

High Country News

For people who care about the West



Public Pushback

Arivaca, Arizona, became a magnet for anti-immigrant activists. Locals wouldn't have it.

By Tay Wiles



The entry to Arivaca, Arizona, a vibrant community of artists, families, ranchers and desert rats, some of whom have joined together in an attempt to keep out border militia groups.

DANIEL TEPPER FOR HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

Editor's note

It's time to take a stand

There is no crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border. In fact, apprehensions of illegal crossings have plummeted over the last two decades, from 1.6 million in 1999 to just 400,000 in 2018, according to the U.S.



Border Patrol. It is true that an increasing number of families are fleeing civil strife in Central America and seeking safe harbor here, as they have the legal right to do. For their efforts, they are being separated, detained, pushed into self-deportation and otherwise harassed in what is becoming one of the darker periods of U.S. history.

Most troubling on the border, though, is the presence of militias. Fueled by the xenophobic rhetoric of our president, these groups of armed men and women believe they are doing the country a favor by "assisting" the Border Patrol. One group in New Mexico, the United Constitutional Patriots, recently changed its name and moved to an undisclosed camp, after its armed members were accused of holding a group of border-crossers against their will — an act otherwise known as kidnapping. This kind of vigilantism plagued the lawless American West throughout the 19th century. Today, it represents an intricate fantasy world that is both sad and dangerous, as fake soldiers with real weapons threaten the safety of actual civilians fleeing actual violence.

Luckily, common sense can and sometimes does prevail. As this issue's cover story shows, citizens along the border are getting fed up with the ongoing antics of militias. In one town, Arivaca, Arizona, a coalition of residents has come together to resist, refuse and otherwise retaliate against militia activity. Writer Tay Wiles, who follows extremism throughout the West, assembles an intimate portrait of the town and the impacts that militia and violence have had there over the years. There, militia members are banned from some establishments, and residents have put plans in place to protect each other if these armed interlopers carry out any of the (mostly) hollow threats they have made against the town. As one resident tells Wiles: "We need to take a stand."

We should all learn from Arivaca, where neighborliness and decency have risen above national politics and provocation. In today's political climate, it is becoming all too tempting to bar the door, turn down the lights, and tweet from the safety of the couch. I would encourage everybody who truly cares about the West to take their own stand, wherever they may be. The region is facing many challenges, but every hand helps. If a militia has moved into town, ban it. If a racist makes a snide comment, confront him. If a colleague claims that climate change is a hoax, correct her. We can all act together on behalf of the American West, and right now that means standing against ignorance, racism and intolerance, in any form, whether it comes from the border, the White House or the house next door.

—Brian Calvert, editor-in-chief

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Arivaca, Arizona, became a magnet for anti-immigrant activists. Locals wouldn't have it. By Tay Wiles

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On the cover

"No Militia" signs stand outside the humanitarian aid office in the middle of the one-block downtown of Arivaca, Arizona.

ANDREW CULLEN
FOR HIGH COUNTRY NEWS



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Red-legged frog.

THE LATEST

Backstory

In 2001, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated **4.1 million acres in California as critical habitat for the California red-legged frog**, following a federal court order the year before. The once-prolific species had been losing numbers due to habitat loss and an invasive species of bullfrog. At the time, Jan Erik Hasselman, an attorney for the Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund, called it an "important step in getting this frog back on its feet." ("Red-legged frog habitat slated for protection," *HCN*, 9/25/00).

Followup

In 2017, wildlife biologists reintroduced red-legged frogs into Yosemite National Park through a partnership with federal and state agencies. **This spring, ecologists announced the first signs of successful breeding — egg sacs have appeared in ponds and meadows throughout the park.** Since March, 20 egg batches have been spotted, which accounts for approximately 50,000 tadpoles. "It's unusual to find eggs in any location, and to find them this soon is a strong indication that red-legged frogs are adapting successfully to the riparian areas where we reintroduced them," Yosemite Superintendent Mike Reynolds said. JESSICA KUTZ

Grassroots groups help asylum-seekers

One morning this spring in the parking lot of a mall south of Tucson, Arizona, four people gathered around a gray minivan as the sun spilled into the still-cold desert air. Bags loaded with toys and stuffed animals filled the trunk of the van — donated by the Green Valley-Sahuarita



Lauren Asrael, left, a volunteer, helps Norma Lopez and Yason Hernandez, 8, check in at the Benedictine Monastery after they were dropped off by Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

MAMTA POPAT / COURTESY OF THE ARIZONA DAILY STAR

250 million

Number of federal records added monthly to the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse from Freedom of Information Act filings, litigation and court orders.

The Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) is a vital tool for watchdogging the federal government. But in early April, the organization hit a wall: Its requests for information about asylum and immigration cases weren't getting through. Some of the records withheld indicated whether individuals in immigration court have filed for asylum. Other information showed where immigration court cases were being filed throughout the country. This has been helpful information in the past for advocacy organizations and immigration lawyers.

"I mean, here we have this big current debate about (who should be given) asylum, and they suddenly withhold all the information about asylum?" Susan Long, the co-founder of TRAC, said. "Just think about that. It just makes no sense." JESSICA KUTZ

Read more online: hcne.ws/watchdog-wall

How 'pretendians' undermine the rights of Indigenous people

A few months ago, presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren ignited controversy after using a DNA test to prove her Cherokee ancestry. According to Rebecca Nagle, non-Natives claiming Native ancestry is dangerous because it perpetuates the myth that Native identity is determined by the individual, not the tribe or community.

Pretendians "compound the stereotypical imagery, name and behaviors and further misconceptions about Native people," says Suzan Harjo, a member of the Cheyenne and Hodulgee Muscogee nations, and an award-winning columnist for *Indian Country Today*. Harjo has spent years fighting pretendians like now-discredited author and academic Ward Churchill. "They are attacking the sovereignty of Native nations to select citizens and set citizenship standards," Harjo said. REBECCA NAGLE

Read more online: hcne.ws/Native-identity



Princess Pale Moon's 1977 album cover. Pale Moon claimed to be Cherokee and Ojibwe, though she was not an enrolled tribal member.

WORD RECORDS

Photos

Bears = tourists

In Montana's Tom Miner Basin, the number of bears has drastically increased in the last decade, and tourists have followed. Locals worry that the confluence of humans and bears is dangerous. "People not from the basin are often unmindful of the risks posed by their very presence, their speed and their activities," one resident said. LOUISE JOHNS Read more online: hcne.ws/grizzly-basin



A grizzly bear and her cubs pass through the Anderson Ranch, in this photo captured with a camera trap. Vegetation, berries, caraway roots, carrion and, sometimes, whitebark pine nuts are abundant for them in Montana's Tom Miner Basin.

LOUISE JOHNS

Trending

Most national parks have hazardous air quality

Millions of tourists will head out into America's national parks this summer in search of fresh mountain air. But according to a new report, they should instead expect dangerous levels of pollution: Roughly 96% of the nation's parks are struggling with significant air quality issues. The report, released by the National Parks Conservation Association, found that some of the most popular parks, including California's Sequoia, Kings Canyon and Joshua Tree national parks and Mojave National Preserve, were among the worst offenders. Last year, these parks recorded up to two months when ozone levels were considered dangerous — mostly during summer, when visitation is at its highest.

GABRIELLE CANON / THE GUARDIAN

You say

BRIAN HAINES: "It's called loving something to death. I'd rather wander the national forests without all the people."

DEBBIE MOORE: "Our species' wealth, privilege and sense of entitlement needs some serious re-evaluation. I feel for the other species that are being subjected to hordes of tourists and the pollution they bring with them."

BONNIE BLODGETT BARNETT: "The national parks are overcrowded. We need to support more national monuments, such as Bears Ears and Escalante."

Read more online: hcne.ws/park-pollution and [Facebook.com/highcountrynews](https://www.facebook.com/highcountrynews)

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MEANDERING ROAD TRIP

I'm not quite sure of the purpose of "The Atomic Road Trip" (HCN, 5/13/19), which was not quite a travelogue, nor a thoughtful examination of New Mexico or its people and nuclear past. The story meanders and never comes to a point, which is ironic because that's something you can do in New Mexico — meander the hundreds of back roads and scenic places that can seem otherworldly and fantastical. Which is why New Mexico is the "Land of Enchantment." But the authors didn't seem interested in any of that, and, as far as I can tell, only spoke to one actual New Mexican for their "reporting." This read more like a hit piece written by a pair of smug Californians who must think it the height of hilarity to ridicule the gift shop at Clines Corners, as if such truck stops don't exist in every single state, each with their own variety of kitsch.

I've never found New Mexico to be hiding its violent past. Every shrine, every monument, every pueblo or sacred Native American site you visit has a display that discusses the violence perpetrated within the state. It is not swept under the "colorful Mexican rugs" the authors found at Clines Corners. The authors also make a point to ridicule Roswell as one of the "worst tourist traps in the U.S." So what? The packaging and selling of the strange and unusual is part of the American fabric. The authors also talk about White Sands and the gift shop selling vials of sand that isn't theirs to sell, but fail to mention that White Sands has a rich history tied to the space program, or that White Sands is also where a memorial march is held every year to commemorate the Bataan Death March and honor the many New Mexicans (and others) who lost their lives in World War II.

New Mexico has its issues, to be sure. But there are so many amazing, interesting things about New Mexico that are completely missing from the piece. New Mexico has a vibrant artistic history, a rich spiritual center and an amazing culinary tradition. But I guess none of that's important when you can laugh about the aliens on the windows of the Roswell Walmart.

*Kristen Green
Eagle, Colorado*



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AMERICA'S NUCLEAR PAST

This is a beautifully written story that notes the whitewashing of our nation's nuclear past (and present). It's tempting to think of it as a "New Mexican" story, but it's actually an American story that took place here because of New Mexico's relative remoteness in the 1940s.

*Ray Gulick
Bernalillo, New Mexico*

SANCTUARY PLANS

I was pleased to see Gustavo Arellano's article about the plans of the Catholic Church to build a "multimillion-dollar retreat center" next to the Santuario de Chimayó in the community of El Potrero ("Whose Santuario?" HCN, 5/13/19). However, the article fails to mention the process that led to the church putting its plans on hold. From March 2012 to April 2014, Chimayó Citizens for Community Planning conducted a series of 29 meetings led by Santa Fe County planners, each attended by 20 to 50 community members (including representatives from the church). A comprehensive plan was then developed that covered a wide variety of issues important to the community. This included the impacts a retreat center would have on El Potrero, including the infrastructure demands from an influx of visitors: increased traffic on narrow roads, increased water usage, sewerage, etc. It became clear through this planning process that many real obstacles to the plans existed. The article gives

a simplistic view of conflict between the church and one community planner. In reality, hundreds of people were involved. The final draft plan may be read on the Santa Fe County website.

