

High Country News

For people who care about the West

El Nuevo Movimiento

Across the West, veteran Chicano groups embrace undocumented immigrants. It wasn't always this way.

By Gustavo Arellano





Utah Coalition of La Raza President Richard Jaramillo helps his organization bridge the gap between the immigrant and Chicano communities. RUSSEL DANIELS FOR HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

On the cover

Ingrid Ordóñez Campos poses for a portrait in the South Valley Academy in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where she teaches a middle school special needs class. Ordóñez Campos is a Southwest Organizing Project board member, community organizer and DACA recipient.

JUAN ANTONIO LABRECHE FOR HIGH COUNTRY NEWS



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Editor's note

Making sense of things

There is an important debate unfolding in the pages of this magazine. I read it in your letters to the editor, in online social threads, and in the emails sent to me from readers far and wide. Broadly speaking, the debate involves our mission. Readers' concerns vary, but they are generally tied to one of three things: our coverage of non-environmental or non-resource-related issues; our coverage of under-represented (or non-rural, non-white) communities; and our coverage of anything outside the Intermountain West. It's a lively, and I think healthy, conversation, coming at a challenging time for journalism — amid a flurry of "fake news" and misinformation, mass layoffs and budget cuts, and growing threats to our democracy. Given all this, we need a magazine that makes sense of things. A lot of things.



The mission of *High Country News* is "to inform and inspire people — through in-depth journalism — to act on behalf of the West's diverse natural and human communities." It's a broad mission, but an important one, and it forces *HCN's* editors to constantly ask two big questions: What, exactly, is the American West, and what does it mean to act on its behalf? We ask these questions over and over, and sometimes they lead us to unexpected answers and unexpected stories.

We do this because no matter what you love about the West, this place has always been under threat from unethical forces — of greed, oppression, exploitation, or just plain carelessness. To counter these forces requires broad alliances of unlikely partners and a deep understanding of myriad issues. Climate change is tied to economic inequality, land conservation to environmental racism, energy to pollution, and on and on. The West is a vast web of competing values and interests, and we at *High Country News* seek to cover them all. We do this not from a sense of "political correctness," as one letter-writer puts it in this issue, but because we believe our readers want to understand the West as a whole.

In this issue, for example, you will read about how Chicano movements are beginning to embrace immigration as an issue relevant to their cause. You will also read stories about a major public-lands bill just passed in Congress; a water grab in Idaho; a crackdown on humanitarian aid along the southern border; and a Portland neighborhood that is already adopting the principles of the Green New Deal. Meanwhile, in Pinal County, Arizona, climate change is forcing some tough agricultural choices. We also discuss why environmental victories don't guarantee economic justice, and we explore the surprising challenges faced by women of color who simply want to mountain bike on public lands. I believe each of these stories is important, and I hope you'll find them informative or inspiring. It's up to all of us to act on behalf of the West — however you define it.

—Brian Calvert, editor-in-chief



Dying trees on U.S. Route 20 in Oregon's Cascade Mountains. USDA FOREST SERVICE

Dead pine trees drive new herbicide rules in Oregon

A chemical known for killing trees across the country is exposing divides between state and federal pesticide regulation, and between environmental challenges on either side of the Cascades in Oregon. State regulators are clamping down on a chemical that federal regulators banned under one name, but continued to license under another. As environmental advocates from the Willamette Valley spearhead an effort to ban the chemical and reduce pesticide use overall, public works officials from central and eastern Oregon would like to keep using a chemical they say is important for managing invasive plants that threaten native ecosystems, agricultural operations and roads.

CARL SEGERSTROM

Read more online: hcne.ws/herbicide

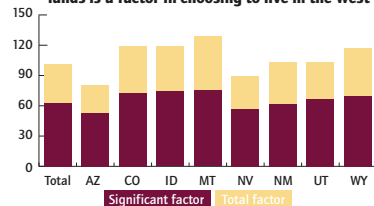
Harvey Weinstein and a broken promise in Indian Country

The film *Wind River*, which follows the aftermath of a Northern Arapaho woman's death, was supposed to benefit the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC) in Lame Deer, Montana. When the filmmakers severed ties with Harvey Weinstein, the film mogul who faced multiple accusations of rape, sexual assault and sexual misconduct, all further film royalties that would have gone to The Weinstein Company were to go to the resource center, which works to support tribes responding to incidents of missing and murdered Indigenous women. In May 2018, though, Weinstein was arrested for rape charges, leading to the company's bankruptcy — and erasing its obligation to the royalty agreement. Now, Lantern Entertainment, a Texas-based company, owns The Weinstein Company's assets and has not said whether it will honor the arrangement. "It's all somewhat disappointing," said Lucy Simpson, executive director of NIWRC. But, as an organization used to operating on small budgets, Simpson said they will "move on and keep doing what (they're) doing."

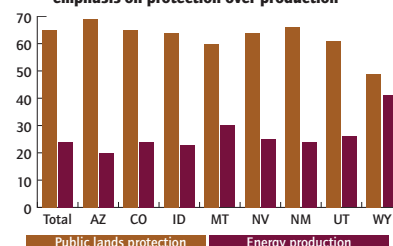
ELENA SAAVEDRA BUCKLEY

Read more online: hcne.ws/weinstein

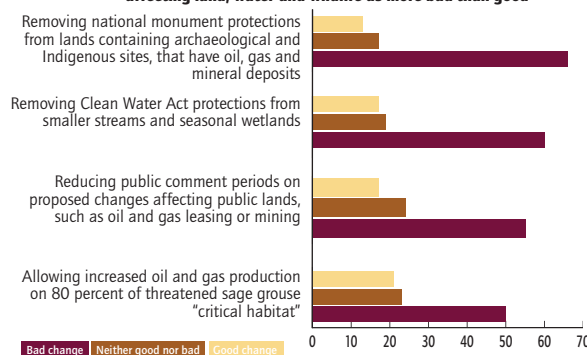
Majorities in each state say living near public lands is a factor in choosing to live in the West



In every Western state, voters advise placing greater emphasis on protection over production



By wide margins, voters perceive a number of policy changes affecting land, water and wildlife as more bad than good



Western voters care more about climate change than energy dominance

Climate concerns among Western voters have jumped in the past two years, according to Colorado College's annual Conservation in the West survey. The study also found that a majority of respondents identified as "conservationists," and two-thirds said they favor federal policy to preserve public-land protection and access, and just under a quarter prefer the Trump administration's "energy dominance" policy of increasing extractive services on public lands. It is common for public opinion polls to find widespread concern for issues involving climate and the environment. But while these concerns exist, they "are often less intense than those regarding other issues," said Christopher Borick, director of the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion. Whether climate concerns in the West outweigh more traditional political issues remains an open question. This study did find some evidence of a possible shift: Respondents were more worried about water supply issues than economic concerns like wages and unemployment.

NICK BOWLIN

Read more online:

hcne.ws/climate-change-poll

Why was a study on trafficking in Indian Country canceled?

In 2016, the National Institute of Justice awarded funding to a study on sex trafficking in Indigenous communities, the first federally funded plan to research the issue. But in 2017, after the arrival of the Trump administration, the study was killed. According to former institute researchers not affiliated with the trafficking study, the nix fits into a broader pattern of the recent turn away from research into violent

crimes committed against minority groups.

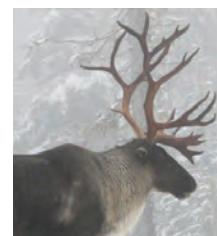
That doesn't mean it isn't needed. "The crisis is intensifying, and we don't fully understand the magnitude of what's happening," said Deleana Otherbull, executive director of the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women, about trafficking in Indian Country. NICK PACHELLI

Read more online: hcne.ws/trafficking-study



Families of missing and murdered Indigenous people join hands for a prayer at the start of an awareness drive in Gallup, New Mexico. CAYLA NIMMO

THE LATEST



Woodland caribou.

STEVE FORREST / USFWS

Backstory

Woodland caribou, which once roamed from Maine to Washington state, were protected as endangered in 1983. Eventually, they all but vanished from the Lower 48.

Still, the tiny South Selkirk herd hung on along Idaho and Washington's northern border, ranging into British Columbia, where perhaps 1,000 animals remain. But wide-scale timber harvesting, unchecked recreation and climate change mean that the species continues to spiral downward ("In Canada, mountain caribou recovery effort falters," *HCN*, 10/31/16).

Followup

In January, Canadian officials captured the last remaining member of the South Selkirk herd. That female and two animals from British Columbia were transported to a breeding facility in Revelstoke. The species' long-term fate remains uncertain, as the Canadian government faces pressure to allow more logging in caribou habitat. "You know it's sad. We're still in mourning over the whole situation," Bart George, a wildlife biologist for the Kalispel Tribe, told the *Spokesman-Review*. "The Selkirk lost some of their magic." (See our review of Caribou Rainforest, page 13.)

JODI PETERSON

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UNWARRANTED CRITIQUE

I am very much enjoying your focus on Native American issues, and I thought the “Nizhóni Girls” comic was marvelous (*HCN*, 2/4/19). But I was disappointed with Kim TallBear’s critique of Sen. Elizabeth Warren, “Playing Indian.”

As a former elected official for the Green Party, I’m proud that San Miguel County, Colorado, adopted Indigenous Peoples Day in 1998, one of the first government jurisdictions in the country to do so. In 2015, our county made a formal government-to-government apology to the Ute Indian Tribe of Utah for the forced removal of Uncompahgre Ute from our county boundaries in 1881. That apology was accepted. We have followed up with cultural exchanges with the three Ute nations in our region, and offer free Ute youth ski days in Telluride.

I’m aware of the continuing appropriation of Indigenous identity by American culture. But isn’t having a family tradition of ancestry a different thing than claiming membership in a tribe, or any minority group? I have a tradition of Hispanic ancestry in my family tree that I’ve long maintained, but I don’t have “proof,” other than oral history and some corroborating historical research. But I always check the “Hispanic” box these days, and often “other,” because I’m European-American, not “white,” anyway.

Warren may have used poor judgment in self-identifying as Native American in college directories, but an exhaustive investigation by the *Boston Globe* last year found she hadn’t used her ancestry to obtain preferential treatment or benefits. (Though it may have helped some of the colleges she worked at to tout a diversity that didn’t really exist.) Honoring a family tradition of Indigenous association by listing it in faculty directories is not “playing Indian” to my mind, but rather choosing to own up to the multicultural roots that make up Warren’s own personal “herstory.”

Having an NFL sports team named with a derogatory slur, or a national baseball sports team whose fans use a “toma-hawk chop” chant — those are instances of playing Indian we ought to be working to change.

Art Goodtimes

Program Director, Telluride Institute’s
Ute Reconciliation Program
Norwood, Colorado

SPURRED TO SUBSCRIBE

Osiyo. We most respectfully have been spurred to subscribe for a year due to your perspective commentary by Kim TallBear. *Wado*.

Sarah Mix and Susan Strubel
Citizens of Cherokee Nation

Ashland, Oregon

EDITORIAL DRIFT

I’m concerned about *HCN* running a 10-page comic book as the cover story in the magazine (“Nizhóni Girls”). I have nothing against comic books. When I was a kid, I enjoyed the debut of *Spider-Man* in 1963. As a young man, I enjoyed the revolutionary underground comic books of the late 1960s and

1970s, such as R. Crumb’s *Mr. Natural*. Lately, I collect well-done graphic nonfiction books, including *The March*, a three-volume story of black congressman John Lewis’ life and his role leading the civil rights movement against violent racist resistance in the South in the 1960s. (The third volume won a 2016 National Book Award.) What I see in *HCN*’s comic book glorifying an all-women Native American rock band is: Almost no storyline, no character development, ultimately no characters at all, no scenes worth remembering, no message, no significance. It seems racist to me, the kind of racism that assumes whatever any Native American does (a rock band or a comic book) is automatically worthwhile. I think it’s the most obvious example of *HCN*’s editorial drift into political correctness and narcissism in recent years, which other longtime *HCN* readers have also lamented on this letters page.

