press, 2018.

As the lifeblood and sculptor of vast expanses of the arid West, the Colorado River has defined the region's human and natural history for millennia. In *The Colorado*, longtime river-runner, environmental educator and author Christa Sadler invites readers to sit down by the riverside and listen to its stories.

The large-format book, which accompanies an award-winning documentary of the same name, reads like a tour through a natural history museum. Beautiful photographs, instructive visual aids and engaging writing take readers from the geology of the river to the customs of Native cultures, European colonial histories and modern political debates. Along the way, it gives readers a better sense of the complex system that brings water to the people of the Southwest.

Accessible to the uninitiated and enlightening even for river devotees, the book has something to offer all who care about the Colorado River Basin. **CARL SEGERSTROM**



Olivia Lone Bear, a mother of five, has been missing since October 2017, when she was last seen on the Fort Berthold Reservation in New Town, North Dakota.

COURTESY OF THE LONE BEAR FAMILY/
SEARCHINGFOROLIVIA.
WORDPRESS.COM



The Search for Olivia Lone Bear

Native families grapple with scant support to locate their missing loved ones

FEATURE BY
JACQUELINE
KEELER

Thirteen minutes into Taylor Sheridan's feature film *Wind River*, the body of a young Native woman from the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming is discovered by the protagonist, a white hunter who works for the federal government. That spurs a multi-agency investigation, and within days, officers from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and local and tribal law enforcement face off in a bloody, Tarantino-style shootout with the bad guys: oil workers living in the company-owned temporary housing known as man camps.

According to Sheridan, the film is "inspired by true events" and the "thousands of actual stories just like it," involving the sexual assault of Native American women on reservations across the country. Yet Native families seldom get such dramatic closure or swift justice. Rarely do local or federal law enforcement officers respond so quickly or take bullets in defense of tribal members. Had

Sheridan really wanted to be true to life, he would have ended his film with the family never finding the body of their loved one, much less tracking down the culprit. On Oct. 24, 2017, a real Native American woman, a 33-year-old mother of five named Olivia Lone Bear, disappeared from the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota. Her family has been frantically searching for her ever since. Like so many others, though, they've run up against uncooperative law enforcement agencies, which are themselves stymied by jurisdictional complications and a lack of resources. "(Tribal police) told us they couldn't investigate Olivia's disappearance because there was no crime scene," her cousin, Matthew Lone Bear, told me in February, shortly after the Bureau of Indian Affairs took over the investigation from the Three Affiliated Tribes police.

There is no reliable official database recording the names or even the number of missing and murdered Native women

in the United States, but the scattered data available paint a frightening picture. The blog Justice for Native Women, run by Makoons Miller-Tanner, Ojibway from Minnesota, uses crowd-sourced information to put names and faces to Native women who have disappeared or whose bodies have been found but whose deaths remain unsolved.

Week after week, more names and photos are added. Each listing begins with the phrase, "This is _____," followed by a photo of the woman. Many of them are selfies, showing the women and girls as they wanted to be seen: vibrant and perfectly made-up young people, their smiles brilliant with life and hope. "This is Nicole Morgan, missing from New Mexico since 2018. ... This is Val Caye, missing from Washington since 2018. ... This is Ashley Loring/HeavyRunner, missing from Montana since 2017. ... This is Natalie White Lightning, murdered in

"I remember, as a child, hearing my mother, my aunts and their friends at the kitchen table lowering their voices and whispering about those women in our families who went missing or were murdered."

—Tami Truett Jerue, executive director of the Alaska Native Women's Resource Center

North Dakota in 2014."

These data are kept mostly in the hands of civilian stewards. Justice for Native Women records about 600 names. Another Native activist, Annita Lucchesi, keeps an "MMIW Database" with over 2,500 names. The initials "MMIW" stand for "Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women."

"We all know someone," said Tami Truett Jerue, executive director of the Alaska Native Women's Resource Center, during a congressional briefing in 2017. "I remember, as a child, hearing my mother, my aunts and their friends at the kitchen table lowering their voices and whispering about those women in our families who went missing or were murdered." The murder rate for Alaskan Natives is nearly double that of other Alaskans.

In October 2017, Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, D-N.D., introduced a bill that would address the lack of data on missing and murdered Indigenous women and seek to improve law enforcement protocols and collaboration between jurisdictions. It's called Savanna's Act, after Savanna LeFontaine-Greywind, who vanished from Fargo, North Dakota, in August 2017. She was a member of the Spirit Lake Tribe, and her selfies document her happiness at her pregnant belly and the new life growing inside her. Her body was found, wrapped in plastic, after an extensive eight-day community search. In an unbelievable act of cruelty, her white neighbor cut Savanna's daughter from her womb, stole the baby, and then murdered the young mother.

In 2016, according to the National Crime Information Center, North Dakota accounted for 125 of 5,712 nationwide cases of missing Native women. Experts believe that the actual number is considerably higher, given that police departments are not required to identify victims as Native American. A 2013 National Congress of American Indians policy brief notes that Native women experience two-and-a-half times the rate of violence and double the rate of rape or sexual assault compared to American women of all other races. In some counties, Native women experience 10 times the rate of murder. Even in suburbia, Native American women are assaulted at nearly three times the rate of their non-Indian counterparts.

In Canada, a government report cited 1,181 police-recorded incidents of First Nations women missing or murdered between 1980 and 2012. However, an advocacy group estimated that the actual number was closer to 4,000. Since there are far more Native people in the U.S. than in Canada, the number here is likely much higher.

The Fort Berthold Reservation, which Lone Bear called home, spans nearly 1 million acres, an area about the size of

Rhode Island. Named for a former U.S. Army fort, the reservation is home to the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara tribes, otherwise known as the MHA Nation or Three Affiliated Tribes, which together have about 16,000 members.

The reservation is also home to nearly one-third of the famous Bakken shale formation, which, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, holds somewhere between 4.4 and 11.4 billion barrels of oil. That oil is recoverable using horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing, a process by which a mixture of water, sand and chemicals is injected at very high pressures underground to release the oil from the rock. The tribe has benefited monetarily from the drilling, but tribal members are worried about the environmental damage involved, along with the violence brought by transient workers and the corruption that has festered in the tribal government ever since the boom's earliest days.

