High Country News

CROSSING TO SAFETY

By Ben Goldfarb

From coal to solar

Washington's housing crunch

Farmworker strategy

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Mark Gocke / Mountain goats bring traffic to a halt on Wyoming Highway 89 in the Snake River Canyon near Alpine. At least three mountain goats have been hit and killed in this area so far this winter.

High Country News is a nonprofit 501(c)3 independent media organization that covers the important issues and stories that define the American West. Our mission is to inform and inspire people – through in-depth journalism – to act on behalf of the West's diverse natural and human communities. (ISSN/0191/5657) is published monthly, 16 times a year, by High Country News, 119 Grand Ave., Paonia, CO 81428. Periodicals, postage paid at Paonia, CO, and other post offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to High Country News, Box 1090, Paonia, CO 81428. Subscriptions to HCN are $37 a year, $47 for institutions: 800-905-1155 | hcn.org

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EDITOR'S NOTE

A fresh start for 2020

WITH THE NEW YEAR COMES A NEW LOOK FOR *High Country News*! We're pleased to offer you the first issue of our revamped magazine, in which you'll find the rich and nuanced reporting and analysis you've come to expect from us, now bolstered by a reimagined design and new vision for the future. Our editor-in-chief explains the issue's new features on page 25.

One thing that hasn't changed is our commitment to exploring the deep tensions that crisscross the West like so many roads. In this issue's cover story, that metaphor becomes a reality, as a fight over how best to help elk, deer and other wildlife cross a stretch of highway in Idaho opens big questions on land management.

As writer Ben Goldfarb details, wildlife crossings have become a popular way to keep car-creature collisions in check and allow animals to travel through landscapes otherwise fractured by pavement. But a plan to build three such bridges over Targhee Pass, at the edge of Island Park, Idaho, ran into a different kind of fault line: a distrust of outsiders and a desire to exact local control over public lands.

In Island Park, different groups of people connected the same dots in vastly different ways, at times drawing connections that, to others, veered into absurdity. Tracing how they came to those conclusions won't lead to agreement, of course, but it might lead to a deeper understanding of — and empathy for — the myriad individuals who call the West home.

Elsewhere in this issue, we interview United Farm Workers Secretary Treasurer Armando Elenes on the importance of union organizing and compromise. We also review the film *The Incredible 25th Year of Mitzi Bearclaw,* an entertaining coming-of-age story centered on a young Indigenous woman in Canada, and check in on the promise of one of our nation's bedrock environmental laws, the National Environmental Policy Act, on the occasion of its 50th anniversary.

High Country News is celebrating the very same milestone this year. And five decades of chronicling the complexities of the American West have left us with one conclusion: From the highways of Idaho to the fields of California, there are always more stories to be told from this fascinating place.

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High Country News covers the important issues and stories that are unique to the American West with a magazine and a website, hcn.org. For editorial comments or questions, write High Country News, P.O. Box 1090, Paonia, CO 81428 or editor@hcn.org, or call 970-527-4898.

TOMO / A tourist takes a selfie at the Stockyards in Fort Worth, Texas. (*above*)

Luna Anna Archey / High Country News / Students adjust a tilt-mount solar array. The adjustable array is one of three that a solar class has constructed outside of Delta High School in Delta, Colorado. (*right*)

FEATURES

ON THE COVER

Paul Queneau / A white-tailed buck is backlit by headlights moments before it dashes across rush-hour traffic on Hillview Way in Missoula, Montana. Deer are frequently hit along this busy street as it bisects two islands of open space amid growing neighborhoods. During 2016 renovations to this key arterial, the city installed streetlights in part to help traffic spot wildlife, as well as a pedestrian/wildlife underpass at Moose Can Gully. That narrow tunnel of concrete, though, isn't used very often by deer. Soon they won't have as much incentive to cross; in November, the city approved construction of 68 townhouses which will cover most of the grassy meadow below Hillview.

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One family's ordeal under Trump's zero-tolerance immigration tactics.

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Chris Goldberg / CC via Flickr / The town of Yucca Valley, California, in the Mojave Desert. In Lalami's novel, the town is the scene of a suspicious hit-and-run accident.

High Country News is dedicated to independent journalism, informed debate and discourse in the public interest. We welcome letters through digital media and the post. Send us a letter, find us on social, or email us at editor@hcn.org.

FACEBOOK

Whether coal has been "good to Wyoming" or not is pretty debatable ("Coal state struggles," 12/9/19). Much of the cleanup costs will fall on the state's taxpayers, and Wyoming doesn't have much of a tax base as it is, much less after a large part of its income (and its workers) leaves. Wyoming needs to reinvent itself. The enormous amount of land taken up by mining and other destructive extraction would make ideal places to put solar and wind farms, resources that Wyoming has in abundance and that are literally inexhaustible! It's not like it's going to spoil people's view out there or cause any ecological destruction. (Hardly!) My God, if Wyoming embraced both technologies with open arms and invited in companies to take advantage of those resources, it could rival Texas' envious solar and wind programs, probably within a decade. For much of those areas, the transmission lines for power are already in place. In the longer run, having those power sources — and the revenue taxes and employment they generate — close at hand would aid greatly in the funding of restoration of Wyoming to its former beautiful self, which is something else that makes a good jobs program.
Andy Groz

FACEBOOK

The folks who have been in Wyoming for generations would probably prefer that the decisions about Wyoming's future were left to them, rather than all the "wonderful schemes" those moving from other places have in mind. ("Coal state struggles," 12/9/19). What they should do is charge an entrance fee for all the newcomers and tourists.
C. Ralph Allen

TWITTER

It never ends well when a whole local economy is based on nonrenewable natural resource ("Coal state struggles," 12/9/19). Communities all over the world want the jobs that mining brings, but then their children or grandchildren end up living through the burst of the bubble.
Taal Levi

FACEBOOK

It couldn't be that the Transcontinental Railroad opened up thousands of square miles of land, connecting it back to civilization ("Gilded Age problems," 12/9/19). It couldn't be that it was an engineering marvel of its time. Nor could it have been an economic boom at the time. Nope, *HCN* just takes history and spins it so that, while wrong by today's standards, it seems that all the U.S. has done is oppress and denigrate people. Pathetic.
Richard Beauchamp

TWITTER

This profile of Markwayne Mullin ("A Cherokee for Trump," 12/9/19) by Graham Lee Brewer is an incredible piece, and yet another example from *High Country News* as to why it's crucial for Native reporters and editors to be hired to cover their own communities.
Nick Martin

EMAIL

Jonathan Thompson aptly calls out Bureau of Land Management Acting Director William Perry Pendley's big lie about the "existential threat" to public lands ("BLM chief 's wild horse fixation," 11/25/19). Sadly, Thompson goes on to refer to the estimated 88,000 wild horses on public lands, stating that their "hooves trample and lay waste to big swaths of cryptobiotic soil." Whoa!

The BLM relentlessly pushes the notion that wild horses and burros overpopulate and damage Western lands. Facts tell a different story. Without environmental review, the BLM has removed half of the animals' federally designated habitat. The 88,000 horses now roam on 27 million acres — hardly the surging overpopulation claimed by Department of Interior publicists. In Europe, ecologists are re-wilding horses as a way of restoring ecosystems and reducing fire-prone vegetation. In the U.S., the BLM is un-wilding lands that are federally designated for these free-roaming animals.

Wild horses and their advocates have enough problems with the BLM's eradication scheme and discriminatory treatment. Having the myths repeated by other ecologists is not helpful. We share the same goals: healthy public lands, protecting wolves and other natural predators, strengthening safeguards against pollution by extractive industries, fighting the efforts to gut the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and pushing for congressional oversight of this too often roguish agency.
Charlotte Roe

EMAIL

In "Is Renewable Energy's Future Dammed?" (11/25/19) Nick Bowlin asks an important question, but fails to mention some critical facts that we need to weigh when thinking about future hydropower projects. According to the National Inventory of Dams, maintained by the Army Corps of Engineers, there are 91,468 dams in the United States — the equivalent of having built more than one per day since Thomas Jefferson was president. Only 3% of these dams produce electricity. Sure, some of the remaining 97% that do not — 88,724 dams — might not support a hydropower retrofit, and others deserve to be considered for removal due to environmental and cultural impacts, risks to downstream communities, or simply because they've exceeded their useful lifespan. But with so many to choose from, it's likely that many would fit the bill. Let's take a hard look at electrifying existing dams before we even consider building new hydropower projects on free-flowing segments of river. The fact that hydropower dams are incredibly damaging to the ecosystems that we depend on is well-documented, and they also happen to be very expensive to build. It's up to us to make sure that in the headlong rush to de-carbonize energy sources of the future, we also protect what we have in the present. Better yet, let's come up with an energy vision that also restores many of our damaged and degraded ecosystems, starting with our rivers. Building more dams on free-flowing rivers is not the answer, but distributed residential solar with battery storage just might be.
Mike Fiebig

An array of hopes

Where coal mines once provided steady employment, solar energy now offers jobs for the next generation.

BY NICK BOWLIN

AT A PICNIC TABLE IN A DRY grass field, a group of elementary school students watched as high school senior Xavier Baty, a broad-shouldered 18-year-old in a camouflage ball cap and scuffed work boots, attached a hand-sized solar panel cell to a small motor connected to a fan. He held the panel to face the setting Colorado sun, adjusting its angle to vary the fan speed.

"Want to hear a secret?" he asked the kids around him. "This is the only science class I ever got an A in."

As he readily acknowledges, Baty hasn't been the most enthusiastic science student at Delta High School. This class, however, is different. Along with a group of other seniors and a few juniors, Baty is enrolled in "Solar Energy Training." The class not only provides a science credit needed for graduation; it also trains students for careers in solar energy or the electrical trades. It allows Baty to work with his hands, something he enjoys, while positioning him for employment in a fast-growing industry.

In Colorado's North Fork Valley, solar energy — along with a strong organic farm economy and recreation dollars — is helping to fill the economic hole left by the dying coal industry, which sustained the area for more than 120 years. When the mines still ran, graduating seniors could step immediately into good-paying jobs. But in the past five years, two of Delta County's three mines have closed. Approximately 900 local mining jobs have been lost in the past decade. Ethan Bates, for example, another senior in the solar energy training class, is the son of a mine foreman who lost his job when the Bowie Mine outside Paonia closed in 2016. Now, he'll graduate as a certified solar panel installer.

National environmental and climate groups often discuss "just transitions" for fossil-fuel dependent communities like Delta, or Wyoming's Powder River Basin. Mining companies are going bankrupt, while every year, solar and other renewables get cheaper. Such economic shifts are complex, but one thing is clear: If the transition to renewables is to truly account for the communities and economies it undercuts, it will include programs like Delta High School's solar training. The class positions young people for success in a coal-free future, and does so from the ground up, attentive to the needs and cares of the local community.

SCIENCE TEACHER BEN GRAVES started the class four years ago. Described by a student as "cool" but with a "mad-scientist vibe," Graves has a salt-and-pepper beard and dresses casually in trail-running shoes and hard-wearing khakis. In class, he is affable but authoritative.

As a teacher, Graves sees his main duty as educating young people and creating good citizens. But to do right by his students, he needs to set them up for success under the current economic realities. And that requires classes like solar training. "I think we have to be doing some sort of trades education," he said. "For a kid with a high school diploma, working service is really all you can do without more training."

Many students in the solar class, like Baty, weren't particularly successful in traditional science classes. They're kids who haven't "played the school game," as Graves put it, of college admission and standardized tests. For these students, training in electrical trades has now joined ranks with welding and agriculture programs offered by the high school.

In the past four years, the class has helped install two solar arrays behind Delta High School. Students have done much of the work designing the structures and digging the trenches to lay conduit cables. This year for their final project, they will take apart and fully re-install one of the solar arrays. According to Graves, teachers at other local schools are keen to integrate solar training into their classes. Solar Energy International, or SEI, a local nonprofit and a major catalyst behind the Delta class, is working to integrate solar training into science curriculum across the region.

These projects are a boon to public school budgets, which lost a tax base when the mines closed. On a school day, the projects can supply about 10% of Delta High School's energy demand — and up to 30% on weekends. Thanks to a municipal cap, Graves said, the school has reached the limit on how much solar it can install, but even the current amount makes a difference.

"The facilities folks at first waved it away as a class project," Graves said with a laugh. "Now, maintenance sees it as a real way to reduce demand charges. It went from us pushing some of this stuff on the administration to them saying, 'Wait a second, we actually want this.' "

The economics of renewables are changing Delta at the county level, too. The area's electric cooperative, Delta-Montrose Electric Association (DMEA) is ending its contract with its wholesale power supplier, Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association. Tri-State long required that buyers like DMEA purchase 95 % of their electricity from the utility, limiting the amount of solar and other renewables local co-ops could produce. The company is notorious for its continued reliance on coal-fired power plants.