*William Wroth
Santa Fe, New Mexico*

FLY ELSEWHERE, GROWLERS

The Navy plans to expand its electronic warfare training for EA-18G "Growler" jets, some of the loudest aircraft in the world, over Olympic National Park ("A crusade for quiet" HCN, 5/13/19). Plans are already in the works to add another 36 jets to its existing fleet of 82 on Whidbey Island, a 44% increase. More jets mean more noise. The Navy's training airspace is planned over the Hoh Rain Forest, recognized as one of the most naturally quiet places in America, thanks to its canopy of forest and moss. Numerous visitors have already documented the deafening impacts from current training activities, outlining the detriment to the natural sound and solitude of the region. The Navy is planning up to 5,000 jet flights annually here. There are other places they can fly, whereas the Olympics and the Hoh cannot move. The Navy should be looking at other alternatives in its environmental impact study now out for public comment by June 12. Let's hear the Olympics, not Growlers.

*Rob Smith
Seattle, Washington*

FISH RIGHTS

We don't have any pupfish here, but we have an assortment of hoodlums who practice their gun shooting while both drunk and sober, on every road sign they find ("Scene of the Crime," HCN, 4/15/19). They also shoot every living thing in sight, including bald eagles and deer out of season. They can't read "no trespassing" signs and consider it their inalienable right to hunt anything, anywhere, at any time. One year in jail for a pupfish? What about everything else these so-called citizens destroy?

*Carolyn Munn
Hayfork, California*

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Left, A recently signed executive order looks to fast-track permitting for coal terminals.

PEABODY ENERGY, INC./
WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

Right, Longview, Washington, residents gather to protest the coal terminal project. The community has been fighting the proposed terminal for years. COURTESY OF POWER PAST COAL

Executive privilege

Trump supports states' rights when it suits his agenda

BY CARL SEGERSTROM

At nearly 17 million acres, the Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska is part of the largest intact temperate rainforest in the world. Meanwhile, about a thousand miles south in Longview, Washington, on the banks of the Columbia River, decades of industrial waste mar the proposed site for the largest bulk coal terminal in North America.

On the surface, these places may not have much in common, but they're both part of a simmering nationwide conflict over state and federal power. In the Tongass, that means the Trump administration deferring to Alaska's desire to rewrite federal rules to promote logging, while in Longview, it looks like an executive order designed to limit a state's ability to block fossil fuel projects — including the Millennium coal export terminal.

The Trump administration's treatment of these areas demonstrates its all-in support for extractive industries. In the name of energy dominance, the federal government is looking to curtail state environmental reviews and promote fossil fuel exports. By doing so, it's wading into an ongoing fight between coastal and Interior West states over permit denials for export facilities on the West Coast. Where the administration stands on that battle — and its apparent willingness to trample on some states' regulatory authority — exposes the uniquely flexible nature of its support for states' rights: It appears interested in shifting power to states only when the goal is less environmental protection.

President Donald Trump's April 10

executive order was part of a package of directives designed to pave the way for infrastructure like the Millennium coal terminal. In the order, Trump asked the Environmental Protection Agency to rewrite the policies for how Section 401 of the Clean Water Act is implemented. That section of the linchpin federal law gives states and tribes authority over whether to permit facilities that release pollution into federally protected waters within their borders. Trump's directive declares that the current process "cause(s) confusion and uncertainty, leading to project delays, lost jobs, and reduced economic performance."

While it's unclear exactly how the EPA will change the guidelines, environmental lawyers are skeptical that the executive branch has the authority to weaken state and tribal oversight. That's because the right of states to protect their rivers, lakes and coastal waters is fundamental to the Clean Water Act, and the 401 certification process gives affected communities a voice in that process. Andrew Hawley, a lawyer with the Western Environmental Law Center, put it bluntly: "To undermine that goes straight to the heart of the Clean Water Act."

The orders come as states are battling over export infrastructure along the Pacific Coast. Fossil fuel-producing states in the Interior West — frustrated that local and state governments in Washington, Oregon and California have stymied a string of projects — see Trump's directives as a crack in the coast's green wall. "I stand with governors across the land in asserting our states' rights to access markets foreign and domestic," said Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon, R, following the orders' announcement. "The states along the West

Coast have abused their authority under section 401 of the Clean Water Act to unfairly discriminate against Wyoming coal."

Gordon blamed the blocking of export facilities on climate politics, but Washington denied the Longview permit because of local impacts, not big-picture threats. In a summary of the decision, the state's Department of Ecology wrote that the project "would cause irreparable and unavoidable harm to the Columbia River," by driving hundreds of pilings into the riverbed, destroying nearly 30 acres of wetlands and aquatic habitat, increasing ship traffic on the Columbia River by 1,680 trips a year, and impairing tribal access to protected fishing sites.

Elsewhere, the Trump administration has sought to shift power to the states — so long as the end result would slash environmental protections. In the past couple of years, the Interior Department has implemented policies that defer wildlife management to states, thus allowing controversial hunting practices like killing coyotes and wolves during denning season on national wildlife refuges in Alaska. And the Forest Service is working with Utah and Alaska to weaken restrictions on carving roads into roadless forests. That would mean major changes in areas like the Tongass, where most of the forest is inaccessible to industry.

As some Western states get more leeway to weaken environmental safeguards, green activists are left wondering how far the federal government will go to subvert state regulatory authority in their communities. Diane Dick, who lives just outside the Longview city limits, has spent the better part of a decade fighting the Millennium coal terminal. From the beginning, she said, the fight over the terminal felt bigger than just one project; she's watched it become a poster child for a national debate over energy infrastructure. Now, as the executive branch tilts the scales against local environmental protection, Dick sees a larger question looming: When, and based on what, can a community protect itself? □

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

The BLM's blessing

Pardoned for starting range fires, the Hammonds graze again

BY TAY WILES

Oregon ranchers Steven and Dwight Hammond are known for starting fires, both literally and figuratively. Range fires they've set put them in jail, twice, on federal arson charges. Meanwhile, the passions they ignited in people like Ammon Bundy helped set their northern corner of the Great Basin ablaze, when Bundy led armed militiamen in an occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge — partly to protest the Hammonds' incarceration. Now, the Bureau of Land Management wants the Hammonds and their cows to help reduce wildfire risk.

Last year, President Donald Trump pardoned the ranchers, ending the jail time they were still serving for lighting wildland

weren't renewed in 2014.

After years without grazing, the allotment has become a wildfire risk, and locals have sent letters to the BLM, voicing concern. The agency's plan would authorize the Hammonds to graze cattle to help reduce that risk. In many ways, it comes as the anticlimax to decades of disputes between the Hammonds and federal land managers. Facilitated by Trump's pardon last year, it represents a return to business as usual in an area where ranching interests have significant sway over land-management policies.

BLM planning documents show a landscape transformed by over a century of agricultural use — and a reluctance to

because BLM scientists couldn't find any topsoil-saving crusts. "This may be due to the complicated disturbance history of the area, historic improper grazing, and cultivation/herbicide preparation for planting crested wheatgrass," the assessment says.

The environmental assessment also addresses whether cattle could damage Native American historical objects: "If cultural resource sites are located within existing livestock congregation areas, these sites have likely been affected during the last 100+ years of grazing," the document reads. "Possible effects are continued soil churning up to 12 inches deep ... and artifact breakage. These effects are not significant because the site integrity has already been lost."

These admissions indicate that the BLM seems resigned to a damaged ecological and cultural landscape, rather than a deep look at potential impacts and ways to mitigate them. It's not clear whether additional environmental assessments will be released for the Hammonds' other BLM allotments. The agency did not respond to requests for comment by time of publication.

While Steven and Dwight Hammond declined to comment, leaders in the livestock industry cheered the presidential pardon and grazing permit reissue. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association and the Public Lands Council, a national organization that advocates for public-lands ranchers, applauded Zinke's actions in a joint statement in January: "The reissuance of the Hammond Ranches' grazing permits is the final step in righting the egregious injustices the Hammonds faced. This is the culmination of years of effort on behalf of this industry to restore a family's livelihood." Dwight and Steven Hammond ultimately served three and four years respectively, and paid \$400,000 to the federal government.

But some environmentalists see recent events as a sign that the decades-old tensions are still smoldering, rather than being extinguished. Steve Herman, a wildlife biologist and former professor at Evergreen State College who has studied the region for decades, likens the renewed permits to the acquittal of the leaders of the Malheur occupation. "I see (the new grazing authorizations) as part and parcel of all those acquittals. It says to me that, you can make death threats ... you can start fires, and you're going to be rewarded not in this case with acquittal, but with a great big package of privilege."

Idaho-based activist Katie Fite of the environmental group Wildlands Defense speculated that the 2016 occupation, paired with Trump's pardon, sends a message about how public lands are managed in the region. "In eastern Oregon, throw in the whole Bundy Malheur refuge seizure and BLM is going to be treading very, very carefully not to upset ranchers." □



A new BLM assessment recommends that Steven and Dwight Hammond's cattle be used to reduce fire risk in an area that hasn't been grazed for five years. In this 2016 photo, Dwight Hammond speaks to reporters outside his home days before he turned himself in for arson. BROOKE WARREN/HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

fires that endangered federal firefighters. Then, in January, then-Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke reissued their grazing permit, and the Hammonds returned to ranching. On April 9, the BLM released a new environmental assessment for grazing on the Hammond Allotment, one of the largest of several the family uses in the high desert of eastern Oregon, where rolling hills are broken by rocky outcroppings. The BLM says cattle have not grazed the land for five years because the ranchers' permits

reverse this trend. More than 6,000 acres of the allotment are considered priority habitat for the greater sage grouse, a declining species that serves as a litmus test for the health of sagebrush ecosystems. But the BLM sidesteps habitat concerns in the planning because most of the bird's habitat has already been altered by decades of grazing and seeding invasive species. The document says grazing could now benefit the sage grouse by reducing wildfire risk.

Grazing impacts to microbiotic soil crusts, which can help prevent erosion, are also not a current issue. That's

Tay Wiles is a correspondent for *High Country News* and a freelance reporter.