The community is starkly divided between the haves and the have-nots. Tribal members who inherited fractional ownership of energy-rich allotments enjoy oil royalties from their mineral leases, while the rest receive few benefits, even though they have to help carry the burden — higher housing costs, violence and drug use. Former Chairman Tex "Red Tipped Arrow" Hall has dubbed this new paradigm "sovereignty by the barrel." By 2014, toward the end of what was a

nearly 10-year-long boom, the tribe was pumping 333,000 barrels of crude a day, slightly less than Oklahoma's oil production. In three years, the MHA Nation had paid off \$100 million in debt and had grown its operating budget to \$57.7 million, while squirreling away nearly \$250 million for "special projects" funding.

It was probably not the path envisioned by Chairman George Gillette in 1948, when, in tears, he signed away 150,000 acres of land for the construction of Garrison Dam, solemnly declaring, "Our Treaty of Fort Laramie ... and our Constitution are being torn to shreds by this contract." The 1956 construction of the dam, which created Lake Sakakawea (named for the Shoshone Hidatsa woman known as Sakajawea, who guided the Lewis and Clark Expedition), flooded the best bottomland farmland on the reservation and devastated the tribe. Residents of traditional communities were relocated by the Army Corps of Engineers to tract homes in places like New Town, created in 1950. Tight-knit communities up and down the Missouri River became unraveled, and over 2,000 Native Americans lost their farms entirely.

It was into this landscape that Olivia Lone Bear was born, and it was from her father's ranch house along Highway 23 — lined with oil well flares that give the place a hellish aspect — that her voice was last heard. Raised a citizen of a confederation of three surviving nations, around a

One of the flyers distributed on a website the Lone Bear family set up to help in the search for Olivia Lone Bear.

COURTESY OF THE LONE BEAR FAMILY/SEARCHINGFOROLIVIA.WORDPRESS.COM

JANUARY 2018

**MISSING:
OLIVIA
LONE BEAR**

LAST SEEN:
October 24, 2017

TIP LINE:
701-627-6141

WEBSITE:
SearchingForOlivia.com

FACEBOOK:
Searching for Olivia
Lone Bear

\$21,000 REWARD*

**FOR INFORMATION LEADING
TO THE RETURN OF OLIVIA OR
INFO LEADING TO THE ARREST &
CONVICTION OF SOMEONE WHO
MAY HAVE HARMED HER.**



*** ADDITIONAL \$5,000 REWARD OFFERED.
SEE WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION.**



Lake Sakakawea on the Fort Berthold Reservation. The Lone Bear family urged the tribal police to conduct a water search for the body of Olivia Lone Bear, and although other agencies offered assistance, the tribal police declined it.

JACQUELINE KEELER

lake ostensibly named to honor a woman of her tribe, she lived almost half her life in the midst of a Wild West-style oil boom that brought thousands of out-of-state workers to town, mostly without their families, and with money to burn.

It was a difficult place to be a woman. A bartender at the tribe's Four Bears Casino told me that she and her friends party only in their own apartments. They never go out because it's too dangerous. Every night after work, the bartender is walked to her car by the casino's security.

But Robin Fox, a 38-year-old mother of three, lacked this sort of protection. On March 5, 2014, her car was found outside a local country club, door ajar, dome light on, keys in the ignition, and a large sum of cash and her cellphone inside. Fox was nowhere to be found.

A Facebook group was created and flyers printed with photos of Fox, a Three Affiliated Tribes member who was raised in Seattle, and directed the Rockview School for Tots in the reservation community of Parshall. In one photo, she is elegantly dressed in formal attire, and in another she proudly wears teal and blue to celebrate the Seattle Seahawks' 2013 Super Bowl championship.

When volunteer searchers showed up to help find Fox, they complained that tribal law enforcement was, at best, unhelpful. "Two hostile (tribal police) officers were waiting for us when we arrived in Roseglen to search," Lissa Yellow Bird-Chase alleged on Facebook. "We were told, 'We aren't here to help you';

'You don't need to be here'; 'There really is no missing person.' " *A Bismarck Tribune* article, one of the few media reports on Fox's disappearance, took note of tribal law enforcement's lack of communication regarding the case, both with the press and other local law enforcement agencies.

Fox was found less than an hour later, a few hundred feet from her vehicle. Although family members say the circumstances of her death were "suspicious," no cause of death was made public, and no media outlet ever did a follow-up story.

The violence that seems to pervade this corner of the world also seeped into the life of Olivia Lone Bear. She once worked as a bartender at Ranchman's 23 Steakhouse and Saloon Restaurant in New Town, an establishment frequented by the mostly white oilfield workers. A waitress who worked with her described Lone Bear as a nice person and a good worker, but told me that she was fired from the job after the wife of an ex-boyfriend came in, confronted Lone Bear and beat her up, repeatedly slamming her head onto the pool table.

In response to all the violence, tribal activists pushed the MHA Nation to become one of the few Indigenous nations to outlaw sex trafficking. "Loren's Law" — named after the late Loren Whitehorn, an MHA tribal member and sexual assault victims' advocate — was passed in 2014 following numerous reports of sexual assault in man camps on or near the reservation.

The law's effectiveness is hampered

by the tribe's limited jurisdiction, which extends only to enrolled members of federally recognized tribes. In 2015, after two years of Republican opposition, the Violence Against Women's Act (VAWA) was finally amended by Congress to expand tribal jurisdiction to non-enrolled defendants who commit domestic violence on reservations. This is critical, given that Native women are, more often than not, assaulted by non-Indians. The MHA Nation, however, still has not met the federal requirements necessary to gain these expanded VAWA powers, and the law does not cover sexual assault outside of a committed relationship or due to sex trafficking.

If a tribal member like Lone Bear is trafficked or assaulted by someone the tribe cannot prosecute, the FBI has jurisdiction. However, the FBI declines to prosecute the vast majority of cases, and with six counties sharing jurisdiction over the reservation, sheriffs are reluctant to respond due to the possible jurisdictional confusion.

IN FEBRUARY, in New Town, North Dakota, population 2,500 and home to the tribal headquarters, I sat across the table from Jim Hofhenke as he held court at a small table in a tiny, hole-in-the-wall bar on the main drag. Hofhenke, who is white and in his 50s, is from California, but spends most of his time working in the oilfields here. Occasionally, other white men approached him tentatively. He barely acknowledged their presence, saying little and hammering back beer after

If a tribal member like Lone Bear is trafficked or assaulted by someone the tribe cannot prosecute, the FBI has jurisdiction. However, the FBI declines to prosecute the vast majority of cases.

beer from a box at his feet. He was the last person to hear from Olivia Lone Bear.