For many Delta residents, solar offers a certain self-sufficiency and local independence they find appealing, as evidenced by DMEA's defection from corporate control. It's also cheaper: DMEA can cut customer costs by increasing its share of renewable power. DMEA is a rural electric co-op, so its members call the shots, and in October 2018, they voted to raise money and sell stocks in order to buy out their Tri-State contract. Politically, Delta County might not be an obvious leader in renewable energy; it voted for President Donald Trump by about 70 %. But solar panels on homes and businesses are increasingly common, with demand sometimes outstripping the capacity of local solar firms.

In the school district where Graves works, DMEA has encouraged the adoption of solar by funding solar arrays at every high school in its service area. Through SEI, the co-op has administered grants for Graves' class, and it funds solar trainings for teachers across the area.

FROM AN EDUCATIONAL VIEW, the solar class' value rests in its capacity to combine technical training and scientific learning outside

Luna Anna Archey / High Country News / Ethan Bates and Cody Sauve adjust the wiring box on a solar array outside their Delta High School classroom.

the traditional grade structure. This dynamic was on full display on a bright fall day in October. The class was participating in an energy reduction contest against other Delta County high schools. Sponsored by the Colorado Energy Office, the Renew Our Schools program promotes student-run energy efficiency projects. At the end of the five-week competition, the winning school would receive $12,000.

The contest transformed the kids from students to energy auditors. Graves sent them out to prowl the hallways, counting light bulbs and measuring the energy used by the tech lab's computers. In the hallways, every other light fixture is dark, the bulbs removed by solar students. At a separate table, another group used the data to calculate savings if the building's sodium vapor bulbs were replaced by LED lights. Lights, the kids found, account for about half of the school's peak power demand.

All this activity halted when tragedy struck in early November. Gannon Hines, a senior who hoped to use his solar skills upon graduating, died in a car accident. Three other students were in the car, and one remains badly hurt. Graves did not try to teach during the dark days of mourning that followed; instead, he simply let the students talk and remember their friend. He contemplated calling off the competition, but Hines had been one of the class' more enthusiastic members.

"We talked about whether to stop or to keep going with the competition, and we decided to keep going for Gannon," said Allora McClellan, another senior.

On the final day of the competition, just before Thanksgiving, it was clear Delta was going to lose, and some of the students were frustrated. They had redoubled their efforts after the heartbreak but came up short. It's easier for smaller schools to show large energy-use cuts, and Delta is the largest school in the district. Students grumbled about an unfair contest. (In December, though, the school was awarded $2,000 by the state for their efforts. The funds will help replace fluorescent bulbs with LEDs.)

As the hour wound down toward lunch, Graves watched a group of students finish some final kilowatt calculations. A few were already drifting toward the door.

"Hey," he said, "let's finish our work."

Rent control

Can a growing city keep its people housed?

BY CARL SEGERSTROM

Kathy Plonka / The Spokesman-Review / Kate Burke has been a driving force behind the push for tenant protections in Spokane, Washington. She is pictured, center, protesting against a city law criminalizing homelessness.

SPOKANE CITY COUNCILWOMAN KATE Burke knows what it's like to get an eviction notice. When she was running for office in 2017, a real estate agent knocked on the door of the house she was renting and told her that it would soon be on the market; a week later, she got a letter telling her she had 20 days to move out. She hadn't violated her lease terms or damaged the property, but in a city without tenant protections, that didn't matter — she had to find a new place.

Burke was luckier than many renters. Her property management company helped her find a new place, and she was able to afford the rent increase, from $900 to $1,200 a month. Still, the experience helped shape her role on the city council, where she has fought for tenant protections.

In Spokane, income inequality and out-of-reach housing costs are forcing people onto the streets and into shelters. In late November, lawmakers drafted a set of laws that, should they pass, would usher in new safeguards for renters. The fight over these proposed rules exemplifies the struggles many Western cities face as they attempt to balance continued growth with stability and shelter for their residents.

Housing costs are soaring in Spokane, but wages aren't keeping up. Since 2010, the average rent has grown by 74%, to over $1,000 per month. In the same period, the average renter's income has increased by only 51%. For Keri, a single mother, that's a major problem: Landlords want tenants who earn three times the rent, well above what Keri makes working full-time. (Keri asked *HCN* to withhold her last name to avoid conflict with her current landlord.) With her rental duplex slated for renovation and her lease ending in December, she's looking at basement apartments, searching for roommates and even considering leaving Spokane altogether. "I've never had this problem before, ever," she said. "That just sucks."

Rent is going up in part because of an influx of new residents. In November 2019, real estate in Spokane and Spokane Valley had the highest relative show of interest in the nation for out-of-towners, according to Realtor.com. Much of that demand comes from the high-priced Seattle area. Census data show that between 2013 and 2017, about 13,500 more people moved to Spokane County than left, with the highest amounts coming from populous counties in western Washington.

Faced with a challenging housing market and the prospect of being priced out, tenants in Washington's second-largest city are pushing for protections. Over the course of last year, city leaders convened a series of meetings with landlords and tenants to address the issue. In late November 2019, the council drafted tenant protection ordinances that narrow the reasons for eviction, set limits on deposit and pet fees and guarantee the rights of tenants to organize, among other provisions. The new laws would also require landlords to pay renters $2,000 in relocation costs under certain circumstances, including rent hikes that create a financial burden.

The proposed ordinances — especially the relocation provision — could make a bad rental market even worse, said Steve Corker, the head of the Landlord Association of the Inland Northwest. Many small landlords might choose to sell their units rather than pay tenants to move. Big developers could also shy away from investing in Spokane, if laws limit how they carry out their business and can't control conduct on their properties, Corker said. "We don't want to discourage people out of the rental business," he said. When the new tenant protections were announced, Corker posted on the landlord association's website "asking every landlord, every

realtor, every property manager to write, call, e-mail City Council members requesting a delay in this vote. …"

SPOKANE ISN'T ALONE IN SEEKING solutions to keep housing affordable for renters. Earlier this year, Oregon's Legislature enacted statewide rent control that caps year-to-year increases at 7% plus inflation. In Seattle, City Councilwoman Kshama Sawant hopes to repeal a Washington state law banning local rent-control measures; she also wants to ban evictions during winter. And, starting in 2020, California will have statewide rules that require landlords to cite legitimate reasons for evictions, pay relocation fees to tenants evicted without cause, and restrict annual rent increases to 5% plus inflation.

Statewide rent control is a new phenomenon in the West, but some large cities have served as a testing ground for it, with mixed results. In the short term, limiting rent increases protects tenants from being priced out, according to a 2019 study by Stanford University economists assessing the impact of a 1994 rent-control law in San Francisco. Rent control proved especially beneficial for people of color, who, in Spokane as well as in San Francisco, are more likely than their white counterparts to rent. But in the long term, landlords who were subject to rent control were more likely to sell their rentals or redevelop them to skirt the tenant protections. The researchers concluded that, over time, rent control in San Francisco shrank the rental supply, increased rental costs, and exacerbated gentrification and inequality.

Spokane tenant advocate Terri Anderson, the co-executive director of the Washington Tenants Union, acknowledged that the proposed measures might not be a long-term solution. They would, however, help people currently facing evictions and the specter of homelessness.

"We're just stopping the bleeding as we fight for permanent affordable housing."

"It's triage," Anderson said. "We're just stopping the bleeding as we fight for permanent affordable housing."

Vicki Dehnart, a 72-year-old retiree on a fixed income, would have benefited from such protections had they been in place last summer, when she was evicted from the apartment she'd lived in for 33 years. Unable to find a rental in the tight market and without relocation assistance to help with moving costs, Dehnart first endured a disturbing experience with a roommate and then, last summer, became homeless for two months. During July and August, she spent her days at a park, sitting on a blanket with her two 20-year-old cats, Feather and Socks, and her nights at the Hope House shelter in downtown Spokane. Every month, she'd bump up against the $500 limit on each of her two credit cards.

"It was very traumatic for me," she said. Eventually, Dehnart was able to find stable senior housing. But she still worries about the women she met in the shelter who haven't been able to find housing, and the many others who face evictions and rent increases. "There's nothing we did wrong," Dehnart said. But rising rents and lack of protections "forced us into a vulnerable situation."

A WEEK BEFORE THE SPOKANE CITY Council was set to vote on the ordinances in early December, the blitz of phone calls and emails from landlords led to the vote being postponed until March. The night after the delay was announced, incoming City Council President Breean Beggs met with about 20 tenants and advocates and told them the vote had been delayed because the measures, at the time, lacked the votes to pass.

Attendees sitting in clusters at small tables peppered Beggs with questions as he listened patiently. He advised the tenants on the rules for public testimony and suggested that loud displays of frustration would be less effective than heartfelt personal stories. He also encouraged them to leverage any personal connections with council members.

Councilwoman Kate Burke felt less conciliatory. "We're deferring action in winter, and I guarantee I'll be getting more emails and phone calls from tenants telling me they're being taken advantage of," Burke said. In the meantime, she's received more than 150 emails from landlords, many of whom she says were misinformed about the ordinances and their possible impacts. To Burke, delaying the vote seemed like another win for the political establishment. "The power in this city is and always has been with the good old boys," she said. "The more we sit here and keep taking advice from landlords, the more we're just going to wait."

THE LATEST

Visas for shepherds

Backstory

For decades, Western sheep ranchers were allowed to bring in herders, mainly from Latin America, on temporary work visas. In most states, the pay averaged $750 a month, only $100 more than it was in 1965. But thanks to new regulations and combined lawsuits filed in Colorado and Utah, monthly wages were set to rise to $1,500 by 2018. Still, activists question whether the changes go far enough in addressing the abuse of foreign labor. ("Far from home, the West's foreign sheepherders get a pay raise," 2/22/16).

Followup

In a November press release, the Hispanic Affairs Project announced that it had settled its lawsuit against the federal government over the use of temporary guest worker visas. Under the settlement, ranchers will no longer be able to use temporary or seasonal visas to fill labor needs. Instead, they will have to hire American sheepherders or bring workers into the country on permanent visas. Before, workers on temporary guest worker visas were effectively indentured to the same ranch for years, without bargaining power or a path to permanent residency. —Kalen Goodluck

Loren Holmes / Anchorage Daily News Nanieezh Peter and Quannah Chasing Horse stand together on stage at the Alaska Federation of Natives 2019 Convention.

"We shouldn't have to tell people in charge that we want to survive. It should be our number-one right. We should not have to fight for this."

Raised voices

Young Indigenous activists join a growing chorus for climate justice.

BY TRIPP J CROUSE

"WE DO NOT WANT TO STOP OUR WAYS of life. That's why we're here." Seventeen-year-old Quannah Chasing Horse's voice broke as she stood on stage in front of a sea of delegates at the Alaska Federation of Natives 2019 Convention in Fairbanks, Alaska. "We shouldn't have to tell people in charge that we want to survive. It should be our number-one right. We should not have to fight for this."

In October, at one of the largest gatherings of Indigenous people in the U.S., the Hans Gwich'in and Lakota Sioux teenager stood with 15-year-old Nanieezh Peter (Neetsaii Gwich'in and Diné) and advocated for a resolution urging the federation's voting members to take action on climate change as it affects Alaska Native people in a way that matches the scale and urgency of the problem. Chasing Horse and Peter, who spoke for the Elders and Youth Conference, which drafted the resolution, also called on members to create a climate action task force within AFN and to declare a state of emergency on climate change.

In appealing to the public for action, Chasing Horse and Peter join the likes of Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, 16, and clean-water activist Autumn Peltier, 15, (Wikwemikong First Nation). A groundswell of voices is amplifying the concerns of youth on larger stages — and decision-makers at the state, national and global level are starting to listen. At the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention — a delegation of thousands of Alaska Natives from 12 different regions across the state — they were heard. Before the end of the session, the convention voted to declare a "climate emergency" to a standing ovation from the audience.

In their speech to the delegation, Chasing Horse and Peter noted that Alaska's land and waters are warming at twice the rate as the rest of the world and that melting permafrost and mass erosion are forcing many communities to relocate. Chasing Horse said Indigenous youth are watching the climate crisis impact traditional lifeways right before their eyes; she sees it every year as temperatures affect subsistence activities, with berries ripening early, permafrost melting and animal migration patterns changing. Ruth Miller (Dena'ina Athabascan), 22, agreed.

Miller, who grew up in Anchorage, learned at an early age how her heritage, human rights and environment are interconnected, in part from her parents, both Native rights lawyers. This year, she represented the United Nations Association of the United States at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York. At AFN, she was in the audience as Peter and Chasing Horse spoke in support of the climate emergency resolution. The impacts of climate change are "devastating," Miller said, "because they affect day-to-day lives of subsistence hunters and gatherers of our rural communities of a state that relies on and is in deep relationship with our lands and waters."

Still, the resolution faced opposition from delegates with oil and gas interests along the North Slope, who were concerned that it could hamper their ability to develop natural resources and extractive industry. The conflict illustrated philosophical differences between Native communities relying on natural resource development for an economic base and infrastructure, versus communities who see it as a threat to subsistence lifeways.

