

High Country News

For people who care about the West



A Radical Return

Bacone College once redefined what Native art could be. Can it do so again?

By Graham Lee Brewer



Gerald Cournoyer, the newly hired art director at Bacone College, stands next to a Kiowa 6 painting in the college's library. Cournoyer hopes to restore Bacone's tradition of producing some of the most influential Indigenous artists in the country. DYLAN JOHNSON FOR HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

Editor's note

Indigenous art, subversive ideas

One of the best things about working on *High Country News'* Tribal Affairs Desk is the opportunity it offers to report, write and publish stories that no other non-Indigenous outlet would dare to touch. Our reporters produce amazing work, but I would argue that



some of the most incendiary material we print initially appears harmless to the passing eye. From beadwork to dance, painting to film, Indigenous art is as much an expression of sovereignty and identity as it is of diplomacy and law.

In the Western tradition, art has often been used to demonstrate power and wealth, regarded as merely a commodity to be consumed. From the monumental sculptures commissioned in ancient Greece to Rembrandt's moody portraits, and from Remington's idealized visions of the American West to Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup cans, such works, when placed within their cultural, regional and historical contexts, provide insight into the ways white artists have traded influences and become central to understanding European worldviews.

This analysis is somewhat true of Indigenous "art," but the role of cultural production in tribal communities often takes on deeper, more complex layers. From communicating familial and tribal relationships to a form of visual journalism and expressions of identity, Indigenous art reflects constantly evolving ideas about history, colonialism, kinship and innovation. But many viewers are too distracted by form, function — and, of course, market value — to even notice the information stored within the work.

In this issue, Contributing Editor Graham Lee Brewer takes a deep dive into the rich history and current life of Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma. Fewer places have influenced 20th century Native art more than Bacone, but its future is in peril: Crushing debt threatens to permanently close the institution. Brewer eloquently brings the past into the present through the presentation and explication of early art forms: "In Kiowa calendars drawn by Silver Horn," he writes, "the goal was simply to document everyday life, everything from tornadoes and crops to battles and deaths. Using images for record-keeping and storytelling was common among the Kiowas; preserving and displaying those images as artwork was not necessarily the intention. Rembrandt may have worked well with light, but Silver Horn worked with time." Brewer describes the school's rich mix of art and intellectual influence: from Swedish immigrant Oscar Jacobson to Chickasaw scholar Mary "Ataloo" Stone, legendary painter Woody Crumbo, and contemporary artists like painter Gerald Cournoyer and filmmaker Sterlin Harjo. Their stories reveal that the things we do, the tiny details of our lives, have their origins in extraordinary events. These originate in times and places we may not see, but they retain influence and determine how we live in and understand the world. These are the kind of stories that other non-Native outlets don't dare to touch, and that is what makes the work in this issue unique.

—Tristan Ahtone, associate editor

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Sign of Spring, an original silkscreen by Woody Crumbo, a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation and one of Bacone College's most influential art directors and artists.

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THE LATEST

Backstory

In May 2017, a black man named Sam Thompson was denied entry to a Portland, Oregon, nightclub. The club cited a dress code, common in Portland, that has often been used against non-white residents. A week later, a white friend of Thompson's entered the bar in identical clothing with no trouble. Thompson sued, and the incident publicized something already obvious to Portland's non-white citizens. Despite its progressive political reputation, Oregon was founded explicitly for white settlers, with laws barring African-Americans. Many discriminatory policies endure today ("Racist policing plagues Portland's nightclubs," *HCN*, 2/18/19).

Followup

Thompson's lawsuit was settled in June, according to the *Willamette Week*. In court documents, numerous former employees of club owner Chris Lenahan said he would explicitly limit the number of black patrons in his clubs, something Lenahan denies. As part of the settlement, Lenahan must end the dress code used to discriminate against Thompson.

NICK BOWLIN



Patrons outside Dirty, a Portland nightclub whose owner settled after being sued for discrimination.

LEAH NASH



A girl works on a drawing next to an unused viewing scope as a smoky haze obscures the Space Needle and downtown Seattle during wildfires last summer. AP PHOTO/ELAINE THOMPSON

Seattle will offer residents shelter from the smoke

Seattle has suffered some of the world's worst air quality in recent summers due to wildfire smoke; on several occasions, the air has been declared "unhealthy for all." Drought and a warming climate mean the wildfire problem is not going away. In June, Mayor Jenny Durkan announced plans to build five public clean-air shelters. Set to debut in late July, the buildings will filter out toxins and monitor the quality of the air outside. City officials acknowledge

that five buildings are not enough and are exploring expanding the program. But clean-air shelters alone do not address the warming climate driving the wildfire crisis. "We see more and more that climate change is affecting communities in ways that really go to our everyday life," Durkan said.

HALLIE GOLDEN/CITYLAB VIA CLIMATE DESK

Read more online:

hcn.ws/seattle-smoke-shelter

“The university system is a lot more flexible. It's not a big, slow, grinding engine.”

—Michael Banks, director of the Cooperative Institute for Marine Resource Studies at Oregon State University Cooperative Institute for Marine Resource Studies, one of the 43 independent universities that partners with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on projects that help predict changes in climate, weather, oceans and coasts. The studies continue despite the Trump administration's ongoing efforts to roll back environmental protections, remove the United States from international climate treaties and cast doubts on climate science. LIZ WEBER Read more online: hcn.ws/climate-research

Photos

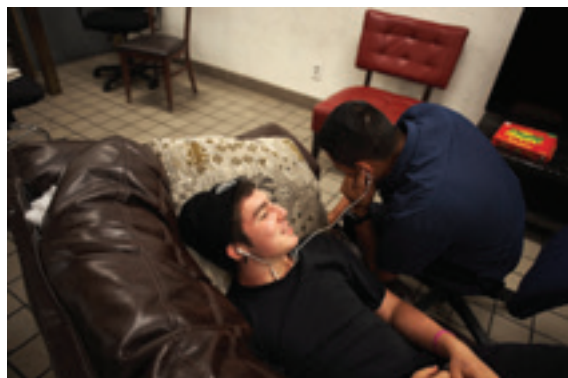
Homeless teens find community

In Las Vegas, Shannon West Homeless Youth Center provides housing, meals and community for a demographic that too often lacks all three. The homelessness rate for youth in southern Nevada is among the nation's highest. BRIDGET BENNETT See and read more online: hcn.ws/homeless-teens



◀ Residents gather for dinner at the Homeless Youth Center in Las Vegas, Nevada. ▼ Craig gets a haircut from another resident, left, and Tiffany and Sam talk in the center's laundry room.

BRIDGET BENNETT



Trending

Critics wary of moving BLM

The Interior Department is considering relocating the Bureau of Land Management's headquarters from Washington, D.C., to the West. Advocates like Interior Secretary David Bernhardt say it would put the BLM closer to stakeholders and the public land the agency manages. But some former staffers say the D.C. location makes it easier for Interior to weigh in on policy issues with Congress and coordinate with other federal bureaus, adding that the BLM already has regional offices and in-state managers. *Web extra: Read Jonathan Thompson's perspective on why the BLM ought to move West after all.* LIZ WEBER

You say

GENE BLANKENBAKER: "There is significant value to having senior leadership presence in D.C. in terms of budget, policy, coordination with other department agencies and bureaus, and legislative affairs, to name just a few."

LYNN JACKSON: "Virtually all BLM lands are west of the Mississippi, so how is Washington, D.C., central to those lands?"

LORI LAIDELLA: "Trump is doing the same thing to the USDA and other important agencies."

MIKE CORONELLA: "It's a brain drain meant to get rid of our professional government workers who can't or won't move."

Read more online: hcn.ws/blm-move and [Facebook.com/highcountrynews](https://facebook.com/highcountrynews)

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THOSE WERE THE DAYS

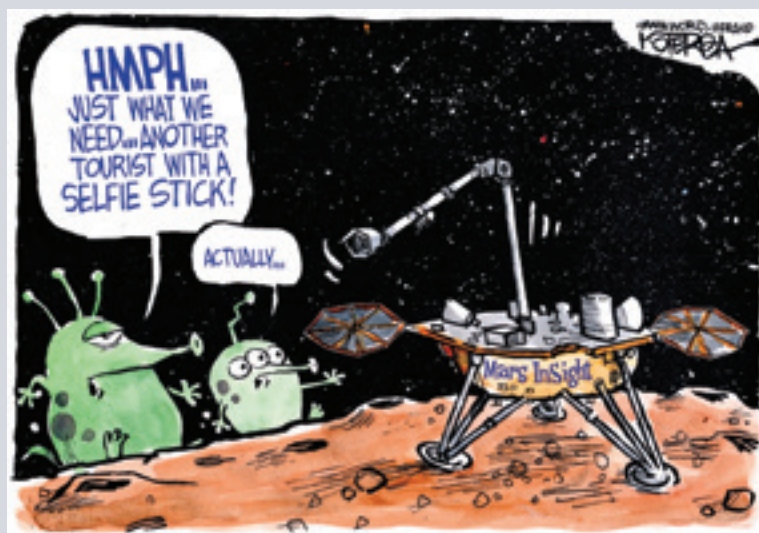
I grew up in Spokane and northern Idaho, and I remember the toxic streams feeding into Lake Coeur d'Alene when the mines were still working when I was a kid ("Losing Lake Coeur d'Alene," *HCN*, 6/24/19). I learned to swim in the lake and worked on small farms and ranches in the area, as well as the railroad. Before the lakefront development, golf course, etc., there was a small amusement park on a pier downtown that we would hang out at as kids. I just hope I didn't swallow too much lake water while we were swimming! Of course, we didn't know much about the environmental consequences in those days, but we could tell something wasn't right.

*Brent Steel
Corvallis, Oregon*

BLINDSIDED BY POVERTY

I hope we haven't forgotten Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dime*, published in 2001 by Metropolitan Books ("Life below the poverty line," *HCN*, 6/10/19). In Chapter 2, "Scrubbing in Maine," Ehrenreich works in a place that, like Montana, could be known for its whiteness. On the basis of that one piece of camouflage, we watch her infiltrate the low-wage workforce. Ehrenreich has running laments throughout her book, as she procures a series of low-wage jobs, complete with a gantlet of "opinion surveys" judging her attitude toward drugs. The questions appear to be a check on her understanding of hierarchy and subordination. Yet there are no quizzical looks from interviewers. No one questions that a smart, articulate woman cannot escape a menial job. Not a single person is in the least curious about her circumstances, or what brought her to her position of poverty. Ehrenreich nails what it is like living below the poverty line, including its loneliness, hopelessness and dismal outlook. Apparently this story must still be retold endlessly, because, as Ehrenreich says, "America is blind to the downside of its poverty."