He told me that he and Lone Bear were friends. He called her his “running buddy,” and said he lent her his truck whenever she needed it. The day she went missing, a Tuesday, she sent him a text message saying she was doing laundry in her father’s house on Highway 23. Hofhenke said he later went by the house to drop off some groceries, but no one answered the door. When her family came home, she was gone — without taking her jacket, her debit card, her wallet or her cellphone. She did, however, apparently take Hofhenke’s pickup. The last image the family has seen was taken by a security camera at a New Town bank, which showed Lone Bear stopping at a nearby store in Hofhenke’s metallic-gray Chevy Silverado. The police, citing the ongoing investigation, have not told the family exactly when the photo was taken.

That Friday, the Lone Bear family reported Olivia missing, but police were slow to begin a search or even send out a statewide alert. “(The MHA Nation police) did not act on the missing person’s report until the following Monday,” Matthew Lone Bear told me. “And news couldn’t report and put it on air until the tribal police department filed a police report.”

The family has criticized the tribal police’s apparent unwillingness to prioritize Olivia’s disappearance. They allege that on the second day of the search, lead detectives berated Texx Lone Bear, Olivia’s father, telling him: “This is not the only thing going on with the Fort Berthold Reservation.”

“It set the tone for how they treated it,” Matt Lone Bear said. “They don’t treat it with urgency.”

He believes tribal police investigators looked for excuses not to check out tips. Lone Bear claims they dismissed a tip on a truck that looked like Hofhenke’s because the informant didn’t give the color of the license plate. Family members say they’ve asked whether the police tried to locate the truck via an onboard OnStar system, but their questions have gone unanswered.

The police denied these allegations to local news outlets at the time, but would not discuss any aspect of the case with *High Country News*. The case is now being handled by the Bureau of Indian Affairs police.

As the weeks went by and the water in Lake Sakakawea slowly began to freeze, the family urged the tribal police to conduct a water search. Although other agencies offered to help — the North Dakota Game and Fish Department offered its sonar to help in the search — the tribal police declined it. At the same time, tribal police told the family they couldn’t search the lake because they didn’t have any boats available. Matt Lone Bear finally



Matthew Lone Bear looks for his missing cousin using a drone donated for the search last November. Below, Texx Lone Bear, Olivia’s father, and Matthew are joined by a volunteer searcher to look over a map of the MHA Nations’ nearly 1 million acres last October.

DESIREE KANE

forced the department to act: He posted a photo on Facebook of various watercraft sitting unused in the police supply yard, sparking public outcry.

With tribal law enforcement making such a lackluster effort, the family was forced to pick up the slack. The tribe lent them offices from which they could coordinate the search, and they credit Chairman Mark Fox for his support. The tribe’s Victim Services paid for searchers’ hotel rooms for about two months.

Matt Lone Bear, who is 30, sat in Olivia Lone Bear Search headquarters, wearing heavy Carhartt coveralls to keep out the February chill. He told me that when an experienced search team out of Roosevelt County, Montana, showed up, they were impressed by the family’s

headquarters — but not by local law enforcement. “They asked, ‘Where’s law enforcement? This should be full of police officers.’ This was the first time they’d ever seen civilians running a search.”

The space is well-organized, stocked with water bottles, snacks and flyers. With the help of locals, the family extended the ground search to communities far from New Town, such as Minot and Dickinson, North Dakota. Throughout the spring and summer, they continued to search, though the number of volunteers fell drastically. Olivia Lone Bear’s aunt, her father and her cousin seemed reluctant to leave search headquarters. It was if by staying and remaining in active search mode, they could create a talisman that would protect their loved one, wherever she might be. □

Jacqueline Keeler is a Diné/Ihanktonwan Dakota writer and contributor to *The Nation* and *Yes!* magazine. Her book *The Edge of Morning: Native Voices Speak for the Bears Ears* is available from Torrey House Press. [@jkeeler](#)

Pay for Prey

Inside Oregon's troubled wolf payouts

Just before dawn on a chilly day last September, a volunteer range rider left camp in Marr Flat, a ponderosa-pine plain in northeastern Oregon's Wallowa County where ranchers run 200 cattle on private land each summer. The cows were due down by month's end, and the rider was looking for stragglers. Not 30 minutes later, he found something else — the ribcage of a half-eaten calf, gleaming in the sun.

When Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist Pat Matthews came to investigate, he found a carcass ringed by wolf tracks and covered in bite marks. GPS pinpointed a radio-collared member of the Harl Butte Pack nearby. Roblyn Brown, Oregon's acting wolf coordinator, agreed with Matthews: A wolf had killed the calf.

Armed with this information, Todd Nash, its owner, requested and received \$930 from the state — the calf's official value. Oregon, like many states where wolves have made a comeback, has a taxpayer-funded program that compensates ranchers for livestock killed by the predators, offsetting some of the direct costs ranchers bear for their return. In theory, this should also help wolf conservation by encouraging rural areas long at odds with wolves to eventually accept their presence.

Before its adoption in 2011, some believed Oregon's compensation program

might be more successful than others in this regard. Oregon's liberal-leaning urban areas expanded support for wolves' re-entry, and legislators had years of data and experience to draw on from other Western states where wolves had returned earlier. The program required ranchers to implement nonlethal wolf deterrents in order to be reimbursed — something environmental groups like Portland-based Oregon Wild valued. It also gave rural communities more oversight, and recognized the challenges ranchers face in an already marginal business by adopting provisions for missing livestock.

Seven years later, the rate of increase of confirmed livestock kills has remained below the growth rate of the state's wolf population, which increased from 48 in 2012 to 124 by the end of 2017. Brown believes ranchers are implementing best practices for keeping livestock safe. "Producers are learning from other

producers," she says.

But signs of trouble have emerged in the first fully participating counties, suggesting potential pitfalls for other counties as they ramp up the program. In Oregon's Wallowa and Baker counties, local oversight of loss claims has proven unbalanced or thin in key cases, leading to approval of suspicious compensation requests. Confirmed wolf kills may not have skyrocketed, but *missing* cattle claims have, far outpacing them. Between 2012 and 2018, the state paid nearly \$177,000 for missing livestock in just three counties, more than double the total amount paid for direct losses in the nine counties that have been eligible for compensation. Critics fear the program's missing-cow allowance is being abused; ranchers counter that the state's official wolf population — and depredation — numbers are too low.

Whatever the reason, such claims have serious implications for both ranchers and wolves. State funding has stayed





A wolf near the carcass of a dead cow, photographed in April 2014 by a camera trap in Todd Nash's grazing area in Wallowa County, Oregon.