Ray Ring
Tucson, Arizona

MOVING STORY

“Nizhóni Girls” was an important and moving piece. I still can’t read it without tearing up.

Pauly Denetclaw
Manuelito, New Mexico

NOT UP TO STANDARD

I appreciate Associate Editor Tristan Ahtone’s account of the Indigenous storytelling tradition, and I’m glad to hear of the success of these motivated and talented girls, but journalism this is not. *HCN* has such a wonderful history of hard-hitting investigative journalism, stories that

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Editor, *HCN*, P.O. Box 1090, Paonia, CO 81428.

involve research, face-to-face interviews, extensive travel and persistence when confronted with less than cooperative people, bureaucratic obstacles, and passionate partisanship from multiple perspectives. I come to expect that standard from you. The Nizhóni Girls story doesn’t meet your standards by any measure.

Avram Chetron
Ashland, Oregon

MORE VISUAL STORYTELLING

HCN’s effort to delve into visual storytelling has been one of the most exciting things I’ve seen in the many years I’ve been reading my favorite magazine. You can’t please everyone. I hope to see this trend continue.

Dave Bastion
Grand Junction, Colorado

JOURNALISTIC INSANITY

I just received my Feb. 4 issue of *HCN* and was surprised to see that the “environmental bi-weekly for people who care about the West” had morphed into *Rolling Stone*. With Donald Trump in the White House dismantling environmental regulations, assaulting the Endangered Species Act, filling top spots with corporate polluters and environmental destroyers, attacking national monuments and wilderness, bailing on global heatstroke — what the hell is *HCN* doing committing its cover and 10 precious pages to a Native American female punk rock group that accomplishes zero for any critical environmental cause? Please, put down the mind-altering and values-altering substances and return to fighting the good fight on behalf of planetary survival and big wild things in big wild places. If it wouldn’t add to my carbon footprint, I’d burn the current issue.

Brian Peck
Columbia Falls, Montana

BRAVE AND BRAVO!

Integrating this form (comics/graphic novel) into a journalistic outlet is brave; it opens up a lot, formally. By amplifying an Indigenous storyboard, *HCN* is strengthening its adaptive ability to meaningfully respond to the myriad challenges we face, further opening the possibility of a magazine that enacts the actual context of the West, whose past, present, and future are ineluctably diverse. In fact, the power of the West rests in its diversity (both discordant and harmonious), of culture, of ecosystem, of expression. Bravo, *HCN*, for uniting the West.

Rico Moore
Fort Collins, Colorado



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Protected lands, neglected duties

As Congress touts a bipartisan public-lands bill, it continues to punt on setting environmental policies

BY CARL SEGERSTROM

A fresh wilderness designation in southern New Mexico. A new national monument in Los Angeles. Hundreds of miles of river protected in Oregon. A ban on new mining projects on Yellowstone National Park's doorstep. These were a few of the crowd-pleasers the Senate tossed, with Oprah-esque glee, into a bipartisan public-lands bill that passed on Feb. 12.

The bill's passage set off a barrage of praise from many corners of the outdoor community, as groups like Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, The Wilderness Society and the Outdoor Industry Association applauded the legislation. The Natural Resources Management Act, which passed 92-8 in the Senate — Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, was the only Western senator to vote no — is expected to pass the House of Representatives by the end of February.

Given the bipartisan brinksmanship of the current Congress, the passage of such a far-reaching public-lands bill seemed like an amazing feat of détente. But underlying the expanded land protections is an issue Congress refused to take up: updating public-lands laws for the 21st century.

The Natural Resources Management Act is the largest public-lands protection bill since 2009, when Congress passed the Omnibus Public Land Management Act, which protected more than 2 million acres of wilderness and designated more than 1,000 miles of wild and scenic rivers. The current bill adds more than 1.3 million acres of wilderness, protects 367 miles of rivers and creates four new national monuments. All this is tied together by the permanent reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The fund, which reinvests royalties from offshore oil and gas drilling into a wide range of conservation and outdoor-friendly projects, is a favorite of politicians on both sides of the aisle, who can show off the baseball fields and hiking trails that the fund pays for when they're out campaigning.

The bill was widely seen as a compromise that rejected more politically fraught



amendments, including Sen. Lee's push to give Utah veto power over the designation of national monuments in the state. However, a few provisions drew criticism: Alaskan environmentalists have decried a program that expands offerings of public lands in the state to Alaska Native Vietnam War veterans. And Wilderness Watch, a nonprofit focused on preserving designated wilderness areas, is opposing several provisions in the bill, including one that permits hang gliding in the Organ Mountains Wilderness of New Mexico.

Cheers and jeers aside, the bipartisan legislation papers over the continued inability of Congress to actually set laws governing how public land is managed. Rather than address the overarching issues facing public-lands management, such as wildfires, greenhouse gas emissions and protecting wildlife corridors for endangered species, the new lands bill is "classic pork-barrel politics, where everybody is getting a little something," said Chris Klyza, a professor of political science and environmental studies at Middlebury College.

Pushing porky projects while neglecting environmental policymaking is a decades-old tradition in Congress, explains Adam Sowards, an environmental historian and University of Idaho professor and the author of a regular "Reckoning with History" column for *High Country News*. Bedrock environmental laws that drive public-land policy, such as the Wilderness Act, Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act and Federal Land Policy and Management Act, were all signed during or before 1976. With partisan divides on environmental policies deepening since the 1970s, "we've just

been patchworking our way ever since," said Sowards.

Without Congress driving public-land management, policy is left to continuous wrangling between presidential administrations, with federal courts acting as the referees. One recent example of this dynamic involves regulations concerning the flaring of methane, a climate-warming gas produced during fossil fuel drilling. Under the Obama administration, the Interior Department stipulated that oil and gas drillers operating on public lands capture rather than burn the methane generated during extraction. Montana, Wyoming and industry lobby groups challenged the rule, but before the dust settled in the courts, Donald Trump was elected and his administration walked it back. Now, that rollback is being challenged in court by California, New Mexico and environmental groups. Absent throughout this back-and-forth were the nation's legislators, who could have passed laws providing clarity on how greenhouse gas emissions from public lands should be regulated.

Rather than take up divisive issues in this bill, like regulating climate warming emissions, the Senate opted to pick and choose local projects and priorities — leaving the word "climate" out of its nearly 700 pages. Despite the recent emergence of climate-centered policy proposals, like the Green New Deal, this bill and the last three decades of congressional inactivity provide little evidence that legislators will overhaul the nation's environmental regulations anytime soon, said Klyza. That's because, despite this kumbaya moment of bipartisan dealmaking, "the gap between parties on the environment is as great as it's ever been." □

The Organ Mountains of New Mexico are among the more than 1.3 million acres designated as wilderness in the Senate-passed Natural Resources Management Act.

CATHERINE LUCAS / STOCKIMO / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Carl Segerstrom is a contributing editor at *High Country News*, covering Alaska, the Pacific Northwest and the Northern Rockies from Spokane, Washington. [@carlschirps](#)

THE LATEST

Backstory

Northwest New Mexico's Chaco Canyon was the hub of an Ancestral Puebloan civilization extending hundreds of miles. The region, which is sacred to Navajo and Pueblo tribes, holds extensive ancestral sites and remnants of ancient roads. While 34,000 acres are protected as Chaco Culture National Historical Park, **most of the federal land in the Greater Chaco region has been leased for oil and gas development.** Native Americans, New Mexico lawmakers and environmental groups have fought to protect the remainder ("Drilling Chaco: What's Actually At Stake," *HCN*, 4/13/15).

Followup

In February, the **Bureau of Land Management pulled about 1,500 acres located within 10 miles of the park from its March oil and gas lease sale.** It's the third time that the Trump administration has announced plans to lease parcels near Chaco, then removed them. Ernie Atencio of the National Parks Conservation Association said in a statement, "This administration is ... playing a dangerous game of chicken with local communities and tribes. This decision only reinforces the need for permanent protection of these lands."

JODI PETERSON



KENT WILLIAMS

Chaco Culture National Historic Park.



Scott Warren, left, speaks with No More Deaths volunteers in 2015, as they prepare to drop food and water along a migrant trail that crosses Bureau of Land Management land outside of Ajo, Arizona. Now he's facing federal charges. ANDREW CULLEN

Humanitarian aid as crime

The toll of today's border deterrence

BY SARAH TORY

Shortly after Donald Trump became president, volunteers with the Green Valley-Sahuarita Samaritans, a humanitarian aid group, sat in the U.S. Federal Courthouse in Tucson, Arizona. Dozens of migrants were on a fast-track trial for trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico border illegally; these mass trials, which can be as brief as 25 seconds per defendant, are part of Operation Streamline, a 2005 policy meant to deter people from returning after deportation. Two of the men facing a judge that day were so afraid, they could barely speak. They had been traveling separately, but their stories were nearly identical: A Border Patrol agent caught them in the Sonoran Desert and told them to take off their shoes. "Run," the agent said. So the men ran — across uneven sandy ground laced with thorns — while the agent tracked them down, as if for sport.

In recent months, Randy Mayer, the founder of the Samaritans and a pastor in Sahuarita, Arizona, has noticed a growing pattern of intimidation by Border Patrol agents as the administration's border policy becomes increasingly aggressive. This so-called "deterrence" strategy is not new, but under Trump, it has taken increasingly punitive forms — from detaining migrant children in tent camps along the border,

to prosecuting humanitarian aid volunteers working to save lives along deadly stretches of the southern Arizona desert.

"I do think that they are trying to make migrants criminal — that's clear," said Mayer, citing the recent revelation that thousands more migrant children had been separated from their parents than had been previously disclosed. "All these deterrent programs are focused on ramping up the consequences" of migration, he said.

In January, four volunteers with the humanitarian aid organization No More Deaths fell prey to a similar tactic: They were convicted of misdemeanor crimes for leaving water and food for migrants in southern Arizona's Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge without a permit. (On Feb. 21, federal prosecutors dropped the criminal charges of four other No More Deaths volunteers, issuing fines of \$250 each instead.) In late May, another No More Deaths volunteer, Scott Warren, will stand trial on much more serious felony charges for helping migrants at an aid station in Ajo, Arizona, 43 miles north of the border. If convicted, he faces up to 20 years in federal prison. For the small nonprofits on the border and elsewhere in the West, trying to counteract the often-deadly effects of deterrence, the trials raise an unnerving possibility: Is the U.S. government trying to outlaw humanitarian aid?

Mayer, who grew up in Montana and later spent time in Central America, moved to Sahuarita in 1998, drawn by the culture, language and food of the Sonoran Desert — its climate, too. But once here, he found himself immersed in a growing humanitarian crisis. Four years previously, then-President Bill Clinton had implemented a new border-enforcement policy called "Prevention Through Deterrence," which helped militarize the border and sealed off urban entry points, funneling unauthorized migrants to more remote and dangerous routes through the desert.

By the time Mayer moved to Sahuarita, the Sonoran Desert had become the primary migration corridor, and more and more people were dying along its path. Small volunteer organizations like No More Deaths emerged as a response. Still, more than 3,000 bodies have been recovered in the Arizona desert since 2000 — though the true death toll is believed to be much higher.

At first, these organizations operated with little interference from the Border Patrol and land managers, but their efforts have come under increasing attack — especially under President Trump. For No More Deaths, the turning point came in June 2017, when the Border Patrol raided No More Deaths' medical aid station in Arivaca, Arizona, which had been in use for over a decade. In January 2018, No More Deaths released a damning report and videos showing how Border Patrol agents have routinely destroyed water caches and other humanitarian aid supplies for years. Hours after that, Scott Warren was arrested.

Amy Knight, Warren's defense lawyer, says that by charging her client with harboring two undocumented immigrants and conspiring to transport them, the government is attempting to treat humanitarian aid as human smuggling. Yet government prosecutors have refused to divulge who exactly they believe Warren was conspiring with.