Lease relief

Recent court decisions could curb greenhouse gas emissions on public land

BY CARL SEGERSTROM

Over the last few years, residents of the western Colorado town of Paonia, the longtime headquarters of *High Country News*, have planted yard signs, skipped ultimate frisbee to attend public meetings, and embarrassed themselves and each other during a karaoke-themed fundraiser — all in the name of preventing oil and gas development in their watershed. Despite their efforts, the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service approved major fracking projects, in 2015 and 2017, just above this small community, where agritourism and a renewable energy training facility are growing as coal jobs fade.

What public pushback didn't stop, a federal court in Denver has temporarily halted. In late March, Colorado U.S. District Judge Lewis Babcock ruled the agencies failed to fully consider climate and wildlife impacts in approving the projects, and ordered them to rework their environmental reviews. It is the latest in a string of decisions regarding federal environmental planning for oil and gas development and leasing on public lands. Another judge also recently rejected oil

and gas leases in Wyoming, citing an inadequate analysis of how they would harm the climate; together, the rulings have blocked development approved by both the Obama and Trump administrations.

Environmentalists see the decisions as major victories and an opportunity to slow down the "energy dominance" agenda of the Trump administration. At the same time, they're aware that courts alone can't prevent the administration from increasing leasing and drilling on public lands. But in the details of the decisions, and in growing public awareness and activism around climate action, they see a chance to slow or stop oil and gas development on public land.

The courts are merely delaying, rather than actually preventing, fossil fuel development over climate concerns. That's because the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 (NEPA) governs process, not outcomes. The law requires disclosure, "but NEPA doesn't have the kind of teeth to force agencies to act on climate change," said Clare Lakewood, a lawyer for the Center for Biological Diversity. "Practically speaking, (BLM) will do the analysis the court directed," and likely continue with the fracking project in western Colorado, said Laura King, a lawyer for the Western Environmental Law Center. Steven Hall, the BLM Colorado

communications director, said the agency will work with the groups that sued to address the issues identified by the court.

While it would be foolhardy to expect the Trump administration to change its plans based on a climate analysis, just a few years ago the Interior Department appeared to be taking climate change more seriously. In 2016, Interior Secretary Sally Jewell issued a moratorium on federal coal auctions and initiated an environmental review of the entire federal coal-leasing program. Though that review was never completed — and the moratorium was overturned in short order by Trump's then-secretary, Ryan Zinke — the data collected during it were published late last year in a report by the U.S. Geological Survey. That report shows that the extraction and combustion of fossil fuels from federal lands is responsible for approximately one-fourth of the carbon dioxide emissions produced in the United States.

The report not only showed that federal lands are a major contributor to climate change, it also demonstrated that tools exist to track and estimate how they contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Now, federal judges are keen to see those tools employed to inform agency decision-making. In a ruling that is delaying 303,000 acres of oil and gas leases in Wyoming, U.S. District Judge Rudolph Contreras wrote that by omitting analysis of the cumulative impacts of greenhouse gas emissions, the BLM failed to abide by environmental laws. He also wrote, "BLM could decline to sell the oil and gas leases at issue here if the environmental impact of those leases — including use of the oil and gas produced — would not be in the public's long-term interest."

The judge's assertion is critical for activists who want to keep fossil fuels in the ground. The Interior secretary is directed by law to hold quarterly oil and gas lease sales. But if the BLM has the power to decline to issue the leases based on their ultimate contribution to climate change, that could pave the way for future administrations to phase-out or even eliminate fossil fuel leasing on public lands. "We think the agencies have complete discretion," to issue a moratorium on new federal fossil fuel leasing, said Jeremy Nichols, the climate and energy program director for WildEarth Guardians.

Climate action is not coming from the current partisan Congress, an Interior Department led by former industry lobbyists, or a president who blames wind turbines for cancer while praising the beauty of coal. But recent court decisions are giving future administrations a legal footing to phase out fossil fuel development on public lands — and bolstering environmental activists, like the karaoke-singers in Paonia, by posing an important question: Is fossil fuel development a sensible way to manage public land for future generations? □

Oil and gas drilling has been delayed above Paonia, Colorado, because agencies didn't adequately analyze climate and wildlife impacts. COURTESY OF

ECOFLIGHT

The extraction and combustion of fossil fuels from federal lands is responsible for approximately one-fourth of the carbon dioxide emissions produced in the United States.

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



The Central Valley's agricultural resistance

Where industrial monocrops dominate, small-scale farmers could hold the key to a healthier California

BY JESSICA KUTZ

LaCha Her attaches a bottle gourd to fencing. He feeds his family with the produce from his farm and sells the rest. TOMAS OVALLE FOR HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

From above, the crops of California's Central Valley look like a giant tile floor. Some of the tiles are fuzzy; these are the densely planted almond and mandarin groves that dominate large swaths of the Valley. Others are striped; these are rows of grapes growing on long trellises. They stretch for 450 miles across the heart of California, many belonging to industrial farm operators that net millions of dollars a year in profits.

What a satellite image won't show you are the complicated social and political frameworks that govern the Central Valley. For every wealthy landowner, there are thousands of workers, many undocumented, laboring in the fields. The inequalities are glaring: The Valley is home to some of the most impoverished cities in the country. Many residents, surrounded by agricultural bounty, live in food deserts.

When Aidee Guzman, a researcher and Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Berkeley's Department of Environmental Science, Policy, and Management, shows me these satellite images, she sees something else entirely. She zooms in past the hodgepodge of tiles and focuses on one of the small plots of land she's been researching. LaCha Her, for example, a Hmong refugee who resettled in the valley decades ago, has a 25-acre farm — minuscule by the standards of Fresno County, where the average farm is

345 acres and many are over 1,000 acres. Despite its small size, Her's farm grows an abundance of produce, upwards of 70 crops a year, including specialty items like ginger, lemongrass, water spinach, asparagus, taro, mint and broccoli, a diversity that is rare in the valley.

Guzman is focusing on these small farms to find out whether, ecologically, this diversity has any positive effects on soil health. Her work won't be published for another two years, but there is already a large body of research that explains how large monocropping operations strip soils of their nutrients and make them less capable of storing carbon, which contributes to global warming once the carbon is released in the air. As she works, she is documenting a potential alternative to the industrial mega-farms of the valley and the West.

Guzman talks fast, her vocabulary punctuated by the occasional curse word. Twenty-six years old, she was born and raised in the Central Valley. Her parents migrated from El Pedregal, a small town in central Mexico where agriculture is a way of life, even as extreme poverty has forced many to leave. They worked seasonal jobs, her father pinballing between Washington, California and Florida and switching between fields of cantaloupe and apple orchards, her mother picking lettuce

and packaging tomatoes. The Central Valley's acres upon acres of almonds and grapes were the backdrop to Guzman's youth, and Firebaugh, her hometown, has been referenced in studies about the



poverty and pollution that plague the area.

Many of the region's inequalities can be traced to the effects industrial agriculture has had on the environment. Industrial dairies, truck emissions and the intensive use of fertilizers help explain why counties here consistently rank as the worst in the state for air pollution. Yet through her research, Guzman hopes to tell a different story about the place she calls home. In these fields, in a valley that is often painted as a forgotten place by outsiders, Guzman finds seeds of resilience among the immigrant communities. Guzman sees the Central Valley as home to a thriving oasis of diversity, where culturally relevant food grows and gives jobs to people in an area where unemployment is high. What Guzman is trying to prove now is that these farming ventures are important environmentally, too.

"I have to convince Berkeley folks that Fresno matters," Guzman tells me at a local restaurant, between bites of quesadillas stuffed with squash blossoms and huitlacoche, a black fungus that grows on corn. "Even my advisor was surprised I wanted to work there," she said. Typically, students will flock to work at organic farms in Sacramento or Napa Valley. But Guzman has grown used to having to advocate for her childhood home, bridging the divide between the sustainable agriculture movement and the Central Valley, or what she calls "the Valley of the Beast."

Through such research, Guzman and other social-ecologists are helping to expand the definition of agroecology, or the application of ecological principles to farming. Elsewhere in the world, for

groups like La Via Campesina — described as "the international peasant's voice" — agroecology has come to embody a social movement invested in helping peasant farmers challenge the social impacts of Big Ag. But in the United States, it is mostly confined to academia, and thought of solely in terms of its benefits to the environment, rather than people. Researchers are more likely to equate it to "white hippy dippy" farmers, as Guzman jokingly calls them, instead of marginalized groups facing agricultural inequalities.

Given this blind spot, in 2016 Guzman designed a research project with Fresno-based small farm advisor Ruth Dahlquist-Willard, from the University of California cooperative extension program. Guzman surveyed 30 small-scale farms run by refugee and immigrant farmers like Her, and took over 400 soil samples. She hopes to determine whether the soils and beneficial organisms that live there, known as arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi, are healthier in these highly diversified cropping systems. She is also looking at pollinator numbers to see how they vary between small-scale diversified systems and monoculture farms. Preliminary results indicate that the smaller and diversified farms are attracting a greater number of native pollinators, an important factor in a region where monocultures and pesticide sprays have been detrimental to bee populations.

Highly diversified farms make up a small percent of the acreage in the valley, and some people might argue that this makes their impact negligible. "But I disagree," Guzman told me. "Sustainable

Please see Diverse farms, page 22

Left, Aidee Guzman takes soil samples from the Berkeley Student Organic Garden.

SARAH CRAIG FOR HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

Joel Ramos, 83, weeds the farm of Isais Hernandez.

TOMAS OVALLE FOR HIGH COUNTRY NEWS



Vila Xiong helps Michael Yang set up for his weekly radio show. TOMAS OVALLE FOR HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

Radio Free California

Broadcasts in multiple languages deliver key information to farmers

BY JESSICA KUTZ

From a one-story stucco building in Fresno, California, Michael Yang's voice travels through the airwaves across the Central Valley, where hundreds of Hmong farmers are preparing their fields for their summer crops, radios on.

On this particular day, Yang's voice is a little wobbly. He's been sick for nearly a week and has a cough. Yang is a small farms and specialty crops agricultural assistant with the University of California's Cooperative Extension program, a statewide program that engages with researchers and locals in finding solutions to rural challenges. And he is one of the only connections that exist between Hmong farmers and agricultural services in the Central Valley in their native language. So even when he isn't feeling well, he rarely misses his weekly slot at KBIF radio, a station that also broadcasts to Punjabi/Hindi, Vietnamese and Japanese listeners. "His voice is really important," Ruth Dahlquist-Willard, a small farm advisor, told me. Crucial even.