COURTESY OF TODD NASH

nearly 60 years. Two years later, the state updated its management plan, offering staged protections to wolves as they returned home. But state law barred Oregon's Department of Fish and Wildlife from starting a payout program. As Wallowa's wolf population grew, local rancher Dennis Sheehy began looking for ways to protect cattlemen's interests. Sheehy, a slow talker with bright, crinkly eyes whose life has meandered from Hawaii to Vietnam to a Chinese commune in Inner Mongolia, now runs hundreds of cows in northeastern Oregon, with many grazing up in the Harl Butte area.

The trouble with compensating only for confirmed losses, Sheehy told me over coffee at his ranch house near the town of Wallowa, was that the region's dense forests and rocky canyons were too rugged for ranchers to be able to find all the livestock that wolves may have killed. Paying for missing animals is "about the only way you can have any possibility of accurate compensation out in the Marr Flat, Snake River and Hells Canyon areas," Sheehy said.

The program that Oregon ultimately developed, overseen by the state Department of Agriculture, gave ranchers what Sheehy advocated for. Based on their record-keeping, they would be compensated in full for missing livestock if, after wolves appeared in their area, their losses climbed above their documented historical average.

Under the program, county-level wolf committees would vet claims for missing animals and review investigation reports before applying for state grants to cover claims for confirmed losses based on market value. An additional 30 percent of funding over the county's total annual claimed amount was added to help ranchers pay for deterrents, such as range riders to monitor cows, and fladry, colored flagging that scares wolves away from fence-lines. An Oregon Department of Agriculture official would provide oversight, but authority lay largely with the counties.

Sheehy showed me the creased notebook where he tracks his cows. Other ranchers joke that he has fewer losses because his animals wear Alpine-style cowbells, "like *Heidi*." So far, he's requested compensation only twice. That's true for many ranchers — though some claims stand out.

ON A BLUE-SKY FALL MORNING, wolf advocate Wally Sykes picked me up in Joseph, Oregon, his wolf-dog hybrid Koda peering

Critics fear the program's missing-cow allowance is being abused; ranchers counter that the state's official wolf population — and depredation — numbers are too low.

roughly the same since 2014 — \$200,000 every two years, plus a smaller federal grant for preventive measures that the state must match. Increasingly, officials have been forced to cut back on wholly fulfilling missing cattle claims and funding requests for nonlethal deterrents in hopes of stretching the money.

And despite everything, ranchers don't appear any closer to accepting wolves. This raises questions about whether there are better ways to incentivize coexistence, and it shows just how controversial wolves can be — even when all the pieces seem in place to support their return.

WOLVES FIRST RETURNED to Western states on their own, trickling into Glacier National Park from Canada. In 1985, as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service made plans to speed things along by reintroducing 66 gray wolves in Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho, then-National Park Service Director William

Mott Jr. reached out to the nonprofit group Defenders of Wildlife. He suggested that a private fund to pay ranchers for livestock losses might help head off tensions. Defenders agreed, and over two decades, as Northern Rockies wolf numbers surpassed 1,600, it paid livestock producers more than \$1.3 million. "Having the compensation in place helped get a lot of (ranchers') fears addressed early on," says Suzanne Stone, who managed the group's compensation program from 1999 until its end.

By 2010, wolves were stable enough that the feds began to withdraw protections and Defenders ended its payouts. Montana, Arizona, New Mexico, Wyoming, Idaho and Washington filled the gap through state programs, with the help of federal grants and seed funds from Defenders.

Not long before, in 2008, wolf pups were born in Oregon's Wallowa Mountains — the first litter in the state in



Dean Tucker, cow boss at the Pine Valley Ranch, left, and rancher Chad DelCurto talk wolves at Tucker's place in Richland, Oregon. In 2016, DelCurto filed a claim for 11 missing cows and 41 missing calves. The state ultimately paid \$9,540 of his claim, which had an estimated value of \$45,000.

COURTESY OF TONY SCHICK/OREGON PUBLIC BROADCASTING/EARTHFIX

from the backseat of his Subaru. Sykes, 72, has a trim white beard and wore a "Wolf Haven" ball cap. We drove into the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, dodging deer hunters and cows, including two of Sheehy's belled animals, then hiked through thick pine forest to Marr Meadow, not far from where Todd Nash's calf was killed two days earlier. A faint howl drifted through the trees.

Though Sykes has seen wolves in the wild only a half-dozen times, he's devoted a lot of time to them, serving seven years on the Wallowa County Wolf Committee. The program's enabling legislation requires all the committees to include one county commissioner, two livestock producers, two wolf conservation advocates and two county business representatives. But Sykes said Wallowa's committee is biased by local anti-wolf politics, with the other conservation post historically filled by someone associated with agriculture, not wildlife conservation.

Sykes believes that's led to questionable decisions. In one case, the Wallowa committee approved a \$1,000 compensation request and passed it to Jason Barber, the state official who oversees the program, for a calf killed by a wolf while illegally grazing on an allotment the Forest Service had already closed. The state paid the full amount.

Neighboring Baker County has been unable to fill its wolf-advocate posts, which are currently empty. In 2016, concerns were raised when the committee agreed to compensate for 41 missing calves and 11 missing cows, valued at more than \$45,000.

At the time, there had been only one confirmed wolf kill in Baker, in 2012, and, according to the state wildlife department, no pack had yet denned there. That cast doubt on the size of the claim. But the rancher who filed it, Chad DelCurto, said wolves had been active on his allotment for three or four years. Come fall, most of his calves were missing. "I hadn't had problems in the past, until these wolves started coming in so thick," DelCurto said.

The committee's response so alarmed Mike Durgan, one of Baker's business representatives, that he quit. "Nobody believed (DelCurto's claim) except our committee," said Durgan. He worried that it signaled a bigger problem: The county lacked a consistent, defensible procedure for obtaining accurate documentation from ranchers.

Baker County Commissioner Mark Bennett acknowledged the case had problems, but said DelCurto hadn't been using that allotment long enough to have historical loss numbers. When Barber began asking questions, the committee revised its ask, and DelCurto ultimately

received \$9,540.

Critics believe the case could embolden others. Ranchers can only receive money for missing livestock if their animals are grazing in areas of known wolf activity — currently eight counties — as designated by the state wildlife department. But wolves are fanning out, and more counties will soon be eligible.

Even in more moderate Umatilla County, there are concerns about the limits of oversight. The county's committee has two wolf advocates, and for major claims, it closely investigates ranchers' routines for monitoring cows and locating missing ones, says county commissioner and committee member Larry Givens. But there's only so much vetting they can do. Givens worries wolves are getting blamed for cougar and bear kills, as well as cattle rustling. "I think that you're going to face some risks if you have your animals up in outlying areas."