*Mike Fried
Broomfield, Colorado*



JEFF KOTERBA, OMAHA WORLD HERALD

NARCISSISTIC GEOTAGGING

Selfies are narcissistic and obnoxious ("Five reasons to keep geotagging," *HCN*, 6/10/19). Social media is a time-wasting, jealousy-producing machine that most of us should abstain from as much as possible. Electronic addiction is a serious problem. Don't underestimate the damage it's currently doing to society. Geotagging is unnecessary at best, irresponsible at worst and a symptom of Silicon Valley's irresponsibility — just like Donald Trump winning the last election with the help of the Russians and Facebook.

William Gretz

LESSONS LEARNED

The article on the vigilante parade was excellent ("Montana's vigilante obsession," *HCN*, 6/24/19). I would have missed it but for an out-of-state friend who shared the link. Author Gabriel Furshong put into words what has always been disturbing about the parade. His short history lesson is one that most of us conveniently fail to recall as we watch our youth in the parade, year after year. It's sad when folks watching from a distance recognize the false teaching this provides and can see the connections to social ills we continue to struggle with. Thank you for offering such a clear picture. It will help me more effectively explain to friends why I do not attend the parade.

Barbara Lancaster

WHAT ABOUT KANE GULCH?

For 12 years my husband and I lived in Moab, Utah, and we volunteered and worked at the Kane Gulch Ranger Station, which is overseen by

the Bureau of Land Management's office in Monticello, Utah. In your most recent article regarding the Bears Ears National Monument, you are totally incorrect when you indicate there has not been a visitors center available to the public before they explore this fragile area (Bears Ears' guerrilla visitor center," *HCN*, 5/13/19). The ranger station has been located on Cedar Mesa since the early 1980s and has been continuously staffed by rangers and/or volunteers for nine

months of each year. The rangers and the volunteers are very knowledgeable about conditions in the canyons, including trail conditions, water availability and the importance of the fragile archaeological resources. To indicate that there is no such facility available within the boundaries of the new Bears Ears National Monument is not only incorrect, but does a disservice to everyone who works tirelessly in this visitor center. On a daily basis, BLM rangers and/or volunteers spend time patrolling the canyons to ensure visitor safety and to protect fragile archaeological resources. We are very disappointed that your author did not visit this ranger station before he wrote the most recent article.

*Janet Bartolomucci
Tucson, Arizona*

Editor's response: While the Kane Gulch Ranger Station is certainly a valuable resource for visitors to southern Utah's Cedar Mesa area, including Grand Gulch and other ecologically and culturally significant canyons, it was not designed specifically for Bears Ears National Monument. Nor would it fall within the Trump administration's diminished monument boundaries. The BLM rangers and volunteers at Kane Gulch are helpful, the book selection useful, but there is still no federally run visitors center specifically for the national monument. Until there is, readers are encouraged to learn more at Kane Gulch or the nearby Natural Bridges National Monument visitors center, run by the National Park Service, in addition to the Bears Ears Education Center.

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Sounding the alarm at the BLM

Staff complaints reveal concerns that the Carlsbad Field Office violated environmental laws in favor of industry

BY TAY WILES

In early fall 2017, two Bureau of Land Management archaeologists drove to a Chevron oil and gas site in the dry grasslands of southeast New Mexico. The oil company had damaged a Native American archaeological site, and they needed to assess the situation. What they found raised thorny questions about what's happening on the ground — out of the public eye and inside the BLM, an agency tasked with managing 245 million acres of land for the American public's benefit.

The archaeologists, who worked at the Carlsbad Field Office, saw a bulldozed area where, judging by a thermal feature, a centuries-old fire pit or earthen oven used to be. “They had blown a road right through it,” Jasmine Kidwell, one of the archaeologists, told *High Country News*. The BLM had recommended that Chevron reroute a road in order to avoid the site, which was probably Apache or Jornada Mogollon. But according to documents *HCN* obtained through Freedom of Information Act requests, the company stuck with its original plan.

The other BLM archaeologist, whose name was redacted in the documents, told a supervisor that the destruction needed to be fully assessed under the National Environmental Policy Act. Her supervisor disagreed. Over several months, the archaeologist found more damaged sites, yet assessments were still denied, she says. The lack of response created a chilling effect for employees raising environmental concerns or providing professional opinions, she later told investigators after filing a complaint to the Office of Inspector General (OIG) at the Interior Department.

By November, the archaeologist expressed concern that if nothing was done, oil and gas companies “would simply continue destroying other sites.” A colleague scolded her for being “too emotional” and taking her job too seriously. She ultimately “felt she (had) no options but to find a new job,” and she no longer works in Carlsbad. OIG spokesperson Nancy DiPaolo confirmed that a complaint was made 17 months ago, but said that her agency referred it to the BLM.

This is one of several official complaints that staffers made in 2018, alleging that the BLM violated environmental and archaeological laws to expedite oil and gas development near Carlsbad, New Mexico. The allegations come amid a massive oil and gas boom in the Permian Basin, which stretches from West Texas into

southeast New Mexico.

Through documents and interviews with former employees, *HCN* found that Carlsbad BLM staffers tried to sound the alarm, warning that their agency was engaging in favoritism and skirting environmental regulation in favor of drilling. It's been over a year, yet the whistleblowers' complaints have languished without any apparent response.

In 2018 the OIG received at least six complaints about alleged corruption at the Carlsbad office, according to documents *HCN* obtained.

According to one OIG investigation, an employee described what investigators summed up as a “general apathy toward regulations” at the Carlsbad Field Office. The highest levels of the agency exuded this apathy, one tipster said, blaming Mike Nedd, BLM acting director at the time. “(Nedd) stated that (natural resource specialist) staff should protect any staff that chooses to overlook regulations,” one anonymous complaint reads. (Nedd was moved to a different position that year, and at least two other appointees have since held his job. Two and a half years into the Trump administration, the BLM still lacks an actual director.)

In a 2018 interview with OIG investigators, one BLM employee recalled a top official promising a roomful of staffers in 2017 that they would be “protected” in expediting drilling permits. One employee asked, “Protected from what?” According to another, the official then “back-peddled,” (*sic*) trying to indicate that he wasn't encouraging them to skirt any laws.

When the OIG asked the official about the exchange, he called the report “grossly inaccurate.” The OIG concluded that it “found no evidence” of wrongdoing, though only three interviews appear in the investigation, one of them with the top official himself.

Though Randal Pair, a BLM employee at the Carlsbad Field Office from 2012 through 2017, was not one of the anonymous whistleblowers, he expressed concern about the pressure inside the agency. Now retired, Pair told *HCN* that the office was understaffed and overloaded, and that, during his stint there, the pressure increased over time. “There were a lot more requests for applications (for drilling and rights of way) than we had the personnel to process,” Pair said. “No one was paying enough attention to anything.”

Pair added that managers often approved drill plans without the neces-

sary signoff from the biologists and cave experts tasked with ensuring that sensitive resources were protected. He was unaware of his colleagues' OIG complaints, but said, “I'm glad to hear it. They were getting overruled by the managers; I'm glad that they didn't just let it go.”

Oil and gas has long been a priority in southeast New Mexico. Pair and other former employees said that even under President Barack Obama, Interior and BLM leadership encouraged drilling. But in 2017, industry and national officials ramped up the pressure. Drillers made new oil discoveries, and Trump signed an executive order that prioritized energy development over other public-land uses. Jim Goodbar, a national cave and karst expert in Carlsbad who worked for the BLM for 38 years, noticed a significant shift in office culture before he retired in January 2018. “Some staff have lost sight of what the BLM mission is and are only focused on what will move them forward in their careers,” he said.

In another anonymous complaint, a staffer described decisions related to a 6 million-acre new resource management plan as “arbitrary and capricious,” adding that national leadership gave direction over the phone or in person, “since having a paper trail ... would leave evidence of (Federal Land Policy Management Act) violations.”

HCN looked into six complaints. OIG has found no wrongdoing in two of them, though it provided little explanation for its findings. The other four were sent to the BLM to handle.

The BLM did not respond in time for the deadline to comment. □

WEB EXTRA

See the documents obtained as part of this investigation at hcn.org

For years, the Carlsbad Field Office in southeast New Mexico may have been neglecting environmental and archaeological laws. With the high volume of drilling applications, a former BLM employee said that “no one was paying enough attention to anything.”

KIM KAFTON



Gary Bowen outside his multigenerational family cabin beside Emigration Creek. While currently robust after a wet spring, the creek ran dry for the first time last summer after a very dry and hot season. Some believe the district's water system might be responsible for the draining of the creek.

KIM RAFF
FOR HIGH COUNTRY NEWS



A 'preposterously' big water tank

An affluent Utah community spent millions to extinguish its fear of fire. Decades later, they're still trying to buy their way out of a bottomless pit.

BY EMMA PENROD

Gary Bowen and his wife cut short their vacation in 1988 when they heard the news: Emigration Canyon, the site of his multigenerational family cabin in the mountains east of Salt Lake City, Utah, was on fire.

By the time they'd hurried back to Salt Lake City, firefighters had already evacuated and closed the canyon. Bowen watched the news, worried about the log home where he'd spent summers with his grandparents as a child in the 1940s.

Three days passed before a damage report was released. The fire claimed 5,000 acres, but spared the canyon's homes and businesses. The hill just above the Bowen family home was scarred where firefighters had cut a trench-like barrier to stop the blaze. The trench, Bowen says, is still visible from his current home — his grandparents' expanded and remodeled cabin. And the blaze, he says, is seared into the collective memory of one of Utah's wealthiest canyon communities.

"In Emigration Canyon," Bowen says, "we're paranoid about fire."

In 2002, elected officials and residents spent nearly \$2 million in federal funds to build a community water system, hoping

it would protect their town from future wildfires. Today, after years of unexpected costs, maintenance woes and mismanagement, the affluent community is divided about what to do next: Do they pay the unanticipated fees for what most now agree was a massively oversized project, or hire the mysterious outsider who wants to sue it out of existence?

Faced with ever-rising maintenance costs, Emigration Canyon is loud with accusations of fraud and yet still anxious about fire protection. Some local leaders, including Bowen, worry that their community has been backed into a corner from which it can't escape.

Emigration Canyon's 1 million-gallon water tank, its concrete walls stained from unrepaired leaks, is buried beneath an artificial hill above the canyon's priciest subdivision, Emigration Oaks.

The new system was first proposed in the early 2000s, when two recently elected members of the board of the Emigration Canyon Improvement District suggested building a water tank capable of storing 1 million gallons. A 2002 memo from a state engineer described the tank as "preposterously oversized" for a community that needed only 300,000 gallons in storage. But the new trustees argued that if the canyon caught fire again, a larger tank would ensure that they had enough water

to fight the flames.