Julie Maldonado works as a consultant for the Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals, developing climate change adaptation plans with tribal communities. She sees a trend in governments and organizations beginning to seek out and listen to younger voices, a necessary step in finding answers to a global problem. "We have a whole lot to learn from them. And they can also see things much more clearly and be informed in ways that we don't understand," said Maldonado, a lecturer in environmental studies at the University of California Santa Barbara. Because tribal nations are sovereign, Maldonado says, interest groups and governing bodies looking at climate change have a responsibility to consult with them, and to include the expertise of Indigenous communities when determining solutions. That includes heeding the knowledge and experiences of Indigenous youth. "These voices have to be joined together," Maldonado says. "It has to be an intergenerational conversation."

Over the next year, the Alaska Federation of Natives delegation will use the climate emergency resolution to guide its legislative and policy work in the Alaska state Legislature and the U.S. Congress. "For many Indigenous peoples, we've had this agreement to our land and to our animals that we would protect each other, and we keep each other alive. We'd stand up for each other," Chasing Horse said during an interview after the AFN resolutions gaveled out, with Peter by her side. "As youth, we have our new ideas and our perspective and fresh eyes," Peter added, following up Chasing Horse's thought. "Our voices are powerful."


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Where ‘the West’ Begins

Forth Worth, Texas, cashes in on selective history.

BY TRISTAN AHTONE PHOTOS BY TOMO

Twice a day on Saturdays and Sundays, the acting troupe known as the Legends of Texas provides spectators with pistol duels and historic re-enactments from the mid- to late-1800s in *High Noon*-style showdowns. *(left)*

At Pawnee Bill's Wild West Show, performers re-enact the original spectacle from the late 1800s and early 1900s. Here, an actor performs a "ceremonial buffalo dance" for onlookers. Whether the dance has any roots in Indigenous customs or practice is unclear. *(center)*

A "New World" cattle breed, the Texas longhorn descends directly from the first domesticated cows brought to the Caribbean by Columbus in 1493. And every day, at 11:30 a.m. and 4 p.m., they make a lazy parade loop around the Stockyards for onlookers. *(overleaf)*

ON A WARM SATURDAY afternoon in Fort Worth, Texas, half a dozen cowboys got ready to shoot each other. The Brodies, a bank-robbing gang on the lam from the Waco jail, had returned to Fort Worth's historic Stockyards to exact revenge on the folks that put them away: the town marshal and his dim-witted deputy. It was four against two, and the gunfighters stood a few yards apart, ready to draw.

"Marshal, I think they all want to know what you have planned to do about this," squealed the deputy.

"Me?" replied the marshal. "We — as in *me* and *you* — are going to honor the Code of the West."

The men squared up and reached for their revolvers. The leather on their gloves creaked as they tightened their grips on their guns. Their spurs tinkled as they dug their heels into the brick.

"Wait a minute!" cried the deputy — marking the sixth time the shoot-out paused for comic relief. "Code of the West? Is that the one where I gotta die with my boots off? Or die with my boots on?"

"Boots on, boots off, it don't matter to us," said one of the Brodies. "Either way: You gotta die."

The marshal assumed a fatherly tone. "Honoring the Code of the West means standing up for law and order, doing what's right," he explained. "You know, like Hopalong Cassidy, Gene Autry, Marshal Matt Dillon, and of course, Marion Morrison."

"Marianne who?" the entire cast said in unison.

"John Wayne!" hollered somebody from the audience.

After a few more wait-a-minutes from the deputy, the men drew. When the smoke cleared, the evil Brodies sprawled dead on the ground, clutching their chests and sides.

It was just another day's work in the Fort Worth Stockyards, where the past is replaced with mythology and reality is obscured by illusion.

The gunslingers, a gang of volunteers who shoot each other twice a day on Saturdays and Sundays, sported horseshoe mustaches and spoke with thick drawls. Nearby, longhorn cows meandered through the streets. Whiskey was flowing at all the saloons, open containers were allowed on the sidewalks, and kitschy stores hawked everything from plastic trinkets to high-end hats and boots.

If the Old West is a fantasy, the Stockyards is its muse. Here, folklore and legend are summoned through ritual and repetition,

Founded in 1947, the Cattlemen's Steak House is one of more than two dozen restaurants and bars that offer "an authentic glimpse of the American West" to visitors who venture into the Stockyards. *(below)*

burying the reality of the cold-blooded past underneath family-friendly fun, complete with some of the West's oldest phantasms: the dime-store novel hero, the courageous gunfights, the idea of a dusty frontier just waiting to be discovered. It's clean and tidy, with no hint of the brutal scalp-hunters or paramilitaries who attended to the expansion of the nation's frontier, no acknowledgement of their victims or their violent legacy.

"Established at the fork of the Trinity River in 1849," reads the Stockyard's website, "the Fort Worth Stockyards represented the last 'civilized' outpost for cowboys driving cattle to market along the famous Chisholm Trail." Now listed in the National Register of Historic Places, it boasts daily cattle drives, rodeos, a Wild West show, livestock auctions, 14 restaurants, 13 bars, 35 shops and over 17 must-see attractions that offer an "authentic glimpse of the American West."

Fort Worth's version of the West is distinctly different from what lies beyond the 100th meridian. Outside the gunfights, saloons and rodeos, Texas longhorns roam, serving as the region's mascots, despite being uncommon in most other Western states, like Oregon or Utah. Out of all the ungulates, a buffalo might best represent the American West. But Fort Worth has remade the West in its own image.

"If you didn't know it, you're sitting smack-dab in the middle of the Chisholm Trail: the most famous cattle trail back in the days of the drives back in the late 1800s," intoned a man playing famed Wild West showman Pawnee Bill during Pawnee Bill's Wild West Show, which is held every Saturday afternoon. "It's where they would bring their cattle down close to the Trinity River. Well, the chuck-wagon cook could reload supplies and provisions to get 'em to the next stop before crossing the Red River into the Oklahoma Territory."

Like many of the Stockyard's less-than-accurate storylines, this statement requires some context: The Oklahoma Territory was not established until 1890, while the Chisholm Trail was generally no longer in use by about 1884. This is a minor historical quibble, and I don't fault a live performer at a Wild West show for mixing up dates or trying to simplify a story for international audiences. But it is helpful to know that before it was known as the Oklahoma Territory, it was Indian Territory, and it was essentially illegal for a settler and his longhorns to trespass. The Code of the West has its limits, apparently — then and now.

At Pawnee Bill's Wild West Show, which is held in the Cowtown Coliseum, a small herd of buffalo ran through before a man dressed as a Plains Indian came out to perform what Pawnee Bill dubbed a "ceremonial buffalo dance" of dubious cultural origin. A rider atop a galloping horse shot a single-action .45-caliber Colt revolver, and a woman used a mirror to fire over her shoulder, shooting stationary balloons out from between a man's legs.

The show ran twice that day before the rodeo began. Rodeo is big in the Stockyards, with a fairly large competition running in the Cowtown Coliseum every Friday and Saturday night. Twice a night on Fridays and Saturdays, a block

Country music star Neil McCoy performs at Billy Bob's Texas — the world's largest honky-tonk. But Billy Bob's isn't exactly a local haunt. "You're more likely to find someone from Australia than Texas here," a bartender told us. *(right)*

away, another rodeo is held at Billy Bob's, the world's "largest honky-tonk."

"The Stockyards are very historic; it was the last place that people could come and sell their cows before going into Indian Territory," explained Autumn, a bartender at one of Billy Bob's 27 bars. "So we've kind of basically built off of that and kind of stuck with the heritage."

The violence of that heritage rarely appears in such elevator pitches, nor do any of its current iterations. In November, on the Friday night that *High Country News* was reporting there, country music singer Neal McCoy performed. McCoy, the son of a Filipina mother and Irish father, had a merch table that pushed shirts with the title of his newest single, "Take a Knee ... My Ass!" — a political anthem aimed at athletes like Colin Kaepernick and Megan Rapinoe, who have knelt during the national anthem at sporting events to protest police brutality and racism.

"A lot of people don't like this song, and I understand," he says before launching into it. "But you're a dumbass if you don't like it."

Only a month earlier and less than 10 miles away, a black woman named Atatiana Jefferson was shot and killed in her home by a white Fort Worth police officer named Aaron Dean while she played video games with her nephew. Nevertheless, a few people stood and took off their hats. Then a few more. By the end of the song, almost everyone was standing, swaying.

"I'll honor the ones who gave it all, so we're all free to go play ball," sang McCoy. "If only for their sake, I won't take a knee. O, say can you see? If only for their sake, I won't take a knee."

In McCoy's performance, violence was removed, as it generally is, in the Stockyards, replaced by a more favorable, friendly view of the West.

Just 48 hours later, a new set of actors got ready to shoot it out, just a few blocks from Billy Bob's. The Brodies had escaped again, and the dopey deputy was still unsure of just what constituted the Code of the West.

"The Code of the West means standing up for what's right," the marshal intoned in his best John Wayne drawl. "Doing what a man has to do. You know, like Hopalong Cassidy. Like the Cisco Kid. Like the Lone Ranger. Like Leonard Slye."

"Leonard who?" the entire cast said in unison.

"Anybody know who Leonard Slye is?" asked the deputy.

Nobody in the audience answered. A few minutes later, the Brody Gang lay dead in the street as tourists took pictures.

A group of young women at Billy Bob's admire their portrait, which was taken on the back of a stuffed bull — one of many attractions the bar offers to patrons. *(above)*

For visitors with slightly deeper pockets, Leddy's offers high-end Western wear and handmade boots and saddles in almost every style and variety of leather imaginable. *(left)*

A call on the Clark Fork

As subdivisions spread, it's becoming harder to manage Montana's water.

BY HELEN SANTORO

O'BRIEN CREEK IS SITUATED ABOUT four miles west of Missoula, Montana. Flowing alongside country roads, it meanders past neighborhoods on its journey to the Bitterroot River, a tributary of the Clark Fork. But years of drought, decreased snowpack and water siphoned off for crops, livestock and lawns have led to dangerously low flows by late summer. To protect the stream and its native westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout, the Clark Fork Coalition, a watershed-wide nonprofit, bought the majority of the creek's senior water rights in 2014. This permits the organization to stop upstream homeowners from using too much water.

But that might be easier said than done. A few summers ago, Jed Whiteley, the organization's project manager and monitoring coordinator, contacted every homeowner on the formerly agricultural land and told them they had to stop using large amounts of water by mid-July. The homeowners were shocked. "Nobody had made a call on the senior water right in a while," said Whiteley. "They got used to not getting called on, and all of a sudden, we're shutting them down."

And such calls may soon become more common. Montana's population has risen by 7.4% since 2010, and ranch lands across the state are being subdivided. But when land is divided, so are the water rights, creating an increasingly fractured landscape. For senior water-right holders like the Clark Fork Coalition, this makes protecting a valuable resource even more challenging.

The Clark Fork River's 14 million-acre watershed stretches from the city of Butte in southwestern Montana all the way to Lake Pend Oreille in North Idaho. Once it was dotted with farms and ranches, but in recent decades, tens of thousands of new houses have been built in the region. From 1990 to 2016, over 1.3 million acres of undeveloped land in Montana was converted into housing, according to a 2018 report by Headwaters Economics. The demographic landscape is changing as well: Several western Montana counties are attracting younger people and new residents from across the country.

"It's making an already complicated system more complicated."

All this population growth is making water management more complicated. Montana practices the "first in time, first in right" rule common among Western states, meaning that the first person to use a water source has senior rights over newer users. Senior water-right holders are responsible for enforcing their own water rights; when less water is available, they have to call upstream junior users and ask them to turn off their water. But where there used to be one rancher to call, there may now be an entire subdivision with 20 homeowners in it. A senior user now must speak to multiple property owners, many of whom may not understand the limits of their water rights. "It's making an already complicated system more complicated," said Andrew Gorder, the legal director at the Clark Fork Coalition.

Furthermore, many homes in subdivisions depend on "permit-exempt wells" for domestic use. Because these "exempt" wells are largely immune from regulatory oversight, it's not necessarily clear whether they're taking the amount of water they're permitted to, said Michelle Bryan, a professor at the University of Montana, Missoula's law school. That makes it harder for senior users to prove they aren't getting the water they deserve. "It puts the burden of proof on the injured water-rights holder," Bryan said.

To make this task easier at O'Brien Creek, the Clark Fork Coalition installed a satellite telemetry station with sensors that can provide water-level data to people at a distance. "Using the telemetry station has helped keep everybody in compliance," Whiteley said. "It's raising awareness of people who live on the creek." And it's working: Since the coalition bought its water rights, the tributary no longer goes completely dry during the hot summer months.

However, this awareness may be limited. In 2011, Barbara Chenoweth moved from Missoula to O'Brien Creek Meadows, a quiet subdivision of around 30 houses downstream from the neighborhood Whiteley had to call. "We absolutely love it," said Chenoweth. "It's private and out of town." Still, when it comes to water, she notes that her neighbors don't seem overly concerned. "It never feels like we're losing a bunch of water," she said, "but the river flows are obviously affected."