Yang's broadcast starts with a saxophone melody that welcomes the farmers to his hour-long program, *The Hmong Agriculture Radio Show*. After he plays some traditional Hmong folk music, he'll read through the market price for various "Asian vegetables," a catchall term to describe the variety of crops that Hmong farmers and other Southeast Asian farmers grow, such as bok choy, lemongrass and bitter melon. This unique produce is sold at farmers markets or to trendy restaurants in the Bay Area, among other places on the West Coast.

California is the country's largest resettlement destination for the Hmong, an ethnic minority that helped U.S. soldiers fight a secret war in Laos in the 1960s and 1970s. For farmers like LaCha Her and his wife, Tong Vue, the radio program is one of the only ways they learn about new regulations or opportunities for their small-scale, highly diversified farming operation. "On the farm, we don't have time to watch TV," Vue told me, "So we have to use Facebook and listen to the radio."

Yang started the program in the late 1990s, after realizing that this community of *Please see Radio, page 22*

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Iceberg at low tide. Prince William Sound, Alaska.

COURTESY OF CLARK MISHLER

UP HERE, Edited by Julie Decker and Kirsten J. Anderson
195 pages, hardcover: \$44.95
The University of Washington Press, 2016

In *Up Here*, a book of photos, essays and poems curated by the Anchorage Museum, the North is a way of living rather than a latitudinal state. With photographs from Brian Adams, Acacia Johnson, Oscar Avellaneda-Cruz, Clark Mishler and others, *Up Here* zooms in on the contours of Northern lives amid landscapes that could seem deserted from a distance. But there is always movement: People are dwarfed by iceberg chunks, gut sockeye salmon and play cards on the banks of the Kenai River. Humans and nature seem to exist in hard-won equilibrium. In both photographs and text, climate change's oncoming impacts on the vulnerable region appear. "Maps have long showed the Arctic at the edge — up at the top, far away from the center of humanity," Julie Decker, one of the curators, writes in her opening essay. "Today the Arctic is at the edge of discovering the limits and the glory of human resilience." ELENA SAAVEDRA BUCKLEY

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Rhubarb and redactions

It's been a busy time for *High Country News* staff all around the West. Over in our Paonia office, Associate Photo Editor **Luna Anna Archey's** new puppy, **Rhubarb**, has successfully charmed most of the staff since she arrived as a tiny fur ball in April. A rescue of uncertain breeding but undeniable cuteness, Ruby is growing fast. She's a welcome addition to the *HCN* pack. In early May, the Gunnison satellite office staff celebrated the birthday of Editor-in-Chief **Brian Calvert**, who turned [REDACTED] years old.

On May 7, Contributing Editor **Graham Lee Brewer** led a cultural competency and ethics training workshop for reporting in Indian Country with the staff of *The New York Times's* national desk. A few weeks earlier, Brewer led a similar workshop with the Mountain West News Bureau. The Native American Journalists Association sponsored both events. Meanwhile, **Julian Brave NoiseCat's** February 2018 story "A tale of two housing crises, rural and urban" was a finalist for the prestigious Livingston Award for excellence in local journalism. The award honors standout work by journalists under the age of 35.

We have a few pieces of sad news to share from the wider *HCN* community. **James Bishop Jr.**, an author, periodic contributor and conservationist, died April 23 at the age of 82. Bishop spent his early life as an editor at *Newsweek* magazine and later worked as an energy official in President Jimmy Carter's White House. His true calling, though, was as a writer about, and advocate for, the American Southwest. One of his books compiled myths and legends from the region, while another detailed the life of another desert lover, Edward Abbey. In this publication, his dispatches from Arizona included literary essays and reporting on pollution and development. While he often bemoaned the haze hanging over the Grand Canyon or the filling of Lake Powell, Bishop continued working through the end of

his life, according to those who knew him. "He never lost hope," wrote his friend **Lorena Williams**.

We also want to honor the memory of longtime readers **Allan and Armella Benton**. A lifelong environmentalist, Allan died in August 2011 at the age of 84, while Armella passed away two years later. She was also 84. Allan and Armella's daughter, Ruth, made a major donation to the magazine in their memory last fall. We at *HCN* want to thank the Benton family for sticking with us all these years.

Finally, a small correction is in order from our Outdoor Recreation and Travel issue (*HCN* 5/13/19). A caption mistakenly referenced Olympia National Park. It is Olympic. And in the Heard Around the West photo from the same issue, the caption reads "Colorado." Some astute readers have pointed out that the license plate pictured is from Montana. We want to clarify that it was seen and sent by a reader in Silverton, Colorado. We regret the errors.

—Nick Bowlin, for the staff



Minutes later, Rhubarb discovered the joy of swimming in the muddy irrigation ditch. LUNA ANNA ARCHEY/
HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

Public Pushback

*Arivaca, Arizona, became a magnet for anti-immigrant activists.
Locals wouldn't have it.*

Weather rolls into Arivaca, Arizona, with plenty of warning. The community's 630 residents live in a desert valley with sweeping vistas, where gigantic cloud mosaics are constant and ever shifting with the wind.

For a long time, Arivaca has received outsiders looking to make it their own. It sits just 11 miles from the U.S.-Mexico border, on land that was once the territory of the Tohono O'odham. The area's vast public lands are littered with defunct silver and gold mines. In the 1970s, hippies moved in, and later, a stream of retirees. "We have people that come to Arivaca just to get away from whatever they want to get away from," says librarian Mary Kasulaitis, a local historian and fourth-generation rancher.

For a hideout, though, it's pretty smack-dab in the middle of things. Almost everyone has a story about undocumented immigrants knocking on their doors, desperate for water. Arivacans tell stories about bricks of pot dropped on their land to be carried north. Locals say smuggling has long been a tacit part of life here.

Yet Arivaca — a vibrant community of artists, families, ranchers and desert rats — tries not to let politics or the drug trade disrupt daily life. "Most people in Arivaca look at national and international politics as kind of a joke," says longtime resident Alan Wallen, 50, the founder of the town's cooperative internet provider. "Here's the thing about Arivaca. More and more, it became tolerant of different viewpoints. It evolved into a really odd

mix of really tolerant people." As one Tucson newspaper put it, Arivaca is "a live-and-let-live kind of town."

So it was significant when, in 2017, locals bristled at the arrival of an outsider. Tim Foley, a wiry, blue-eyed 59-year-old, moved to town from nearby Sasabe. Foley is the head of Arizona Border Recon, an armed group that tries to intercept immigrants and smugglers in the Borderlands, and also claims to provide "intelligence and security services" to the Border Patrol. He is a well-known figure in the right-wing militia world and, increasingly, in anti-immigrant conservative politics. Last September, Foley gave a speech outside the U.S. Capitol building, alongside several members of Congress and presidential advisor Kellyanne Conway.

Around the same time, other men appeared in Arivaca, either inspired by Foley or by President Donald Trump's calls to "build the wall." They used the town as a backdrop for online tirades against smuggling and immigration. Their presence irked those already uneasy with Foley, and set in motion an organizing effort among a small group of locals, who worried about the threat the visitors posed and wondered what to do about it.

Here's the other thing about Arivaca: This wasn't the first time people had come from away to expound on the evils of immigration. And last time it happened, things went badly for the community. Ever since a fateful night in 2009, many Arivacans say some things are not welcome here.

Jo Rae Vass, Mary Kasulaitis and Clara Godfrey (sitting) and Dan Kelly and Megan Davern (standing) are some of the Arivaca, Arizona, residents who are working together to combat the militia presence in town.

DANIEL TEPPER FOR
HIGH COUNTRY NEWS



"Everybody can have different views, but when views become murder, then I don't want to hear shit about your views."

—Clara Godfrey, Arivaca resident

ON THAT MAY NIGHT IN 2009, a woman and man banged on the door of a local home, wielding a handgun, revolver and a duct-taped shotgun. The woman was Shawna Forde, the leader of Minuteman American Defense, a militia that patrolled the Borderlands for migrants. Originally from a Seattle suburb, Forde was also interested in joining the drug trade. That night, posing as a member of the Border Patrol, she entered the home of the Flores family, looking for drugs and money. She and her male companion found neither. Still, they murdered Raul "Junior" Flores and his 9-year-old daughter, Brisenia, shooting Junior in the neck, throat and head, and Brisenia point-blank in the face. The killers were put behind bars, while Arivaca was left with the kind of wounds that never truly heal.

When Tim Foley moved here in 2017, some locals thought Arizona Border Recon sounded a lot like Minuteman American Defense. In Sasabe, Foley had earned a reputation when he threatened to burn down his house after the rent was raised, according to a sheriff's report. "We were warned from people in Sasabe," says Clara Godfrey, a petite and charismatic 58-year-old, whose family has roots in Mexico, Greece and southern Arizona. "We didn't give him much of a chance," says Eli Buchanan, 36, who runs the recycling center. "As soon as we found out he was moving here, the town had a big candlelight vigil for Brisenia and made it clear he wasn't welcome."

But Foley stayed and continued patrolling the border. "I thrive on using my mind," he told me during an interview at his home in Arivaca. As border security

became a cornerstone issue for the Trump administration, Foley's longtime anti-immigrant obsession took on new prominence. And in some online corners of the far-right world, so did Arivaca.

The second outsider was a tall redheaded conspiracy theorist named Michael Lewis Arthur Meyer, who often goes by Lewis Arthur. In early September, he started livestreaming from Arivaca's main street to his Facebook followers, claiming that a local humanitarian aid group that helps migrants in need of food, water or medical attention was in cahoots with drug cartels.

"If you're ever down here," Arthur bellowed, "if you want to know who helps child traffickers, if you want to know who helps dope smugglers, if you want to know who helps ISIS — any of the bad guys. These people help them." A woman in a long brown dress approached him. It was Megan Davern, 30, a local butcher and bartender. Davern had seen Arthur in the bar and realized he was a friend of Foley. As he livestreamed, she asked Arthur what he was up to, and if he was part of a larger group. "We're only with God," he replied.

"I would appreciate it if you don't come in again," Davern told him.

"Understood," he said, and continued his tirade.

A few days later, Arthur confronted another bartender downtown, demanding to know why an anti-militia sign had been posted on the door. When the bartender asked him to leave, he made a vague threat to mess with the town's water supply. As he livestreamed, his Facebook followers encouraged him. Someone

suggested burning down the bar.