"The people who were making these decisions were living in the canyon ... when the canyon had a fire and there was no water system," says Eric Hawkes, the general manager of the Emigration Canyon Improvement District. "Can you have too much water if you have a fire?"

At that time, many residents figured they'd rather be safe than sorry. Some also probably hoped that the project would help them get fire insurance for homes priced at an average of \$700,000.

So the district borrowed \$1.8 million from the federal government. The tank they built was more than three times larger than the population required. Community managers merrily dotted the canyon's wooded neighborhoods and windy roads with brightly colored fire hydrants.

The decision to build the project, local leaders acknowledge, was based in emotion. Lack of water wasn't a problem in the 1988 fire. Firefighters say the steep, rugged terrain is the greatest challenge when it comes to fighting fires here. And even those who argued in favor of the large tank acknowledge that any sizeable fire is likely to be fought from the air, not with water on the ground.

Even so, Danny Egbert, the local fire inspector, defends the oversized water system. "The potential for property loss and loss of life is very high," he says. Emigration Canyon is a high-risk area, with difficult terrain, dead and dying scrub oak, and a relatively dense population concealed by trees. "Having all that water available is on the positive side."

The project bought residents peace of mind — and made it easier to get fire insurance. Bowen, now a member of the

Emma Penrod is a journalist based in rural Utah who covers science, technology, business and environmental health, with an emphasis on water.

Emigration Canyon Community Council, couldn't properly insure his \$900,000 cabin home until the water tank and hydrants were constructed. To Bowen and his neighbors, the water tank wasn't oversized; it was just right.

Once the tank was built, Emigration Canyon residents breathed a sigh of relief. But their real problems were just beginning.

For the better part of a decade, the new water system seemed to work fine. Behind the scenes, though, the improvement district struggled to manage it. The concrete tank had cured improperly, causing it to spring a leak shortly after it was installed, and connected wells suffered frequent mechanical failures and water-quality concerns. Then-District Manager Fred Smolka, who also ran an accounting firm, became overwhelmed by the demands and hired several relatives to help him; former board member William Bowen (no relation to Gary Bowen) says he paid family members six figures for part-time work. Within a decade, the district was struggling to pay its bills.

The residents of Emigration Canyon were happy to throw money at their wild-fire problem in 2002, but when the costs rose — when people were charged \$15 a month for fire hydrants near their property — they got angry.

When the district was first created, residents were offered three options. They could connect to the district water system and become customers in a traditional sense, paying monthly bills based on water use. They could also opt to pay a smaller monthly fee to become "standby" customers — eligible to begin water service upon request. Or they could opt out entirely. Town leadership promised the roughly 600 households that opted out that they would never be charged.

But with just 300 paying customers, the district lacked the revenue base it needed to maintain the oversized water system. In 2013, district managers assessed the hydrants and calculated that non-paying residents were still using the water. When the district began to issue monthly service fees to anyone living within 600 feet of a hydrant, Hawkes says, the real fire in the canyon began.

Residents were outraged.

In the midst of this turmoil, a mysterious outsider arrived to fan the flames with rumors of unfair water bills, stolen water and taxpayer fraud. Mark Tracy, a translator who says he trained as an attorney in Germany, regards himself the canyon's personal advocate and protector. Recounting his story in a downtown Salt Lake City café, Tracy blithely refused to discuss exactly how he makes a living.

Tracy says he learned about Emigration Canyon's problems while helping his ex-wife buy property there. In 2014, he sued the water district,

alleging that it had defrauded taxpayers by using federal funds to build an oversized water system designed to support large-scale development on properties owned by trustee owners. Shortly thereafter, he formed the Emigration Canyon Home Owners Association, or ECHO. In exchange for membership, Tracy promises to fund legal services for members who are fighting water bills or who may lose water service due to what he calls the water district's malpractice. He refuses to disclose who his members are, how much they pay him, or how many employees he has, and he claims he does not take a salary. So far, his suits have been unsuccessful.

Tracy's legal case has been repeatedly dismissed on the ground that it falls well outside a six-year statute of limitations. The most recent ruling, issued this past February by the U.S. District Court for the District of Utah, ordered Tracy to pay the water district thousands of dollars, in part, Judge Jill Parrish concluded, because Tracy "began taking liberty with the facts. ... Each time the underlying facts were disproved, Tracy changed the basic factual assertions giving rise to his complaint."

Tracy plans to appeal. Meanwhile, his opponents, including Gary Bowen, argue that his aggressive tactics threaten the district's ongoing efforts to address the water crisis collaboratively. They worry that the fighting could cause some residents to lose access to water service entirely.

If that happens, Tracy says, so be it; as he sees it, anyone who built a home in Emigration Canyon after his allegations of fraud deserves to lose water service.

The fear of fire has only grown. Last summer's extreme drought — the worst in Utah's recorded history — dried up the canyon's iconic creek. Tracy spread rumors that dozens of household wells had run dry; a few of them had. Pointing to a 1966 master's thesis from the University of Utah by Jack Barnett that insinuated Emigration Canyon's main aquifer cannot support large wells, Tracy warns that the district's water system might be responsible for the draining of the creek and the desiccation of the surrounding vegetation. The water district disputes this claim.

Gary Bowen believes there's a third reason for the canyon's problems. Many of the affluent community's newest residents, he says, have never lived in a rural area. The broken-down wells, the over-pumping, the water contaminated by septic tanks — all these could stem from poor management by the residents themselves, he says.

But he's unsure whether his wealthy neighbors are willing to consider their own role in the canyon's plight. When he worked as a financial advisor, he says, highly paid professionals like his neighbors were often his most difficult clients — lawyers and doctors were convinced they knew more about investing than he,

but refused to so much as read the prospectus on their funds.

"It's outside their area of expertise," he says. "Whether it's making an investment, listening to your attorney, or listening to a hydrologist — people are going to go with the quick, easy path that feeds their emotion." □



Mark Tracy, top, who formed the Emigration Canyon Home Owners Association, filed a lawsuit against the Emigration Canyon Improvement District, alleging that they defrauded taxpayers. Above, one of the canyon's plentiful hydrants, controversial because residents have been forced to pay for them in what was originally an opt-in program. KIM RAFF



Protesters gather outside the State Capitol in Salem, Oregon, at the end of June. Loggers feared that fuel taxes proposed in House Bill 2020 would lead to a loss of milling and manufacturing jobs.

ALEX MILAN TRACY/SIPA USA VIA AP IMAGES

Oregon's derailed climate plan

Many state policies have failed to address rural anxieties

BY CARL SEGERSTROM

For environmental activists, Oregon's legislation was the cream of the crop of the new bills, with its cap on greenhouse gases extending across all sectors of the economy, not just transportation or electricity generation.

As Oregon moved toward joining an international market to cap carbon emissions in late June, truckers, loggers and farmers chugged into the capitol in Salem. With horns blaring, they protested a proposed bill to rein in greenhouse gases, rallying behind slogans like "Timber Unity" and "Cap Kills Jobs."

As demonstrators gathered, Oregon's Republican state senators absconded to Idaho in a last-ditch effort to prevent a Senate vote on the bill. Political wrangling over the emissions-reducing legislation was punctuated by arrest threats, menacing remarks aimed at state police, and pledges of support for the senators from militia members. More than a week later, the Republicans returned — once Democratic leaders declared that they didn't have enough votes to pass the climate bill.

After the climate legislation was shelved, lawmakers passed more than 100 bills in a frenzied weekend before the legislative session ended on June 30. But the battle over the carbon emissions legislation revealed a deepening political chasm between Oregon's conservative rural areas and liberal population centers. Republicans held firm to their base, aligning with legacy industries and the rural jobs they support, rather than engaging in

restructuring the economy to address carbon pollution. While the potential costs of the climate legislation took center stage, a deeper economic truth went unspoken — that the issues that hamper the fiscal well-being of rural Oregon have less to do with environmental regulations than with broader market forces, from international policy to demographics.

Since 2018, Democrats in Colorado, New Mexico and Washington have followed through on promises to limit carbon emissions. For environmental activists, Oregon's legislation was the cream of the crop of the new bills, with its cap on greenhouse gases extending across all sectors of the economy, not just transportation or electricity generation.

But, at least initially, the climate bill would have cost rural Oregonians more. According to an analysis by *The Oregonian*, fuel taxes would hit wallets harder outside urban centers, where people drive longer distances in less fuel-efficient vehicles and lack access to public transportation. Higher energy costs also raised concerns about milling and manufacturing jobs leaving the state for friendlier economic conditions.

Still, Oregon's rural communities face larger forces than the proposed carbon-pricing system. For nearly three decades, the state's less-populated counties have fallen behind urban centers in wages and employment. Lack of industry diversification, reliance on natural resource industries, and an aging population are some of

the reasons why, according to a 2018 state report. International politics also play a role. For example, the ongoing trade war with China added uncertainty to an economically strapped agricultural industry, costing Northwest cherry growers \$86 million in 2018.

Railing against environmental rules and shifting blame from big-picture economic forces to regulations harks back to earlier fights over logging, said Peter Walker, an author and University of Oregon geography professor. In the 1980s, before spotted owl regulations cut old-growth logging in federal forests, the state's timber industry had already lost nearly one in five jobs, due to a recession, technological changes and increased competition from other markets. "The flash-point issues — spotted owls and climate bills — belie the bigger economic forces that shape the state's economy," he said.

As the Republican party harped on the costs of the proposed climate legislation, proponents of the bill countered that it would benefit rural Oregon. An analysis conducted by University of California Berkeley economists, for example, estimated that it would create 50,000 jobs by 2050, and that rural areas would get a larger share of those jobs.

But a job created isn't the same as a job lost. Any upheavals in the job market as workers shift from one industry to another — from timber harvesting to solar installation, say — take a toll on workers' self-confidence and the social networks they rely on. "Even for people who get re-employed quickly, the change can have big impacts," said Jennie Brand, a sociology professor at University of California Los Angeles.

Regardless of government interventions, the economy and climate are both changing. In Oregon, plans for transitioning to a less fossil-fuel-intensive economy have been pushed down the line as politicians wrestle over the details. In a press conference the day after the legislative session ended, Democratic Gov. Kate Brown pledged to spend more time traveling the state and listening to people's concerns, even as she explores executive actions to curb the state's emissions.

Former Republican Rep. Lane Shetterly, who for seven years represented a timber district in the Willamette Valley and Coast Range and is the current board president for the nonprofit Oregon Environmental Council, said climate change isn't a rural or urban issue. People across the state feel its impacts, and must rally around solutions. "Climate change won't go away," he said. "And the need to address it won't go away." □

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

Forest Service might limit public comments

The revision would allow the agency to approve more projects without environmental review

BY NICK BOWLIN

Under President Donald Trump, federal agencies have chipped away at the reviews and permitting required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), one of the nation's bedrock environmental laws. Earlier this month, the Forest Service proposed a significant overhaul of the NEPA process for logging and development on millions of acres of federal forest and grassland across the West.