This worries Whiteley. "Many people don't understand the intensity of what's going on," he said. "Especially in more urban areas, most people don't know that things are going dry." For Whiteley, it's a familiar problem: His hometown of Sonoma, California, has grown drastically since he was a kid. Now, he's seeing some of the same changes hitting Montana. "We're right on the tip of the iceberg," he said. "I don't think anyone can really see what is going to happen to Montana in the next 20 years."

FACTS & FIGURES

Waste not, want not

Nuclear power is emissions-free, but at what cost?

BY JONATHAN THOMPSON

NUCLEAR POWER GENERATES electricity without emitting greenhouse gases or other air pollutants. Yet it hasn't been extensively deployed to fight climate change because of safety fears, the high cost of construction and, perhaps most significantly, the hazardous waste, or spent fuel, reactors produce. Now, as the climate crisis worsens, pro-nuclear groups are speaking out.

One such group, Generation Atomic, argues that nuclear power doesn't really have a waste problem. All 88,000 tons or so of waste produced by reactors in the U.S. could fit onto a single football field, stacked just 24 feet high, it says, with the waste produced by an individual's lifetime energy consumption fitting in one soda can. Compare that to the 100 million

NUCLEAR WASTE

Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station generates about 31,000 gigawatt-hours of power each year. That requires about 86 tons of uranium oxide, enriched to 3-to-5% uranium-235. In order to produce that, you need to:

MINE: 323,624 tons of ore. This produces **1.62 million tons** of lightly radioactive waste rock. Currently, only about 5% of the uranium used in U.S. reactors is mined domestically; most comes from Canada, Russia, Australia and Kazakhstan.

CONVENTIONAL URANIUM MINING can be done either underground or open pit, with ore dug out of the earth and sent to the mill. Uranium miners are exposed to radium, radon, and other toxic dusts and historically have experienced high rates of lung cancer and other illnesses.

WITH IN SITU EXTRACTION, substances are pumped into the ground to dissolve the uranium into a sludge that is pumped back to the surface. The practice is safer for workers and causes less surface damage, but it's not hazard-free; Wyoming's Lost Creek in situ facility has had at least 40 spills, violations or "events" since 2013, including a **711 cubic meter** spill of uranium-tainted injection fluid in 2017. The Trump administration's Bureau of Land Management approved an expansion at Lost Creek in March 2019.

CONVERSION: The uranium must then be converted via chemical reaction with fluorine to **912.1 tons** of UF_6 or uranium hexafluoride, producing **431.6 tons** of solid waste and **4,008 cubic meters** of liquid waste.

The ore must be **MILLED**, or pulverized and processed with sulfuric acid and other chemicals to extract the uranium, producing: **731 tons** of U_3O_8, triuranium octoxide, or yellowcake, along with **322,893 tons** of radioactive tailings. Uranium extracted in situ is processed, but not milled, and produces waste slurry and water rather than tailings. **TAILINGS** contain uranium's radioactive "daughters" — radium, radon and thorium — as well as significant amounts of other hazardous material, such as lead, copper, arsenic and vanadium. Millions of tons of tailings were piled up or dumped in waterways next to mills across the West during the Cold War, leaving behind a deadly legacy. Some mills, including the Atlas Mill in Moab, Utah, are still being cleaned up today.

... AND THEN THERE'S COAL

In order for a coal-burning power plant to produce 31,000 gigawatt-hours per year, or the same amount of electricity generated by Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station, you would need to:

MINE: 15.24 million tons of coal. Coal mining produces its own form of waste rock, known as spoil, overburden or gob. Coal mines also release methane — a greenhouse gas with 86 times the short-term warming potential of carbon dioxide. A surface mine would emit as much as **207,000 tons** of methane per year.

tons of solid waste — about a 5-mile-high pile on a football field — that U.S. coal-fired power plants kick out each year.

These figures are accurate, but incomplete: They leave out several steps that precede the power generation phase, each of which produces sizable quantities of hazardous and radioactive waste. By omitting these, we risk ignoring the bulk of the nuclear industry's human and environmental toll.

The following diagram quantifies the waste that is produced, from mining to power generation, from a year of power production — enough for about 2.44 million households — at a plant the size of Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station in Arizona. It would take about 1.7 billion soda cans, or a football field stacked 580 feet high, to contain just one year's waste.

Diameter of circle =

100,000 tons of waste product from coal power generation

100,000 tons of waste product from nuclear power generation

1 billion gallons of water use

INFOGRAPHIC BY LUNA ANNA ARCHEY

SOURCES: Waste and Environment Safety Section of the International Atomic Energy Agency; U.S. Energy Information Administration; Generation Atomic; Nuclear Energy Institute; World Nuclear Association; Arizona Public Service; WISE Uranium Project.

ENRICHMENT: The uranium left at this point consists mostly of the 238 isotope, but reactors (and bombs) need the more reactive 235 isotope. So the UF_6 must be enriched to increase the concentration of the fissionable uranium-235. Enrichment yields **113.03 tons** of enriched UF_6, containing 3 to 5% percent U-235 (high enough to run a reactor, but not to build an atomic bomb) with the remainder made up of U-238 + **798.7 tons** of depleted UF_6 (waste).

WATER: Nuclear power generation requires water for steam production and for cooling. Palo Verde uses up to **24 billion gallons (90.9 million cubic meters)** per year, but since it's in a desert, 97% of the water is recycled sewage from nearby communities. The wastewater is recycled or evaporated, not discharged into the environment.

FUEL FABRICATION: Finally, the enriched UF_6 is converted into **86.05 tons** of uranium oxide, which is then subjected to high heat to create ceramic pellets that are packed into fuel rods, producing **37.89 cubic meters** of solid waste, plus **682.85 cubic meters** of liquid waste.

POWER GENERATION: The fuel rods, containing **86.05 tons** of uranium oxide, are inserted into the reactors — Palo Verde has three — where a uranium-235 atom is bombarded with a neutron, causing it to fission, or split, and release high amounts of energy (heat) along with other neutrons, which then split other atoms, creating a chain reaction. During the reaction, the uranium-238 can absorb neutrons, turning it into plutonium-239. The heat generates steam, which turns a turbine, generating an electric current. After one to three years, the fuel rod is traded out for a new one, resulting in a total of **86.05 tons** of spent fuel, or high-level radioactive waste, per year. This spent fuel consists of approximately **80.8 tons** of U-238, **.86 tons** of U-235, **.34 tons** U-236, **2.93 tons** fission products and **.86 tons** plutonium.

When **BURNED** to produce steam to turn a turbine to generate electricity, that amount of coal will emit about **44.8 million tons** of carbon dioxide per year (which, at the scale shown in other circles on this page, would result in a circle over 8 ½ feet tall), along with **11,138 tons** of sulfur dioxide, **47,609 tons** of nitrous oxides and **600 pounds** of mercury per year. Burning this amount of coal would produce at least **2.5 million tons** of coal ash, tainted by mercury, arsenic, selenium, lead and even radioactive materials, each year.

WATER: Like nuclear power, coal power uses large quantities of water. The Navajo Generating Station, for example, which was just shut down, consumed about **9 billion gallons** per year.

Ash Ponders for High Country News / Jose Montelongo and his sister, Marisela, sit in the living room of her Flagstaff, Arizona, home where Jose has recently moved to save money for a lawyer.

REPORTAGE

‘Why are you doing this?’

One family’s ordeal under Trump’s zero-tolerance immigration tactics.

BY SARAH TORY

**Note: Some names have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals*

ONE AFTERNOON LAST APRIL, a group of agents with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) drove the four hours from the ICE field office in Phoenix, Arizona, north to Flagstaff, a city nestled beneath the 12,000-foot San Francisco Peaks. They were looking for 28-year-old Jose Montelongo, an undocumented immigrant who grew up in Flagstaff and is the father of three young children, all U.S. citizens. Over the next two days, the agents would arrest and threaten multiple members of Montelongo’s family in Flagstaff and in Sedona in their attempt to find him.

For many people who witnessed the arrests or heard about them, the aggressive tactics and collateral arrests that took place last April raised questions about the power extended to ICE under the Trump administration. For the local immigrant and Latino communities in particular, the arrests felt like a confirmation of their worst fears: that even a minor encounter with the criminal justice system can mean deportation, by any means necessary. A few months earlier, Montelongo had been pulled over for driving 2 miles over the speed limit. Police officers discovered that there was a warrant for his arrest over an unpaid fine related to a 2016 DUI charge. They brought Montelongo to the Coconino County Jail, where, under a special agreement with ICE, the sheriff’s office honored a “detainer” — a request by ICE to hold someone for an additional 48 hours after his or her release date, in order to allow agents to take them into immigration custody. Detainers raise serious constitutional issues because they often hold people even when there are no charges pending or a probable cause of any violation.

While he was still in jail last January, Montelongo and his lawyer filed a lawsuit against Coconino County Sheriff Jim Driscoll and Matthew Figueroa, the jail commander, arguing that detainer requests don’t give Arizona sheriffs the authority to

prolong detention for civil immigration violations. In response, the sheriff's office offered Montelongo a deal: If he dropped the lawsuit, ICE would drop the detainer. ICE lifted his detainer, and he was released from jail on Feb. 14.

But it wasn't over yet; Montelongo had no idea just how far ICE was willing to go to get him. ICE refused to answer my questions on its investigative techniques, but in interviews, Montelongo's family recounted similar stories of how the agency secretly monitored them as part of its efforts to find Montelongo. One teenaged niece described how she received Facebook friend requests from strange men who turned out to be ICE agents. Then came the arrests.

Under President Donald Trump, aggressive tactics have become more common as ICE looks to fulfill the goal of "zero tolerance." One of Trump's first acts as president was to undo his predecessor's priorities: Now, every undocumented immigrant is a possible target. As a result, the number of ICE arrests has soared: Between September 2016 and December 2018, the number of people in ICE custody around the country increased by over 8,600 to nearly 47,500. Meanwhile, the vast majority of people arrested by ICE as of June 2018 — four out of five — had no criminal record or had only committed a minor offense, such as a traffic violation.

Many of ICE's new tactics are unprecedented, César Cuauhtémoc García Hernández, an immigration lawyer and migration scholar, told me. "They're using the existence of children and family members, for example, to capture someone they're interested in detaining," he said. Montelongo's arrest was also part of a new pattern of targeting immigration activists or anyone who has spoken out against the agency. (ICE denies that it has targeted anyone for retaliation.)

In May, I traveled to Flagstaff to interview Montelongo, his family and others connected to the April 18-19 arrests. I wanted to understand the power and reach of modern-day immigration enforcement in America and how it affects the lives of those involved. Every year, thousands of individuals are arrested by ICE and taken to remote detention centers, with life-altering consequences for their families and often their entire communities. I turned to oral history in an effort to capture the emotional reality of those arrests. What follows is a first-person record of those two days.

Jose Montelongo, 28: *I got my first DUI in 2013 and went to Eloy (an immigrant detention center in southern Arizona). At the time, I qualified for a cancellation of removal because of my kids. I got a work permit, and things got a little better.*

In 2016, I got another DUI. I got sent to Eloy again. Arizona is really strict about DUIs, so my lawyer recommended I take the voluntary departure option (commonly known as "self-deportation").

I went to Zacatecas, but I missed my kids. I would talk to them and they'd ask me where I was, but I couldn't really tell them because they didn't know what's going on, so I'd just have to be like, "Oh, I'm working, but I'll be home soon."

There's a lot of cartels there (in Zacatecas). One time some guys came up to me and told me to get in the truck. They showed me their guns, and that's when I decided to come back.

I went to (Ciudad) Juárez and basically just crossed illegally. It is really scary because there are cartels on the border that try to control territory, but I was more scared to get picked up by immigration and go through that process again.

That's when I started driving a little more, because I'd get jobs and, well, I needed to work.

I got back to Flagstaff in 2017. That's when I started driving a little more, because I'd get jobs and, well, I needed to work.

The day I got pulled over, I had gone to pick up my youngest daughter. She's 4 years old. I took her out for breakfast and as soon as we got back home, they (the police) pulled up right behind me. He told me I was going 32 (miles per hour) in a 30 mph zone. I gave him my registration and insurance and he ran my ID. There was a warrant on me for the 2016 DUI. I was making payments towards the fine, but when I went back to Mexico, I couldn't pay anymore, so they put out a warrant for my arrest.

I tried to ask the police officer to arrest me behind the truck so my daughter wouldn't see. He said, "No, put your hands behind your back."

She was in there looking at me, and I kept telling her that everything will be OK.

AFTER THE POLICE TOOK Montelongo to the Coconino County Jail, Sheriff Jim Driscoll notified ICE about his arrest, which put a detainer on him. On Jan. 9, 2019, Montelongo and his attorneys filed a lawsuit against Driscoll and Matthew Figueroa, his jail commander, challenging the constitutionality of the detainer policy.

Similar lawsuits have been filed in courts across the country over concerns that they lack the legal authority to do so. In Arizona, many sheriffs continue to honor detainers under SB 1070, the state's draconian "show me your papers law." Even though it was mostly struck down in 2016, a number of the law's provisions remain in place, including one that gives sheriffs the option of upholding detainers.