So Arivacans started to organize. They created a phone tree and helped the bartenders close up at night. Godfrey called a community meeting to urge people to watch out for one another. What the heck was going on? they wondered. Would anyone actually try to burn down the bar — or worse? About 50 people packed the old schoolhouse, and a local cowboy named Huck sat outside to keep watch, in case someone came around with bad intentions.

"I have always been adamant in my belief, since what happened to us in 2009, that these people are nothing but no good," Godfrey told me. "We have a tree planted for Brisenia. I'm at the point where I don't need to plant a tree. We need to take a stand."

Also around this time, Bryan Melchior of Sandy, Utah, arrived, talking about the need to fortify the border. Melchior, who ran a group called the Utah Gun Exchange, was famous for driving the country in an armored vehicle mounted with a machine-gun replica to intimidate gun control advocates at rallies. When he drove the vehicle through Arivaca, he set off a wave of new anxiety. He had been inspired by Trump's calls for a border wall. "We're in town because Trump is going to put the border at the top of the national priorities list again," Melchior said, in a recording made by an anti-militia organizer. He wanted to lease land and start building the wall himself.

Davern was behind the bar when he showed up, carrying an open container of Mike's Hard Lemonade. When Melchior said he sometimes worked with Foley, and started getting into arguments with the bar's patrons, Davern asked him to leave. And then she called another town meeting.

THIS TIME, THE TOWNSPEOPLE CALLED IN OUTSIDE SUPPORT: They invited Jess Campbell to the meeting. Campbell works for the nonprofit Rural Organizing Project in Oregon, which helps communities organize around issues ranging from defunded libraries to hate crimes and far-right extremism. In 15 years of this work, Campbell had never seen such an organized and self-directed community. "Arivaca was very special in that people weren't so terrified of speaking to neighbors. They have a strong social fabric," she said. But they wanted answers. "Folks felt their community might be a special kind of messed-up and were trying to understand why this happened to them," Campbell told me.

At the meeting, she gave a presentation on how militia groups operate in rural areas, and offered suggestions about staying safe in the face of threats. She helped Arivacans consider ways to collect and organize information about incidents like the recent confrontations at the bar. And she tried to help them figure out what the real threat was.

Campbell explained that militia groups tend to see themselves as above the law, which increases the risk of



The Arivaca house where Raul Flores and his 9-year-old daughter, Brisenia, were murdered in 2009 now stands abandoned. Shawna Forde, the leader of Minuteman American Defense, and her companion, Jason Bush, were later convicted of the crime. ANDREW CULLEN



confrontation with law enforcement. For example, in 2015, a chapter of the Oath Keepers that had embedded in a rural county in southern Oregon for over two years ultimately led hundreds of supporters in an armed show of resistance to law enforcement at a mining claim.

But there was also a more diffuse threat. An armed militia in a small community can be polarizing, forcing people to choose sides. “If they can drive a wedge into the community, or people are very quiet because they’re nervous to speak out, that’s where we see (militia groups) get the strongest foothold and be able to rock and roll,” Campbell said. This happened in Burns, Oregon, during the 2016 armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, she said. Militia groups “tried to twist the arms of whoever was in power there — the sheriff, the (county officials),” Campbell said. When the militia failed to gain support, it demonized local leadership and created divisions in the community.

“That’s the playbook,” Campbell said.

After Campbell left, Godfrey, Davern and others monitored social media and kept in touch, sharing information about threats and accusations on a community Facebook page. A woman named Ann Ayers collected internet videos on her



computer — documentation for potential harassment claims. Arivacans pestered Facebook to shut down Arthur’s page, which the company eventually did.

In their quest to understand why their sleepy downtown had drawn so many threatening outsiders, one common thread emerged: Tim Foley. In November,

Ben Bergquam, a California talk radio host with over 100,000 Facebook followers, livestreamed outside the bar. “Good morning, y’all,” he began, donning a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement hat. He trailed off, forgetting the name of the town he was in. Tim Foley stood in the background, smoking a cigarette.

Men play pool inside La Gitana Cantina & Cafe, which has adopted a no-militia policy, notice of which is posted on its door. As the town’s only bar, La Gitana’s clientele includes ranchers, a ski-industry avalanche consultant, marijuana home growers, and nearly everyone else in town. ANDREW CULLEN FOR HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

In his home office in Arivaca, Border Recon founder Tim Foley looks at photos from his excursions into the desert mountains along the Mexican border.

ANDREW CULLEN



"Go into town and shoot people's doors in? Are you out of your freakin' mind?"

—Tim Foley, Arizona Border Recon

Foley didn't actively take credit for bringing the other men to town. He even distanced himself from Arthur after the man drew too much negative attention online. But Foley had become a magnet for MAGA activists looking for a like-minded tour guide to the Borderlands; Melchior and Bergquam both came in part to meet him.

"I got invited by the one and only Tim Foley ... of Arizona Border Recon," Bergquam said in his livestream. "If you're coming through Arivaca and you're a patriot, don't go to that bar. Or do go to that bar."

The downtown incidents weren't the worst part. It was the uncertainty about who else might be watching online. Who would show up next, and with what intentions? "Things that were said in anger about our community weren't just said to us," Godfrey said, "but to the world."

AT ITS CORE, ARIZONA BORDER RECON is a three-person organization composed of Foley, his girlfriend, Jan Fields, and a man named Lorenzo Murillo, who also lives in Arivaca. Foley started thinking about immigration issues when he was living in Phoenix in 2006. As the owner of a small construction company, Foley said undocumented immigrants undercut his bids. Then the mortgage crisis hit, and his house foreclosed. Frustrated and broke, he sold his three Harley Davidsons and moved to Sasabe, which straddles the international border. In 2010, he founded Arizona Border Recon.

Today, Foley and Fields host groups of people, mostly white men, for a week or two at a time to patrol the desert for illegal activity. In addition to intercepting migrants, Foley aims to disrupt drug-smuggling routes.

Foley also courts the media: He's received coverage from *Wired*, *Vice*, *USA Today* and many others. He usually charges news outlets \$200 to tag along on his patrols. (*High Country News* interviewed Foley but did not pay for his time.) *Cartel Land*, a 2015 documentary film nominated for an Academy Award, compared Foley to the Mexican citizens taking an armed stand against the cartels inflicting horrific violence on their communities. It was great publicity.

That same year, Foley began connecting with right-wing militia leaders. Montanan Ryan Payne and a California man named Gary Hunt recruited him to help establish an organization called Operation Mutual Defense, or OMD. The group dreamed about organizing militia actions across the country — from standing up for ranchers at odds with the federal government and breaking fellow patriot movement members out of jail, to intercepting buses of Muslim refugees in Montana and other states, and interrogating them. Hunt is a longtime right-wing thinker, who described Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh as "the first patriot of the second American revolution." Payne was a primary militia leader involved in the Nevada standoff between rancher Cliven Bundy and the federal government in 2014. Lingering enthusiasm from the Bundy victory — or as Hunt called it, the great "unrustling" — fueled the creation of OMD.

Foley brought media savvy to the group. He encouraged members not to call themselves "freedom fighters," since it sounded too aggressive. He recommended "concerned citizens" instead. "Image is everything, and you don't want to portray that offense," Foley said at the time. "You want to portray defense." A series of

conversations recorded between the OMD founders reveal that Foley planned to provide a place for people to train for future operations. The group saw Foley and the border as key to building a national militia network.

"That's the beauty of the border," Payne said "There's an active, hot environment that we can conduct real-world operations, where we're making a difference and at the same time, we're building cohesion amongst ourselves."

OMD's founders also discussed using Lewis Arthur's Tucson-based group, Veterans on Patrol, to provide tents and cooking facilities if they were to have "an operation like the Bundy Ranch" on the border. OMD discussed taking a stand against the government in Harney County, Oregon, where anti-federal sentiment eventually morphed into the 2016 armed occupation of Oregon's Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. But Foley told me he ultimately wasn't on board with the occupation because it came too close to a government overthrow. "When they started talking crazy, I said, 'Nope, I'm out.'" As the 41-day occupation unfolded and then unraveled when state police and FBI apprehended its leaders, Foley stayed home in Arizona, out of the fray.

Foley scoffs at some Arivacans' fears that Arizona Border Recon or its associates would cause violence on par with the 2009 shootings. "Go into town and shoot people's doors in? Are you out of your freakin' mind?" he told me, in his tidy mobile home in Arivaca. And not everyone here minds his presence. Many people told me that if he wants to help Border Patrol stop illegal activity, more power to him. He's just one more person living his dream.

But to Godfrey and her allies, his connections are troubling. They worry

that Foley is becoming a local conduit for national angst, who will only bring more disruption the longer he stays.

BORDER MILITIAS FIRST GAINED STEAM in the early and mid-2000s. Several made alliances with cattle ranchers who were fed up with migrant traffic across their land and smugglers cutting their fences. In 2000, a paramilitary group called Ranch Rescue formed to help Arizona cattlemen defend their property. After members of the group were arrested for imprisoning and pistol-whipping migrants, Ranch Rescue dissolved. Then, in 2008, a group called the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps set up operations from a ranch 30 miles north of Arivaca. The Corps was Shawna Forde's first real introduction to unofficial border patrols; her Minuteman American Defense was a spinoff.

Today, some Arivaca ranchers are vehemently opposed to the militias. Local ranchers Jim and Sue Chilton had nothing to do with Shawna Forde, but they are vocal about their support for Foley and Arizona Border Recon. One of the Chiltons' federal grazing allotments abuts the international border in a heavily trafficked smuggling area, Jim says. The Chiltons want Trump's wall and more resources for the Border Patrol. For now, though, they have people like Foley, who calls the couple his "biggest cheerleader" in Arivaca.

The Chiltons don't view the 2009 murders as the result of right-wing extremism. "It wasn't really a militia," Sue Chilton said in a video the Utah Gun Exchange posted last fall. She argued that drug dealers orchestrated the killings. Indeed, in court documents, a judge described one of the three found guilty as a dealer who was "plotting to kill (Junior) Flores as a perceived rival in the drug trade." That man was Clara Godfrey's nephew, Albert Gaxiola, who waited outside the home while the first shots were fired.

And yet it's also true that right-wing extremism was baked into the horrific deed. According to court documents, Forde got involved in the trade as a way to fund her Minuteman American Defense, which required transportation and firearms. Jason Bush of Wenatchee, Washington, the man who shot Flores and his daughter that night, was part of Forde's group and a known white supremacist.