In a statement, the Forest Service said NEPA environmental reviews are time-consuming, redundant and prevent active maintenance of healthy forests. The agency called it the first serious change to NEPA's regulation of forest management in more than 10 years.

The public has 60 days to weigh in on these significant changes. The proposed NEPA revisions comment period closes Aug. 12. Here are some key takeaways:

The proposed changes would reduce environmental review for logging and infrastructure.

The Forest Service wants to expand the number of projects that would qualify for "categorical exclusions" — projects that can bypass environmental analysis or environmental impact statements. The exclusions would apply to forest thinning, various types of road and trail building, brush removal and recreational site management. More controversially, forest projects of up to 7,300 acres (with logging on up to more than half of those acres) could be excluded from NEPA review. Mineral and energy exploration — such as using seismic testing to gather geological data and various small-scale infrastructure building — could also be exempt if it lasts less than one year.

The changes would undercut public engagement.

Since its inception, NEPA has established public engagement as a core principle of environmental review. Citizens should know what's happening on public land — from being notified of potential projects, to having some input on whether or not a project should go through. The changes would undermine the public's role in NEPA permitting, said Mark Squillace, professor of natural resource law at University of Colorado Law School; people would be less informed about proposed projects and less able to weigh in on them. "The proposal leaves it up to agency officials whether or not to allow public

engagement for anything but an environmental impact statement," he said.

The backlog is already long.

The NEPA permitting bottleneck is a legitimate public concern. Permits to remove buildup of fire-prone organic material and to build roads take far too long, Squillace said. In the introduction to the rule, the Forest Service claims more than 5,000 new permit applications and existing permit renewals await decisions, while 80 million acres of national forest land need work to curb "wildfire, insect epidemics, and forest diseases."

Western lawmakers of both parties have shown an interest in streamlining NEPA, but there is disagreement over the recent proposal. In a statement, Congressional Western Caucus Chairman Paul Gosar, R-Ariz., called the new rule a necessary correction to "costly, burdensome and uncertain" environmental reviews.

In a Senate committee hearing on June 13, Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden, D, took the opposite view. Wyden, who supports streamlining forest thinning projects, accused the Trump administration of trying to further "ideological pipe dreams of rolling back environmental laws," rather than working to approve existing projects

to reduce hazardous fuel loads. Rural Oregon is a "tinderbox," he said — a massive forest fire hazard.

The changes will almost certainly end up in court.

Wyden called the revisions a "full employment plan for lawyers" because they invite litigation, further slowing permitting for projects that might help lower wildfire risk. Environmental groups, including the Center for Biological Diversity and the Western Environmental Law Center, are already hinting at legal challenges. These cases could involve the Forest Service's justifications for weakening NEPA, as well as possible violations of other environmental laws, like the Endangered Species Act.

In determining whether a project that impacts protected species warrants environmental analysis, the proposed rule gives agency officials authority to judge whether "there is a likelihood of substantial adverse effects to the listed resource conditions." But the Endangered Species Act contains no wiggle room. If an agency knows a project could impact a protected species, it is supposed to consult the Fish and Wildlife Service. The leeway in this clause could be used in future lawsuits, Squillace said. □

A timber site in Kaibab National Forest, Arizona. Under new changes to the National Environmental Policy Act, some forest projects might not be required to undergo environmental review.

LANCE CHEUNG/USDA



Nick Bowlin is an editorial fellow at High Country News. [@npbowlin](#)

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Development in Bozeman and the basin



BY PAUL LARMER

THE WHITE STUFF FALLING FROM THE SKY ON JUNE 7, the day of *High Country News*' board meeting in Bozeman, Montana, wasn't quite snow and it wasn't quite sleet. "That would be graupel," one local told me at Wild Joe's Coffee Spot, one of the half-dozen or so cafes on the bustling Main Street. Outside, the miniature snowballs were forming a layer of slush on the sidewalk, while dozens of flame-orange and red western tanagers huddled in the bushes on the side streets, waiting for a break in the storm.

The weather didn't stop 75 or so hardy Bozemanites from attending *HCN*'s first official "On the Road to 50" reader event, held that night at the historic Baxter Hotel. After Editor-in-Chief Brian Calvert, who oversees the magazine from Gunnison, Colorado, and Associate Editor Emily Benson, who reports from Moscow, Idaho, described how our geographically dispersed editorial staff generates on-the-ground reporting from our 12-state beat, the audience shared story ideas and gave feedback on *HCN*'s direction as we launch into our second half-century of existence.

One thing on everyone's mind: growth. With a population of 112,000, Bozeman is one of the nation's fastest-growing small cities, and demographers predict another 55,000 residents by 2045, drawn here by Montana State University, a burgeoning tech industry and the stunningly beautiful mountains and valleys, all within an hour's drive of Yellowstone National Park. There's a reason former *HCN* Senior Editor Ray Ring's column, "Top Ten Reasons Not to Move to Bozeman," has remained our most-read online story since it was published in 2013. "When do we kill the goose that laid the golden egg?" asked Tim Crawford, a longtime local business-owner.

Bozeman's growth has led to heated fights over everything from the height of local buildings — several giant cranes loomed over the low-slung downtown area — to the management of Custer-Gallatin National Forest, just outside of town. Several readers told me that the U.S. Forest Service's recently released draft management plan gives too much roadless land

to mountain bikers and snowmobiles, and retains too little for actual wilderness, where elk and grizzlies and other wild animals don't have to contend with humans on machines. Others argued that the plan simply reflects the area's changing demographics and the need for greater access to public lands. "It's time to move on. Public lands are not just about designating wilderness anymore," one longtime conservationist said.

Several readers praised the broadening scope of *HCN*'s coverage, with one middle-school teacher describing how her students loved our January graphic-novel-style feature about an all-girl Navajo rock band. Another reader, who identified herself as a member of the Navajo Nation, said she appreciated our expanded coverage of tribal issues.

Thank you, Bozeman. Our next "On The Road to 50" event takes place Sept. 13 in Salt Lake City. Stay tuned for details.

WITH HIS FLOPPY HUCK FINN STRAW HAT, white plastic Walmart sunglasses, and baggy boat pants big enough for two, Thomas Minckley doesn't look like your typical scientist. Then again, I haven't met that many paleo-ecologists — certainly not the sort who spent their youth riding flash floods on sheets of plywood in the desert outside Phoenix. Perhaps that experience helped inspire him to become the fearless leader of this summer's 77-day voyage down the Green and Colorado rivers, 150 years after John Wesley Powell's epic river trip. Minckley has never been one to avoid a challenge; a longtime *HCN* reader, he now teaches students at the fossil-fueled University of Wyoming that climate change is a reality, not a debate.

Shortly after the Bozeman board meeting, I joined Minckley and the crew of his Sesquicentennial Colorado River Exploring Expedition (SCREE), on one leg of their 1,000-mile float through the Colorado Basin, from Green River, Wyoming, to Lake Mead on the Arizona-Nevada border. Our group — which included a couple of water scientists from the U.S. Geological Survey and several longtime *HCN* readers, including Western historian Paul Hirt of Arizona State University, and Dan McCool, a political science professor at the University of Utah — set out to navigate the Green River's Desolation and Gray canyons down to Green River, Utah. The 86-mile stretch hasn't changed much since Powell described it back in 1869:

The river is very rapid and many lateral canyons enter on either side. ... Crags and tower-shaped peaks are seen everywhere, and away above them, long lines of broken cliffs; and above and beyond the cliffs are pine forests, of which we obtain occasional glimpses as we look up through a vista of rocks. ... We are minded to call this the Canyon of Desolation."

It's still a wild and remote place; one evening, a black bear scampered through our shady campsite underneath old gnarled cottonwood trees. But SCREE's task is to document not only the canyons' enduring beauty, but also the changes in the basin, from oil and gas fields in the north to the depleted reservoirs in the south, and to ponder the uncertain future facing the 40 million people who rely on the Colorado River.

Would Powell be surprised by today's landscape? Minckley doubts it. "We like to think of John Wesley Powell as a visionary conservationist, but his mission was to 'reclaim' the Colorado River basin for human use. I think he would be just fine with all of the dams, agricultural fields and oil and gas wells." You can follow the SCREE team's progress this summer at Powell150.org. □



"On the Road to 50" is a series of community gatherings in cities across the region, collecting feedback about *HCN*'s future direction as we approach our 50th anniversary in 2020. See more: hcn.org/otr-50

Paul Larmer is executive director/publisher of *High Country News*.



Artist Patrick Kilcut from the University of Wyoming made drawings and paintings while on the expedition down the Green River. PAUL LARMER

A Radical Return

Bacone College once redefined what Native art could be. Can it do so again?

When Mary “Ataloo” Stone arrived at Bacone College in the summer of 1927, the small tribal school in Muskogee, Oklahoma, had no art program. Hired to work in the English department, the Chickasaw scholar, originally from Indian Territory, had an impressive résumé: an undergraduate degree from Redlands University in California and a new master of arts degree from Columbia. Despite the very clear racial and gender divisions in the male-dominated America of the 1920s, Stone — who is usually known simply by her Chickasaw name, “Ataloo” — was better educated than most white men of her generation.

Turning down job offers that included a proposed tour of Europe as a singer, Ataloo chose instead to teach at Bacone. The school was unlike other tribal schools at the time: Bacone’s Indigenous students studied advanced academic subjects like social science and Indigenous history, rather than elementary education and agriculture. Established as a private Baptist institution a quarter century before Oklahoma became a state, it is Oklahoma’s oldest college, and Native students have long sought intellectual refuge there. Ataloo, whose own intellectual journey began with the stories of her Chickasaw grandmother, wanted to teach students how to navigate the Western world the way she had. “Realizing the only hope for the Indian is the right kind of education, I know my task must be in helping raise the standard of our schools,” she told *The Literary Digest* in 1931.

Bacone became a bastion of Indigenous culture as well as a place where Native students learned to use stereotypes and myths to their own advantage. When raising funds for the college, Ataloo implored white Americans to “save” the best of Native culture, “since it is you who have taken the responsibility in changing our old civilization.” This tactic would prove to be one of the most important lessons her students learned, and it helped the small tribal college radically reshape the world of modern Native art.

Throughout the middle and later 1900s, as the United States government sought to suppress tribes and erase their cultural and societal structures, the Indian Arts Program at Bacone inspired Indigenous artists to test the perimeters of the Native artistic canon and assert their own identities through their work. Instructors like W. “Dick” West, Acee Blue Eagle and Woody Crumbo, some of the most prolific and influential Native artists of their day, gave hope and continuity to displaced

people, reminding them not only of who they had been, but of who they still were and could be, said Stephen Fadden, program director at the Poeh Cultural Center and Museum, a Bacone alum and citizen of the Mohawk Nation. “It was a place to, in a sense, resist detribalization by expressing the spiritual and cultural ideas they held dear through their art,” he said. As more and more Native artists thrived there, what became known as the “Bacone style” left an indelible mark on modern Native art.