The hardening of national boundaries transforms borders into spaces of exception, according to border scholars like University of Hawaii Mānoa professor Reece Jones; they become places where the usual laws are suspended — where human lives are seen as more expendable, lacking in political value.

And yet, there are exceptions, even in difficult times. Mayer was shocked when, a few weeks ago, a Border Patrol agent stopped by a Samaritan water drop vehicle and told the volunteers that they were his heroes. He explained that he'd found a 13-year-old girl who'd been abandoned by her group and raped repeatedly; she survived thanks to one of the water stashes the group had left behind. The Border Patrol agent carried her for miles to safety. Mayer listened and thought to himself, "This guy is *our* hero." □

Sarah Tory is a correspondent for *High Country News*. She writes from Carbondale, Colorado.

Twitter: @tory_sarah

In need of water, an Idaho town turns to its neighbors

Does recharging an aquifer solve one of the West's oldest water problems, or perpetuate it?

BY EMILY BENSON

When CS Beef Packers — a partnership between agribusiness giant J.R. Simplot Company and Caviness Beef Packers, a Texas-based company — opened a 700-job, state-of-the-art cattle-processing facility near Kuna, Idaho, in 2017, officials boasted of boosting the local economy. But to Mountain Home, 50 miles southeast of Kuna, that triumph looked more like a failure: CS Beef Packers had passed over Mountain Home after realizing the city didn't have enough water to support the new plant.

Like many Western communities, Mountain Home, a town of about 14,000 people in Elmore County, relies on groundwater to irrigate fields and supply homes with water. But the community's needs — and its agricultural irrigators, in particular — use more water than nature can replenish, and aquifer levels have been dropping for decades, drying up household wells. Local leaders have been pursuing additional sources of water for years. Now, that search has prompted a modern manifestation of an old Western practice: Having begun to exhaust the water within

its own basin, thirsty Mountain Home is turning to a neighboring watershed.

Idaho, like most Western states, allows a city, irrigation company or other user to pump water up and over (or through) the ridge separating natural watersheds, a process called a trans-basin diversion. Such transfers have a long and fraught history, from Owens Lake in California, which the Los Angeles Water Board drained in the early 1900s to slake the thirst of the growing city 200 miles to the south, to Colorado's dozens of diversions, most of which funnel water across the Continental Divide, from the wetter western side of the state to cities and farms in the arid east.

In Elmore County, officials have applied to draw up to 20,000 acre-feet of water from the South Fork of the Boise River each year; for comparison, that's enough water to supply about 40,000 households, though it wouldn't go directly to municipal use. Instead, the county plans to pump it into a neighboring basin and let it seep down to recharge Mountain Home's aquifer. But because so much of the water in the Boise River Basin is already promised to other uses, Elmore County would only be allowed to operate its pumps when the river is flooding; most

years, they could pump less than half what they're asking for, and during dry years, they wouldn't be able to pump at all.

The Idaho Department of Water Resources is still considering Elmore County's application. Late last year, the department convened a hearing on it, after the city of Boise, the Idaho Conservation League and a coalition of irrigators in the Boise Basin contested the claim. The objections range from environmental concerns to economic ones. The project is expected to cost about \$32.6 million to build; because of that and other factors, Boise estimated, in opposing the application, that the price of an acre-foot of water — \$304 — would be three times more than Elmore County farmers can afford to pay. That means the proposal may not be economically feasible, which is grounds for rejecting a water right application under the Department of Water Resources' rules.

Allowing Elmore County to divert water from the Boise River to replenish Mountain Home's aquifer could also jeopardize the health of the South Fork of the Boise River and the fish that live there, the Idaho Conservation League argues. That would be counter to the public interest — another reason the department can deny a water right application.

The hearing also raised an existential question looming over towns across the arid West: Should a community be forced to live within the constraints of its natural watershed? "You compare today's world to Owens Valley, and we are in a different place in how we think about water," Alex Maas, an economist at the University of Idaho who specializes in water issues,

*Please see **Aquifer**, page 22*

Elmore County, Idaho, hopes to pump up to 20,000 acre-feet per year from the South Fork of the Boise River (shown below) into a neighboring basin to help recharge its aquifer.

USAF/SAMUEL MORSE



Emily Benson is an assistant editor at *High Country News*, covering the northwest, the northern Rockies and Alaska. [@erben1](#)



Pinal County's pain

A small group of central Arizona farmers are contemplating a new future, following a drought plan's devastating cuts to their water

BY TONY DAVIS

A bit of cotton lingers on a plant from the Shedd's previous growing season.

ASH PONDER'S
FOR HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

The furrows in a 60-acre patch of dirt on Rodney and Tiffany Shedd's Arizona farm still hold cotton scraps from last year's crop. This year, that patch will stay barren for the first time in recent memory, thanks to the decline in Colorado River water for farms across Pinal County, one of America's cotton-growing centers. The farmers' supply was cut because Arizona's growing cities are taking more water than ever.

"We will fallow from here to the white tank," said Rodney Shedd, driving past the barren field and pointing toward a water tower nearby.

And that's just the start of water-slashing, due to drought, climate change and a proposed state plan to prop up the over-allocated Colorado River and its shrinking reservoir. Lake Mead has supplied the Shedd's farm for decades through the \$4 billion Central Arizona Project, or CAP.

Starting next year, deeper cuts to CAP supplies are expected, and despite receiving subsidies for wells to replace that lost water, 200 Pinal farmers will have to fallow up to 40 percent of their lands by 2026. The cuts to cities and tribes won't be nearly as big — certainly not enough to slow the development that has returned Arizona to a spot among the nation's fastest-growing states.

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@tonydavis987

"We didn't see this issue coming until it was here," Shedd said. He quickly corrected himself, noting that the irrigation district to which he belongs had started leaving a small portion of its river water in Lake Mead a few years ago to delay the day of reckoning. Still, the reality of the larger cuts is just starting to sink in.

Only the timing should come as a surprise. Statewide, farmers use 70 percent of Arizona's water, but have long held the lowest legal priority for river water. Under a 2004 settlement, they agreed to give up all their CAP water by 2030, in exchange for cheap rates to buy it. But hotter, drier weather, stoked by climate change, dropped Mead's level much faster than experts had predicted.

The drought plan, approved in January by the Arizona Legislature, reduces Arizona's total CAP take by one-third in 2020 and by nearly half by 2026, in hope of delaying the day when Lake Mead's water levels drop so low that Arizona cannot use it. Before it takes effect, however, the state and water users must approve a set of legal agreements by a March deadline set by U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Brenda Burman.

Arizona's water negotiations have been painful for most involved. The Gila River Indian Community, for example, has a right to the state's biggest share of CAP supplies and would have had to take a large cut. The tribe would have received \$92 million from the state and feds in compensation — far less than the tribe's attorney, Jason Hauter, says the water is

worth. The tribe, however, threw a wrench into the drought plan when it announced recently that it would not sign its part of the plan, because State House Speaker Rusty Bowers had been pushing for legislation that the tribe believes undermines its water-rights claims to the Gila River in eastern Arizona.

Arizona's metropolitan areas have emerged as the clear winners in the negotiations. Cities in Phoenix's mushrooming Maricopa County — the fastest-growing in the U.S. — will receive higher priority.

Meanwhile, the Shedd's 500-acre farm sprawls within view of alternating patches of mesquite flats, now temporarily green due to El Niño-fueled heavy winter rains, while the cotton and wheat fields remain barren until spring planting begins.

Pinal has received more federal farm subsidies than any other Arizona county — \$571 million from 1995 to 2017, according to a database kept by the Environmental Working Group. The Shedd's were among them, gaining nearly \$2 million from a program that pays farmers when cotton prices fall too low.

Though they'll lose a lot in the long run, farmers will get \$22.5 million from the state and CAP's governing district and potentially another \$25 million from the federal government to build infrastructure to access groundwater. That may prolong their survival, but many environmentalists and water experts see the well subsidies as a step backwards.

The fear is that with the CAP water gone, farming will revert to its unsustainable past — pumping out far more groundwater than nature replenishes. That practice has triggered major land subsidence and ground fissures up to nearly two miles long. The farmers, however, say that they won't pump as much groundwater as they did before CAP arrived.

"This is the main industry for Pinal County," Tiffany Shedd said. "By not (offering subsidies), you are basically sending this county into a major economic depression that would be almost instantaneous."

But why keep agriculture afloat in this increasingly arid valley?

Tiffany Shedd and other Pinal County farmers point to their history: The farmers were the first group to push for CAP's construction, back in the 1940s, and they used the water for many years before the cities were big enough to justify taking it. Plus, they know how to conserve their supply. "We are 80 to 90 percent efficient on water now. You're talking about spending millions and millions to become 1 percent more efficient," Tiffany said. "I do think these wells, either ones we fix up or new ones we drill, are energy-efficient and will make more efficient use of electricity." But ultimately, that sidesteps the real problem: More water rights were issued than the Colorado River can support.

"I don't see a lot of efficiency in the way they put water for the grass for front yards. Tucson doesn't tear out their desert. They put the homes in the desert. In Phoenix, they take out all the desert plants, and put in the grass," Shedd said. "I see the mentality up there: 'As long as we have water, why not use it recklessly?'"

But it's not that simple: Despite its lawns and growing population, Phoenix has cut its water use 30 percent in the last two decades.

Many local farming families have come to view the drought negotiations as a threat to their entire way of life. Frank Shedd Jr., Rodney's grandfather, started farming here in the 1930s. Now, the Shedds and other families in the area are being forced to adapt.

"When you talk about fallowing our business, bankers are going to look at that and say, 'No,'" to loaning money to farms to buy new tractors or install water-saving technology, Tiffany said. "The only reason we can stay in business is that we have very little debt."

Using mainly well water, the Shedds will have to find some productive winter crops, and not put everything in one crop, said Rodney. He noted that wells could be used year-round but that cotton isn't grown in the wintertime. "If we plant all cotton, we plant everything in April and the first of September. You just can't pump that much water in that time."

And so the Shedds, like other local farming families, have had to think about their future. Tiffany said they would love to start growing industrial hemp, a water-thrifty plant whose production was legalized in the recently passed federal farm bill. "We might be able to grow it really, really well," Tiffany said. "But what infrastructure do we need? How do we get the financing to build that? Those things don't happen overnight."

The drought plan basically ignores the population growth and sprawl that have charged Arizona's economy since World War II. Phoenix-area cities are taking small-enough cuts that their customers won't be affected for at least seven more years, when the plan expires and must be rewritten.

Throughout this debate, Arizona leaders from Gov. Doug Ducey, R, on down have stressed that the plan's main purpose besides protecting Lake Mead is to assure investors nationwide that Arizona has enough water for continued development. That's because a decade after the financial crisis killed its housing industry, Phoenix is booming again.

Douglas Ranch, a megaproject that had been on hold since the bust, will soon break ground in the far-flung western suburb of Buckeye. The developers hope to have 1,000 home lots on the market in



With Picacho Peak in the background, Rodney Shedd turns a cotton field. According to the Shedds, getting loans for new equipment will be difficult for them under new drought negotiations.

ASH PONDER



Left, Tiffany and Rodney Shedd stand on a makeshift bridge over the Central Arizona Project canal that bisects their farm. Above, dry mud lines the bottom of a ditch on their farm.

ASH PONDER

less than 2 years, eventually playing host to 119,000 homes and 300,000 people.

Project developer Jerry Colangelo has called it the West's largest planned community. He told a local TV station that the project sits atop a plentiful aquifer — a "100-year water supply."

That may not be enough, though. Such developments must prove they have access to a renewable water supply such as the Colorado River — and as the urgency of the drought negotiations has illustrated, that supply is far more difficult to guarantee.

"We rush out to this desert, pave it over and use groundwater to sustain that till when?" observed Kathy Ferris, a former Arizona Department of Resources director. "This is the mindset of Arizona. This is how we grow."

Tiffany Shedd wouldn't comment on Colangelo's project specifically, but she does wonder if Arizona will be the same without the green spaces of farms surrounding its cities. Farms have been giving ground to urbanization for decades; the only question is how fast it will continue. She has seen the transition in her own backyard.