All of this makes it difficult to untangle the real threat in Arivaca. If the murders were the result of a drug feud, why not organize against smugglers? Some said that's just not practical. "When you live near a border of any kind, there is smuggling," Mary Kasulaitis told me. "It would happen if you were off the coast of Cornwall in England." Smuggling is an economy as old as the border. People told me it's just a fact of life.

"For the most part, Arivaca has been pretty stable and quiet because they don't want to attract law enforcement,"



according to David Neiwert, a national expert in right-wing movements and author of a book about Shawna Forde. Militia members, however, threw things off balance, he said. "(Militia) introduce an unstable element that's capable of extreme violence," Neiwert told me. He said militias can become tools for people who need muscle, whether it's ranchers feuding with the government, like Cliven Bundy, or drug dealers. In Arivaca, Neiwert said, "Shawna was basically a lethal tool."

By Neiwert's logic, the late-2018 confrontations had disrupted Arivaca's equilibrium once again. This time, though, there seemed to be little promise of resolution. There were no obvious repercussions, no arrests or court trials as there had been after 2009. Instead, there were lingering questions — and a persistent sense of unease.

AFTER THE START OF THE NEW YEAR, Arthur and Melchior faced charges elsewhere for criminal trespassing and guns and drug violations. If the Arivacans' goal was to get people to stop making angry livestreams downtown, "maybe it did work," Wallen said. "Maybe that's what it takes. That each time there is a flare-up, people get together and let their voices be heard. But each time this border war escalates, people in our town get hurt. And we're tired of that."

Experts say border militias don't just have a local impact; they have a national one. "Extremely anti-immigrant ideas are now embedded in the White House and our policymaking system," says Heidi Beirich of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks hate groups. Beirich says the mobilization of border militias in the mid-2000s helped elevate immigration issues and nativist rhetoric

into mainstream politics. "It was picked up by the Tea Party, eventually made its way into the GOP, and we got Trump." Now, the cycle is coming full circle, with the president fueling the ideas that motivate people like Arthur, Melchior and Foley. "They see themselves as a bulwark protecting Trump," Beirich says of many far-right activists.

In January, Godfrey held another meeting at the historic schoolhouse, the fourth such gathering in the last five months. "We have to really be on guard," she warned her fellow citizens. "Everybody can have different views, but when views become murder, then I don't want to hear shit about your views." The group planned to send a letter to the district attorney about the livestreamers and the town's concerns about militia activity. Godfrey wanted the authorities to be aware, in case things went downhill. Word also got around that Foley was interested in buying a piece of land outside of town. In February, Eli Buchanan sold his tractor in order to purchase the land first. In early March, locals reported yet another armed group in town, this time a couple of men who reportedly called themselves anarchists and wanted to confront Foley. Wallen said he and another local man talked them down.

"There's a feeling like we can't let this rest until it's done, and I don't know what that means," Ann Ayers told me. Ayers worries the threat to the town will persist as long as the president continues his inflammatory rhetoric. She still periodically plugs into the Facebook pages of right-wing activists, where the conversation never stops. "It's a weird world," she says. "A couple of weeks ago (I was) talking to some people, and they were like, 'It's all quiet now.' And I'm like, 'But is it?'" □

Clara Godfrey, who has organized community meetings to discuss the arrival of militia groups in Arivaca, Arizona, outside the humanitarian aid office in the middle of town.

ANDREW CULLEN



Tay Wiles is a correspondent for *High Country News* and a freelance reporter.

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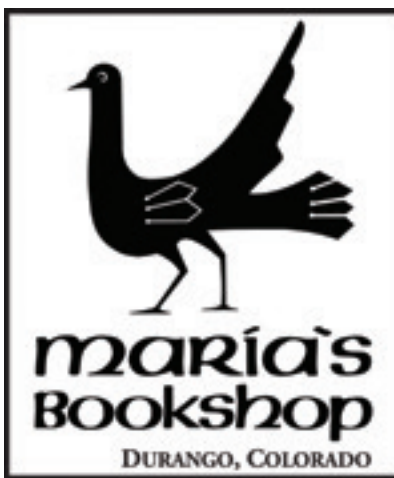
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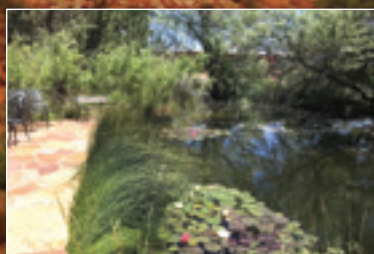
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Isais Hernandez drives a tractor on his small farm of 33 acres.

TOMAS OVALLE FOR
HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

Diverse farms *continued from page 9*

farming practices are happening in the valley, and if these farmers are actually providing (soil health benefits) then, shouldn't we think about them more? And support them?"

Fresno and Tulare counties together had approximately 8,000 small-scale farms, according to the 2012 agriculture census. Many of these are operated by immigrants or refugees, said Dahlquist-Willard, who focuses on the two counties. While the census numbers can be unreliable ("Farmers don't like to fill out paperwork," Dahlquist-Willard says), a 2007 survey found approximately 900 Hmong farmers in Fresno County. As for the Latino farmers — many of whom started out as farmworkers — Dahlquist-Willard

has noticed that they are entering farm ownership at a younger age than white farmers, creating "the next generation of family farms."

One of those farmers is Isais Hernandez, a portly middle-aged man whose white chin stubble contrasts with his tan skin. On his 33-acre parcel, Hernandez grows Japanese, Chinese, Italian and Thai varieties of eggplant, as well as other fruits and vegetables. Originally from Michoacán, Mexico, he started out working alongside his parents on a farm that was run by Japanese farmers. "I never worked for gringos," he told me with a chuckle. After years of saving their earnings, he and some family members were able to buy their own property. Later, he purchased this parcel of land, too.

Last summer, Guzman visited Hernandez to look at his farm's soil health. Hernandez didn't really know too much about the research Guzman was conducting, but he offered insight into why her work is so important here. Gesturing to the farms around him, he expressed frustration over ag subsidies and how they are distributed. "The programs seem to benefit the big companies more than the small farms like us," he said.

This is true for a few reasons. First, resources for offices like the Cooperative Extension program where Dahlquist-Willard works are limited, so their ability to reach and disseminate information to farmers like Hernandez is constrained. But there is another structural inequality at play: Whenever government resources

are up for grabs, they typically go to those who are more plugged into the system. Other groups can take advantage of the funds simply because they have more resources. Researching these marginalized growers is one way to change that. Not only does that bridge connections between academics and farmers, but it can inform new regulations that might otherwise disproportionately hurt them.

Take, for example, the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program. The program was created in 2003 with a mission to hold agricultural producers in California accountable for the water contamination typically caused by Big Ag. New reporting requirements ask farmers to fill out paperwork that lists fertilizer inputs and the crops they grow annually, a difficult data point for farmers who grow between 50 and 70 crops over multiple seasons per year, and who don't have the time, administrative help, or, in some cases, writing skills to fill out the requests.

Guzman's research could help these farmers by bringing visibility to their small-scale operations before state agencies create new, more onerous rules, Dahlquist-Willard said. "Whatever (regulations) agencies are making, if they don't know these people are here, they aren't going to consider them in that decision." For Guzman, this type of dilemma gets to the true heart of "agroecology," where, despite the social and political forces that shape these farmers' lives, they are able to occupy space. "Them existing and surviving in a landscape like this," she said, "that's resistance." □

Radio *continued from page 9*

farmers was having a hard time accessing important information and new agriculture regulations. "A lot of farmers said we need to be aware of what is going on," he said. "So I talked to my boss and we were able to get some grants to help the radio announce agriculture (information) to the small farm community."

In addition to providing farming resources, Yang keeps farmers up to date on pesticide safety, Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards, and labor laws. The station has become a tool for community advocates to reach this demographic in the people's native language as well, including groups like the Fresno Center, which helps connect Hmong and other immigrant or refugee communities with services like education, healthcare and housing.

The radio model has proven successful. Sam Vang, a soil conservationist with the local Natural Resources Conservation Service, based in Fresno, started his own Hmong radio program around the time Yang did, to get out his messages about soil health and NRCS funding opportunities. By listening to Vang's program, LaCha Her learned about hoop houses and was able to receive assistance through a NRCS environmental incentives program to install them on his farm. Also known as

tunnel structures, hoop houses help farmers grow certain kinds of produce all year.

More recently, Vang filmed a series about soil health for HmongUSA TV, which was streamed to YouTube. Vang said people from around the country have watched the show — there are large Hmong populations in Minnesota and Wisconsin, as well — and some of his advice has even gone global to Vietnam, Laos, French Guiana

and Australia.

When he first tried to connect with the Hmong community in California's Central Valley, Vang would go door-to-door. Distrustful of government meddling, farmers would brush him off. With their radios on, tuned to programming in their native language, farmers listen openly. "It has been a challenge, right?" Vang said. "But you find a way that reaches people." □

Michael Yang speaks with LaCha Her in a greenhouse full of sweet potato plants.

TOMAS OVALLE FOR
HIGH COUNTRY NEWS





Plumbing the Gila for solace and hope

“To be left alone,” wrote Anthony Burgess, “is the most precious thing one can ask of the modern world.” Burgess penned the line, astonishingly, in the 20th century; imagine how cramped he would have felt by the omnipresence of social media. We are never alone in 2019, nor have we ever been lonelier.

Philip Connors quotes Burgess’ maxim in *A Song for the River*, his latest work of strange and lovely memoir. Connors is well-acquainted with solitude’s pleasures: For more than a decade, he has worked as a fire spotter in a tower overlooking New Mexico’s Gila Wilderness, his most frequent companions black bears and lizards. His original motivation in becoming a lookout — a job whose rituals formed the marrow of *Fire Season*, his 2011 debut — was escape. “In the beginning I simply wished to remove myself from human company,” he writes on *Song*’s first page. What kept him returning was creaturely communion, a “beautiful Babylon of owls hooting and nutcrackers jeering and hermit thrushes singing their small and lovely whisper song.”

White guy contemplates nature in

isolation: If that strikes you as groundbreaking, there’s this pond you should probably visit. And yet *A Song for the River* is a singular book, resistant to categorization. Is it nature writing or confession? Obituary or farce? Consult *Walden* all you’d like, but Thoreau never wrote any side-splitting descriptions of backcountry prostate massage. Nor, in a canon dominated by stoics, are you likely to encounter vulnerability this naked: Nothing in *Desert Solitaire* is as devastating as Connors’ admission that he once “checked into the guilt suite at the Hotel Sorrow and re-upped for a few hundred weeks.”