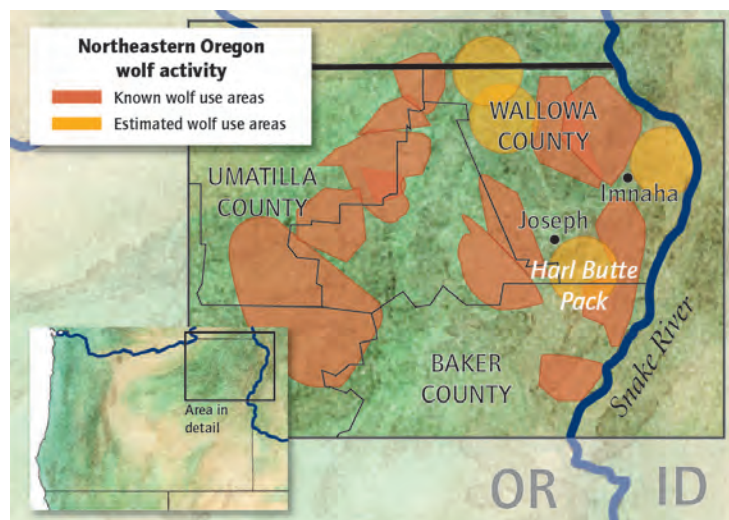
In 2018, compensation requests for missing livestock from four counties climbed to \$42,000, far outpacing requests for direct losses, which have remained between \$7,000 and \$18,000 statewide annually.

Roblyn Brown, the state's wolf coordinator, said that she's not aware of any biological reason for the surge. In theory, places with high missing-cattle claims should more closely track areas that are known to have dense wolf populations or high numbers of confirmed kills.

In a case at Baker County's Pine Valley Ranch, 24 animals disappeared without a trace in fall 2013. The rancher requested more than \$26,000. But just one confirmed wolf kill had occurred in the area, a year before. "If the producer is checking his livestock, you would expect the producer, or other people recreating in the area, to find several injured or dead calves to correspond with the missing numbers, if wolves were the cause," said Brown.

The spike isn't good for either rural residents or for wolves. If wolves are solely responsible, then nonlethal preventive measures aren't working. That could lead the state to kill more wolves. To date, the state has paid \$595,790 in state and federal funds to 13 counties for nonlethal deterrents. But because the enabling legislation that required these deterrents didn't define what their "reasonable use" would look like, Oregon Wild worries they aren't being deployed effectively. Fladry works in small pastures, but not large allotments. Wallowa County Commissioner Susan Roberts says the only thing that has worked to keep wolves away there is human presence — the county's range rider. But that's just one person for thousands of acres.

Another possibility is that some claims are inflated, either unintentionally or deliberately, blaming wolves for animals that disappeared for other reasons. "Wolves would have to do nothing but kill livestock for 24 hours a day to get up to the numbers they're talking



LUNA ANNA ARCHIE/HIGH COUNTRY NEWS. SOURCE: OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

about,” said Defenders’ Stone. And if ranchers are submitting illegitimate, or poorly documented, claims, they’re not just taking money from taxpayers, they may also jeopardize public support for reimbursing ranchers. “That’s the kind of thing that’s going to kill this program,” Durgan said.

SOME RANCHERS HAVE ANOTHER

EXPLANATION for the discrepancy between missing cattle claims and confirmed kills: They believe there are more wolves in Oregon than acknowledged, and that the wildlife department is attributing actual wolf kills to other causes. They feel betrayed.

I met rancher Cynthia Warnock at her home in Imnaha, overlooking rolling hills dotted with Indian paintbrush. She, her husband and brother-in-law have been some of Wallowa’s most frequent claimants for confirmed losses, receiving more than \$4,000.

In late 2016, when wolves killed one of their calves and maimed two others, the Warnocks asked officials to kill the offenders. They had lost more than four animals in the previous six months to wolves — the number legally required for a lethal removal permit. But the state declined, because the season was almost over and the cows would be moved soon.

In another case, Cynthia Warnock found a calf covered in bite marks. But investigators said they weren’t wide enough to be from a wolf and more likely came from a coyote. A month later, the Warnocks found a partially eaten cow, but the state ruled that wolves had scavenged an already-dead carcass.

Cynthia didn’t trust the findings; like other ranchers, she felt investigators were biased in favor of the wolves the department is charged with protecting. Producers want Wildlife Services, which handles many rancher-wildlife conflicts, often by killing predators, to take over.

Phase three of Oregon’s wolf management plan, which eastern Oregon entered in 2017, does allow Wildlife Services to conduct investigations once staff complete required training. That prospect worries Oregon Wild’s Rob Klavins. Roughly a quarter of Wildlife Services’ budget in Oregon comes from livestock and agricultural producers. “There’s an incentive to make a different decision,” Klavins said. And with such investigations ultimately leading not just to a payout, but deciding if wolves will live or die, the stakes are high.

Cynthia Warnock was clear on what she wants. “If we have a pack that preys on livestock, then we eliminate the pack,” she said. “Compensation helps us adjust financially, but that’s it. ... You can’t pay for what we feel.”

OREGON’S COMPENSATION PROGRAM

doesn’t appear any closer to achieving local tolerance for wolves — one of its key goals. If it had, you’d expect to see fewer requests for lethal removal and a decrease



in poaching, said Adrian Treves, director of the Carnivore Coexistence Lab at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In 2017, after eastern Oregon passed a population threshold where the state’s plan begins to relax protections, officials killed five wolves at ranchers’ behest — the same number killed in 2016 — despite far fewer confirmed livestock losses. An additional four wolves may have been poached.

Oregon’s troubles raise questions about whether there are better ways to proceed. Some wolf advocates argue that high-conflict areas just aren’t appropriate for grazing, and recommend paying ranchers to give up those permits, rather than killing native predators to save non-native livestock on public land. Others suggest paying ranchers if wolves pass through their private grazing allotments — to reward them for maintaining a healthy ecosystem. That would eliminate the moral hazard posed by programs that depend on hard-to-document, emotionally fraught losses.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is trying something similar with the Mexican gray wolf in Arizona and New Mexico. In addition to receiving money for confirmed losses, ranchers are paid based on the number of wolves on their private land and public leases, the number of livestock exposed to wolves, and the rancher’s efforts to avoid conflicts. But the program has received just a third of its proposed \$634,000 budget. “The funding issue is the biggest challenge,” said John Oakleaf, the agency’s field coordinator for the Mexican Gray Wolf Recovery Project.