This year, some family friends opened a restaurant named the Cotton House, whose windows look across the street towards the Shedds' cotton fields. Its menu displays paintings of people picking cotton. Just two days after its Valentine's Day opening, Cotton House drew 900 customers. But "pretty soon," Tiffany said, "those fields won't be growing cotton anymore, and people will ask, 'Why do they call it that?'"

"We're turning into historical dinosaurs." □

Local residents and food cart businesses discussed plans for Las Adelitas, an affordable housing complex, at a community workshop in the Cully neighborhood in 2017.

COURTESY OF SALAZAR ARCHITECTS



A Green New Deal at work in Portland

How one community is building a green workforce to combat climate change

BY JESSICA KUTZ

It's a cloudy gray day in Cully, a neighborhood in northeastern Portland, and the air is thick with the smell of burnt tires. The culprit? An asphalt manufacturing plant, where black rubble is piled into one long heaping mound, waiting to be hauled off to areas across the city to fill in old potholes and pave new streets.

Cully is located in one of the city's most culturally diverse pockets, but the predominantly low-income neighborhood is regularly subject to industrial pollution. Automobile salvage lots, including one that caught fire and spewed toxic chemicals into the air last year, litter entire city blocks with old car parts and used tires.

Across the street from the asphalt plant, a barren parking lot is cordoned off by a chain-link fence. This was formerly the site of the Sugar Shack, a notorious strip club and adult video store that was torn down less than two months ago. After the owners' arrest in 2015 for tax fraud and running a prostitution ring, the lot became a meeting spot for neighborhood groups and community members. Now, thanks to a coalition of four local organizations called Living Cully, the site will soon be home to a new affordable housing complex: Las Adelitas, named in honor of the women soldiers who fought during the Mexican Revolution.

Jessica Kutz is an editorial fellow for *High Country News*. [@jkutzie](#)

On the surface, this housing complex in one of the most rapidly gentrifying corners of the country will be much like any other development designed to help respond to the national housing crisis. But dig a little deeper, and Las Adelitas has the potential to become a model for much more — a solution not only to the displacement of longtime residents but to the lack of green investment in the low-income communities of color that are already on the front lines of the looming climate change crisis.

Dig deeper still, and Las Adelitas — together with the whole Living Cully framework — begins to look a lot like the much-touted Green New Deal: a preliminary plan put forth by Democratic congressional members to create a “green workforce” that will build out green infrastructure and clean energy projects while bringing economic opportunities to vulnerable communities. The long-term success or failure of Living Cully could provide a window into an ambitious national program that's still in the visionary stage today.

When the Great Depression hit in 2008, Mateo Fletes Cortes, who lives in the town next to Cully, lost his job. Originally from Nayarit, Mexico, Fletes Cortes moved to Oregon with his uncle in 2002, picking up work in construction, building out wooden window frames,

installing baseboards, and adding finishing touches to buildings and houses. But when the construction industry collapsed, so did Fletes Cortes' job stability. He'd heard about opportunities in landscaping work but been reluctant to apply, associating landscaping with unskilled low-wage labor. Then he heard about Verde.

The area nonprofit, which is also the lead organizer of Living Cully, operates a landscaping company called Verde Landscaping. The business was started in 2005 in order to train and employ residents to do sustainable landscaping for affordable housing developments built by Hacienda CDC, a Latino Community Development Corporation. Hacienda is also a member organization of Living Cully, and the owner of Las Adelitas. At Verde, wages start at \$13.50 an hour and increase to \$18.50 by the third year of employment, with paid training sessions and certification provided, as well as medical and dental benefits. So far, the program has trained over 200 area residents in jobs like stormwater management and habitat restoration, according to Verde's executive director, Tony DeFalco. Ironically, as the economy has picked up in recent years, it's become harder to recruit labor for the training program, DeFalco said. “You've got historically low unemployment, and so it can be really challenging to be competitive.”

Through Verde's workforce training

program, Fletes Cortes took English classes, received industry certifications, and learned that landscaping was indeed for him. “As fate would have it, I started to work in habitat restoration,” something he’d previously known nothing about, Fletes Cortes said. “I saw that (landscaping) wasn’t just about working a lawnmower.” Rather, it could be about restoring wildlife habitats or redirecting stormwater to hydrate vegetation and native plants and shrubs.

These days, Fletes Cortes spends a lot more time in the office, having been promoted to landscape crew supervisor. Bidding for landscaping contracts and checking on equipment and crewmembers keep him busy. He’s been with Verde for a decade, and today, he manages other employees in the workforce program. When the Las Adelitas project gets fully underway, it will be highly skilled workers like Fletes Cortes who carry out the necessary landscaping and subsequent maintenance work for the planned 140 affordable housing units and ground-level commercial spaces.

Living Cully’s motto can seem counter-intuitive at first: “Sustainability as an anti-poverty strategy.” After all, it’s now widely believed that the more green investments like parks and vegetation appear in a neighborhood, the more desirable (and expensive) that place becomes, often pushing longtime residents out of their homes and neighborhoods. The phenomenon even has its own trendy name: “green gentrification.” This is certainly a challenge in Cully, where, despite anti-displacement efforts, housing prices are in fact rising. But DeFalco believes that pairing housing projects with environmental

investments will be key to the project’s success. “(That) is a really simple recipe for proofing the community against green gentrification,” he said.

That experiment is coming together in Las Adelitas: Verde Builds will construct the building’s green features; green roofs and walls, solar panels, water reuse systems are all being considered in the design. Verde Landscaping will provide local skilled workers to build out green stormwater infrastructure as well as sustainable landscaping. The housing project is expected to be completed by 2020.

In addition to Las Adelitas, Living Cully partners are not only creating energy-efficient affordable housing but also preserving existing low-income housing, through initiatives like a mobile home weatherization program that aims to lower the bills of low-income residents who pay a disproportionate amount of their paychecks to utilities. And there are other benefits: That weatherization allows low-income residents to lower their energy use and therefore their carbon footprint. In August, the Portland City Council passed a new zoning designation to protect mobile home parks in Portland from redevelopment, thanks to organizing efforts by Living Cully partners and other area organizations.

As Congress continues to figure out what a Green New Deal might look like on a national scale, Cully could become a valuable and tangible model community to turn to for inspiration. “We are at a place now, where — as a nation — we can no longer make an environmental investment without social and environmental justice outcomes,” DeFalco said. “What we’ve been able to do here at a smaller scale is basically to demonstrate how you do that.” □



Now a landscape crew supervisor, Mateo Fletes Cortes, center, specializes in habitat restoration at Verde Landscaping. NAIM HASAN



Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., at the New York City Women’s March in January.

DIMITRI RODRIGUEZ/CC VIA FLICKR

Get to know the Green New Deal

Not long after Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., was elected last November, she began gathering support for a “Green New Deal,” mobilizing young climate activists and pushing Democratic leaders to pursue the concept. The idea, which was first floated by *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman in 2007, is modeled on Franklin D. Roosevelt’s sweeping Depression-era New Deal and proposes tackling climate change as a massive job creator to boost the American economy. In its current form, it also marries climate action with a host of other progressive aims. On Feb. 7, Ocasio-Cortez introduced a nonbinding resolution articulating what a Green New Deal might include, from eliminating fossil fuels entirely to establishing universal health care and ensuring stronger rights for Indigenous people and nations. Here’s the proposal — and some context — by the numbers:

- 68** Number of co-sponsors of the nonbinding resolution as of Feb. 15.
- Zero** Number of Republicans who have signed on.
- 35** Percentage of co-sponsors who come from Western states, including California, Washington, Colorado and Arizona.
- \$4.03** Average hourly wage for a U.S. worker in January 1973.
- \$23.68** Equivalent hourly wage in today’s dollars, in terms of purchasing power.
- \$22.65** Average hourly wage of a U.S. worker as of July 2018.
- 457,169** Estimated number of jobs in the wind and solar energy industries as of 2017.
- 11.3** Estimated percentage of the energy Americans used in 2017 that came from wind, solar, hydropower and biomass.
- 80** Estimated percentage of the energy Americans used in 2017 that came from fossil fuels.
- Zero** Percentage of the energy mix in the Green New Deal resolution that would come from fossil fuels.
- 10** Number of years the resolution proposes for achieving that goal.
- Just over one** Number of centuries fossil fuels have dominated U.S. energy consumption.
- 8** Percent by which natural gas production is expected to rise in 2019, projected to be the highest year on record.
- \$500 billion** Projected annual cost of climate change to the U.S. economy by 2100, if temperatures increase by 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) or more.
- \$1 trillion** Projected cost of climate change-related infrastructure and coastal real estate damage in the U.S., if temperatures increase by 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) or more.

KATE SCHIMEL

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Mountain caribou use the sprawling forests of the region as a refuge from predators. DAVID MOSKOWITZ

CARIBOU RAINFOREST: FROM HEARTBREAK TO HOPE, By David Moskowitz. 192 pages, hardcover: \$29.95. Braided River, 2018

The last caribou in the Lower 48 lived in a rare sliver of North American rainforest that stretches from western Canada into the Pacific Northwest. Both the species and landscape are endangered. In *Caribou Rainforest: From Heartbreak to Hope*, biologist David Moskowitz mixes descriptions of caribou and their ecosystem with the history of industrial logging, climate change and habitat loss. Moskowitz's photographs are real treasures — precious glimpses of the vanishing mountain rainforest.

Moskowitz looks with clear eyes at the mountain caribou's dire state. If they go extinct, he writes, we should still strive to protect the remaining slivers of rainforest. But it's too late for the caribou in the U.S.: In January, biologists captured the last female woodland caribou in the Selkirk Mountains, where Idaho, Washington and British Columbia meet, relocating it to a breeding facility in Canada. (See "Latest," page 3.) If caribou in the Lower 48 are effectively extinct, Moskowitz's book becomes a fitting elegy for a lost world.

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A new podcast, and a farewell

Is it spring yet? Winter has been great, but some of us are already looking forward to warmer, longer days here in Gunnison, Colorado, where *High Country News* has an editorial satellite office. Luckily, Assistant Editor **Anna Smith**, who is based in Portland, Oregon, flew out for a visit and brightened up our lives. She managed to attend to some important business too, leading a training session for newer editorial staff members together with Associate Editor **Tristan Ahtone**, who heads *HCN's* Tribal Affairs desk. We also welcomed another visitor to our Gunnison office, longtime reader **Chris Mochulsky**, who was first introduced to *HCN* way back in law school and said he's especially excited to see our expanded tribal affairs coverage.

Meanwhile, our dispersed editorial staff has been busy, meeting with readers and speaking to students in classrooms around the West. Associate Editor **Kate Schimel** video conferenced from Seattle to discuss her most recent feature, "What Killed Washington's Carbon Tax?" with graduate students studying environmental management at Western Colorado University. Contributing Editor **Carl Segerstrom** was invited to appear on *For Lands Sake*, a radio program produced in Carbondale, Colorado, where the conversation bounced from the new nominee for Interior secretary to sage grouse and the impacts of the federal shutdown

— and more. As Carl put it: "We covered some ground." And out in Elko, Nevada, *HCN* Correspondent **Tay Wiles** participated in panel discussions about the state of rural journalism in the American West during the annual National Cowboy Poetry Gathering.

Contributing Editor **Cally Carswell**, who is based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, started a new podcast called *Hot and Dry*, co-hosted by fire ecologist **Collin Haffey**. It covers the impacts of climate change on New Mexico and offers some thoughts about how we need to respond. The first season will focus on how the state's new governor and Legislature are planning to tackle major climate issues. (You can subscribe via your favorite podcast app or listen at: <https://soundcloud.com/hot-drypod>.)