Jim Driscoll, 67, Coconino County sheriff: *The state of Arizona has a specific law; it says no official or agency of this state may limit or restrict the enforcement of federal immigration laws to less than the fullest extent permitted by law. If they change the law, I'll gladly comply. I don't have a personal interest in this.*

When a person is brought in, they've been arrested on local charges — what we call "state of Arizona charges." They're brought in, and at that point if there are suspicions that they could be in the country illegally, we contact ICE.

If they're not involved in major issues, ICE generally doesn't want them. If they had a minor warrant for a traffic violation, ICE probably doesn't want to pick them up, but if they've been deported four times or 12 times, ICE wants 'em, or if they've been involved in other criminal activities, ICE will just about always put a detainer on them.

There are some groups out there that I think create the fear in the community. As we tell people: If you haven't done anything wrong, you don't have to worry. If you are undocumented, don't engage in criminal activity and you don't have to worry about anything. Don't get drunk and drive. Don't get arrested.

MONTELONGO HAD BEEN IN JAIL for more than a month when the sheriff's office made a deal with ICE to get Montelongo's lawsuit dismissed: ICE lifted its detainer, and on Feb. 14, his family paid his bond and he was released. Two months later, they came back for him.

Alejandra Becerra, 26, Flagstaff immigrant rights organizer: *It was a Thursday — April 18 — when I got a call from Marisela (Montelongo's sister). She was crying and saying that ICE was at her house and to please come. I drove there quickly, using a back way because ICE had blocked off the majority of their street. I got out of my car and saw eight to 10 officers standing outside the house. They were talking to another one of Jose's sisters, and then I saw her being put in handcuffs. I saw her kids crying. Jose's two older nieces were asking the officers, "Why are you doing this?"*

I remember coming inside, and Jose's niece was asking me, "They took my mom? Did they take my mom?" They didn't know what to do or what was going to happen to them.

Marisela, 35, Montelongo's sister: *About two hours after they took my sister and her husband, they (ICE) told me over the phone that they were bringing them home.*

My sister told me that they (the ICE agents) had told her that if she revealed where Jose was, nothing

bad would happen, but if she did not tell them, they would arrest us all and give the children to the government.

Then my sister started telling me that they have information on all of us — on all of Jose's siblings and on my dad and my mom. She said they have a folder for each of us, with pictures. The know everything. They told my sister that, two Sundays ago, the family had gone to eat at Taco Bell. They knew what time my mother dropped off my nephew at school, what time she got on the bus and when she went to work.

We started thinking about how … how they might have followed us. We don't know how they have so much information.

Rosa, 15, Montelongo's niece: *When all the trucks started to come around us, that's when I got scared. They told my auntie, "You're arrested." They didn't tell her for what or anything. She was carrying her little baby, so she gave me her son, and my sister was holding her baby, but she couldn't breathe and that's why I took the baby from her because I thought she was going to faint.*

What's been affecting me the most is that I've just been afraid. Like one day, if I go home, and my mom's not there, what would I do?

THE DAY AFTER THE ARRESTS, on April 19, ICE agents arrived in Sedona, 30 miles south of Flagstaff, to continue their hunt for Montelongo, who had been living there with his sister, Karen. They arrested Karen at a gas station on her way to work. After putting her into their truck, agents asked her about her brother's whereabouts, threatening to take her children away if she did not tell them. After she told them, they drove to her home to find Montelongo.

Mik Jordahl, 61, lawyer, witness to the Sedona arrests: *I was given a street address, and I went by. It was 10 a.m. I saw nothing. It looked like the home was completely vacant. It was a double-wide mobile home in a nice area with trees lining the street. I went around the block and did another circle, and all of a sudden I saw several SUVs showing up and there was a bunch of men getting out — some with bulletproof vests on and some carrying rifles.*

There were probably 11 of them (ICE agents) that I counted, in four to five different vehicles. It looked like a SWAT team. They surrounded the house, and I asked if they had a warrant, and they said no. They didn't tell me who they were looking for or what was going on at all, so I just stayed there.

They spoke to the owner of the home to see if he would give consent for them to enter. They said they'd break in if they had to wait for a warrant.

While they were negotiating with the homeowner (Montelongo's brother-in-law), they said that they had arrested his wife (Jose's sister, Karen). She was in one of the vehicles with tinted windows so you couldn't see in. They said that if he consented to a search, they would release her that day with just a date for an immigration court hearing, but if he did not consent, they would bring her to jail. So that was a lot of pressure against the homeowner.

Right at that moment, Jose walked out the door, and they detained him immediately I turned around, and I didn't see them release the homeowner's wife, but I saw her lying on the pavement just sobbing, face down. She was sobbing as hard as I've seen anyone sob.

ICE DECLINED MY REQUEST for an interview to discuss the tactics used to arrest Montelongo, including the threats made to his family members, but did issue the following statement.

Yasmeen Pitts O'Keefe, ICE Public Affairs Officer: *On April 19, 2019, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrested Jose Guadalupe Montelongo-Morales and placed him into removal proceedings. An immigration judge with the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) granted him bond, and ICE released him after he posted bond.*

Previously, in November 2016, an immigration judge with EOIR granted Montelongo-Morales a voluntary departure and ICE repatriated him to Mexico at that time.

Further, relevant databases indicate Montelongo-Morales has two misdemeanor convictions (5/2013 and 3/2016) for driving under the influence of alcohol.

An immigration judge with EOIR will determine if Montelongo-Morales has a legal basis to remain in the United States.

> *"They were like, 'You shouldn't have done that. You just made it worse it for everybody.' But it's not like that, because ICE is gonna come no matter what."*

THIS PAST JUNE, A JUDGE dismissed Montelongo's lawsuit against the Coconino County Sheriff's Office, ruling that because ICE lifted the detainer, he no longer had legal standing to sue. Montelongo and his lawyer are appealing the ruling. And this coming January, Judge Linda Spencer-Walters will rule on Montelongo's case in immigration court in Phoenix.

Jose Montelongo: *Some people in my community don't agree with me for speaking out because they're afraid. They were like, "You shouldn't have done that. You just made it worse it for everybody." But it's not like that, because ICE is gonna come no matter what. If they're looking for someone or they're gonna do raids, no one can stop them. That's ICE.*

They came for me, and they were gonna get me no matter what.

There are still days when I'm just tired of this. I can't work, I can't drive. And … like, what am I doing? Sometimes I want to give up. I just want to say, "I'm done, I'll go back (to Mexico), or go to another country." But it's kind of hard to because my whole family is here. My kids motivate me a lot. I need to fight — then at least I can tell them I tried.

How would you feel if you were in my situation?

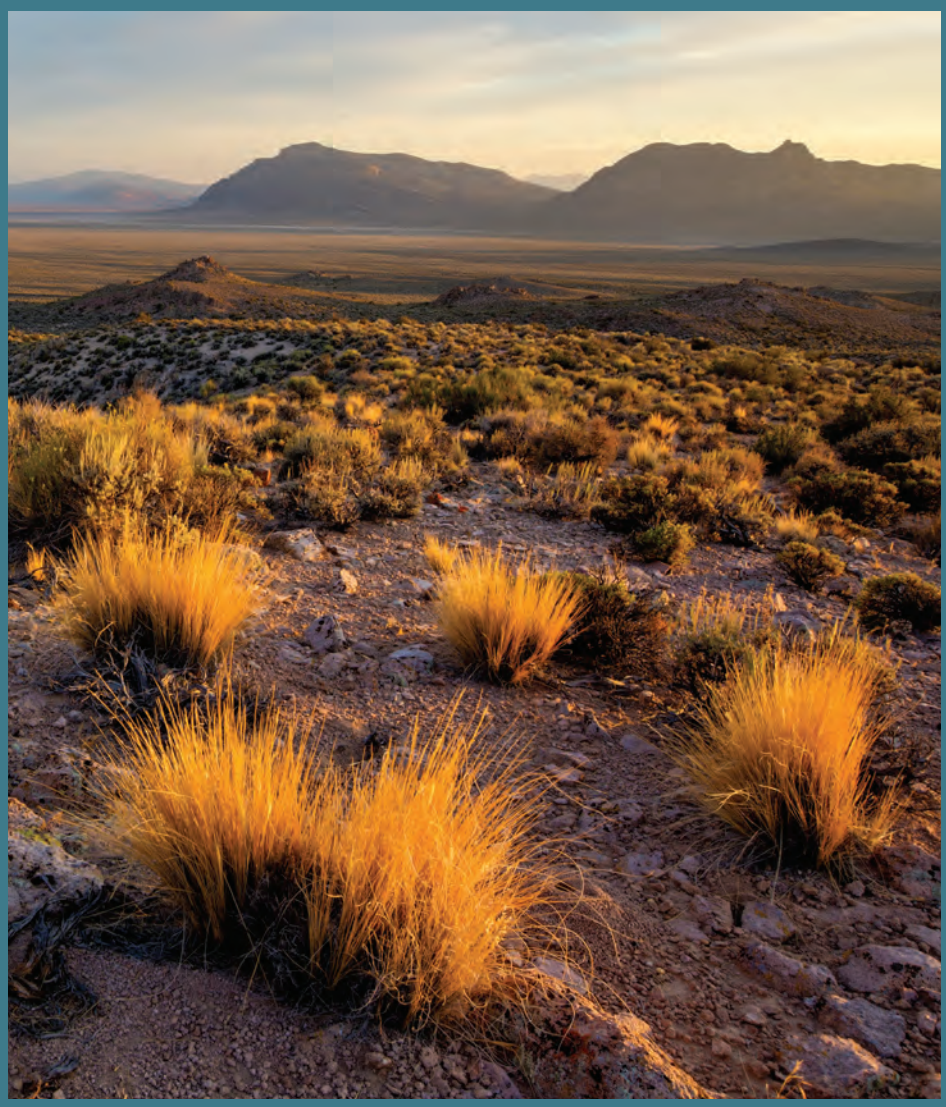
What do you think is fair?

What would you have done?

ON THE ROAD TO 50

A quick guide to your redesigned magazine

BY BRIAN CALVERT



Bob Wick / BLM / A vista in Basin and Range National Monument, Nevada.

We want to inform, inspire and challenge readers to make the West a better place for its people, its wildlife and its landscapes.

High Country News has turned 50. To celebrate, we're bringing you a new magazine with a new schedule and a new look. Watch this space for more notes from the magazine staff on celebrations and observations throughout the year.

The January issue you hold in your hands is the product of two years of experimentation and hard work. In many ways, it's also the product of 50 years of success. It marks a significant evolution of the magazine, not just in its look and feel but in its vision and breadth of coverage. It's our 50th anniversary gift to you, our readers.

The West has become an increasingly complex place. With the new magazine, we will continue to cover the high country, even as we journey farther afield, bringing you stories essential to understanding the region as a whole. We want to inform, inspire and challenge readers to make the West a better place for its people, its wildlife and its landscapes. Today, that requires an understanding of the intricate relationships between environmental, ecological, cultural, social and political issues.

We are up to the challenge. Our aim with the new design and 16-issue schedule is to bring our in-depth journalism to a wider range of subjects and deliver it to you in a useful and beautiful magazine. Every month, you'll find thorough coverage of the region, including Alaska, the Pacific Coast, tribal nations and the Interior West. You'll see photographic stories that bring the Western U.S. to life and read features that emphasize storytelling to help explain what's happening here. And you'll read essays, criticism, perspectives and reviews exploring the ideas that spring from the West. Meanwhile, we've kept your (and our) favorite parts: "Heard Around the West" endures, but we've snugged it just inside the magazine, where you can still read it first thing or save it for dessert.

We've also added several departments. In "What Works," we'll highlight solutions to the region's most vexing challenges. In "Facts and Figures," we'll analyze new and interesting data and other information troves to create a fuller picture of the region. "West Obsessed" will consider how the region impacts broader national trends. And on the back page, in "#iamthewest, we will honor, in their own words, people who are making a positive contribution to the West.

We hope this new approach will deliver all that you've come to expect from *High Country News* and more. We could not have done it without you, and we are committed to constant improvement in the years to come. Your suggestions are welcome; please email me at editor@hcn.org.

Thank you, and enjoy your new magazine!

“As local newspapers slowly move toward extinction, HCN is more vital than ever for people who care about the West.”

—John Rosenberg, Tumwater, WA

Thank you for supporting our hard-working journalists. Since 1971, reader contributions have made it possible for HCN to report on the American West. Your donation directly funds nonprofit, independent journalism. Visit hcn.org/support to give.

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Dear Friends

High Country News has a fresh look and a new schedule, but fear not: We'll keep you up to date on all our doings right here at "Dear Friends."

It's the time of year for blizzards and road closures in the high country. But though some of us have been hunkered down indoors, getting the new magazine out to you, others have ventured out on the road, making face-to-face appearances.

In December, Associate Editor Tristan Ahtone journeyed to Durango, Colorado, to teach a feature-writing workshop to journalism students at Fort Lewis College. That night, Tristan and Associate Editor Paige Blankenbuehler, who is based in Durango, spoke on a panel about investigative journalism.