Oregon faces a similar financial struggle: The fund for wolf compensation has barely changed since 2014, while the number of wolves in the state has

nearly doubled. In 2018, Barber had to reduce payments on counties’ requests for nonlethal controls — \$271,000 — by more than half. Missing cattle payments, traditionally reduced by 25 percent, were cut to 50 percent. “It’s just simple math,” Barber says. “We have to do more with less.”

Several people are working on possible fixes. Oregon state Sen. Greg Barreto, R, introduced a bill last year that would put more money in the compensation fund based on wolf population increases. And Barber has been working with the county committees to improve claim documentation. One approach might be to have an independent third party verify the number of animals before ranchers let them loose on their range for the season. Chad DelCurto said he did that this year, with the chairman of the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association Eastern Oregon Wolf Committee present to help count calves in his corral.

“We’ve got more eyes and witnesses on,” said DelCurto, who has become more hesitant to apply for compensation since the last time. He didn’t file any claims for the animals he says went missing in 2017, even though at the end of the year, Oregon confirmed that Baker County had its first pack, the eight-wolf Pine Creek Pack. “It’s not just a hearsay deal,” DelCurto said. “We have a problem.” Less than 48 hours after DelCurto turned out his herds this spring, he said, a turkey hunter spotted wolves among his cows.

Despite using nonlethal deterrents, burying bone piles, and hazing wolves away, DelCurto and another rancher still lost four calves to the pack this spring. They asked for a lethal control permit. In April, the wildlife department shot and killed three of the Pine Creek wolves. □

One subadult and one pup from the Catherine Pack on private property in eastern Union County, May 2017.

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE



Gloria Dickie is a freelance science and environmental journalist currently reporting from the road.

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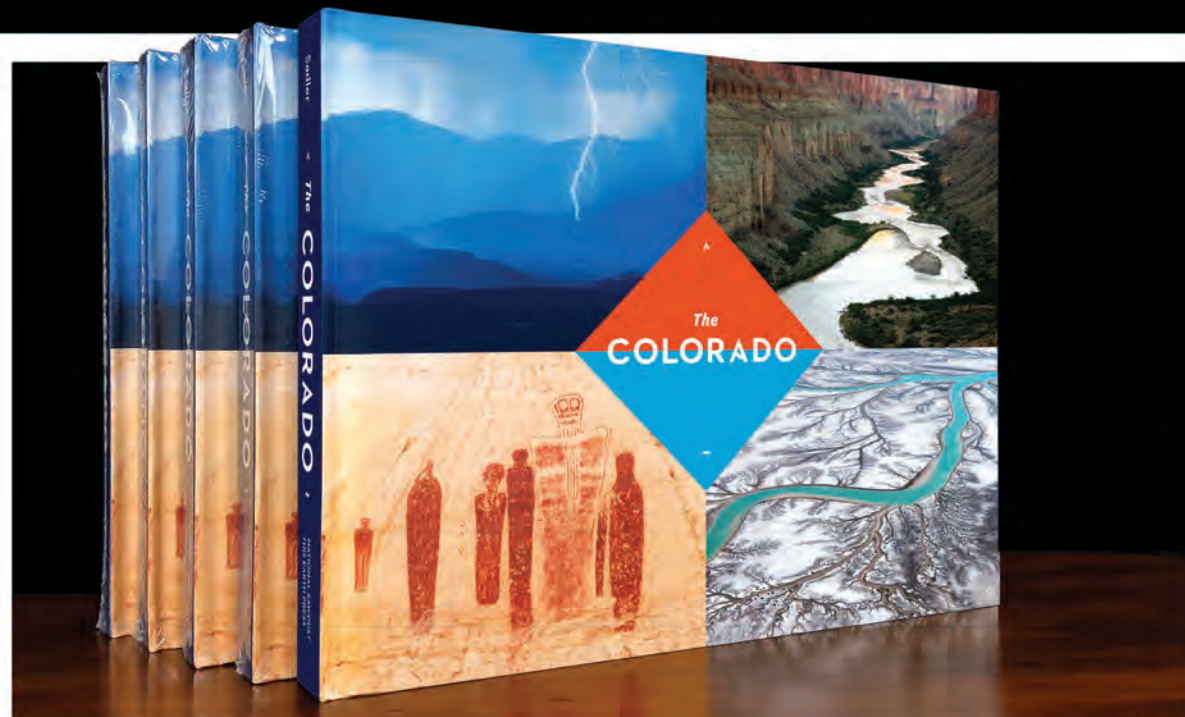
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High Country News

THE COLORADO HAS CARVED THROUGH CANYONS, CULTURES AND CENTURIES. HERE ARE NINE CHAPTERS IN ITS FAST-FLOWING JOURNEY...



THE COLORADO by Christa Sadler.

■ Table of Contents:

1. BEGINNINGS: The Colorado River Watershed and Prehistoric Peoples
2. A PADRE, A HORSE, A TELESCOPE: Eusebio Francisco Kino and the Land and Peoples of the Lower Colorado River
3. AN UNKNOWN DISTANCE YET TO RUN: John Wesley Powell and an Understanding of the American West
4. SHIMMERING DESERT: The Salton Sea and the Birth of Western Water Issues
 - The Law of the River—The Fight for the West's Most Precious Resource
5. THE COLOSSUS: Hoover Dam and the Beginning of the Dam Building Era
6. CATHEDRALS IN THE DESERT: Glen Canyon Dam and the Waterscape of the New Southwest
7. EL CORRIDO DE JOE R.: Industrial Agriculture in the Land of the Colorado River
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A baby born to fires

The menace of a snow-free winter turns into the fear of flames

In November, we still thought winter would come. The sky was leaden, the tops of southwest Colorado's mountains edged with snow. We had five cords of wood split and stacked. I was pregnant, and looking forward to cozy afternoons by the fire with a pot of soup simmering on the stove.

But November passed without its usual storms. In December, I rode my bike down the same dirt roads I usually skied on. In January, my husband, Jesse, and I bought our first house. After helping us move, our friends sat in the yard in T-shirts and sandals, drinking beer in the sunshine like it was the middle of summer.

The mild weather might have been pleasant, except each brittle sunrise seemed to carry with it the specter of wildfire, of dry rivers and dangerous heat. "The scary thing about drought," I wrote in my journal that March, "is how nebulous it is. There's no way of knowing how long it will last; nothing you can do except compulsively check the 10-day forecast, again and again, hoping for rain."