Finally, we have some sad news to share. **Patsy Batchelder**, wife of longtime *HCN* board member **Andy Wiessner**, passed away peacefully at home in Old Snowmass, Colorado, on Feb. 9, with Andy and his daughter, Mia, at her side. Patsy was a fixture at *HCN* board meetings and hosted several events for *HCN* in Old Snowmass as well as in Vail. A lively outdoorswoman and enthusiastic dog-lover, armed with a radiant smile and boundless energy, she fought for the environment and nature throughout her life. We will miss her.

—Jessica Kutz, for the staff



Patsy Batchelder and Andy Wiessner at St. Barts in the Caribbean. We mourn her passing. COURTESY OF ANDY WIESSNER



El Nuevo Movimiento

Across the West, veteran Chicano groups embrace undocumented immigrants. It wasn't always this way.

FEATURE | BY GUSTAVO ARELLANO



There's a party going on

outside Servicios de la Raza, a social services nonprofit in Denver less than a mile away from Mile High Stadium. Police block off a street to better accommodate the fiesta's occasion: a Thanksgiving giveaway for the city's poor.

Four hundred or so families stream in for bags and boxes filled with food and clothes. Representatives from health provider Kaiser Permanente offer free flu shots and blood pressure tests; a DJ spins some hip-hop but mostly plays *reggaetón* and *conjunto norteño*, the polka-style music of northern Mexico. A large, colorful mural of the Aztec calendar high on the side of Servicio's two-story building looms over the scene, along with the organization's name in English: Services of the People.

Executive Director Rudy Gonzales works the crowd. Sharp in a black suit, loafers and sunglasses, he tosses out jokes and words of encouragement in English, Spanish and enthusiastic Spanglish. “¡Buenos días, señora!” he tells a weathered, middle-aged Latina before shouting, “Hey man, what's up?” to a friend. African-American and white families join in the festivities, but the majority of the crowd is Latino — mostly immigrants, according to Gonzales.

More than a few are probably undocumented, but Gonzales doesn't care.

“We serve anyone who comes to our door,” he says, as cheerful volunteers grab boxes of donations from inside a garage stacked to the roof. “We don't ask for documentation. We don't ask for papers. No human being is illegal.”

Servicios, which was started in 1972, has joined many similar, decades-old nonprofits across the West in a historical pivot to welcome new immigrants. For years, many of these groups, created at the height of the 1960s civil rights movement to help Chicanos — American citizens of Mexican descent whose families have deep roots in the United States — ignored and sometimes even actively opposed more recent immigrants from Latin America. Now they've begun to reach out, partly

in fulfillment of their overall mission to help out those in need but also out of a desire for self-preservation. In an era when immigrant-rights groups and their concerns now dominate the progressive Latino agenda, it's hard to remain relevant without the new outreach.

Interviews with the heads of four Chicano nonprofits — Servicios, Utah Coalition of La Raza (UCLR), the Phoenix-based Chicanos por la Causa and the SouthWest Organizing Project in Albuquerque — reveal another, deeper-rooted factor, however. They say escalating anti-immigrant sentiment across the Southwest over the past three decades, from state legislatures to the White House, endangers the social justice gains Mexican-Americans have made.

“Me walking down the street with an undocumented friend, a gringo isn't going to be able to tell the difference between us,” Gonzales says indignantly. “They don't distinguish. We're just Mexicans.”

To fight back is not just the right thing to do: It's necessary. And to try and bridge the long-standing divide between Chicanos and Mexican immigrants — related groups but with different histories and needs — is now more important than ever.

“It doesn't matter if you've been in this country six generations and your grandpa served in World War II,” says UCLR president Richard Jaramillo. “You're still brown in this country. You're still an ‘other.’”

GONZALES' OFFICE COULD be out of a Hollywood screenplay for the executive of a busy, idealistic nonprofit. Trophies and stacks of documents form mountains around the edge of his desk; awards and Chicano art cover the walls. A couple of pictures feature Gonzales' father — Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, a former featherweight boxer who went on to become one of the founding fathers of the Chicano movement through his group, Crusade for Justice. He brought an urban perspective to *el movimiento*, rallying people against police brutality and other inner-city issues. Corky also wrote an epic poem, “Yo Soy Joaquín/I am Joaquín,” which is still read in Chicano studies classes for its lyrical depiction of the internal identity struggles of people who claim both Mexican and American heritage.

His son has led Servicios for a decade now. It originally emphasized mental

health services for Chicanos in Denver but has since expanded to offer voter education, HIV screenings and counseling for gang prevention, job re-entry and substance abuse, and to run youth academies across Colorado. But state law prohibits Servicios from using government grants to help undocumented immigrants, and that infuriates Gonzales. “It's inhumane.”

Instead, he relies on private donors and foundation money to assist that population. Fortunately, the work has drawn almost no complaints from the Denver community.

“We don't get that as much here,” he says from behind his desk, while employees bring checks to sign or reports to review. “This is the land of Corky Gonzales. He'd tell us, ‘They're your brothers and sisters. They're not aliens.’ And people remember that.”

Before the late 1960s, however, that position was outside mainstream Mexican-American thought. Almost from the end of the 1848 Mexican-American War, many Mexicans who remained in the U.S. tried to align themselves with Anglos in order to survive. They married their daughters to white settlers, and minted new identities — as Tejanos, Californios, Hispanos — that emphasized the European side of their ancestry at the expense of their Indigenous side.

Many of these American citizens of Mexican descent joined whites in stereotyping the hundreds of thousands of Mexican immigrants who arrived after the Mexican Revolution as “greasers” or “cholos.”

The intra-ethnic antagonism confounded outside observers. “The attitude of the Mexicans who are American citizens toward the immigrant is a curious one,” wrote Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio in his 1931 study, *Mexican Immigration to the United States*, one of the first academic treatises on the subject. “They speak slightly of the immigrants ... and say that the immigrants should stay in Mexico.”

That schism endured for decades, especially among groups created to fight Anglo discrimination and segregation against Mexican-Americans.

The League of United Latin American Citizens explicitly barred non-citizens from joining when it was founded in 1927. The American GI Forum, formed by Mexican-American World War II veterans to combat hate against members on the

In 2008, Sonia Salazar, a UCSB student in Chicano Studies, joins over 1,000 people to commemorate the historic East LA student walkouts of 1968. Due to pressure from a new generation of leaders with a progressive pro-immigration stance, Chicano organizations have been pushed to expand their agenda.

ANNIE WELLS/LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES



Servicios de La Raza executive director Rudy Gonzales in his office. DANIEL BRENNER FOR HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

A founding father of the Chicano movement, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez (right) at the National Convention of the Raza Unida Party in 1972.

SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM

home front, published a pamphlet in 1953 titled “What Price Wetbacks?” that claimed undocumented Mexicans were “the fundamental problem facing the Spanish-speaking population of the Southwest.”

A few Latino leaders, most notably labor organizers Bert Corona and Luisa Moreno, tried to soften this stance, but to no avail. Even the legendary Cesar Chavez notoriously lambasted migrant workers almost from the start of his career, regarding them as perpetual threats to his unionizing efforts. His United Farm Workers spearheaded an “Illegals Campaign” that asked UFW members to report undocumented immigrants to immigration authorities. Chavez’s cousin oversaw so-called “wet lines” in Arizona that monitored the U.S.-Mexico border — a Chicano predecessor to the far-right Minuteman Project militia of the mid-2000s.

When other UFW members urged

Chavez to tone down his anti-immigrant tactics, he refused to listen.

“You (Chicano liberals) get these hang-ups,” he told Dolores Huerta in 1974, as recounted in Miriam Pawel’s book, *The Crusades of Cesar Chavez: A Biography*. “They’re wets, you know. They’re wets, and let’s go after them.”

By then, though, attitudes had begun to change. In the late 1960s, young activists began embracing the concept of *Aztlán* — the idea that the American Southwest was the historical homeland of the Aztecs, and hence that all people of Mexican descent were part of the same family, regardless of where the current border lay. This new generation — many of them children of the very “wetbacks” derided by the Mexican-American old guard — felt that the assimilation strategy of the civil rights movement during the 1950s had done little to improve their lives. They forged a new label — “Chicano” — to root them both in the U.S. and Mexico.

This pro-immigrant outlook arguably had its debut at the First National Chicano Liberation Youth Conference in Denver, a March 1969 convention hosted by the Crusade for Justice. Gonzales — whose father was born in Chihuahua — teamed up with the poet Alberto Baltazar Urista, or Alurista, to write *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, a manifesto for Chicano liberation that included the line “We do not recognize capricious frontiers on the bronze continent.”

Rudy Gonzales has fully embraced his father’s message.

“When you look at it, undocumented people are bearing the brunt of the extreme racism occurring in this country,” he said. “We look to uplift the most

marginalized. I hate calling them immigrants. We’re migrants. They’re walking back to a historical homeland, and we’re here to help.”

ROBERT “ARCHIE” ARCHULETA distinctly remembers his first encounter with *la migra* — immigration enforcement. His godparents, Mexican nationals, were repatriated during the 1930s when he was a child, at a time when the Hoover administration forced over a million Mexicans, some of them American citizens, to return to their home country, putting them on trains or otherwise deporting them.

His own family — whose roots in the American Southwest go back to the 16th century — soon fled Grand Junction, Colorado, for Pocatello, Idaho. He eventually moved to Utah during the 1950s to become an elementary school teacher. In the late 1960s, he co-founded one of the first Mexican-American civil rights groups in the state, the Spanish-Speaking Organization for Community, Integrity, and Opportunity (SOCIO).

“We were fighting for Chicano rights during the movement, but there was always this tinge of immigration,” says Archuleta, who’s now 88 but still active in the community. “Utah was always a cross-road for Mexicanos going to the mines or farms here, or up to Washington or even Wyoming. We enjoyed the same language and music and culture.”

He says that Chicanos in the state first truly aligned their cause with that of undocumented immigrants in 1986, when the Immigration and Naturalization Service deputized the Utah Highway Patrol, Tooele County sheriffs and local police to conduct raids in Wendover, a small city on the state border with Nevada. “They stacked children and women and men in a jail cell,” he says with disgust. “On television, there were images of truckloads of migrants stopped by state patrol. People were just running in all directions and being hunted.”

Archuleta and other citizens hired lawyers and successfully sued the federal government so local law enforcement agencies could no longer be deputized to act as *migra*.

“They’ve always denigrated us,” he says, speaking of his Anglo fellow citizens. “In elementary school, I fought nearly every day. Seeing Mexicanos treated like that brought back memories for many of us.”

Multiple immigrants’ rights groups sprang up in Utah after the Wendover raids, as the state’s Latino population exploded. U.S. Census figures show that Utah had just about 60,000 Latinos in 1980; by 2000, the total stood at about 200,000. (The population was estimated to have passed 400,000 in 2015.)

But even as Latino immigrants streamed into the West, politicians began to crack down on them. In 2010, Arizona lawmakers passed SB 1070, which sought to push out undocumented immigrants

from the state by making it a felony for anyone to not have their identification on them at all times. Other states passed similar measures — including Utah.

“Ten years ago, we were largely working with Chicanos,” says UCLR president Jaramillo, who was mentored by Archuleta. But “copycat laws” convinced UCLR to align itself with immigrants more than before. And the harsh words and anti-immigrant actions of President Donald Trump, Jaramillo maintains, were the final wake-up call Utah Chicanos needed.

“For years, we’ve struggled in the Chicano movement to advance and reach some type of equality,” he says. “We’ve failed to reach that Promised Land. And then you have this moment — this guy stands up there and says this hateful stuff, and becomes the embodiment of ‘Here’s why we haven’t made progress.’”

Under Jaramillo, UCLR started know-your-rights workshops and joined with other groups to offer undocumented people legal, medical and even housing assistance. He argues that this is in line with the historical Chicano movement, despite some pushback from older UCLR members.

“I can already hear in my mind one man, in his gruff voice: ‘This organization wasn’t for immigrants, it was for Chicanos,’” he says. “I know that sentiment is out there, but I think we’ve done a good job bridging that gap between the immigrant community and Chicano community. The hate isn’t just for one of us; it’s for all of us.”