Song’s narrative orbits loosely around a river, a fire and four deaths. The river is the Gila, New Mexico’s last free-flowing watercourse, now threatened by a diversion dam that Connors deems “a folly in search of a justification.” The blaze is the Silver Fire, which devours 138,705 acres and forces Connors to evacuate his perch. One death, in a horseback accident, is that of John Kavchar, a fellow lookout and kindred spirit whose charming eccentricities included a habit of slapping on lipstick, puckering his mouth to mimic

The Middle Fork of the Gila River. JAMES HEMPHILL

a flower and “luring hummingbirds for a kiss.” The other three casualties, horrifically, are local teenagers — Michael Mahl, Ella Myers and Ella Jaz Kirk — who perish in a plane crash while surveying the forest’s burn scars, an accident “appalling and preposterous.”

Each twining trail in *Song*’s labyrinthine plot leads Connors to a different literary mode. His descriptions of post-fire ecological succession read like Stephen Pyne channeling Annie Dillard: We see the “standing snag (that) rose like an iron spire,” the “aspen and oak in subtly varying shades of yellow ... encircling remnant islands of unburned conifers.” There are Abbeyish polemics against the Interstate Stream Commission, the water buffaloes who “sang hymns of praise to concrete berms.” There’s ribaldry amid rage and sadness: Day hikers who climb fire towers without warning the lookout, we’re told, risk “a surprise confrontation with a hairy human ass.” In the most emotionally gutting chapter, which describes the teenagers’ final moments, Connors wears an investigative journalist’s hat, poring through aviation reports that describe “normalization of deviance” and “mission completion bias” — bloodless phrases that mask tragedy.

Song’s stories are connected by grief, both personal and ecological, and the challenge of summoning “grace in the face of the unbearable.” Connors, whose brother committed suicide in 1996, spends much of the book conducting mourning rites — spreading ashes, visiting bereaved parents. As climate change and misguided fire suppression transform routine blazes into infernos, even his vocation comes to feel elegiac. “We weren’t so much fire lookouts anymore as pyromaniacal monks or morbid priests — officiants at an ongoing funeral for the forest,” he writes. Once, he helped manage public lands; now, he’s just watching the world burn.

Fire, of course, renews as well as destroys; in a chapter titled “Birthday For the Next Forest,” Connors returns to his tower after the Silver Fire to find, miraculously, a mountain tree frog, “(his) compatriot in an island of green.” Although it’s impossible to draw similar solace from the deaths of young people, Connors honors their legacies as best he’s able — particularly that of Ella Jaz Kirk, who was Connors’ friend and who spent her too-brief life fighting the Gila dam. By *Song*’s final verses, her struggle has become the author’s own. As he sprinkles her ashes, he imagines the celebration that will ensue if the dam is defeated. “All of us will be there in the water, joined once more in tears and laughter, gathered in memory of you and your friends,” he assures the departed. A book whose headwaters originate in solitude concludes in solidarity. **BY BEN GOLDFARB**



A Song for the River

Philip Connors

246 pages,
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Cinco Puntos
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The queer Mormon policy reversal is not enough



NEWS
COMMENTARY
BY KRISTEN
NICOLE CARDON

When I was a student at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, I thought it was a coincidence that I befriended suicidal students. Three of my close friends confided their suicidal intentions in me, and I spent evenings talking to them, trying to help them feel hope, trying to keep them safe. In each case, it took at least a year of friendship before they confided a further secret: Each of these three women was queer. I was still at BYU when I survived my own attempted suicide in the winter of 2012. I had realized I was queer myself and found my conflicting identities unbearable. In Utah, family and religion frequently tell queer folk that we're sinning, but that we won't have our sinful urges after we die. For a while, my life plan was to retain the Mormon beliefs I had loved since childhood while remaining celibate and holding out for a straight afterlife, where God would "fix" my sexuality.

For decades, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has enforced policies that harm queer Mormons. This April, when one policy was repealed, it made headlines. The 2015 proclamation had called people in same-sex marriages apostates — people who renounce their faith — and banned our children from baptism. But the church's homophobia remains. Even the language around the repeal includes beliefs that contribute to queer suicides. Repealing this policy is a step in the right direction, but it is not nearly enough.

It falls short because it reinforces, rather than reverses, anti-queer rhetoric. In a press release, church leader Dallin H. Oaks says that "while we cannot change the Lord's doctrine, we want our members and our policies to be considerate of those struggling with the challenges of mortality." Mormon theology believes a "challenge of mortality" is limited to earth life and ceases after death. Such rhetoric is dangerous for trans and queer Mormons, who are often

taught that death will remove these "challenges" that alienate us from our families and communities. Until leaders stop calling our sexuality an aberration that will be cured after death, queer Mormons will need help seeing ourselves positively.

It is not enough to say that I, a woman married to another woman, am no longer an "apostate," as long as the church still teaches my family that my marriage is a "serious transgression," like murder, rape and abuse. Oaks claims that church leaders "want to reduce the hate and contention so common today," but at no point does he take responsibility for leaders' role in fostering "hate and contention" — both by creating the exclusionary policy, and by claiming it as revelation from God.

A queer Mormon friend I met after college, Berta Marquez, took her own life last year. Near the end of her life, she intensely feared that the church was correct in labeling her and her wife as apostates — that she had actually turned away from God. Berta was an immensely compassionate woman who spent much of her time working to heal the rifts between the church and queer folk. She was an advocate for queer Mormons and for Utah's homeless youth, working with Operation Shine America, Mormons Building Bridges, Affirmation, Equality Utah, and the American Civil Liberties Union, among many others. This policy reversal makes her death more heart-rending, both because it might have given Berta some peace if she were still alive, and because it fails to acknowledge the harm the church caused and continues to cause for queer Mormons like her.

Though the government does not track victims' sexuality, researchers have linked Mormon culture and rhetoric with queer suicides. Utah's suicide rate has increased by nearly 50% since 1999. Queer folk, including youth made homeless by devout parents, are particularly vulnerable.

Let me suggest a path forward, based on my experience after my suicide attempt. A chaplain visited me in the psych ward. (I don't think she was Mormon; the church apparently didn't allow female chaplains before 2014.) She was gentle and patient as I told her about my family, my friends, the woman who is now my wife, and my conflict with my devout father over my sexuality. She listened to me and cried with me, and before she left, she prayed for me. She remembered everything I told her and prayed for every person I mentioned, every problem I was struggling with. That prayer is something I carry with me. It was perhaps the most important therapy I received.

I am no longer a practicing Mormon. At this point, I am able to integrate the things I love about being Mormon with the person I am becoming. I remember that chaplain's prayer as affirmation that I can become the person I will be without destroying the person I was. This understanding has kept me on a path of recovery.

The church should apologize and make amends for its repealed exclusion policy, and members should change their approach to ministering. Family is a centerpiece of Mormon theology and culture. Accepting, listening to and connecting with queer Mormons — rather than excluding and denigrating us — would help celebrate our roles in the theology of the family and, I hope, save lives. □

If you or someone you know is considering suicide, please call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-8255.

Kristen Nicole Cardon is a Ph.D. candidate in the English department at UCLA, where she is conducting an interdisciplinary study of suicide notes, with the goal of suicide prevention.



Kathy Carlston embraces her wife, Berta Marquez, who worked as an advocate for both the church and the LGBTQ community. Berta took her own life in 2018. KIM RAFF



Workers prepare compost for the next season at Live Power Community Farm in Covelo, California. KITRA CAHANA/GETTY IMAGES

How farms and ranches can capture greenhouse gases



**NEWS
COMMENTARY
BY MARCELLO
ROSSI**

Marcello Rossi is a science and environmental journalist. His work has appeared in *National Geographic*, the *Guardian*, *Al Jazeera*, *Smithsonian*, *Reuters*, *Outside* and others.

WEB EXTRA

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Agriculture is responsible for one-third of global carbon emissions, but an increasing number of farmers and ranchers think it can be a powerful ally in the fight to slow climate change, through a set of techniques called carbon farming.

The underlying principle of carbon farming is straightforward: to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, where it drives climate change, and put it back into plants and the pedosphere, the Earth's living soil layer. One way farmers do this is by fertilizing their lands with nutrient-rich compost. As plants grow, they store carbon in their leaves and roots and bank it in organic matter, such as decomposing plant pieces in the soil. Soil microorganisms, including bacteria and fungi, also store carbon. This prevents the carbon from escaping into the atmosphere and joining oxygen to form carbon dioxide.

Carbon farming has taken hold in California, which is increasingly stepping up as a pioneer of progressive climate policy in the U.S., even as the Trump administration denies the reality of climate change. Today, more than 80 ranchers and farmers in the state are implementing the practice. And the number is likely to increase, since the 2018 Farm Bill includes provisions for a pilot program that gives farmers an incentive to farm carbon.

Grassland soils naturally absorb and store carbon in soil organic matter, but common agricultural practices, like plowing and tilling, diminish this ability by breaking apart the soil and releasing its stored carbon into the atmosphere. The good news is that carbon can be reabsorbed by the very same soil. Dozens of farming methods, including composting, managed grazing, no-till agriculture and cover crops, are thought to achieve this feat. Many of them mirror age-old organic farming techniques.

The potential for land-based carbon sequestration in California is significant. Rangelands cover about 56 million acres, half the state's overall land area. According to *The New York Times*, if 5% of that soil is treated with compost, the carbon sequestered would offset about 80% of the state's agricultural emissions, the equivalent of removing nearly 6 million cars from the road. If scaled to 41%, it would

render the state's agricultural sector — now accounting for 8% of the state's overall emissions — carbon neutral for years. This amount is anything but negligible: California is the most populous state in the U.S. and the country's second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases. Overall, it's responsible for 1% of global greenhouse emissions.

Because carbon farming allows farmers to use fewer pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, it's likely to help cut costs. That means that increasing soil carbon while farming isn't just possible; it's also good for business.

Still, logistic and economic challenges remain. The up-front cost, for one: While carbon-farming techniques can ultimately save money, the high production costs associated with compost make it quite expensive in the short term. Applying compost in California costs around \$700 per acre — more than the majority of ranchers and farmers can afford. California is trying to offset costs by offering ranchers and farmers small grants. With demand currently outstripping supply, there is also the problem of compost availability.