More than 50 years after it redefined the Native artistic canon, and almost a century after Ataloo’s arrival, the college has quietly fallen into decay and near-financial ruin, its student body dwindling and its old buildings in disrepair. But the institution’s new leaders are ambitious. Hoping to once again produce some of the country’s most vibrant artists, new President Ferlin Clark announced last year that the school would soon offer classes in film production. It will also, after a several-year hiatus, offer an arts degree again. But clawing back from a \$2.5 million debt and regaining accreditation, both as a private and a tribal college, will not be easy.

In 2018, the Higher Learning Commission, which accredits post-secondary educational institutions in 19 states in the Central and Western U.S., put Bacone on probation, citing its lack of proper infrastructure and “systematic and integrated planning.” The school’s financial woes damaged recruitment efforts and caused many students to leave. The student body plummeted from a record-breaking more than 700 the year before to fewer than 300, and all but five of the college’s 95 employees were let go and rehired only after the college sold some of its newer properties. In a May 2018 interview with KJRH, then-President Franklin Willis blamed Bacone’s financial woes not on poor investment decisions and financial practices but rather on the students, citing \$2 million in unpaid tuition. “If we had that money, we’d be open. It’s the \$2 million we need, and there’d not be a care in the world.” But Bacone’s problems will likely cost far more than \$2 million to fix. When it temporarily suspended Bacone’s accreditation in 2018, the Higher Learning Commission noted that the college had no existing policy or procedure for monitoring its finances and could provide no evidence on how it would meet its future obligations. It made no mention of unpaid tuition.

Last fall, the college hired renowned Oglala Lakota painter Gerald Cournoyer to head the art department. When we first spoke in December, about a month before art classes resumed, Cournoyer sounded optimistic despite the school’s setbacks — eager to recapture some of Bacone’s old magic. “It is my dream that we get a new art building large enough to encompass all the art, where we can do more outreach to the communities and have basket weaving, beadwork, silversmithing, things that you wouldn’t be able to find at another institution,” he said.

Given Bacone’s historic accomplishments — the fact that it offered Indigenous students in Indian Territory a proper education when other institutions refused to do so, even as it empowered a generation of artists to change the art world — it’s easy to understand why Cournoyer and Clark are determined to save what is left. When I visited Bacone, the look in Cournoyer’s eye told me he doesn’t want to consider a future without the historic Indian school.

LEDGER PAPER FROM TRADERS’ NOTEBOOKS and military commanders’ rosters made its way slowly across North America in the 18th and 19th centuries. Combined with commercial paints and inks, the new medium began to take hold, and gradually it replaced animal hide. Paper eventually became essential for record-keeping after white settlers decimated the buffalo to near-extinction.

Shading and perspective are typically absent from early 19th century Indigenous ledger drawings, which have a

► *Cheyenne Warrior* by W. Richard West, from the mid-20th century. West was one of several influential and prolific art instructors at Bacone.

GILCREASE MUSEUM, TULSA, OKLAHOMA





▲ *Women Gathering Corn* by Marian Terasaz, c. 1938. The piece's bold colors and absence of background are indicative of many Indigenous artists in Oklahoma at the time.

GILCREASE MUSEUM,
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distinctive two-dimensional quality — images defined by crisp black outlines as much as by their bright colors. Backgrounds, for the most part, are nonexistent. But aesthetic appeal was necessarily not the primary concern; in the Kiowa calendars drawn by Silver Horn, for example, the goal was simply to document everyday life, everything from tornadoes and crops to battles and deaths. Using images for record-keeping and storytelling was common among the Kiowas; preserving and displaying those images as artwork was not necessarily the intention. Rembrandt may have worked well with light, but Silver Horn worked with time.

It's unlikely that the Cheyenne and Kiowa prisoners, among others, who created prolific art in the ledger style in the late 1800s ever worried about "style" or what future art patrons might think. But their distinctive style of portraiture, with its stark absence of background, would later propel the Kiowa 6, a group of Kiowa artists active in the early 1900s, to international stardom.

The Kiowa 6 are best known for their depictions of Indigenous dancers in motion, dressed in regalia. Working with the University of Oklahoma Art Department's director, a Swedish immigrant named Oscar B. Jacobson, they seized on the fact that, on a practical level, European art stood the test of time, said Russ Tall Chief, former director of the Jacobson House in Norman, Oklahoma, now a museum just off campus. European art was carefully preserved in museums, highly valued by the art world and the broader culture. "Whereas we've lost a lot of traditional arts in wood and hides and stuff that just disintegrated," he said. "Think about the hundreds of years of Native art that we will never see that happened in the 1700s. It had its life, it ran its course, and then it went away. That's a natural phenomenon."

Though Jacobson gave the Kiowa 6 easels and a studio in his home, the present-day museum, the artists' forebears had been recording history through visual representations for

generations. The young artists, most notably Spencer Asah, Monroe Tsatoke and Stephen Mopope, excelled at the easel painting, becoming some of the most prolific Native artists of their time.

Many of the artists at Bacone saw themselves as keepers of their culture, which they took one step further by incorporating modern artforms, said Tall Chief. They established the rules of the new world based on those of the old; Bacone simply played its part in a progression of visual storytelling that began millennia ago. "That is why the art that came out of (Bacone) was so 'Oklahoma,'" Tall Chief said. "That came straight off the hide, straight off the tepee and onto the paper and tried to keep that essence, while starting to apply some of the Western techniques that make art interesting. You can't live in a bubble, and they knew that."

Jacobson and his University of Oklahoma students were deeply involved with their Bacone counterparts, and Bacone's instructors took that influence and ran with it. Texture, dimensionality and movement became hallmarks of the "Bacone style," as did abstract imagery, like the darting birds and geometrically entrancing blades of grass in Acee Blue Eagle's paintings or the crystal-blue deer in Woody Crumbo's work. It was the natural evolution of the old ledger drawings, and the work of the Kiowa 6 that moved into a new phase of design and structure, "a rearticulation," said Lisa K. Neuman, a professor of anthropology and Native American studies at the University of Maine and the author of *Indian Play: Indigenous Identity at Bacone College*.

Artists like Blue Eagle, Crumbo and West taught their students to harness traditional culture and ceremony and express them in newer mediums and styles. And the college launched generations of young Native artists into the mainstream art world — people like Jerome Tiger, Ruthe Blalock Jones, Mars Biggoose and Marcelle Sharron Ahtone Harjo, whose growing influence not only gave them

an opportunity to make a living as artists, but also enabled them to reclaim their own narratives, redefining art through the eyes of Native artists, rather than the expectations of the white patrons who bought their work. It was a chance to tip the balance of power in the art world, and Bacone's leaders took advantage of it. When one of the respected Yanktonai Dakota artist Oscar Howe's post-Cubist paintings was rejected at the 1958 National Indian Painting Competition at Tulsa's Philbrook Museum of art, which was then the country's largest Native art market, because the jury said his work did not meet the definition of "traditional," Howe responded forcefully by letter. "Are we to be held back forever with one phase of Indian painting, with no right to individualism, dictated to as the Indian always has been?" he wrote. Bacone's instructors and students were also steeped in traditional art, and as the *Indian Annual* began to include more modern elements, thanks to pushback by artists like Howe, Bacone's artists started moving from small galleries to museums.

At the same time, the program's leaders played up their "Indianness" to sell Bacone and its art to white donors and collectors. To woo white audiences, West would often don a large feathered headdress, face paint and regalia that did not represent his own Cheyenne heritage. Most of Bacone's art directors exploited the stereotype that Indians were naturally spiritual and artistic to garner more funding or promote their students. "Their politics, we would look at them as being a little bit odd today. But they were playing the system, gaming it," said Neuman. "I use the phrase 'playing Indian to Indian advantage.'" The artists were confronted, both personally and professionally, with what white buyers thought "Native" art should be, as well as the question of who was qualified to make it. Neuman writes that in 1939, Crumbo lamented to the *Tulsa Tribune* that he was often asked to certify his own authenticity as Indigenous. A potential buyer once asked him how Indian he is. "Lady, I wouldn't know," Crumbo said he replied. "I hung

around the barns often enough, but I never got a pedigree."

Cournoyer knows the sentiment well. Today's buyers, he said, are no more sensitive or forgiving. "They want to know all these things about your history in order to make a judgment on whether this is true Indian art or not." Some people only buy work from the reservation, he said, "because that is *real* art, the struggling Indian artist," not work by somebody who left to earn a master's degree, or, in Cournoyer's case, more than one. "We can tell our story, but if we want someone to buy it, we got to tell the story the way you want it to be told," he said.

His understanding of that reality should serve Bacone's students well, as it did for those of his predecessors. Cournoyer is regarded as an accomplished painter, and Bacone's supporters have a lot of confidence in his ability as an instructor. The big, bold colors of modernism are obvious in his work, but so too are the experiences of the Lakota Sioux. His paintings feel at once modern and traditional. "I think he represents that balance Native artists have found, good Native artists who have been able to hang onto that Native aesthetic," Tall Chief said.

Cournoyer wants his students to feel connected to their heritage, much as he did at the Institute for American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, where class was just a short walk from the sweat lodge. He wants Native artists from across the country to find their way to Muskogee. But for now, his goals have to be more modest. When we spoke in February, his tone was more urgent; he's focused on getting his students the credits they need to transfer to an art institute. Currently, Bacone can only offer a two-year associate's degree in art. He hopes to implement a seven-year plan to raise funds and eventually offer studio credit hours. The art department needs a newer facility with more studio space. Supplies are scant, and he has to be creative. While eating at the local Chili's, he asked if he could take home some empty wine bottles. Those bottles are now part of his still-life display.

▼ *Stickball Game*
by Jerome Tiger,
c. 1965. The use of
movement became
a central part of the
"Bacone style."

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"We can tell our story, but if we want someone to buy it, we got to tell the story the way you want it to be told."

— Oglala Lakota painter Gerald Cournoyer, head of the Bacone College Art Department

Across the hall from the still-life models, on the second floor of the small, rough stone art building, Cournoyer stands in the midst of desks, each covered with piles of sketches. It's May, and classes ended just a couple of weeks ago. Cournoyer, with his first semester of art instruction at Bacone under his belt, had recently returned from a recruiting trip to the Pine Ridge Reservation, where he grew up. He wanted to show kids there that making art is a viable and fulfilling way to make a living and to see the world. Bacone's student body is currently about 42% Native American, and if the college can get that number to 51%, it will be one step closer to regaining accreditation as a tribal college. Both the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians and the Osage Nation have recently agreed to charter Bacone, another necessary step. The college will also have to establish a trustee board that is majority Native American.