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE between Chicanos and Mexican immigrants has proved particularly vexing for the SouthWest

Organizing Project (SWOP) in Albuquerque.

Here in the West, New Mexico’s Mexican-American population has historically been the most adamant about keeping Mexican nationals at arm’s length. To this day, many Hispanos in the Land of Enchantment insist they’re descended from pureblooded Spaniards, or even *conversos* (Jews who hid their religion during the Spanish Inquisition) — anything but Mexicans. Residents even created a slur for them: *surumatos*.

“Colonization is alive and well among us,” says SWOP Executive Director George Luján with a sigh.

The group isn’t Chicano-focused, per se. It works to engage ordinary people with issues ranging from gentrification to the schools-to-prison pipeline via workshops, community forums and lectures. It also has fostered partnerships with Native American groups, renting out storefront spaces near its headquarters in a working-class barrio of Albuquerque to a Native American comic book store and an incubator space.

Everything is a bit messy in the SWOP offices on a Monday morning because “we had a lot of events over the weekend,” jokes Luján. But the atmosphere is positive as a multiracial wave of volunteers and workers rolls in a bit after 9.

Luján officially started working for SWOP in 2008, though he’s known the organization his whole life. His father, Joaquín, was a member of the Black Berets, a militant group that looked to New Mexico’s own radical history of resistance for inspiration. They claimed as spiritual ancestors the Gorras Blancas, a Hispano secret society in the late 1800s that fought Anglo encroachment on their

land grants and water rights — cutting down fences, ripping up railroad ties and setting fire to barns.

That past, however, is not one that Mexican immigrants know about, let alone care for, Joaquín Luján believes.

“*La gente de Mexico* (the people from Mexico), they don’t come to join our struggle,” he adds, noting that his family has lived in New Mexico for hundreds of years and keeps a farm south of Albuquerque. “They come to make a better life for themselves.”

“A big thing is fear,” his son counters. “Someone who just crossed the desert isn’t going to be ready to join in the struggle.”

Founded in 1980, SWOP initially focused on environmental racism and voter registration drives while creating ties with similar movements across Latin America. But members realized they couldn’t ignore the tensions that existed between Hispanos and newly arrived Mexican immigrants.

They see it especially at community workshops, where SWOP tries to present issues it feels the two groups can rally around.

“A Chicana once said, ‘We gotta stop them Mexicans from getting our welfare!’” Joaquín said with a laugh. “And then one time, an immigrant from Juarez told someone, ‘*¿Que es Joaquín? ¿Que es él? Es como un gringo!*’ (‘What is Joaquín? What is he? He’s like a gringo!’)” The woman evidently thought Joaquín Luján was a well-meaning but patronizing Anglo American.

While SWOP works to unite adults, it especially focuses on high school and college students, encouraging them to see beyond a citizen-or-immigrant worldview. One particularly effective tool has been

“We were fighting for Chicano rights during the movement, but there was always this tinge of immigration.”

—Robert “Archie” Archuleta on the founding of SOCIO in the 1960s



SB 1070 made failure to carry identification a felony. FAVIANNA RODRIGUEZ



SWOP Executive Director George Luján. When it was founded in 1980, SWOP focused on environmental racism and voter registration, but soon found that immigration issues couldn’t be ignored. COURTESY OF JOHN ACOSTA



Chicanos Por La Causa President David Adame (wearing glasses) cuts the ceremonial ribbon of a new Native Health Phoenix clinic at the CPLC Maryvale Community Service Center. COURTESY OF CHICANOS POR LA CAUSA



SWOP board member Ingrid Ordóñez Campos and fellow community activists discuss the script for an informational video on their “Education not Deportation” campaign.

JUAN ANTONIO LABRECHE
FOR HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

500 Años del Pueblo Chicano / 500 Years of Chicano History, a book edited by legendary Chicana educator Elizabeth “Betita” Martinez, which tells the saga of Mexican-Americans in the United States through archival photos and explanatory captions. The 1990 volume explicitly connected the struggles of Chicanos to Mexican immigrants.

“‘Deport exploitation, not workers!’ is our cry against the U.S. war on Mexican workers,” Martinez wrote in one passage, calling anti-immigration sentiment a “new attempt to divide us.”

SWOP has sold 33,000 copies of *500 Años*, and also turned it into a video and coloring book. The volume is consistently banned by school districts for its unapologetically Chicano approach — or else stolen by students who want a copy for themselves. But more than a mon-eymaker, it represents an opening for SWOP.

“You start with a connection first,” says George Luján. “A shared value, then shared problems. History. Or chile. You start talking about chile — everyone can relate to that.” (One of SWOP’s logos is two red and green peppers connected at their respective tips and stem to form a heart.)

“Then you can talk about troubles,” Luján continues. “These people are coming and taking our jobs.’ You don’t challenge it right off the bat, because that’s an argument. But you talk it out, and you make connections. You find when to push or stand back. It’s work — it’s not a lecture.”

“We’re not going to work out everything,” his father adds, “but we can march together.”

SWOP doesn’t try to take the lead on immigration issues in Albuquerque. Instead, it assumes peacekeeping during rallies and teaches other groups about their rights during protests. And SWOP has offered a lot of training as of late.

“Trump is a great organizer in the Latino community because everyone hates his ass,” George Luján cracks. “A shared enemy is great. We all get a new awakening.”

CHICANOS POR LA CAUSA (CPLC) president David Adame calls the rapprochement between Chicanos and immigrants “*el nuevo movimiento*” — The New Movement.

“It’s important we work with these groups,” Adame says from CPLC headquarters in an industrial section of Phoenix. “The immigrants — especially the younger ones — have this hunger, this *ganas* (will) to take on (hate). You can’t just sit back and do nothing. We’re here to learn; teach us! But we can teach them, too.”

CPLC is unique among Chicano nonprofits in the United States in that it’s part of the political establishment. The group ended the 2017 fiscal year with revenue of \$75.7 million, \$72.4 million in expenses and \$53.6 million in net assets that include everything from health clinics to charter schools — even real estate — across Arizona, New Mexico and Nevada.

It started in 1969, with a grant by the Ford Foundation, a private entity that helped to fund many of the country’s oldest Chicano groups. CPLC’s founders were Arizona State students who had pushed for affirmative action at their university and organized walkouts at Phoenix high schools to protest the bleak learning conditions.

In those days, the struggle “was nothing about immigration,” says Danny Ortega, a past member of the CPLC board of directors and former chair of the National Council of La Raza, the nation’s largest Latino rights organization. (It now goes by UnidosUS.) “In some ways, we forgot that our own family members were immigrants.”

But CPLC adjusted with the times, especially as border clampdowns in California and Texas in the early 1990s forced undocumented migrants to enter the United States through Arizona. The group opened a branch in Somerton to help migrants, which is still operating today. CPLC also took vocal stances in the last decade against the state’s increasingly vitriolic anti-immigrant actions. In 2006, voters passed Proposition 300, which forced undocumented college

students to pay out-of-state tuition; in response, CPLC created the American Dream fund, which raised over \$5 million for affected undergrads. The group became a plaintiff in one of many federal lawsuits against Arizona’s SB 1070.

In the years since, CPLC has provided rent-free office space for immigrant-rights groups, helped to incubate new ones, sponsored events and hosted town halls. Nevertheless, some activists have complained that CPLC is too corporate and *vendido* (sell-out) because of its size and willingness to speak with politicians on both sides of the aisle.

“I tell the younger people, ‘Go form your own groups, because that’s what we did,’ ” Ortega says. “The criticism is good. We were fighting discrimination; the new people are fighting deportations. It’s a new civil rights movement. But they need to understand about the different ways you can do it.”

“We can use each other’s strengths,” adds CPLC Executive Vice President Max Gonzalez. “Apply pressure from different points, all for the same goals.”

That’s now the de facto strategy for nearly all Chicano community groups and activists in the United States in the era of Trump. The plight of undocumented immigrants weighs heavily on *la lucha* — the struggle. Politicians are as likely to speak in their defense as are high school students. It’s as if they’ve absorbed the 1973 speech Corky Gonzales gave, urging Chicanos to realize that they and Mexican immigrants were one and the same.

“If I were to say, ‘Keep out Mexicans without documents,’ then I would be putting a knife to my father’s heart,” he told an audience in Los Angeles. “For us to try to prevent Mexicans from coming across to a land which is theirs by historical right is to become part of the murderers.” □

(Editor’s note: Since the reporting and initial online publication of this article, Robert “Archie” Archuleta has passed away. On Jan. 25, 2019, Utah’s House and Senate Democratic caucuses announced the news. He was 88 years old.)

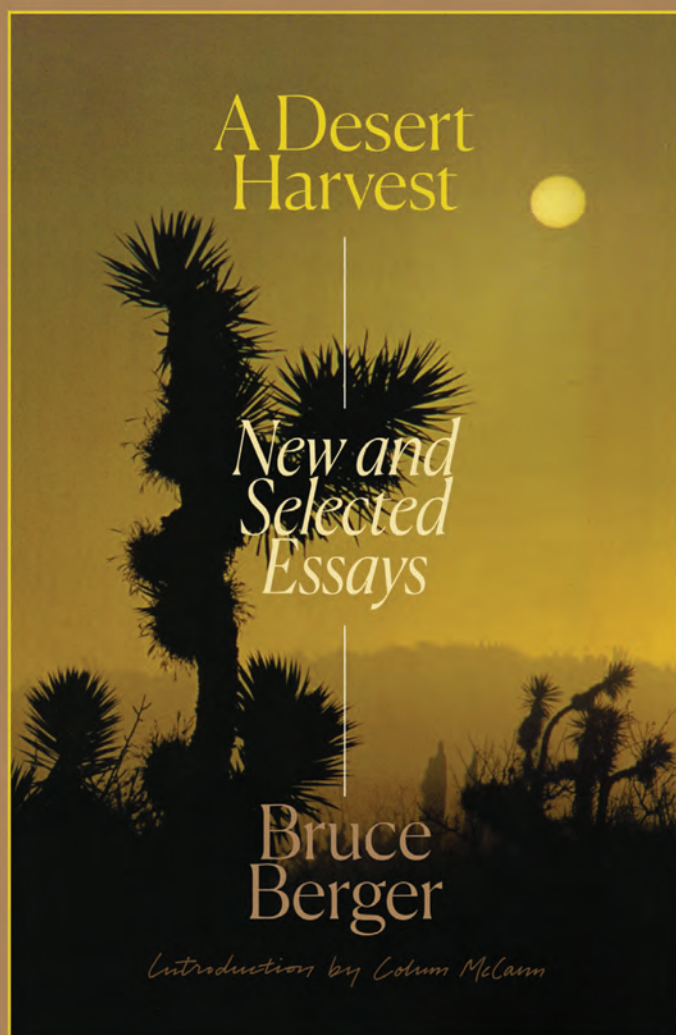


Gustavo Arellano is a features writer for the Los Angeles Times and the author of *Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America*.

This story was funded with reader donations to the High Country News Research Fund.

ANNOUNCING
A DESERT HARVEST:
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INTRODUCTION BY COLUM MCCANN | PUBLISHED BY FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX



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A DESERT CONVERSATION

Critically-acclaimed novelist James Anderson, *The Never-Open Desert Diner* (2015) and *Lullaby Road* (2018), joins Bruce Berger for a discussion of *A Desert Harvest* and the enduring necessity and beauty of the American desert.

AUTHOR APPEARANCES MARCH 2019

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Tattered Cover Bookstore | Lo Do location
Denver, Colorado

7:00 p.m.

www.tatteredcover.com/event

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13

Explore Booksellers | Aspen, Colorado

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www.explorebooksellers.com

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The aquifer recharge plan would replenish groundwater wells that have dropped in recent decades, and provide water for irrigation around Mountain Home.

LUNA ANNA ARCHIE/HCN.
SOURCE: IDAHO DEPARTMENT
OF WATER RESOURCES

Aquifer, continued from page 7

told me. “But in the end, there’s scarcity.” That means that, eventually, the water will go to the highest bidder, Maas said, unless society decides to make an ethical argument to protect, for example, the fish that live in the South Fork of the Boise.