It's also the time of year where we welcome a new cohort of interns and fellows. This round, we've invited former intern Helen Santoro to become an editorial fellow for the West-North Desk. Kalen Goodluck and Nick Bowlin, our current editorial fellows, will stay on at the Indigenous Affairs Desk and the West-South Desk, respectively. Meanwhile, we're excited to announce two new additions to the magazine. Leah Sottile, the brilliant reporter behind the podcast *Bundyville*, has joined the West-North Desk as a correspondent, and we're bringing on a contributing editor for features, McKenna Stayner, who has returned to the West after five years as an editor at *The New Yorker*.

We have bid adieu to Chris King, our digital marketer, but are glad to say he's still in the neighborhood; He's working at Solar Energy International just down the street from *HCN*'s Paonia, Colorado, headquarters. Good luck, Chris!

One correction: In a recent perspective, we mistakenly referred to Henry George's famous book on railroads ("Gilded Age problems – and remedies – echo in today's economy," 12/9/19); its title is *Progress and Poverty*. We regret the error.

—Helen Santoro, for the staff

By Ben Goldfarb

CROSSING TO SAFETY

HOW A FIGHT OVER ROADKILL TURNED INTO A REFERENDUM ON GOVERNMENT CONTROL

Bradly J. Boner for High Country News / Jean Bjerke on U.S. 20 near the summit of Targhee Pass on the Idaho/Montana border. Bjerke has been a vocal proponent of wildlife passage structures for the area, where numerous wildlife-vehicle collisions have occurred.

Chris Rodocker / DroneWolf Media for High Country News / U.S. 20 climbs Targhee Pass near Island Park, Idaho. Collisions with wildlife caused at least 94 vehicle crashes along a 56-mile section of the highway in the early 2010s.

THE LONGEST MAIN STREET IN AMERICA begins at the southern limits of Island Park, Idaho, and ends an eyelash west of the Montana border. On a map of Fremont County, Island Park has the profile of an immense shoelace — 36.8 miles long and, in many places, just 500 feet wide. The town's main street is its spine, the thoroughfare that connects everything with everything else: It's how Island Park's 270 year-round residents, along with its thousands of seasonals, get to Harriman State Park and the TroutHunter fly shop and 500 miles of snowmobile trails. It's also a segment of America's longest road, U.S. 20, a federal highway that meanders from Newport, Oregon, to Boston, Massachusetts. More than a million vehicles speed past Island Park each year, many conveying tourists to Yellowstone, which lies beyond the Continental Divide. Eastbound trucks tote lettuce from California; westbounders slosh with Bakken crude. To Island Park, U.S. 20 is a lifeline. To most of America, it's a conduit.

For Idaho's wildest inhabitants, it can also be a death trap. Elk traverse the highway as they descend from mountain redoubts to winter range on the Snake River Plain, then return on the crest of spring's green wave. Moose cross U.S. 20 on their way to browse near the quartz folds of the St. Anthony Sand Dunes. Mule deer, grizzlies and pronghorn all ford the asphalt river, and some perish in the attempt. Between 2010 and 2014, animals caused 94 vehicle crashes along a 56-mile stretch of U.S. 20. Because most collisions go unreported, the real body count is even higher: According to state surveys, 138 ungulates died on U.S. 20 and a connected 9-mile stretch of State Highway 87 in 2018 alone.

Such car-inflicted carnage is not unique to Idaho. More than a million large animals, and around 200 drivers, die annually from collisions nationwide. Over the last two decades, researchers have converged on a solution palatable to politicians on both sides of the aisle: wildlife crossings, tunnels and bridges that funnel creatures under and over highways. If roads are habitat-sundering gashes, crossings are the stitches that sew up rent landscapes. In the three years after the Wyoming Department of Transportation installed eight crossings near Pinedale in 2012, for instance, some 40,000 mule deer and 19,000 pronghorn safely navigated U.S. 191.

So when the Idaho Transportation Department began contemplating wildlife overpasses along U.S. 20 in 2016, you could forgive local conservationists for expecting the proposal to meet smooth sailing. Instead, the crossings inspired a fierce debate about the future of U.S. 20, an argument that pitted conservation's burgeoning emphasis on large-scale habitat connectivity against the rural

West's long-standing desire to exert local control over land management. The controversy has bewildered more than one observer. "In my world, I look at wildlife crossings as a win-win situation," Patricia Cramer, the transportation ecologist who first recommended the U.S. 20 overpasses, told me. "Never has anybody said, 'Not in my backyard.' Nobody says I don't want a wildlife crossing."

Nobody, that is, until Island Park.

"Never has anybody said, 'Not in my backyard.' Nobody says I don't want a wildlife crossing."

ONE BLUEBIRD MORNING in September, I chugged north on U.S. 20 in a procession of RVs, campervans and Subarus back-loaded with mountain bikes — the West's recreational economy loose on the land. The highway slipped from sagebrush flats to lodgepole forests and back, occasionally do-si-doing with the glittering course of the Henrys Fork River. The speed limit plunged from 65 to 45 mph as the road passed through clusters of gas stations and cabins, though the signs felt more like suggestions — everyone in a hurry to get to a trailhead or a fishing hole, anywhere besides where they already were.

North of town, the road began to climb. The land tightened, crinkling as though squeezed by a giant fist, as the highway wound out of the Island Park caldera — the vast volcanic footprint planted more than a million years earlier by the Yellowstone hotspot — and into the Henrys Lake Mountains. Whippy poles marked snowmobile trails. This tortuous 4-mile stretch was Targhee Pass, and it was the source of the trouble.

Like much of America's aging infrastructure, the roadbed at Targhee Pass is gradually deteriorating, afflicted by icing, frost heaves and poor drainage. In the fall of 2016, under the National Environmental Policy Act, the Idaho Transportation Department and the Federal Highway Administration began studying how best to remedy the section's problems — among them wildlife collisions, which accounted for nearly a quarter of Targhee Pass' crashes (none of them fatal, at least for humans). Swelling tourism would only exacerbate the danger: While just 5,600 vehicles navigated the pass daily in July 2012, the agency forecast summer traffic to reach 9,400 cars a day by 2042.

As traffic intensified, conservationists feared U.S. 20 could eventually truncate wildlife movement. In Idaho and elsewhere, busy highways chronically thwart mule deer and elk migrations — a threat that's more subtle than roadkill, but, in some cases, more ruinous. "Herds can take a couple of hits on the road," Kathy Rinaldi, Idaho conservation coordinator for the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, told me. "But if they can't get to their winter or summer range, that's when they start to die off."

The Idaho Transportation Department had long recognized U.S. 20's wildlife dilemma. In 2009, the agency partnered with the state's Department of Fish and Game and the Wildlife Conservation Society to study animal movements around the highway, affixing satellite collars to 37 elk and 42 moose. Six years later, the department hired Patricia Cramer, who'd consulted on road projects in Utah, Washington, Florida and other states, to convert that research into action. Cramer pored over crash data, conferred with agency staff and environmentalists, and analyzed the movements of the collared critters. In the end, she identified a litany of fixes, including 16 potential crossings scattered along the highway's length. Three wildlife bridges, she suggested, could span Targhee Pass.

In July 2016, the Idaho Transportation Department invited the Henrys Fork Legacy Project, a collection of agency and nonprofit representatives, to review a draft of Cramer's report. The group liked the ecologist's Targhee Pass recommendations, and several of its members, including Rinaldi, penned a letter urging the agency to act on them. "You look around the West, and everybody is going along this path," Rinaldi said.

That trend is driven by financial motives as well as ecological ones. Collisions not only kill valuable game animals, they often result in property damage and even hospital bills. Marcel Huijser, a research ecologist at the Western Transportation Institute, has estimated that each North American deer crash costs society around $6,600, elk $17,500, and moose more than $30,000. Virtually every Western state has jumped on the crossing bandwagon: There's the $5 million Parleys Summit bridge in Utah, the $6.2 million Snoqualmie Pass arch in Washington, and the $87 million overpass that may someday assist cougars over California's U.S. 101. A highway bill introduced in July 2019 by Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., included $250 million for still more passages. As Ed Arnett, chief scientist at the nonprofit Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, put it to me: "How can you say no to saving wildlife, preventing accidents, and reducing insurance costs?"

WHEN, AT 8:30 on a Wednesday morning, I entered the dining room of the Lakeside Lodge, a strenuously rustic resort several miles off U.S. 20, Ken Watts was halfway through his pancakes. Watts — local gadfly, prolific newspaper columnist and *bête noire* of Fremont County's conservationists — had greeted my emailed appeal for an interview with skepticism. The Island Park Preservation Coalition, or IPPC, a group he chairs whose ethos is to "keep Island Park like it is," even held a meeting to debate my request. At last, Watts and several others agreed to speak to me. Given their partially consumed breakfasts, I wondered whether they'd arrived early for a last-minute media strategy session.

Watts, whose knee-length cargo shorts, trim white beard and amiable manner gave him the mien of a retiree on a cruise, proved as voluble in person as he'd been apprehensive over

Bradly J. Boner for High Country News / Traffic on Highway 191 passes through the tunnel of a wildlife overpass near Pinedale, Wyoming. In the three years after the Wyoming Department of Transportation installed this and seven other crossings in the area, tens of thousands of mule deer and pronghorn successfully crossed.

email. An improbable spokesman for a group that denounced federal overreach, Watts had worked for 34 years as an engineer at the Department of Energy's Idaho National Laboratory, where he'd developed tests to assay other nations' chemical weapons. In 2006, he and his wife, Patsy, began building a cabin in Island Park, and moved there full-time in 2010. Before long, he fell into politics and eventually opinion-writing, penning a column called "Ken's Korner" in the *Island Park News*, a weekly paper that bills itself as "CERTIFIED Politically incorrect and 100% American." For a time, the *News*' publisher labeled him its ace reporter, depicting him in a Gay Talese-style fedora. "Every week I ask myself, 'What should the people of Island Park know today?' " Watts told me. "I hope I'm provoking thought."

The roots of Island Park's overpass saga, Watts said, were entangled with a separate, previous drama. In 2013, the *Idaho Statesman* unearthed documents showing that the George W. Bush administration had explored creating a national monument in the area years earlier. Local officials, surmising that Barack Obama's Interior Department could revive the idea, used federal funding to study the impacts of a possible protected area and discussed the matter with conservationists. Although a monument was never imminent, Watts resented what he considered an opaque process, alluding in the *Island Park News* to a "covert plan" to establish one. In 2014, he encouraged Fremont County's commissioners to put the question to an advisory vote, a nonbinding election gauging popular opinion. The monument was summarily crushed.

Galvanized by victory, Watts and others formed the Island Park Preservation Coalition to stave off other unwanted impositions that could, in theory, change the community's character. At first, the group didn't perceive wildlife crossings as such a threat. When Kim Trotter, U.S. program director for a wildlife group called the Yellowstone-to-Yukon Conservation Initiative, touted overpasses at an IPPC meeting in September 2016, she met a cordial reception. The peace, however, would not keep.

There is something at once futuristic and anachronistic about wildlife overpasses, parabolas of green that vault over highways with a Middle Earthish grace. Yet crossings work best in concert with a less elegant technology: roadside fences, which funnel animals away from the highway and toward passages.

String some fencing through the Nevada desert, and no one complains about impaired views. At the base of Targhee Pass, though, squats a subdivision called Big Horn Hills Estates, whose residents weren't keen to see woven-wire barriers running near their dream properties. In one op-ed, homeowners named Ralph and Connie Kincheloe vented that fencing would force them "to live like animals in a virtual prison."

By the time I met the IPPC for breakfast, the group's anti-crossing angst had expanded to fill a

thick file labeled "Grievances/Concerns". Its members were worried about the visual impact: "The view of Island Park from the top of Targhee Pass is spectacular, and to disrupt that aesthetic beauty with overpasses and fences just seems to be counterproductive," said Bob Stantus, a retired U.S. Air Force officer, to nods around the table. They were also concerned about the price tag: To more nods, a lawyer named Steve Emery said that Idaho's dilapidated infrastructure had more pressing needs. (The Idaho Transportation Department estimated that building and maintaining the fences and overpasses would cost nearly $500,000 a year spread over three decades.) And, although the agency had held three public meetings and convened a working group, including Watts, to discuss the project, IPPC members were irate that consultation hadn't begun years earlier, when the state first started studying elk and moose movements. "We felt like we weren't being treated fairly as a community," Watts said, to the most nods of all.

They experienced the fiercest anxiety, though, over public-land access. The transportation agency had insisted that gates in the fencing would permit hunters and snowmobilers to reach trails unimpeded, but Watts didn't buy it. For overpasses to work, he pointed out, animals have to feel safe using them — which suggested to him that human travel would be restricted. Gates, he claimed, "would defeat the whole purpose."

Watts' *Island Park News* column gave him a powerful platform to oppose the overpasses. Beginning in early 2017, he and Leanne Yancey, another outspoken IPPC member, inveighed against the crossings weekly, predicting the structures would "desecrate" Island Park and "destroy the beauty of the natural gap God carved between the rugged mountains." Their missives were countered by the crossings' supporters, who defended the bridges as "the most logical and cost-effective long-range solution."