And there are many unknowns — for example, no one really knows how long soil keeps carbon out of the atmosphere. Additionally, climate change itself could be an enemy of carbon farming: As temperatures warm, soils heat up, and soil microorganisms expel carbon dioxide. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC, calculates that by 2100, up to 15% of the world's soil and biomass could become net carbon-emitters.

Ultimately, carbon farming may pull only a limited amount of carbon from the atmosphere. But in California, grasslands appear to be a less vulnerable carbon storage option than fire-prone forests. With global greenhouse gas emissions on the rise, we need to commit to using carbon farming. □

Because carbon farming allows farmers to use fewer pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, it's likely to help cut costs. That means that increasing soil carbon while farming isn't just possible; it's also good for business.

Trump could boost uranium mining from Bears Ears to the Black Hills



NEWS
COMMENTARY
BY JONATHAN
THOMPSON

In July 2017, lobbyists from Energy Fuels Resources, a Canadian uranium mining company with operations in the United States, urged the Trump administration to shrink the boundaries of Bears Ears National Monument in order to free up uranium deposits for future mining.

Some observers found it odd. After all, foreign competition and low prices had beaten the domestic uranium industry down to just about nothing, and lobbyists — including Andrew Wheeler, who has since been appointed head of the Environmental Protection Agency — had already convinced the Obama administration to leave Energy Fuels' Daneros Mine out of the new national monument. Why would they want to go after more deposits?

Now we know: Those same lobbyists are pushing the Trump administration to order utilities to purchase at least 25% of their uranium domestically. Such a quota would throw a lifeline to the handful of uranium mining companies still operating in the U.S. and likely spur more uranium mining in the West — including, perhaps, within Bears Ears' former boundaries as well as near the Grand Canyon. And it would continue the federal government's long history of propping up the uranium industry at the expense of the people and places of uranium country — and maybe, even, of the nuclear power industry.

When prospectors with Geiger counters started scouring the Colorado Plateau in the 1940s, the government supported them, building roads to potential deposits, giving federal land to anyone interested in staking a claim, and paying \$10,000 bonuses to those who found uranium. When corporations arrived to develop the prospects, the government again stepped in, becoming the sole buyer of the yellowcake they produced, virtually eliminating any economic risk.

Hundreds of mines and mills popped in Wyoming and across the Colorado Plateau, many of them within or near the borders of the Wind River Reservation, the Navajo Nation and New Mexico's Laguna and Acoma pueblos. Many, if not most, of the miners and millers — and the people who eventually suffered from radiation — belonged to those tribes.

Decades before the U.S. boom got going, researchers had firmly established that European uranium miners (before the bomb, uranium was used to make dye) got lung cancer at much higher rates than the general populace. And in 1952, U.S. scientists uncovered the mechanism by which radon — a radioactive "daughter" of uranium found in at dangerously high levels in mines and mills — caused lung cancer. And yet the miners were never informed of the risks, nor were protective measures taken. In fact, the federal Atomic Energy Commission actively withheld this information from the public in a cover-up that benefited the corporations.

The government ended its uranium-buying program in the 1970s, but by then nuclear power was catching on worldwide, and demand for reactor fuel kept U.S. mines afloat and spurred new mining in Canada, Australia and elsewhere. After the Three Mile Island disaster in 1979, though, U.S.

utilities stopped building new reactors. A global glut resulted in a uranium price crash, and with cheaper yellowcake flooding in from overseas, the industry withered. As of 2017, U.S. utilities were buying only 5% of their nuclear fuel from domestic producers, and mines and mills employed just 424 people, compared to 16,000 in 1979. While the industry's future remains in question, its past legacy endures in the form of hundreds of sick miners and millers; abandoned, contaminated mines; and the ongoing, taxpayer-funded effort to clean up giant tailings piles near communities.

Now, the industry — led by Energy Fuels and Ur-Energy — is hoping the government will once again step up, meddle in the markets, and throw it a lifeline. The 25% quota would immediately and substantially up demand — and prices — for domestic uranium, potentially raising production to levels that haven't been seen in decades. It could breathe new life into Energy Fuels' Canyon Mine, which is near the Grand Canyon, along with its Daneros Mine and White Mesa Mill — the only conventional mill in the U.S. — both located near Bears Ears National Monument. Ur-Energy, meanwhile, would see more demand for its products from the spill-prone Lost Creek in-situ facility in Wyoming near Jeffrey City, a community that bet everything on the uranium boom in the 1970s, only to see it all crash a few years later, leaving the town a husk.

If these existing, active mines can't keep up with demand, uranium companies could revive long-dormant ones or seek new deposits. Both can be found in the White Canyon uranium district, which was part of the original Bears Ears National Monument but was cut out by the Trump administration's shrinkage at Energy Fuels' request.

Late last year, U.S. Department of Commerce officials visited the White Mesa Mill, the Energy Fuels mines near the La Sal Mountains outside Moab, Utah, and other uranium facilities. This spring, they submitted their report on the quota proposal to the Trump administration, which has 90 days to act. Indigenous and environmental activists, including citizens from the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe near White Mesa, Utah, are protesting the proposal. And this time, they have an unexpected ally: The nuclear power industry. That's because the proposed quotas will drive up fuel prices for nuclear reactor operators, which are already having a hard time competing against cheap natural gas-generated power.

That puts President Donald Trump — who hasn't hesitated to interfere in the free market in order to boost the coal and nuclear power industry — between a rock and reactors. □

Indigenous and environmental activists, including citizens from the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe near White Mesa, Utah, are protesting the proposal. And this time, they have an unexpected ally: The nuclear power industry.

Jonathan Thompson is a contributing editor at *High Country News*. He is the author of *River of Lost Souls: The Science, Politics and Greed Behind the Gold King Mine Disaster*.

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Timber framer Bodie Johansson chisels out floor joist housings in the Handcrafted Log & Timber yard in Ridgway, Colorado. **BLAKE GORDON** © 2018 Patagonia, Inc.



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THE WEST

Forget all the fuss about the newest royal baby to appear in Great Britain; let's hear it for the giraffe that "entered the world with a thud" at Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo. Less than an hour after making a 5-foot drop to the ground from Olivia, its mother, the newborn was on all four feet, reports the *Seattle Times*, lurching about "like a baby Bambi." The zoo said it would hold a "community contest" to name the new giraffeling. The newborn — typically about 6 feet tall at birth — is expected to double its height in a year. But baby needed a new pair of shoes in record time: The zoo recently outfitted him with "therapeutic shoes" to treat abnormalities in his legs.

Another youngster made news near the South San Francisco exit on Highway 101 during morning rush hour: a sea lion pup that wandered away from the beach and was "loitering on the freeway," according to the California Highway Patrol. Before officers could arrive, reports the *Los Angeles Times*, several commuters stopped to help, one waving a handkerchief to "herd the mammal to safety." Surprisingly, when patrol cars arrived, the baby sea lion "willingly jumped right into the backseat." Apparently healthy and uninjured, the pup was taken to the Peninsula Humane Society.

Meanwhile, in Missoula, Montana, an osprey named Iris, who has successfully fledged over 40 chicks in the last two decades, fell victim to a love triangle. Abandoned by her two-timing mate, who is hanging out at another osprey nest, she is trying to incubate two eggs on her own, reports ABCFoxMontana. Erick Greene, wildlife biologist and professor at the University of Montana, said that nesting seasons often imitate soap operas, and this year is no exception, with Iris working a double shift as a "single mom." How this will affect her struggling family isn't clear: "There isn't much research" involving a "male osprey spending time with two ladies."

THE WEST

If you ever find yourself completely buried by wet snow, which can almost immediately set up



MONTANA Iris, a single-mother osprey, defends her eggs from an intruder.
COURTESY OF HELLGATE OSPREYS

like concrete, it helps to have taken avalanche-training classes. In Crested Butte, Colorado, maintenance man Alex Theaker, 28, had taken such classes, so when he was shoveling out a vent on a client's house and heard ice cracking on the roof, he knew what was up, or coming down, rather: A snow slide plunging toward him. Theaker ran, but couldn't escape it. Yet before the cold mass of snow hardened around him, he bought himself time by throwing up his arms "to form a basketball-sized pocket around his head," as Katie Eastman and Anne Herbst reported for 9News. He was also able to see a crack of light and pushed his hands toward it, creating an air tunnel. For the next two and a half hours, Theaker remained trapped under the snow, barely breathing. His wife, Tori, who had gone searching for him, called rescuers, but before they shoveled him out, Theaker had plenty of time to think about her, he recalled. He also thought about his friend Brad, who had died in an avalanche, as well as another friend who died last year. Luckily, he was sustained by the soundtrack to his ordeal — "the rapper in his right ear," Tupac Shakur. But he passed out at some point and eventually woke up in a hospital. During his overnight stay, a nurse told him that another young man had been brought in who was also buried by a roof slide. Sadly, the second patient, Stephen Michael Martel, died that night. A few days later, Theaker said he

attended a memorial service for Martel — "an incredible guy" — and felt he was attending what might have been his own farewell. These days, he says, Theaker intends "to make the most of the life he almost didn't have."

Another avalanche accident, this one in the high-elevation backcountry of Teton County, Wyoming, occurred while a group of friends took turns snowmobiling people uphill so they could ski back down. A 28-year-old woman was waiting for a ride when a snowmobiler above her triggered an avalanche, reports the *Jackson Hole Daily*. The woman saw the wall of snow "flowing toward her" but couldn't get out of the way fast enough. Witnesses saw her become engulfed and

carried about 450 feet. Unfortunately, the beacon she was wearing wasn't turned on. But a "probe strike" was able to locate her, and when rescuers freed her from the snow, she was alive, though "cold and pretty shaken up." She was taken to a hospital for observation.

ARIZONA

The Republican Legislature in Arizona has taken a stand about what it describes in dark terms as the state's "public health crisis." If you guessed measles, or opioid addiction, or perhaps an epidemic of suicides or increasing homelessness, you'd be wrong. No; according to Republicans, pornography has created a public health crisis because its sexual images are "poisoning" the minds of Arizonans. Democrats seemed baffled by the resolution, which was largely symbolic, report the *Arizona Republic*. "I think we really need to focus on those types of things that are life-threatening and fatal and could spread so quickly to anybody," said Sen. Jamescita Peshlakai, a Democrat from Window Rock.

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

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