Marie Kellner, the league’s lawyer in

the case, asked the Department of Water Resources to consider the history of water use in Elmore County — the fact that more water rights have been issued there than can actually be fulfilled. “An unsustainable status quo is not made sustainable by doubling down on what created the problem in the first place,” Kellner wrote in a brief. In other words, issuing a new water right may not be the best way to solve a problem caused by issuing too many water rights. “At some point,” the brief concludes, “it has to stop.”

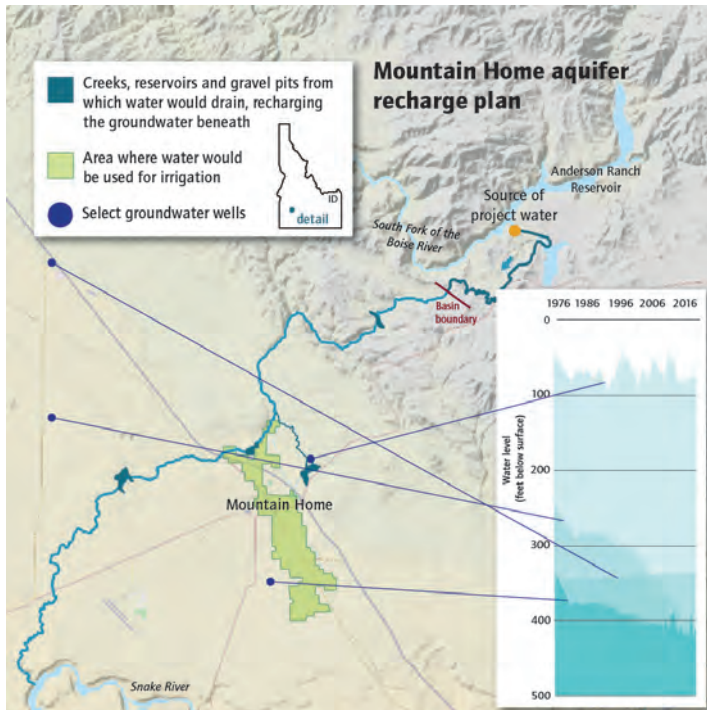
Mountain Home officials see recharging the aquifer with floodwater as a solution to the problem, not a perpetuation of it. If, in some years, there’s more water flowing down the Boise River than others are already using, why not let Elmore County boost its groundwater levels? “Mountain Home’s just trying to survive,” the mayor, Rich Sykes, told me. The city has also instituted water conservation measures, and begun replenishing its aquifer by diverting water into gravel pits north of town. Sykes testified during the hearing that the Boise Basin seemed to be looking out for its own future water needs rather than its neighbors — after all, the Boise area is one of the fastest-growing regions in the nation.

The Department of Water Resources is expected to make a decision by mid-March. It may deny the water right, or grant it, or issue it with conditions, such as requiring occasional high flows during

flooding to keep sediment from clogging the gravel where fish spawn.

That might represent a workable compromise for Elmore County and the Boise River Basin. County commissioners have indicated they’d be willing to accept conditions; as Bud Corbus, one of the commissioners, said, their intent isn’t to harm the river, or the fisheries it supports. “We’re a little neighbor that isn’t asking for much, just a little drink of water,” he told me. “And there’s no reason that that shouldn’t be able to happen.”

For her part, Kellner is concerned about the impacts of even a seemingly small trans-basin transfer; still, she acknowledges that there are no easy fixes for today’s water problems, rooted as they are in more than a century of irrigation in the West. “What do you tell these people that have built up ag operations and things like that, that are reliant on that?” She mentioned a tough question that she’d asked Nancy Brletic, the president of the Mountain Home Chamber of Commerce, during the hearing: Should the city consider purchasing older water rights from farmers to free up water for new businesses, like the CS Beef Packers facility? No, Brletic said: That would amount to picking winners and losers, and she couldn’t do that. “I respect that,” Kellner told me. “But I feel like those are the kinds of conversations that have to start happening if we’re going to continue to maintain a livable society, really.” □



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Caribou crossing a stream on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge on Alaska's North Slope.

THEO ALLOFS / ALAMY

That certain slant of light

How one writer's point-of-view frames the American West

For Robert Leonard Reid, protecting wilderness is a literary act. The Carson City, Nevada-based writer has spent 40 years roving Western landscapes in an effort to preserve them, primarily through his words. Reid's latest work, *Because It Is So Beautiful: Unraveling the Mystique of the American West*, displays an almost claustrophobic curiosity: An exploratory spirit envelops and propels him across the Arctic, the Sierras, the Rockies, the sacred spaces of Native America and all the footholds and crags in between, from the High Plains of eastern New Mexico to the Bugaboos in British Columbia.

Reid writes with the flair of daredevil naturalist Craig Childs and the philosophical quotient of nature essayist Edward Hoagland. The book functions like an atlas; each essay is a wayfinding tool, navigating the reader toward "the mystique of the American West" — something that, despite the book's subtitle, he seeks not to unravel but preserve: "A journey into the Sierra, even today, is a journey into ambiguity and mystery ... any account of a wilderness journey that omits the ambiguity ... is bound to be false." *Mystique* is his muse in these essays, which blend wilderness and adventure writing, environmental reportage, and historical and literary analysis. Drawing on three earlier books and previously unpublished material, this career-spanning collection was a finalist for the 2018 PEN/Diamonstein-Spielvogel Award for the Art of the Essay.

A central question unifies the book: How do you truly know a place?

Topophilia — loving a particular landscape and identifying with it deeply — might be innate in each of us, but it is not necessarily accessible to us. It is for Reid, however. A formative experience with environmental writer Barry Lopez in 1979 fired Reid's literary intuitions. A mountain climber and would-be writer, Reid attended a wilderness preservation conference that Lopez keynoted. His speech struck Reid like a bolt from the sky. Lopez argued that wilderness activists needed to tell their legislators "that a certain river or butterfly or mountain ... must be saved, not because of its economic (or) recreational or historical or scientific value, but because it is so beautiful." Reid's future as a writer flashed into focus. Aesthetic value alone can save a landscape, but not unless it has a voice.

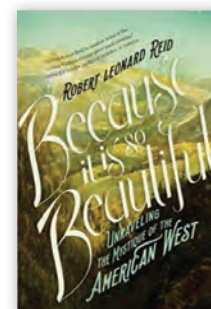
Reid builds that voice through sentences that construct landscapes and court curiosity, as his lexicon shifts with the terrain. His diction bewitches even the sleepest of readers: J. Robert Oppenheimer is a "Heldentenor in cowboy boots"; the scientists at Los Alamos, those "Kyries of Trinity," are "hosannas." Reid is a craftsman: "Writers who hope to reveal the essential matter of their subjects must have the patience, the facility, and, not least of all, the good luck to discover the proper light."

Reid is keen on New Mexico, whose "wide skies and yawning spaces" remind him of the Judeo-Christian tradition of "seeking God in big empty country." Such places attract people "drawn to grand vistas and soul-searching ruminations"

— such as Oppenheimer. Reid understands the contradictory forces at play in sacred spaces. In Los Alamos, "physics and engineering became prayers and incantations," as if the magnitude of scientific discovery was a manifestation of the divine itself. A pilgrimage to a back-to-the-lander's remote cabin in Alaska's Brooks Range — "eighty miles north of the Arctic Circle, fifty miles from the nearest neighbor, two hundred miles from the nearest road" — dovetails with a story about the elusive Porcupine caribou herd, which migrates annually to its calving grounds in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Reid tracks down the caribou right as they give birth, unraveling a mystical ecological process that had previously eluded him.

Whether one agrees that awe and beauty trump economics might be beside the point for Reid. His writings are about the larger point: the courage it takes to pursue one's ultimate aim, or telos. "To save a wilderness, or to be a writer or a cab driver or a homemaker — to live one's life — one must reach deep into one's heart and find what is there, then speak it plainly and without shame." There is an evolutionary quality to the way his ideas mutate and build in the book, each successive essay refining his lens on the West. This makes sense. You can't capture mystique; it continually enchants us and then slips away. The more Reid interfaces with it — the more peaks and passes he pursues — the more his essays (and he) unfold — and are re-framed.

BY ERIC SIEGEL



Because It Is So Beautiful: Unraveling the Mystique of the American West

Robert Reid
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Healing the wounds from the War on Coal

Without a just transition, environmental victories will go up in smoke



NEWS
COMMENTARY
BY JONATHAN
THOMPSON

Last year, climate-hawk billionaire Tom Steyer forked out more than \$23 million to support an Arizona ballot initiative that would have required the state's utilities to get half their power from renewable sources by 2035. Arizonans for Affordable Energy, a front-group for the state's largest utility, Arizona Public Service, spent nearly \$38 million in opposition. The initiative — which failed — was the most expensive ballot measure campaign in the state's history.

Meanwhile, a group called Save Native American Families, funded by the Navajo Nation, spent an additional \$785,000 opposing the measure. This might seem odd. After all, it's becoming more and more clear that the ravages of environmental degradation — climate change included — have a disproportionately large impact on Indigenous people, people of color and the poor.

Yet too often, the victims of the very efforts to stem that degradation come from disadvantaged communities. A fuel tax takes a greater portion of the income of someone driving an old beater between two jobs than it does from a wealthy, SUV-driving gas-guzzler. If you don't own a house, you can't take advantage of rooftop solar incentives, and yet may have to pay for your wealthier neighbors via increased electricity costs. And the great coal phase-out has failed to faze coal corporation executives, who pay themselves multimillion-dollar bonuses while yanking health insurance and retirement benefits out from under retired miners.

This can be the result of badly crafted policies or of wily corporate polluters who have managed to shift the burden of environmental policies onto those in the lower income brackets. Regardless, the dynamic often results in environmental justice coming at the expense of economic justice. But it doesn't have to be that way.

Take the case of the Navajo Generating Station in northern Arizona. In early 2017, the majority owner of the plant, the Salt River Project, announced that it would shut down the plant at the end of this year, forcing the closure of the Kayenta Mine on Black Mesa, which is currently operated by Peabody Energy. The closure comes primarily because the plant is no longer profitable, but pollution-control requirements played an indirect role by increasing the operating costs. It is a major environmental victory, keeping more than 14 million tons of greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere annually along with a slew of other harmful pollutants. It also represents a dire threat to the communities that have come to rely on the revenue from the plant and the mine. The closure will do away with as many as 900 jobs, 90 percent of which are currently held by Native American workers, in a region where unemployment hovers around 50 percent. It will also

eliminate more than \$50 million in royalties and other revenue to the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe.

As a result, members of both tribal governments have fought to keep the plant open. They've sought outside purchasers to no avail, and they've appealed to the federal government, which owns 25 percent of the plant, to intervene. And now the tribe's own Navajo Transitional Energy Company is looking to purchase both coal mine and power plant and keep it running — and polluting — for decades to come.

Indigenous opposition groups, such as Diné CARE and the Black Mesa Water Coalition, have made concerted efforts to stop the purchase, because it would mean taking on financial risk while also allowing the plant and mine to continue to inflict harm. Meanwhile, the major outside environmental groups that have badgered the Navajo Generating Station for years — and remain deeply invested in keeping the plant closed — are in a difficult position. Any interference with the plant's purchase would constitute an attack on sovereignty and a continuation of the same resource colonization that brought the power plants and mines to the Navajo Nation in the first place. Yet if the environmental groups stand idly by, they risk allowing serious environmental and human harm to continue.

There is a middle way, though. Environmental groups can work with the affected communities, the polluting companies and the relevant governments to push the current owners to live up to their moral duty and repair the damage they've done, to make amends for historical land and resource theft, and to patch up the economic hole their departure leaves. They can help pave the way for a just transition away from coal, one in which a solid framework is provided for affected communities to exercise agency and move forward to a greener and more economically robust future.