Looking among the sketches stacked throughout the classroom, it wasn't hard for me to find impressive examples of promising young Native talent, the likely source of the gleam in Cournoyer's eye. Cournoyer and Creek filmmaker Sterlin Harjo, who has offered to help create a film program, know there are talented Native artists, writers and filmmakers everywhere, sometimes concentrated in areas just a short drive from Bacone. "I had a hard time leaving Holdenville. I have a hard time leaving Tulsa now," Harjo said, mulling over whether or not to move to Los Angeles, where he already spends much of his time working. "If they want to stay in Oklahoma, like a lot of us do, then I'd like to create space for them to stay there and work."

The stone buildings where Cournoyer has stacked his students' work may be musty and prone to flooding, but there is life here still. And whether or not the students know it —

Cournoyer sometimes has his doubts — they are walking among legends. Kiowa 6 paintings awaiting restoration are in the library, sometimes leaning against shelves; a Dick West mural of a dancer adorns a classroom wall on the art building's steamy second floor, and prints from Jerome Tiger's studio are piled in a room full of decades of art from past students. The college's museum overflows with treasures, from oil paintings to beaded regalia; even stones in its fireplace are etched with hieroglyphs. But the old silversmithing basement is often flooded, the boilers fail, and priceless works of art spend decades in buildings that are not climate-controlled.

Cournoyer walks through all of this, the history and struggle, with a sense of purpose. Every corner, every aging façade or dusty sketch, evokes a smile. To Cournoyer, the past is alive and moving all around Bacone. To him, the murmur is a shout. Behind the modest duplex on the edge of campus Cournoyer shares with another professor, he had a sweat lodge built, and when he speaks about the process, the heating of the stones and the seating arrangement, or how he will soon dig a trench the way he had been taught, he can't help but smile again. "Everything has a purpose, and we're trying to teach that."

ATALOA, WHO HELPED PRESIDENT BENJAMIN D. WEEKS BUILD

Bacone's art program in the late 1920s, believed deeply that Indigenous people should be the ones in charge of the preservation of their culture. At the time, genocide was still very much a daily reality in the United States. In her travels across the country, Ataloa saw a generation of Native youth who too often knew little about their history, the collective memories of their tribes scrubbed away by the government. "The Indian has



◀ Oglala Lakota painter Gerald Cournoyer looks at some of the Kiowa 6 paintings awaiting restoration in Bacone's library. Cournoyer was hired last fall to lead the college's art program. DYLAN JOHNSON FOR HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

▼ *Contest Dance* by Spencer Asah, c. 1940. Asah and the rest of the Kiowa 6 became internationally known artists when Bacone's art program was still in its infancy, and their influence is seen in the art produced at the college during the 20th century.

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been studied as a curiosity — a 'dead' and 'vanishing' race, not as a living contributor to the art, music, and religious moral code of later Americans." Ataloa and Weeks worked together to build an institution that set itself apart from other Indian schools by cultivating their minds, rather than just teaching them "from the shoulders down."

"The trouble has been that the Indian's education has never fitted him for anything worthwhile," Weeks said in 1935. "We have been trying to make carpenters out of artists, house painters out of musicians, and printers out of poets. We are beginning to realize that the Indian is an artist in the truest sense."

Bacone is no longer solely an Indian school; the private college teaches students of any background. But Ferlin, Cournoyer and Harjo want it to be a place where young Native artists can encounter a way of life that has shown their teachers, and their kin, value and purpose. "There is something amazing about having Native professors," Harjo said. "People who share the Native student's life and perspectives. It just makes a big difference."

Ataloa, Crumbo, the Kiowa 6, Blue Eagle and countless Bacone students were all rooted in an artistic tradition that thrived long before them and will continue long after. But what sets them apart, what makes them so important to the Indigenous experience, is not how their work was perceived as "different" or "new," but rather how it preserved the true histories of this place we currently call the United States and hurtled that truth into the future. The popularity of their art in the white world contrasted with, and was likely bolstered by, the invisibility of tribal life in America. Bacone's art leaders

deliberately played up the idea that Native people were natural artists, but even as their patrons saw their art as merely a colorful novelty, an interesting depiction of Indian life to decorate the mantelpiece, the artists knew it was more than that; it was how they carried their ancestors into the future, and how their children escaped the confines of their dreams.

Cournoyer may have just recently decided to call Oklahoma home, but the legend of Bacone found him long ago — in South Dakota, when he dreamed of making art, and in Santa Fe, when he studied to make a career of it. When he strips outdated wood paneling from the walls of his almost century-old art building so that he can slather on plaster and a fresh coat of paint, he might as well cleaning a precious stone to later smooth and cut into a gem. Cournoyer is every bit as much of a culture keeper as his predecessors were. This place, with its generations of artwork stacked on desks, its peeling walls and its flooded basements, is his church, and he's putting in the work to keep it going.

In the basement, the waters have receded for now. This summer has been particularly rainy, and the thick Oklahoma summer heat makes for some unbearably humid afternoons, but for now the lower floor of Bacone's art building feels cool and smells like mold and swollen wood. The old silversmithing classroom's small windows don't provide adequate circulation for the craft. But Cournoyer looks around the dusty room, its jeweler's hammers idle and no silver bars waiting inside its thick iron safe, and he grins. He imagines tables and benches full of students crafting necklaces and rings — things that remind them of home or give them a passport to another world — and then there's that gleam in his eye again. ■



Graham Lee Brewer is a contributing editor at *High Country News* and a member of the Cherokee Nation.

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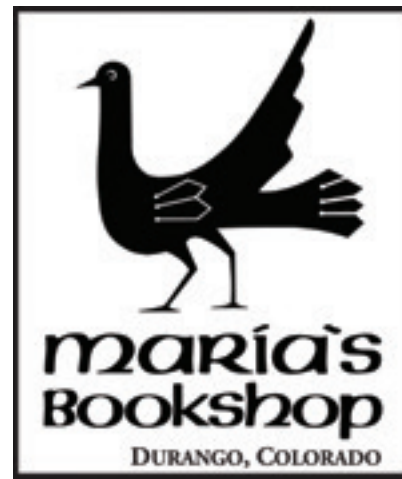
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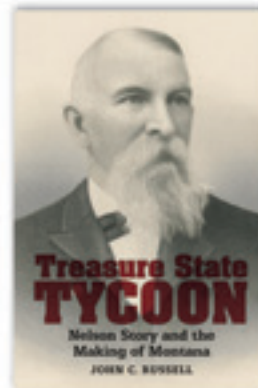
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Close encounters

Colorado's booming growth clashes with the state's wild inhabitants

PHOTOS BY ANDRIA HAUTAMAKI

At the height of the tourist season at Rocky Mountain National Park in 2018, a plump black bear ambled into the lobby of a nearby hotel. It climbed onto a wood table, examined an antique couch and then sauntered back out the same door again.

Overly curious bears regularly wander into inappropriate human places in Estes Park, the gateway community to Colorado's most popular national park. As the population of the Front Range swells, visitation to the area has grown, reaching a record 4.5 million people in 2018. That means more wildlife encounters with "problem" bears accustomed to humans and their delicious munchies.

And yet it's the possibility of encountering animals that encourages so many to visit the West's wildish areas. As much as this challenges natural resource managers, it continues to delight many humans.

In recent years, Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Estes Park have adopted practices to better cohabitate with the non-human neighbors. In 2015, the town passed an ordinance to limit bears' access to their greatest temptation: trash. Residents must either use a wildlife-resistant container or put trashcans outside only on pickup days. The town also replaced all its public trash containers in 2016 for a whopping \$1,200 per canister, funded by a sponsorship program.

And while watching adorable bears awkwardly navigate the human world is fun, our responsibility is clear: We need to discourage them, and let them be wild.

PAIGE BLANKENBUEHLER



A girl touches a rubber bear paw, left, at the Estes Valley Bear Education Task Force "Bear Booth" table set up at the weekly farmers market.

Kelsey Persyn, below, a Rocky Mountain National Park interpretive ranger, utilizes the help of eager volunteers and props to teach visitors the difference between black and grizzly bears.



A Jeep, far left, was totaled after a bear smelled lemonade left in it, and then opened an unlocked door with its paws. Once inside, the bear's weight rocked the car, closing the door. The owners tied a rope to the door handle, and then stepped back before pulling the door open to release the animal.

At left, a man carries a baby along a popular walkway in downtown Estes Park as a black bear peers out from nearby bushes.

Last words from a desert scribe

Who hasn't wondered what a favorite writer might still have bestowed on the world if not silenced too soon? What fan doesn't long for more — letters, a journal, unpublished fragments, even an annotated grocery list?

Devotees of the late southern Utah essayist Ellen Meloy need no longer wait. The sketches gathered in *Seasons* predate her untimely 2004 death by up to 10 years and are not, strictly speaking, last words. But for those who haven't yet discovered Meloy, they can serve as a gateway drug to her profound, sometimes deceptively breezy work. *Seasons'* opening salvo, the thoughtful but hilarious "I Stapled My Hair to the Roof," encapsulates her approach. Outspoken and passionate, Meloy skewers grandstanding, mindless consumption, militarism, patriarchy: "In pioneer times, while the men mumbled about posses and punched each other's lights out, the grandmothers of my Anglo neighbors simply got off their horses and took care of business." She makes an absolute gas out of much that is ghastly. Meloy's eloquent levity, however, is no mere parlor trick; the humor sugarcoats the pills we'll have to swallow if our planet is to heal. It threads through all of her books, even *The Last Cheater's Waltz: Beauty and Violence in the Desert Southwest*, her 1999 account of a nuclear road trip. Such light-handedness has been lacking in too-often dour and preachy "nature writing" ever since Edward Abbey rowed off into the back-of-beyond, followed all too soon by this Bluff, Utah, philosopher-clown.

Seasons' gems all originated as radio pieces. The "Roof" story in particular showcases Meloy's structural genius. Stapled between her gables, she contemplates the view rippling concentrically outward from the house to include the San Juan River, Diné Bikéya (the Navajo heartland), the Colorado Plateau, Earth, and the universe — a mirror of this writer's bio-centric orientation. In the essay's final scene, she flips the perspective, seeing herself through the eyes of gyre-borne vultures: a speck in the landscape, a "two-legged smudge on a plywood platter."