One right-wing blogger wrote that the wildlife passage structures were insidious tools for the dispossession of private property, the vanguard of a "systematic agenda to alter where and how we live."

The IPPC's most vocal sparring partner was Jean Bjerke, a nature photographer who'd built a home in Island Park with her husband, Randy, in 2000. "I thought, when I retired, I would settle into a quiet life of photography and tend my garden," Bjerke, who'd grown up organizing civil rights protests during the tumultuous 1960s, told me. Instead, Bjerke flung herself into the cause, writing op-eds and conducting social media outreach for a pro-crossing coalition called the Island Park Safe Wildlife Passage Initiative, which eventually evolved into a nonprofit called the Henrys Fork Wildlife Alliance.

Over months, Bjerke watched the invective spread from the *News* to Facebook to the real world. "I became appalled at the polarization of the community," Bjerke said. Meetings turned combative; neighbors stopped speaking; employees who supported crossings were allegedly hushed by bosses. Facts themselves — annual roadkill statistics, for instance — became objects of partisan dispute. "There didn't seem to be any middle ground, and there was a ton of misinformation," Todd Lanning, a burly fishing guide who supported the overpasses, told me.

In "Ken's Korner," Watts toggled between stridency and comity, referring to his "conservation friends" and pushing to reduce the speed limit (a measure the Transportation Department dismissed as incompatible with the road's design speed). But he also railed against the influence of environmental groups. "We cannot let 3 or 4 people from Driggs, Bozeman, Boise, Missoula, etc. determine our future," he wrote. Among other objections, Watts took umbrage at conservationists' input in the 2016 study that recommended the overpasses, as well as at the meetings the state held with the Henrys Fork Legacy Project before commencing public discussion about the Targhee Pass repairs. Playing devil's advocate, I suggested that perhaps there was nothing untoward in a state agency soliciting outside expertise. "My position," Watts rejoined, "is that the state of Idaho should never accept data from an organization that is biased and prejudiced and has an agenda."

OFTEN, UNFOUNDED speculation stoked the argument's flames. Throughout 2017, the *Island Park News* reposted articles by Karen Schumacher, a blogger for right-wing sites like *Redoubt News* and *Gem State Patriot*. Schumacher, who had roots in Island Park, asserted that the overpasses were a red herring: The structures, she wrote, were insidious tools for the dispossession of private property, the vanguard of a "systematic agenda to alter where and how we live."

Like many hyperbolic claims, Schumacher's grew from a germ of misinterpreted truth. Beginning in the 1980s, conservationists have increasingly focused on connecting swaths of land through which animals can freely roam, habitat linkages called wildlife corridors. In 2008, the Path of the Pronghorn, a migration route through Wyoming, became the country's first federally designated corridor, and bills that would establish a national corridor system are currently idling in the U.S. House and Senate. Schumacher perceived sinister intent in this turn toward connectivity: Corridors would "be used to justify placing Island Park into a massive, large scale, conservation area" — a scheme, she wrote in other posts, with United Nations backing. Watts shared her alarm, opining that the corridor bill was "FAR worse" than the Antiquities Act, the law presidents use to designate national monuments.

The angriest diatribes, predictably, were directed at the group promoting the largest corridor: the Yellowstone-to-Yukon Conservation Initiative, or Y2Y, which promotes habitat connectivity between Yellowstone National Park and the Canadian Yukon. In Alberta, Canada, Montana and elsewhere, Y2Y has pur-

sued wildlife crossings without sparking controversy; in Island Park, though, its grand dream became a target. "If overpasses are built … Y2Y will then advocate the corridor is classified as a protected area," Schumacher theorized. "The area surrounding a corridor, or buffer, will also require restricted or banned use."

To Y2Y's Kim Trotter, the attacks felt not only specious, but personal. I met Trotter at an outdoor cafe near her home in Driggs, Idaho — a town that lies not in Fremont County, but in comparatively liberal, Patagonia-swaddled Teton County, whose eponymous mountains loomed knife-sharp in the near distance. Trotter spoke in the deliberate cadence of a public figure who's accustomed to having her every word scrutinized, but she'd also preserved a wry sense of humor: "I wish my kids thought I had as much power as the IPPC does," she said. Although the overpasses' foes tarred her as a carpetbagger, she'd spent years working for local lodges, land trusts and community foundations; her parents, she told me, are "good Fremont County Republicans" who have lived in Island Park for three decades.

The notion that Y2Y hoped to turn eastern Idaho into a protected area, Trotter said, was a fundamental misrepresentation of its mission. Y2Y is less a discrete migration route than a conceptual umbrella under which dozens of partners plan connectivity projects, most of which entail voluntary work with private landowners through initiatives like conservation easements, wildlife-friendly fencing and bear-proof livestock management. "Large landscape connectivity is protecting our way of life in eastern Idaho," Trotter said.

Even so, it's not surprising that the theme of large-scale conservation played poorly in a community already wary of outside influence. In Teton County, where voters recently allotted $10 million for new wildlife crossings, roadkill-concerned residents had launched the initiative. By contrast, Leanne Yancey griped in the *Island Park News*, Island Park's overpasses hadn't "originated from within the community of people who really do live here." While the U.S. 20 crossings had many local supporters as well as detractors — one resident named Bonnie Altshuld told me overpasses were "a no-brainer" — its most prominent nonprofit boosters were headquartered outside Fremont County. As more than one conservationist who'd observed the situation from afar summarized it to me: wrong message, wrong messengers.

Bradly J. Boner for High Country News / A box for the Island Park News, which bills itself as "CERTIFIED Politically incorrect and 100% American." The newspaper publishes Kenneth Watts' column "Ken's Corner," which helped rally opposition to the wildlife passage structures.

ONE AFTERNOON, I visited Fremont County's colossal brick courthouse to speak with Lee Miller, the county commission's chair, a timber industry veteran who, at 73, still takes an elk every autumn. Like Watts, Miller told me the state had "blindsided" Fremont County by pursuing long-term wildlife studies without formally notifying the commission. "We sent out letters, both federal and state, saying we require coordination in this county when an agency is going to do something," he said. "When this thing very first started, we should have been at the table."

The view that agencies are obliged to coordinate with counties is a potent one in the West. The notion stems from a provision in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act directing the Bureau of Land Management to coordinate its planning activities with states, tribes and local governments; other agencies' laws, including the Federal Highway Administration's, contain similar language. What that means depends on whom you ask. Although some legal scholars refute this interpretation, county commissions in Oregon, Nevada, Wyoming and other states have demanded equal footing with federal agencies in decisions ranging from grazing permit allocations to road closures. Coordination, wrote *High Country News* in 2015, is a legalistic approach to timeless anti-federalism, a "Sagebrush Rebellion in bureaucratic clothing."

The West's most dogged advocate for coordination is the American Stewards of Liberty, a Texas-based group helmed by Margaret Byfield — the daughter of Wayne Hage, a Nevada rancher who waged a lifelong battle against federal grazing restrictions. Fremont is among many counties whose representatives have attended the group's workshops. And in early 2018, its commissioners heard a presentation from Fred Kelly Grant, the director of the Americans Coordination Institute, a group whose goal is to "restore local government to its rightful place." Two months after Grant encouraged the county to invoke coordination, the commission demanded that state and federal agencies "pause all actions" on U.S. 20 until they'd properly consulted with the county.

On July 30, 2018, Fremont County's commissioners took local control a step further: They elected to put overpasses to an advisory vote on that fall's ballot, the same strategy that, four years earlier, had torpedoed a national monument. The vote's outcome wouldn't hold legal water, but it would wield powerful influence. In an election earlier that year, voters in North Idaho's Bonner County had rejected a wilderness area in the Scotchman Peaks, the range that towers over Lake Pend Oreille, by a 54-46% margin. To environmentalists' chagrin, Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho, deferred to popular opinion and withdrew his support for the wilderness.

Wildlife passage advocates had good reason to fear a similar outcome in Fremont County. Many of the overpasses' staunchest defenders were registered to vote elsewhere; Jean Bjerke, for example, winters in Cedar City, Utah. Such migrants might contribute substantially to Island Park's tax base and love the town deeply — but, from the ballot's standpoint, they were invisible. Pro-crossing seasonals wrote the *Island Park News* to bemoan their disenfranchise-

ment; in "Ken's Korner," Watts countered that foes of the vote wanted to silence legitimate locals. The IPPC mounted a campaign that impressed even its adversaries, garnering endorsements from every county elected official, the Chamber of Commerce, and the district's representatives in the state House and Senate. Although Bjerke and her allies rallied their own troops, by the time Nov. 6, 2018, arrived, they knew it was over. The results were definitive: 78% of the electorate had rejected overpasses.

THE VOTE MAY HAVE BEEN legally moot, but it proved politically decisive. When, two months later, the Idaho Transportation Department released its environmental assessment for the Targhee Pass repairs, it spurned overpasses in favor of a cheaper solution called an Animal Detection System, or ADS — an array of radar stations that would activate flashing warning signs whenever a creature rambled onto the road. With money tight, the agency reasoned, funding should go first toward road stretches with higher documented collision rates than Targhee Pass. It also observed that the largest wildlife migrations happen during lightly trafficked shoulder seasons, diminishing the need for crossings.

But it acknowledged that politics had played a role, too. "Local elected officials have communicated that they do not support wildlife crossings and fencing," the assessment stated. (Megan Stark, a spokesperson for the Transportation Department, told me in an email that, while the agency had indeed considered input from public officials, the advisory vote "did not have an impact on our decision.")

Lee Miller, the Fremont commission chair, told me the Transportation Department made the "right decision." Scientists are less confident. While crossings and fences reliably cut roadkill by more than 80%, detection systems are a riskier bet. Some certainly succeed: In Switzerland, for instance, an ADS slashed collisions by 82%. In Idaho, though, such systems have fallen victim to their own complexity. In 2013, the state's Transportation Department installed an ADS on U.S. 95 near Bonners Ferry. Although the system proved reliable, Brice Sloan, the contractor who designed it, told me the state didn't seem to have the "interest or ability" to maintain it. Five years later, Sloan bought his creation back. Today, it sits in his Boise office.

Since then, Sloan said, animal detection technology has improved: Machine-learning, for instance, has made software better at distinguishing an elk from an SUV. Stark concurred, telling me that ineffective designs had been "largely abandoned," and that the state planned to install "a state-of-the-art system." Even so,

Bradly J. Boner for High Country News / Kim Trotter, U.S. program director for the Yellowstone-to-Yukon Conservation Initiative, which was working to build wildlife passages on Targhee Pass. Trotter was among those painted as an outsider, despite three decades of family ties to the community.

the Western Transportation Institute's Marcel Huijser told me that detection systems are still considered "experimental," and that they remain plagued with technological, maintenance and management problems. "Almost none are in place for more than a few years," Huijser said. "If the main objective is to solve a practical problem, then an Animal Detection System has a super-high risk of failure."

And while Animal Detection Systems may reduce roadkill, they don't make crossing the highway any more appealing to wildlife. Norris Dodd, a road ecologist who designed an ADS on Arizona's State Route 260, found that, while the warning lights reduced motorist speed as intended, animals often judged the road a barrier anyway. The system "doesn't address connectivity," Dodd told me. "When the traffic is high, the elk just come to the road, turn around and leave." Some try again late at night; others may never reach the habitat they set out for. Wildlife crossings and fencing, by contrast, physically separate animals from the road, permitting them to move without waiting for a traffic break.

The advantages of overpasses would not have surprised the Idaho Transportation Department. In late 2018, the Greater Yellowstone Coalition filed a records request that turned up a draft report authored by Renee Seidler, a transportation specialist at the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. Seidler had calculated that fencing and overpasses at Targhee Pass would prevent enough accidents to effectively pay for themselves in as few as 20 years. (When the final report was published, it didn't contain Seidler's calculations, which, according to Stark, weren't consistent with the Transportation Department's own methods for tabulating costs.) Fish and Game, Seidler concluded, "recommends three wildlife crossing overpasses with wildlife fencing … for the length of the project area."

The report proved yet another Rorschach test. For Watts, Seidler's

background — she'd published studies on the effectiveness of crossing structures while working for the Wildlife Conservation Society — constituted further evidence that environmental interests had infiltrated Idaho's agencies. To the Greater Yellowstone Coalition's Kathy Rinaldi, the report demonstrated that the state had prioritized politics over science.

"I think it was easy for them to be like, wow, this thing just got really controversial and hot," she told me, "and we don't want to deal."

TODAY, AN ANIMAL DETECTION System at Targhee Pass, rather than overpasses, seems a *fait accompli*. Stark told me that the Idaho Transportation Department expects to issue its final decision in spring 2020, but won't break ground on the Targhee Pass repairs, which include widening the road and fixing its drainage, until 2026. Meanwhile, Y2Y and its partners have largely moved on. "Honestly, since the advisory vote, we've said, 'Let's go work in places across the state where there is energy for good conservation work,' " Kim Trotter told me in Driggs. For his part, Lee Miller said the ordeal had strengthened Fremont County's relationship with both the transportation department and federal agencies like the Forest Service. "Because of what happened, we have better coordination with all of them," he said.