Still, Jesse and I took advantage of the weather to do a few house projects, and although I'm usually averse to loud noises, the banging of hammers and whirring of saws were soothing. They were the sounds of a home being made. The junipers may have been turning brown and spring winds may have been carrying red dirt to melt our meager snowpack, but the act of building a home felt like creating a bulwark against the drought; like it could somehow shelter us from whatever was to come.

Our daughter, Josephine, was born in April. Two months later, the fire started.

At first, Durango's 416 Fire seemed insignificant. Three other fires had been sparked in Colorado that spring, and each had grown a few thousand acres and been put out. But this one grew, and grew, consuming the parched forest, flirting with the edges of neighborhoods, jumping streams and drainages. From our house, we watched the plume of purple-gray smoke turn into a looming mushroom cloud and then an all-consuming haze. We monitored websites charting the fire's growth and the number of homes evacuated while maintaining our improbable optimism. Surely, it wouldn't reach our

home. Surely we wouldn't have to leave.

As the evacuation line inched closer to our neighborhood, though, we encountered a danger I hadn't considered before becoming a mother: smoke pollution. Each night around 10 p.m., a cloud of ash and fine particulates sank into the valley and enveloped our house, and we'd rush to close the windows despite the fact that the indoor temperature still hovered around 85 degrees. We slept less and less. As I kicked off the sheets and pulled Josephine's tiny, hot body close for late-night feedings, the smoke crept through the cracks and crevices of our 70-year-old home. By morning, it smelled like someone had lit a campfire in the living room.

Josephine, meanwhile, became increasingly fussy and difficult to console. As a first-time mother, I had no idea how much crying was normal, how much was due to the heat, and how much could be attributed to the smoke. The daily air quality warnings issued by the health department advised the very young and the very old to avoid smoke pollution, but they didn't elaborate on what the repercussions might be if you simply couldn't do so.

So I did some research, and started to get worried. The best proxy for how early exposure to wildfire smoke impacts children's health seems to be a study on a group of rhesus macaque monkeys who were exposed to smoke from the 2008 California wildfires. Compared to a control group, 3-year-old monkeys who'd breathed smoke as infants had reduced lung capacity and pulmonary function, as well as problems with their immune systems. And because babies breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults, they may experience more severe coughing, sore throats and respiratory distress.

Josephine wasn't wheezing, and much of the time she was still a smiling, gurgling, chubby baby. But when the air quality index broke 512 on a scale that usually tops out at 500 and the smoke grew so thick we couldn't see our neighbor's house two blocks away, Jesse and I concluded that it was no longer safe for her developing lungs. It was time to leave.

We made our decision on a Tuesday. By Wednesday morning, we'd packed my Subaru with an odd combination of



vacation gear and irreplaceable evacuation items: beach chairs, bathing suits and bike helmets alongside photo albums, journals and my grandmother's jewelry. A box of diapers shoved next to a beloved teapot. Gas in the tank: check. A quick oil change: check. And then we were on our way, skirting national forests that were closed because they were so dry, passing landmarks some 85 miles from the fire that were obscured by smoke. Along with reports that other children fleeing unhealthy conditions were being "sheltered" in abandoned Walmarts at the U.S.-Mexico border, it was enough to make me feel like I was living in some dystopian, climate-addled future. Except it isn't the future. This is now.

Still, Jesse and I are fortunate. By sundown, we'd reached Flagstaff, Arizona, where we saw a clear night sky for the first time in weeks. We rolled down the windows. In her carseat, her face tilted toward the cool breeze, Josephine slept peacefully. □

A young girl overlooks the 416 Fire from a vantage point on Lions Den Trail in Durango.

KATE GIORDANO

Krista Langlois is a correspondent with *High Country News*. She writes from Durango, Colorado. [@cestmoiLanglois](#)

Solar's low-income hopes

California brings renewable energy to more residents



LETTER FROM
CALIFORNIA
BY RUXANDRA
GUIDI

In central Los Angeles, just a couple of blocks from the intersection of two major freeways, an almost century-old, three-story brick apartment building stands. Known as the Alegria — Spanish for “joy” — it is one of the few affordable residential buildings in this industrial but increasingly coveted neighborhood, due to its proximity to the University of Southern California campus and downtown LA. Rent is set at 30 percent of a minimum-wage worker’s salary (around \$12 to \$15 per hour), and Section 8 vouchers are still accepted.

Twenty years ago, the Alegria Apartments were so infested by mice and cockroaches that only five units were occupied. Across the street, less than 50 feet from the building’s entrance, an active oil-drilling operation exposed residents to health threats ranging from respiratory problems to cancer. According to a 2014 report from the Natural Resources Defense Council, there are an estimated 5,000 active oil and gas wells in Los Angeles County. More than half a million people, a majority of them people of color, live within 1,320 feet of an oil or gas well.

In 2004, the Esperanza Community Housing Corporation, a community development nonprofit, bought the building and began to restore it. Now, the Alegria has gone solar, thanks to a partnership with Grid Alternatives, whose mission is to increase access to renewable energy technology and job training. This is the first initiative of its kind to bring free solar energy to low-income renters directly impacted by fossil fuel extraction. The solar energy will by no means offset all the hardships involved in living next to an urban oil well. But it’s a hopeful sign of what’s possible in the future, with California leading the way to environmental justice by making cleaner energy accessible to all, regardless of class.

“Part of what made this the right choice was Alegria’s fight against the polluting AllenCo Energy oil well facility across the street,” Michael Kadish, executive director of Grid Alternatives in Greater Los Angeles, who envisioned the collaboration, told me. “It was evident that this project could draw a stark contrast between old dirty energy extraction that harms community members and the new clean energy future that we are working to make as inclusive as possible.”

The Alegria received a 34.5-kW DC solar photovoltaic system, a medium-sized system that will deliver an estimated \$9,000 in savings annually to the Esperanza Community Housing Corporation. It’s an approach that seems ideal for the area: Southern California has sunshine, an endless sea of rooftops — and a clean energy policy that’s becoming a model for other states.

California recently passed a landmark rule that requires every new single-family home to have solar panels, starting in 2020. This will translate to an extra \$10,000 fee for new homeowners, who, on average, pay \$674,600 for a home in LA. There will be clear long-term benefits for them and for the state’s

electric grid, and carbon emissions will be lowered overall. But what about the middle- and working-class people, who are barely able to afford living in a city like Los Angeles? How will they gain?