Among countless other things, *Seasons'* 26 one-to-two-page vignettes portray quotidian acts: birding, fishing, boating, listening, voting, herding lizards, chauffeuring dough, and — yes — watching TV. Chop wood, carry water. Go to the town dump, but pay attention: "If your Texas melt, it's probably not a good day to scavenge." Like the critters and plants Meloy cherished, nothing was too commonplace to escape her laser-beam attention. She kept returning to

desert bighorn sheep, which she personalized and immortalized in *Eating Stone: Imagination and the Loss of the Wild* (2005). They, like their domesticated cousins, make an appearance in *Seasons*. The tame ones bounce around a truck bed "like berserk piñatas," alas, slaughterhouse-bound.

For this reviewer, a former Moab guide, the magic portal into Meloy's universe was *Raven's Exile: A Season on the Green River*, her 1994 distillation of eight years of floats through Desolation Canyon with her husband, Mark, a Bureau of Land Management ranger. It is hard to resist an author who so downplays her considerable outdoor skills, the kind of person who named one place "Deviated Septum Riffle" after her oar struck bottom and its shaft was rammed into her nose.

This sagebrush sage delighted in the bizarre. Who knew that European classical violin virtuosos palmed toads before a performance so that neurotoxins from the amphibians' glands would numb their own and prevent sweating? Or that medieval science posited that geese hatch from mussels? Meloy's own behavior displayed streaks of eccentricity, as when she crossed barbed wire and in socks and pajamas thrashed through tamarisks in the dark, alerting geese about to be ambushed. Or when she swapped notes tucked under windshield wipers with a literary stalker, as recounted in *The Anthropology of Turquoise: Reflections on Desert, Sea, Stone, and Sky*. That collection, a 2002 Pulitzer Prize finalist, also brought her visual verve to the fore. A plein-air watercolorist and one-time art curator, she'd studied at the Sorbonne, so it is no surprise that her writing sparkled with haiku-like lines, conjuring scenes worthy of Van Gogh. Sunbathers' skin "blushes in lambent coral air or ripples in a stab of lemony sunlight." One wishes samples of Meloy's paintings were at hand to augment her writing. *Seasons'* few black-on-white drawings give only inklings. Her artistic training taught her patience, to just sit and watch the light change and notice nuances — terracotta, blood red, salmon, vermilion, the "temperament of iron" scoring mesa flanks.

This latest outing is a slim volume, but you shouldn't be fooled. It telescopes decades spent exploring home and the desert, two terms that for Meloy became synonyms. Stuff it in your pocket, perch atop the Goosenecks or the Raplee Anticline, where wind gusts can make the roots of your hair ache. Relish it, and if you're lucky, some bighorn sheep might pop up from the limestone, "all springs and coils."

BY MICHAEL ENGELHARD



Seasons:
Desert Sketches
Ellen Meloy
100 pages,
softcover: \$14.95.
Torrey House Press,
2019.

What the outdoor rec industry doesn't get about the LGBTQ community

OPINION BY
MIKAH MEYER

"Nature doesn't care if you're gay," I'll often hear in reaction to articles by myself or my outdoorsy LGBTQ peers. And it's true. Nature doesn't care if I'm gay. But people do.

Two months ago, I finished a world-record journey to all 419 National Park Service sites. For three years nonstop, I lived in a van, hiked trails everywhere from American Samoa to the Arctic Circle, and accomplished an outdoors journey no human had ever done before. But comments about the trip have included things like, "Well, now I need to be careful in the bathroom at national parks," and "Why do you have to shove your lifestyle down our throats!" And a sponsor terminated our partnership halfway through the project, saying over the phone and in writing that I was doing too much LGBTQ outreach.

This month, a camping website called *The Dyrt* posted an interview with me on Facebook featuring a thumbnail photo in which I'm holding a rainbow flag in front of Yosemite's Tunnel View. The comments were so inflammatory that the publishers decided after just a few hours that it was inappropriate to leave it up. They later denounced the hateful comments and reposted the story with a call for civility — which went unheeded. A rainbow flag incited such anger from a community of nature lovers that they ignored what so many outdoor enthusiasts have told me is their "dream trip."

This happened in June of all months, the one month when my social media feels like an explosion of rainbows due to worldwide Pride festivals. When historic anniversaries like the Stonewall uprising and marriage-equality decisions are remembered. And when seemingly every corporation, from Listerine to Disney, is releasing products that celebrate these culture-changing moments.

Yet even as the rest of America chases this "Pink Dollar," the outdoor recreation industry seems less interested in the near \$1 trillion purchasing power of the U.S. LGBTQ community. Or the shift in culture evidenced by the fact that the Los Angeles Dodgers' 2019 "Pride Night" was their best-attended game in seven years. Or — as I can attest after seeing Tinder photos from every corner of the United States during my parks journey — the vast market of gay men hoping to look cute in athletic clothes on top of a mountain.

Some in the LGBTQ community argue that corporate Pride promotions are simply "rainbow washing" to increase profits. But as someone who didn't meet an openly gay adult until I left my home state of Nebraska at age 19, and 14 years later can get married in any state across the U.S., I've seen the progress our culture has made. And I believe companies had a large part in it.

In an age when corporations are afforded some of the same rights as individuals, financial power plays a significant role in our society, from politics to cultural acceptance. When Marriott, a company started and owned by Mormons, is willing to sponsor Pride festivals and has an entire annual #LoveTravels campaign aimed at making LGBTQ travelers feel welcome, even people in so-called "flyover states" are influenced by ideas more progressive than they might see at home.

In the same way, the outdoor recreation industry has the power to help build a future where LGBTQ

outdoors fans are seen the same as everyone else. In that world, other nature enthusiasts' reactions to a photo of a flag-bearing hiker would be the same whether it was an American flag or a rainbow one. If outdoor companies follow the example of the rest of corporate America, they could use their influence in a way that both helps their bottom line and improves the lives of outdoor lovers.

As civil rights leader Marian Wright Edelman said, "It's hard to be what you can't see." The backing of inclusive values by outdoor brands will help nature enthusiasts like the Eagle Scout who wrote me via Instagram, saying that he'd never had an outdoorsy gay role model until he learned about my national parks record. Better representation will invite more people to experience our great outdoors.

Even though discrimination still causes vastly higher rates of suicide attempts among LGBTQ youth than their straight peers, this moment in time still gives me hope.

When I started my national parks journey in 2016, the outdoor recreation industry had never had a Pride Month ad. Now, several companies and nonprofits sponsor an annual LGBTQ Outdoor Summit, an outdoors-themed drag queen is commanding attention from brands, and REI (which I work with to help promote LGBTQ inclusion in the outdoors) received the Kenji Award at 2019's Outdoor Retailer tradeshow in part for its "Outside with Pride" apparel.

The promotions and the work for inclusion of the last three years have expanded the size of the tent for people who see themselves in outdoors culture. Every day, we come one step closer to a goal: A hope that one day, the readers of an article about a gay man visiting all of America's national parks won't care about the sexual orientation of the adventurer. After all, if nature doesn't care that I'm gay, why do people? □

If outdoor companies follow the example of the rest of corporate America, they could use their influence in a way that both helps their bottom line and improves the lives of outdoor lovers.

Mikah Meyer rafts through Dinosaur National Monument as part of his national park tour.
MIKAH MEYER



Adventurer Mikah Meyer was recently named one of NBC's "Pride 50" for his groundbreaking work with LGBTQ communities. He is a regular speaker on topics ranging from epic outdoors experiences to the benefits of inclusion for businesses and individuals. He is based in Minneapolis.

WEB EXTRA

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Lawmakers are failing to address the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women



NEWS
COMMENTARY
BY MARY
KATHRYN NAGLE

Just over a week ago, the Canadian government released its National Inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous people. The report, titled *Reclaiming Power and Place*, garnered some attention here in the United States, albeit mostly in Native communities, primarily due to its declaration that high rates of violence against Indigenous peoples are the result of genocide — violence stemming from “state actions and inactions rooted in colonialism and colonial ideologies.”

According to the report, Indigenous women and girls in Canada are 12 times more likely to experience violence than non-Indigenous women. Between 1997 and 2000, homicide rates for Indigenous women were nearly seven times higher than for non-Indigenous women. In the United States, murder is the third-leading cause of death among Native women, and on some reservations Native women are murdered at 10 times the national average. Tribal advocates hope the Canadian inquiry will elevate the discussion here.

In fact, Congress could begin to address the MMIW crisis in the U.S. by acting on currently proposed legislation. For instance, the Senate could reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act by passing a bill that incorporates tribal provisions — provisions that would restore jurisdiction stolen by the Supreme Court in its 1978 decision *Oliphant v. Suquamish*. In that decision, the court declared that tribal nations could not prosecute non-Indians who perpetrate crimes against Native women and children on tribal lands, even though, according to the Department of Justice, a majority of violent crimes committed against Natives are committed by non-Indians.

“The border line between Canada and the United States is relatively recent in origin — the stories of our relatives in the United States are very similar to the stories of First Nations women in Canada,” says Sarah Deer, a Muscogee (Creek) Nation citizen and University of Kansas professor.

According to *Reclaiming Power and Place*, Canada is largely responsible for the high levels of violence against its Indigenous citizens. The report goes so far as to identify individual state actions, laws and policies that have directly contributed: “This genocide has been empowered by colonial structures, evidenced notably by the Indian Act, the Sixties Scoop, residential schools, and breaches of human and Inuit, Métis and First Nations rights.”

The colonial structures identified in Canada’s National Inquiry have parallels here in the United States, from the Supreme Court’s decision in *Oliphant* to the boarding schools created by the U.S. War Department. The MMIW crisis is well-documented here thanks to advocates like the Urban Indian Health Institute, which recently conducted research across 71 urban areas and cities. It came to a disturbing conclusion: A majority of urban area law enforcement agencies simply do not keep data or records to indicate if and when a Native woman is murdered or missing on tribal lands.

“Canada’s MMIW report confirms many of the issues that we outlined in our report, including how

Native women are invisible due to systematic and ongoing racism,” said Abigail Echo-Hawk, director of the Urban Indian Health Institute. “Since the release of our report, we have been calling it a genocide, but it has rarely been acknowledged as that. ... It is about time that this epidemic is being described as a genocide, but with that, we will need concrete action.”

Action could — and should — come from Congress, where an unprecedented number of bills have been recently introduced to address the crisis, from the re-authorization of the Violence Against Women Act to Savanna’s Act and the Not Invisible Act. Congress seems poised to do something, but advocates worry that this “something” may not address the actual roots of the crisis, particularly when it comes to the theft of tribal jurisdiction over non-Indians.

Recently, the National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center identified five solutions lawmakers could implement immediately to address MMIW: restoring tribal jurisdiction to handle cases at the local, tribal level; allocating resources for victim services; improving access to federal criminal databases; establishing consultation protocols with tribes to respond to MMIW cases; and improving data collection. “If tribes have the resources and authority to respond to these crimes before they escalate in seriousness and lethality, at least some, if not many, potential MMIW cases would have a meaningful intervention prior to fatal escalation,” the center testified before the House Subcommittee on Indigenous Peoples of the United States in March.