The initial pain of closure can be soothed by ensuring that the corporate owners live up to their legal obligation to adequately reclaim both the power plant and mine sites, a commitment that will keep hundreds of jobs active for several years after closure. And even though they are not legally obliged to do so, the corporate owners have a moral duty to take the reclamation further by healing the damage caused by dumping nearly 1 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and poisoning the land, the air and the water — along with the people and other creatures — in the plant's vicinity. The damage can't be reversed, nor can much of the mess be cleaned up. But the corporations that are responsible can contribute to the healing by creating a just transition fund that could be used to retrain power plant workers, provide loans for green energy entrepreneurs in the affected community, or perhaps go toward tribally developed utility-scale projects,

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A Peabody Coal Company strip-mining rig on Black Mesa in Northeastern Arizona, c. 1973.

LYNTHA SCOTT EILER
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such as the 300 megawatt solar plant recently constructed by the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority near Kayenta, Arizona. This healing process can begin by restoring water rights and transferring transmission lines to the Navajo and Hopi nations as soon as the plant closes.

Such an initiative does not come cheap. But the money not only exists; it is owed to the tribal citizens who have been bilked by corporations for decades. Peabody began mining on Navajo and Hopi land on Black Mesa in the 1960s, displacing families and destroying grazing lands and cultural artifacts, sucking up groundwater at a rate of 1.3 billion gallons per year, and shipping the coal — which was owned by the tribes — off to the Navajo and Mojave power plants. In return, the tribes received just a 2 to 6 percent royalty for the coal, an amount that was finally increased to the still-below-standard rate of 12.5 percent in 1984. There it has stood since, another product of the bad-faith negotiations that were facilitated by the federal government.

“Royalty” is a euphemism that is employed to obscure what is really going on here: For nearly five decades, these corporations have paid mere pennies on the dollar to wreck tribal land, take the coal that belongs to the citizens of the Hopi and Navajo nations and burn it in power plants that, in turn, poison the land and people of those very same nations. By not adequately compensating the tribes for their coal, the coal company and its customers have cheated the

tribes’ citizens out of billions of dollars.

The resulting cheap power lights up the neon of Las Vegas, while the Colorado River water that the plant’s electricity pumps has enabled Phoenix and Tucson to sprawl into the desert, enriching the operators of the Southwest’s growth machine: real estate developers, mass-production homebuilders, the automotive industry, the corporate shareholders, the ratepayers and the executives. Arizona Public Service, 14 percent owner of the generating station, raked in half a billion dollars in profit last year. Peabody’s CEO is paid \$20 million a year to run a company that just emerged from bankruptcy. They are all beneficiaries of outright theft.

And then there’s that \$63 million squandered on the renewable energy initiative campaign. That money could have offset a year of the tribal government revenue lost owing the plant’s closure. That same amount could have bought and installed more than 4,000 solar systems in low-income households, providing hundreds of jobs while cutting emissions. Or the money could have been put into a just transition fund. Instead, it was squandered on public relations campaigns that certainly brought no environmental gain.

The Navajo Generating Station and the coal mines on Black Mesa were built on a foundation of theft and colonialism. But closing them down will not help unless it is done in a just way, one that heals old wounds rather than opening new ones. □

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Mountain biking is my act of resistance

As an immigrant seeking a place to belong, I couldn't have felt more out-of-place than when I moved to America shortly before the 2016 presidential election. And as the vitriol escalated, I never expected to find solace on two wheels.

Here's how it happened: Nearing 30, I found myself yearning for a previous life. As an international economist, I lived and worked in Africa for most of my 20s. But after a while, I longed for familiarity, to not be instantly labeled and treated as an outsider because of how I looked and spoke: a South Asian woman with a North American accent. I missed, too, my home in Canada. Jobs in international economics are rare in North America, so I was delighted when I found one in Denver in September of 2016. Colorado seemed to offer everything I wanted: a short flight to my mom in Calgary, the

scared me, my sense of adventure troubled by visions of being attacked and left in the forest. In Fremont, California, a South Asian woman who went hiking just a few weeks after the election returned to find her car window shattered and a note calling her a "Hijab wearing b----" who should "get the f--- out." I debated leaving, perhaps returning to Canada. But that seemed like a defeat, a confirmation that people like me didn't belong in the outdoors — or anywhere in America.

Things began to change in the spring, when a mountain-biking friend convinced me to try it. "There's nothing that makes you feel more alive," he said. That's what the outdoors had always done for me — before it started to appear both inaccessible and hostile, reserved for people with specific levels of material wealth and melanin. Partly to challenge my own perceptions, I rented a bike and started riding with him. Immediately, I was hooked: the searing uphill climbs, the adrenaline of hurtling downhill. There was no time for self-consciousness, no opportunity for other trail-users to ask, "Where are you from?" I started saving to buy a used mountain bike. But once again, in outdoor gear shops and biking groups, surrounded by pale-skinned people with visibly larger budgets, I felt not only poor but out of my depth.

Despite the challenges, I kept biking precisely because I didn't fit in on the trails or in the sports shops or groups. Yet I craved a future where I did. After all, people of color and immigrants also pay taxes that fund state and national parks. We, too, deserve the sight of forest green and sky interrupted only by mountain peaks — and to have a choice in how we experience the landscape, whether by foot, bike, horseback, kayak or some other way. But I wasn't willing to wait for everything to become easily accessible for people like me — I had to start now. And perhaps by doing so, I'd help to create that future.

Still, that dream is continually threatened. Recently, a friend and I traveled to western Colorado to bike, Mesa County's trails being among the best in the country. On the drive to the trailhead, we passed at least three trucks with MAGA stickers. I knew Mesa County had voted 64 percent Republican in the 2016 election. At the trailhead, I sat in the car for a long time before setting off, filled with trepidation.

On the trail, I stopped to take a picture of yucca clinging improbably to slanting canyon walls. A man in a camouflage shirt walked towards me. As he got closer, he blinked noticeably, as if surprised to see someone like me there. But he nodded as he passed by, and I released the breath I hadn't known I'd been holding.

All my worries — money, my U.S. visa, the perceptions and reactions of others — were still with me on the trail, sometimes bubbling up, but gradually dissolving the longer I biked. The trail demanded my attention urgently — jagged switchbacks, tree roots swelling up suddenly from the soil — and at other times, gently. The wind brushed my scalp through my helmet vents. A jaybird call broke the slog of pedaling uphill. A flash of red appeared as my front tire passed blooms of Indian paintbrush. I couldn't have anticipated any of it, yet it was exactly what I needed. □

Raksha Vasudevan is an economist and writer living in Denver. [@RakshaVasudevan](#)



Though confident while out riding on trails, Raksha Vasudevan constantly pushes up against a culture of mountain biking that is predominantly white and higher income.

COURTESY OF RAKSHA VASUDEVAN

mountains, and a climate that made it easy to be outside year-round. Only after I arrived, in a daze of reverse culture shock, did I look up the statistics: 80 percent of Denver's population was white. I was nearly as much an outsider here as I'd been in Africa.

That sense of alienation only mounted after Donald Trump's unexpected victory. The day after the election, I wanted desperately to go to the mountains, far away from people who had chosen a leader who seemed to hate people like me — people of color, immigrants, women. But, like most women of color in Colorado, I'd realized after I got here that I earned a disproportionately low salary. Given Denver's growing cost of living, I could only visit the mountains when my few car-owning friends did — and none of them wanted to leave their homes that day.

In the following weeks and months, as rhetoric and violence against people of color escalated, I hesitated to go beyond the city, into rural areas, where diversity was likely to be even lower, making me all the more visible. The lack of crowds — something I used to love about wide open spaces — now



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COLORADO

Michael Lausch can now truthfully claim to have come back from the dead. The 39-year-old was skiing at Vail when he fell headfirst into snow so deep he almost disappeared from view, reports *Mountain Town News*. Another skier witnessed the accident and began frantically calling for help. “When I got there,” said Tom Nern, who was skiing with a group from Vail Dermatology, “there were two ski boots sticking out of the snow.” In about 10 minutes, the rescuers managed to dig down and free the Ohio skier, who weighed 270 pounds, from the 6-foot snow pit that buried him. But Karen Nern, a Vail dermatologist, feared the worst when she looked at his face: “He wasn’t breathing. He was purple. No pulse — nothing.” Quickly, she and Beth McCann, a retired obstetrician-gynecologist, started CPR. After three sets of chest compressions and six to eight breaths, Lausch revived suddenly, and, “with a snorkeling kind of breath he was alive again.” Lausch later spoke to the *Vail Daily*, marveling at his close call. “It’s overwhelming to know I was dead five days ago and I’m going to make it to my 40th birthday. There were angels on the mountain that day and those people were my angels.” Doug Lovell, chief operating officer at Vail Mountain, said the dramatic save showcases the importance of training in CPR.

MONTANA

An unlikely resurrection also occurred in Kalispell, Montana, when Fluffy, a 3-year-old outdoor cat, was revived after being found frozen stiff in a snowbank. Fluffy was brought into the Animal Clinic with no discernible temperature, but after getting warmed and fed intravenously, the cat began to growl. Veterinarian Jevon Clark told the Associated Press that because Fluffy was “normally a little crabby,” he knew the cat was back among the living.

CALIFORNIA

The lengthy government shutdown last month coincided with Death Valley National Park’s busiest tourist season, so it wasn’t long before garbage overflowed the waste bins. Soon, bits of leftover meals were carried around the desert by the wind, signaling to wildlife that food



IDAHO They can certainly be a wild bunch. PATRICK HAAS

scraps and humans were linked. Three coyotes and two bobcats got the message loud and clear and began boldly approaching people for hand-outs. One coyote even faked a leg injury to beg for food, stopping traffic in the middle of a blind curve. Park rangers worried about the traffic hazard and also that the animal’s growing lack of fear might make it aggressive toward humans. They tried hazing it, said Park Superintendent Mike Reynolds, but the wily coyote soon learned to identify Park Service vehicles and slip away. Ultimately, rangers decided to kill it.

In a press release, park staffers said they spent 1,500 hours assessing damage from the shutdown. Not surprisingly, many involved vault toilets. With no funding to clean, stock or pump the outdoor bathrooms, “even well-intentioned people damaged the park.” At least 1,665 clumps of toilet paper and 429 piles of human feces had to be removed, and that figure was incomplete. “We estimate there was at least a half-ton of human waste deposited outside restrooms.” In a masterpiece of diplomatic understatement, Reynolds called the human waste, trash, vandalism and impacts to wildlife “disturbing.”

OREGON

If you’re considering housing a bison in your back forty, you need to think about a few things first, said Jay McCleary, founder of Bela Animal Legal Defense and Rescue in Victor, Oregon. “For bison to be happy, they really need to be with other bison. ... If they’re alone they tend to get in trouble.” A month ago in Corvallis, a bison named Tonto did get into trouble, busting out of the pasture where he lived alone and strolling around the neighborhood near an elementary school. Tonto’s behavior got McCleary wondering if the bison needed companionship. Now Tonto, a former rodeo performer who would never be accepted by a wild herd, has found a new home with other “misfit” bison in Victor and is enjoying it just fine, reports KPAX. “He’s adjusted perfectly,” McCleary said. “And the female that was here just a second ago is kind of like his girlfriend now. ... He’s the new head honcho.” When Troy Westre, ranch manager of Bit-

terroot Bison in Victor, gets calls from people who want to buy just one or two bison, he tells them he only sells five at a time. Would-be owners also don’t realize how much land is needed for each bison to roam, he added, and that when they get bigger, “they eat 25 pounds of grass a day.”

WYOMING

A snowplow driver got a rich surprise when, some two hours south of Casper, he hit a black case and money came tumbling out of it. Just as he was giving the case and its cash to state police, reports KTVQ, three guys in a small Toyota went to a local state patrol office to inquire about their missing “luggage.” Big mistake: A drug-sniffing dog gave the alert, whereupon police searched the men’s car and found 81 pounds of marijuana, a felony amount of MDMA (ecstasy), and other drugs. Felony charges are pending.

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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