According to Grid Alternatives’ data, low-income households, or those earning annual incomes less than 80 percent of area median income, account for less than 1 percent of LA County’s residential solar capacity. Yet they typically spend a higher percentage of their income on energy costs, so they stand to benefit the most from utility bill savings.

Thanks to Obama-era executive actions and private-sector commitments, low-income multifamily buildings can now get fully subsidized arrays, like the one the Alegria has installed. But in order for those to translate to savings for tenants rather than landlords, Los Angeles County would need to adopt an existing state policy known as virtual net metering — a system that allows people to share solar energy among tenants and receive credits on their electric bills for any excess energy they produce.

“In the future, we hope that virtual net metering will mean that financial benefits can flow directly to affordable housing residents to provide greater equity in California,” said Kadish, who is part of a coalition of clean energy and housing advocates pushing for strategies and programs to assist low-income energy customers. Currently, renters make up about half of the LA Department of Water and Power’s customers. But without a utility policy like virtual net metering, they cannot share a single solar system or qualify for rebates.

This is where the Alegria comes in: Its new solar array is little more than a symbolic gesture, assisting a mere 15 families, but it demonstrates that sustainable energy can and should be accessible and affordable for all. Those 15 families represent a small fraction of the many low-income people who live in one of the most expensive and sprawling urban regions in the country. In full view of the kind of fossil fuel energy they hope to make obsolete, they are pioneering a future that includes virtual net metering and more equitable energy planning. In this way, they’re blazing a path for the years to come.

“We continue to fight, because until we can dismantle oil wells — like the one across the street from us — we won’t truly have a good quality of life,” said Victoria, an Alegria resident, at the “flip the switch” ceremony last month. “But solar panels are giving us a big help.” □

According to Grid Alternatives’ data, low-income households, or those earning annual incomes less than 80 percent of area median income, account for less than 1 percent of LA County’s residential solar capacity.

Contributing editor Ruxandra Guidi writes from Los Angeles, California.

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HEARD AROUND THE WEST | BY BETSY MARSTON

THE WEST

Downieville, California, population 280, may be surrounded by the extremely flammable Tahoe National Forest, but its Independence Day parade always manages to entertain crowds with fireworks — in this case, fireless fireworks. Two wide rolls of Bubble Wrap, hundreds of feet long, are rolled out on the town's main drag, and during what the Sierra County Chamber of Commerce calls the "ultimate small-town parade," volunteers are invited to stomp, crackle and pop their way across the plastic. The sound they make is reminiscent of the cacophony of the real thing, and much less likely to throw off hazardous sparks.

COLORADO

After a raccoon climbed up a telephone pole in Colorado Springs, a man walking by responded in the way that seemed natural to him: He tried to shoot it down, reports KRDO. Police say it's not clear how he botched the attempt, but 67-year-old Don Upshaw was taken to the hospital with a gunshot wound to his lower leg. Apparently, he was trying to shoot the raccoon with his revolver, but "ended up on the wrong side of the barrel."

WYOMING

Uh-oh: Grizzlies in Yellowstone National Park are meandering a little too close to cars, with one "getting close enough to play with the antenna on one vehicle," said the *Cody Enterprise*. "This incident used to be rare," said Yellowstone spokeswoman Morgan Warthin. "So far this year it's happened twice already." There is a park protocol that applies to these dangerous encounters — more dangerous for the bears than the humans — though Warthin said she understands that tourists simply yearn to see the animals up close. Her advice: "Honk and drive away."

THE BORDER

A black bear in Naco, Sonora, decided there were better opportunities up north, so it clambered up the big, beautiful wall between the United States and Mexico and dropped safely down into Naco, Arizona, reports the Mexican news service



ARIZONA These new serpentine belts are always getting loose. GREG WOODALL

Soy Cobre. Though ICE did not appear to be present, it was probably fortunate that the bear entered the United States without cubs.

MONTANA

An unusual incident made the news in Great Falls, Montana, recently. It all began on a Sunday morning when residents of the Fox Hollow Apartments felt their bedrooms shudder at the same time they heard a grinding noise, reports The Associated Press. Looking out their windows, they saw a most peculiar sight: A topless woman was operating a front-loading backhoe — deftly enough to bring the bucket close to her apartment window, which she then climbed through. The backhoe operator was Heather Houston, 34, who had "borrowed" the loader and driven it across town to her apartment, along the way crashing through a fence, damaging a parked car and scraping the wall of the apartment house where she lived. Though police told the *Great Falls Tribune* that Houston was topless, that detail was omitted from their official statement, perhaps because the woman quickly

added some clothing once inside her apartment. Houston's unorthodox trip amassed a bevy of charges, including felony criminal mischief and felony criminal endangerment.

And then there's the Curious Case of the Wandering Kangaroo near the tiny town of Dodson, population 124, in western Montana. Two women were driving down a rural road when they came upon a marsupial standing calmly in front of them. The driver swerved to avoid it, but lost control and the car rolled over, reports KTVQ. Highway Patrol Trooper Matt Finley interviewed the women afterward at the hospital and admitted that he and some of the nurses laughed heartily at the idea that a kangaroo was involved, assuming that the driver was "just out of it." But when the trooper visited the battered car, he couldn't help noticing "a kangaroo in the ditch about 40 yards away." Finley said he was told there was a "kangaroo farm" in the area but was unable to find it. That wasn't the only thing missing. Now, "authorities also do not know where the kangaroo is." Meanwhile, the women were released from the hospital, almost certainly hoping not to see a kangaroo pop up.

There's a place to go in Helena, Montana, if you'd like to rid yourself of a weapon. It's called the National Center for Unwanted Firearms, founded 15 years ago by Bruce Seiler, who worked for the U.S. Secret Service from 1987-1992. "There's more than 300 million firearms in America," he says. "There has to be more guns destroyed." Most of his clients are middle-aged people who inherit guns they don't want, and don't want them ending up in the wrong hands. The first gun the center destroyed was a cheap revolver made of pot metal, which Seiler described as "more dangerous to the user than the intended victim," reports *YES!* magazine. Says Seiler: "There needs to be a junkyard for guns in America."

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

Tips and photos of Western oddities are appreciated and often shared in this column. Write betsym@hcn.org or tag photos #heardaroundthewest on Instagram.



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“I returned again to the idea that they were doing more than just a professional job. They were demonstrating an American neighborliness that had seemed lost in the modern era of ‘me.’”

Auden Schendler, in his essay, "In a time of division and hate, wildfire unites a community," from *Writers on the Range*, hcn.org/wotr