The uptick in legislative activity is due in no small part to the visibility that Native women have gained with the introduction of the first two Indigenous women members of Congress: Deb Haaland, D-N.M., and Sharice Davids, D-Kan. “The Canadian apology and declaration is a significant step to make this crisis visible and points to a severe failure on the government’s part to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Native people. Now, we’ll have more momentum to address missing and murdered Indigenous women epidemic on a larger scale,” said Congresswoman Haaland. “The epidemic of missing and murdered indigenous women has been a silent crisis for far too long. Now that Indigenous communities are finding their voice through advocacy, we’re raising this issue so that our mothers, daughters, and sisters stop disappearing without a trace.”

Without a doubt, Canada’s National Inquiry brings us one step closer to replacing silence with actual solutions. The first test will be whether the Senate re-authorizes a Violence Against Women Act with tribal provisions that restore tribal jurisdiction. But until we restore the right of tribal nations to protect their citizens, MMIW will remain a crisis. □

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Mary Kathryn Nagle is an enrolled citizen of the Cherokee Nation and a partner at Pipestem Law P.C., a law firm dedicated to the preservation and restoration of tribal sovereignty and protection of Native people.

WEB EXTRA

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The Columbia River Treaty, six decades later



**RECKONING
WITH HISTORY**
BY ADAM M.
SOWARDS

On Memorial Day 1948, as Oregonians traveled home from holidays on the coast and the Cascade Mountains, the Columbia River breached a dike at Vanport, an industrial suburb north of Portland. Swollen by abnormally deep snowfall, rapid melting and region-wide rainstorms, the river submerged the town, displacing some 18,000 residents (one-third of them African American), killing at least 51 and damaging property valued at more than \$100 million.

In addition to those immediate, devastating effects, the Vanport Flood also catalyzed changes in international relations in the Columbia River Basin — an area roughly the size of France — hastening plans to build three flood-control dams in Canada and authorizing another in the United States. Those projects were codified in the Columbia River Treaty between the U.S. and Canada, in 1961.

Now, with parts of the treaty due to expire in five years, the two countries are renegotiating it. But the political landscape has vastly changed since 1961. The original treaty was implemented before the 1970 National Environmental Policy Act, the 1973 Endangered Species Act and a host of legal shifts that bolstered Indigenous rights in both countries, including 1974's *Boldt Decision*, which affirmed Pacific Northwest tribal nations' right to co-manage salmon. These historic changes emphasize the need to include environmental protection and equity in an updated treaty.

Over its 1,243-mile course to the Pacific Ocean, the Columbia River squeezes through several narrow spots, ideal for hydropower generation. In 1927, Congress directed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to survey American river basins and create plans to fully exploit their power potential via dams that would also offer navigation, irrigation and flood-control benefits. The Corps' *Columbia River and Its Minor Tributaries*, published following the directive, forecast a future river full of dams, capturing energy and transmitting it through wires to light homes and power industries throughout the Northwest.

The first dam across the Columbia River, completed in 1933, was a small, private one, a puny preview of what would soon transform the basin: behemoths like Bonneville Dam in 1938 and Grand Coulee Dam in 1942. But there were problems: Lacking fish ladders, Grand Coulee prevented salmon and steelhead from migrating hundreds of miles up the Columbia and its tributaries, including into British Columbia. It also flooded 21,000 acres of the Colville Indian Reservation. The effects of this inundation were multifold and tragic, according to former Tribal Judge Mary L. Pearson. The Bureau of Reclamation waited too long to relocate more than a thousand graves, and many of them were flooded. Compounding this cultural tragedy, the reservoir ruined important hunting, farming and gathering spots. It was a multi-pronged attack against Native nations' sovereignty and cultural foundations.

Then, the 1948 Vanport disaster accelerated regional and international discussions on how to control unruly rivers, spurring the signing of the Columbia River Treaty, which went into effect in 1964. It specified that Canada's new dams would hold back 15.5 million acre-feet of water. In exchange, the United States paid just shy of \$65 million, secured flood control and received a share of the hydropower generated north of the border.



Adding ecosystem function as a pillar of the Columbia River Treaty during renegotiations could help address the environmental harm wrought by Grand Coulee Dam and other dams. DANITA DELIMONT / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The treaty emerged from the belief that the economic and social benefits of dam-building outweighed any ecological and cultural losses, regardless of the harm produced. But now, societal values around acceptable tradeoffs have begun to transform.

The U.S. and Canada excluded Indigenous peoples from the negotiating table the first time around. Since then, tribal nations have organized politically and developed crucial organizations within the basin, including the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission and the Upper Columbia United Tribes. Dozens of tribal nations are influencing the renegotiations — attending meetings, publishing position papers and remaining present. Sort of. Despite asking for tribes' input and their central role as co-managers of the region's fisheries, American negotiators have excluded them from any official status, while Canadians have extended official observer status to only three First Nations. These sovereign Indigenous nations bring to today's negotiations a deeper history with the river than either of the nations renegotiating the treaty, and they express that history through distinct values and goals. For instance, they are exploring ways to restore fish runs above the dams, proof that greater involvement produces better ideas and results.

Environmental values and laws have also been revolutionized since the original treaty was signed. Today, for example, federal laws make it much harder to build a dam or highway that eradicates a species or excludes stakeholders. And fewer Americans or Canadians would dismiss social or ecological costs as easily as they did two generations ago. Consequently, in 2013, the treaty's managing U.S. entity, the Bonneville Power Administration, recommended adding ecosystem functioning as a third treaty purpose, alongside flood control and hydropower. But Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho — chair of the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee, through which any treaty must pass before ratification — insists that the concern for ecosystem function could jeopardize Idaho's sovereignty over its water and will not support that measure. Still, widespread public concern about salmon and climate change may not be easy to ignore in the 21st century.

When the Army Corps produced its plan for the basin and the negotiators first signed the treaty, floods and lightbulbs were the issue, not fish and tribal sovereignty. Those blueprints were shot through with oversights. More people involved today will complicate diplomacy, and changing values will challenge the management of this massively complex river system. Yet for the sake of communities and places, nothing else will suffice. □

Adam M. Sowards is an environmental historian, professor and writer. He lives in Pullman, Washington.

✉ @AdamMSowards

"Reckoning with History" is an ongoing series that seeks to understand the legacies of the past and to put the West's present moment in perspective.

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THE WEST

Sometimes it pays bigly to go bankrupt, especially if you're the boss. Cloud Peak Energy, the coal behemoth that owns three mines in Montana and Wyoming, declared bankruptcy May 10, but that didn't stop its board from giving CEO Colin Marshall a "retention bonus" of \$1.15 million earlier this year. Other top executives fared well, too, receiving bonuses that, in total, "could exceed \$16 million" for the year. This generous payout to the people who helped drive the company off a financial cliff "comes on top of a whopping \$78 million that Cloud Peak's top brass took home between 2010 and 2017," reports *Sightline Institute*. Over the years, according to *EcoWatch*, the giant coal company has also bankrolled a network of groups that deny global climate disruption, including the Washington, D.C.-based Institute of Energy Research, which dismisses renewable energy as a waste of resources and stubbornly insists that there's no scientific consensus about our warming climate. Cloud Peak-funded groups have also aggressively attacked the Sierra Club as "dangerous radicals" while backing organizations that want to deregulate mining and sell off our public lands for energy development. Unfortunately, not everyone associated with the corporation will get rich by its bankruptcy; the many Montana and Wyoming companies that supplied the mines will probably get pennies on the dollar. Other losers include the company's rank-and-file employees: Last fall, Cloud Peak "terminated its retiree health plan to save some money."

THE WEST

April was indeed a cruel month for coal: That month, a combination of hydro, wind, solar and geothermal energy generated more electricity than coal-fired power plants. And according to the Energy Information Administration, renewables might continue to trump coal. The Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis reported that in 2018, natural gas supplanted coal as the country's top power provider. Natural gas provided 35% last year while coal's share dropped to 27%. Maybe the times they are a-changin' after all.



WYOMING A classic from the "hayday" of automobiles. GREG KRUSH

WASHINGTON

Kitsap County Public Works officials warned locals to "hang up" on any calls appearing to be from the Silverdale Chamber of Commerce after a prankster "spoofed" the chamber's phone number, the *Seattle Times* reports. Someone claiming to be a public-works employee alarmed residents with oddball warnings, telling people that their street name was changing to "Cannabis Way," or that a cell tower was going up at the end of their driveway. One robo-message sounded quasi-believable: "We're going to be digging a 60-foot hole in your yard on Monday. There was money left in a budget and someone needed to learn how to dig a hole."

MONTANA

After Stephanie Land enrolled in the University of Montana's Creative Writing Program, she asked director Judy Blunt if a writing career really made sense. Blunt's blunt advice: Think of writing as "the same as refinishing a floor." Land appreciated that workmanlike approach. She'd already faced hard times, she said: Being broke, pregnant and without any work except the low-paying jobs that she cobbled together. That experience taught her firsthand about life at the bottom of the economic ladder, a place where many people say they feel invisible. Happily, Land's memoir about her experience, *Maid: Hard Work, Low Pay, and a Mother's Will to Survive*, hit the jackpot, becoming a bestseller. (See hcn.org for

our review.) In an interview with the university's *Montana* magazine, Land said many readers have told her that her book made them think, with some adding that it spurred them to tip at hotels or learn "the name of the woman who cleans my office at work." Land hopes *Maid* gives people some empathy for the unseen people whose hard work makes the lives of others easier: "Take the time to really look at people," she suggests. For the author, the book's success means that these days, she can afford a new vehicle to travel the West "without fearing her car would fall apart."

MONTANA

Missoula, home of the University of Montana, is going its own way when it comes to shedding fossil fuels. Driven by "moral imperative and public demand," the *Missoula Current* reports, the county joined the city in adopting a resolution to achieve

100% renewable electricity by 2030. That makes the county and city the first in the state to buck the Montana Legislature, which is moving in the opposite direction by trying to find a way to prop up coal. They join 110 cities that have also pledged to find green alternatives to fossil fuels. For their part, Montana's Republican-dominated Legislature and Democratic Gov. Steve Bullock "have done little to address climate change."

WYOMING

A while back, the *Gillette News Record* recounted the story of a shoplifter who liked a store, or at least its merchandise, so much that he wanted to work there. On his first trip to the Sportsman's Warehouse in Gillette, the man allegedly pocketed some ammunition and sunglasses. A few hours later he was back, only this time he "asked to fill out a job application." Police say he followed that up by snagging two more items without paying for them. A sales job is probably not in his future — unless, of course, companies with the high standards of, say, Cloud Peak Energy are hiring.

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

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



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