Yet the tensions the fight provoked seem destined to linger. Gaining the ability to govern public lands locally is among the rural West's longest-held causes, the impetus for countless scuffles over federal forest plans and monument declarations and grazing restrictions. Reconnecting the Northern Rockies' fragmented habitats, meanwhile, is a vast regional problem that, by definition, requires high-level oversight. Biology dictates that our conservation efforts must broaden, even as our politics become more parochial.

For all that U.S. 20 means to Island Park, though, it's also a federal highway trafficked by more than a million travelers a year and maintained with federal funding. Should a town with fewer than 300 year-round residents, or even a county with 13,000, shape a vital national artery? What *is* U.S. 20, anyway — Island Park's main street, or the country's longest federal highway? Can it be both?

The balance, for now, seems tipped toward main street. In early 2019, the Idaho Republican Party resolved to oppose all overpasses in Fremont County, claiming the structures would restrict public-land access and funnel animals toward "kill zones" for predators (a fear that's belied by studies in Canada's Banff National Park). The state's House of Representatives followed suit, formally urging the U.S. Congress to "ensure that stakeholders are quickly and fully informed whenever wildlife crossing infrastructure is proposed."

And the issue remains radioactive. In June 2019, Ed Schriever, director of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, nixed a wildlife migration lecture series scheduled for Island Park and neighboring towns, according to an email I received through a public records request. "Stand down on additional conversations on wildlife movement, corridors, and safe passage in eastern Idaho, regardless of invite or desire," Schriever directed staff. In an email, Schriever told me he canceled the talks to make sure his agency's outreach was "constructive to the US 20 process" and "recognized the local community's advisory vote."

Mark Gocke / A pickup is loaded onto a tow truck after it collided with a cow elk on Wyoming Highway 89 north of Jackson, Wyoming. Several elk are hit and killed along this stretch of highway each year.

Elsewhere in Idaho, though, crossings have surged forward. In February 2019, the Boise City Council greenlit the state's first overpass, a $3.2 million bridge over Highway 21. On U.S. 30, the state intends to construct a $5.5 million crossing at a chronic mule deer collision site, a project that has the approval of Bear Lake County's commissioners. And Island Park's conservationists haven't given up: In 2018, homeowners in a subdivision called Pinehaven urged the transportation department to consider crossings along other stretches of U.S. 20, including a roadkill hotspot called Ashton Hill, as it continues repairs. Several IPPC members told me they might have supported an underpass there before the fracas began; now, though, Watts said that any crossing proposal could trigger an advisory vote.

For now, roadkill on U.S. 20 continues apace, the inevitable byproduct of our accelerated lifestyles and wildlife's compulsion to roam. On Aug. 24, 2019, a week before my visit, a truck towing a camper met a black bear as the creature darted across the highway at Ashton Hill, clipping the ursid and dragging it for some distance. The collision left fur snagged on the camper's stairs and the bear spread-eagled in the road. "No one in the truck was injured," wrote the *Rexburg Standard-Journal*, "and the family expressed sorrow that the bear had been killed."

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Worse for wear

What the cowboy hat says about 'Americanism.'

BY BRIAN CALVERT

THE CHIEF ARCHITECT OF President Donald Trump's anti-immigration agenda is a 34-year-old man from California named Stephen Miller. The great-grandson of Jewish immigrants, Miller graduated from Santa Monica High School, in Los Angeles County. In his high school yearbook, he poses in a dark cowboy hat and quotes Theodore Roosevelt: "There is room here for only 100 percent Americanism, only for those who are Americans and nothing else."

Miller wasn't the first aspiring politician to use the cowboy hat as a symbol of power and exclusion. In fact, the cowboy hat has become a persistent symbol for these, worn to signify who is a real American — and who isn't.

To be fair, most people wouldn't want to be judged by their yearbook photos. Miller, however, went on to help design Trump's anti-Muslim travel ban and a policy that separated thousands of migrant children from their parents at the U.S-Mexico border. He has earned condemnation from civil rights groups for his intolerance and his support for white nationalism, which emerged as far back as high school, when he railed against classmates who "lacked basic English skills" in the school paper.

Plenty of American politicians have used cowboy hats to signal their preference for a certain fantasy America. It is hard to imagine Teddy Roosevelt, a New Yorker, without his iconic Rough Rider cowboy hat. The 26th president was, among other things, a eugenicist with little regard for non-white peoples. "Nineteenth-century democracy needs no more complete vindication for its existence than the fact that it has kept for the white race the best portions of the new world's surface," he wrote in 1894. Roosevelt and his peers went on to create a "virgin" wilderness by forcibly removing the Bannock, Crow, Shoshone and other Indigenous groups from the land to create Yellowstone National Park, even as the Blackfeet were displaced to create Glacier National Park. Such places, Roosevelt said, allowed for a person (presumably one in the right kind of hat) to discover his "vigorous manliness."

Many conservatives have since sought to promote the cowboy image as truly American: tough, male, white. Perhaps no politician has benefited more from this prop than Ronald Reagan. An actor in Western movies like 1953's *Law and Order*, Reagan leveraged that image of Americanism to win over conservative voters. Reagan even gave a cowboy hat to Mikhail Gorbachev (who wore it backwards) during a 1992 visit to Reagan's ranch outside Santa Barbara, California. Like Roosevelt, Reagan laced his Americanism with an assumption of white supremacy. In October 1971, when he was governor of California, Reagan called former President Richard Nixon to disparage an African delegation to the United Nations as "monkeys ... still uncomfortable wearing shoes."

Like his fellow California conservative, Miller developed his own idea of "Americanism" and he has clearly decided whom it includes. But if white extremism is having a moment, so, too, is a new wave of cowboy campiness, as public figures of all stripes claim their place as Americans. Rapper Lil Nas X dons a cowboy hat and Western wear in the video of "Old Town Road," melding pop and country into a chart-topping hit. The singer Orville Peck wears his hats with seductive fringed veils, as he croons the story of two gay hustlers in the Nevada desert. With rebellious zeal, glamor and zest, these interpretations of an Old West symbol say more about American identity than the likes of Miller ever could.

If white extremism is having a moment, so, too, is a new wave of cowboy campiness.

Ryley Walker / The veiled singer Orville Peck.

Where NEPA fell short

A look back at the ground-breaking legislation on its 50th anniversary.

BY ADAM M. SOWARDS

"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.

IN LATE JANUARY 1969, a blowout on Unocal's Platform A leaked 3 million gallons of crude oil into the Pacific Ocean, just 6 miles from Santa Barbara, California. The spill — at the time, the largest in U.S. history — spread over 800 square miles, coated 8 miles of beaches and killed thousands of animals. Images of the devastation shocked a public increasingly worried about the environment and helped spur Congress to pass a sweeping law aimed at preventing similar disasters in the future — the National Environmental Policy Act.

President Richard Nixon signed NEPA into law on Jan. 1, 1970, from his home office on the Pacific Coast. The signing was a fitting launch for the environmental decade of the 1970s — a time when "America pays its debt to the past by reclaiming the purity of its air, its waters, and our living environment," as Nixon said in his signing statement. "It is literally now or never."

On the law's 50th anniversary, it is worth considering its origins, development and significance — including the ways it has transformed American environmental governance, and how its promise has diminished. Five decades ago, the federal government recognized its responsibility to reduce environmental problems. But while NEPA provided a road map, only some of those routes have been taken.

Congress introduced, amended and passed NEPA quickly, and only 15 legislators voted against it, indicating a widespread consensus on the need for federal environmental regulation. The law is relatively straightforward: Besides creating the Council on Environmental Quality to advise the president and issue guidance and regulations, it provided general principles to direct federal activities and devised a process to implement them.

At the heart of the legislation lay an optimistic belief that economic growth, environmental protection and human welfare might align without sacrifice or rancor. The law highlights the need to "create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony, and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations of Americans." It clearly takes a long-range view, incorporating tomorrow's environmental fate into today's decisions.

These values, though, tend to be forgotten, overshadowed by a procedural hurdle that changed business-as-usual for federal planning and decision-making. Before undertaking "major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment" — offering timber sales on federal land, for example, or building an interstate highway — federal agencies and their partners now had to submit "a detailed statement." That environmental impact statement, or EIS, needed to be interdisciplinary and thorough, detailing any environmental problems likely to result from the proposed project and listing alternatives, including more costly ones. Then the public was invited to comment. The procedure significantly lengthened and complicated federal land-use planning and politicized it like never before.

The new process was transformative. The interdisciplinary requirement meant that engineers had to consult biologists, foresters needed hydrologists and so on, effectively forcing agencies like the Bureau of Land Management to hire a range of specialists and ask different and often harder questions than ever before. By investigating alternatives rather than simply presenting a proposal as a *fait accompli*, greater degrees of choice and openness came to the process, as well as a franker acknowledgement that building dams or offering gas leases cause environmental problems. The addition of a public comment period also made environmental decision-making more democratic. Although the final decision was not open to a popular vote, the EIS process involved the public much more directly than ever before.

But the EIS process with its public input also opened doors to lawsuits, a result as American — and as controversial — as the public lands themselves. Congress had added the EIS procedure to protect the "productive harmony" at the law's core. But the strategy failed. The year after Nixon signed NEPA, the D.C. Circuit Court declared its goals flexible, but not its procedures: Federal agencies could interpret "productive harmony" however they liked, as long as they filed an EIS. In 1989, in what has become a controlling opinion in *Robertson v. Methow Valley Citizens Council*, the U.S. Supreme Court went further, declaring that federal agencies did not even have to preserve "productive harmony." Instead, it found that "NEPA merely prohibits uninformed — rather than unwise — agency action." In other words, the EIS needed to list all the options, but agencies were not required to choose the best one.

In the decades since, NEPA's critics have periodically tried to gut the law further, such as the Trump administration seeking to exempt certain Forest Service projects from its rules. Critics commonly bemoan the lengthy and litigious process that fulfilling NEPA requirements has become, which is easier to track than the law's successes. Adherence is costly in time and personnel, especially for agencies already underfunded, understaffed and facing large backlogs of work. NEPA's procedures can be rigid, and for a culture bent on efficiency, almost nothing seems as bad as that.

Yet returning to an era when government officials made decisions without considering environmental impacts or public input would erode democratic governance. NEPA's opening section ends by recognizing "that each person should enjoy a healthful environment and that each person has a responsibility to contribute to the preservation and enhancement of the environment." That sentiment captures NEPA's essence from its birth to its golden anniversary: Citizens deserve healthy surroundings, and they also bear a responsibility for securing them through the faithful execution of the law.

Jenna Schoenefeld for High Country News / Armando Elenes, secretary treasurer of United Farm Workers, in Bakersfield, California.

Q&A

The strategist

Armando Elenes is quietly organizing a new wave of farmworkers.

BY NICK BOWLIN

It's been more than five decades since farmworkers in Delano, California, walked off the grape fields and began a five-year strike in what is now considered one of the great movements in American labor history. The strike helped launch the mass organizing of the Central Valley's agricultural fieldworkers under the leadership of Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers (UFW). Today, the UFW continues to carry on that mission: to build worker power, fight corporate exploitation and advocate for labor protections and fair wages.

In Chavez's time, the UFW supported immigration restrictions to preserve the wages and jobs of its own members, but these days, protecting undocumented and seasonal workers is a fundamental part of its mission. This requires both organizing in the fields and playing politics in the halls of power. Most recently, it was instrumental in negotiating the Farm Workforce Modernization Act (FWMA), which was passed by the House in December and now moves to the Senate. If the bill becomes law, it would provide a path to citizenship for hundreds of thousands of undocumented farmworkers. The proposed legislation, which was introduced with support from agriculture corporations and two dozen House Republicans, presents one of the best chances for significant citizenship expansion in recent years. The union had to make some strategic compromises to get conservatives and industry on board, however, and UFW Secretary Treasurer Armando Elenes acknowledges that he is not happy with some of the bill's aspects. But the UFW believes in taking a pragmatic approach to coalition building, bringing together members of both political parties along with industry interests. Partial progress is still progress, especially given the Trump White House's sustained attacks on immigration policy.

Elenes' life exemplifies the link between American farm work and immigration. Elenes, the son of a migrant farmworker, and his family immigrated to the U.S. from Sinaloa, Mexico, in 1980. It was not an easy journey; they were appre-

hended by the Border Patrol three times before reaching California, though they eventually qualified for permanent residency there.

As a teenager, Elenes worked in California's fruit fields and dairies. He got his organizing start in these same fields and worked his way up to UFW's leadership team, where he helps direct its key campaigns. He recently spoke with *High Country News* about protecting undocumented workers, organizing strategy and his own story.

California is the core of your organizing power. How do you think strategically about scaling up?

First of all, you have to understand agriculture. The four biggest agriculture labor states in the country are California, Washington, Oregon and Florida. That's why we focus on the West Coast, in California, where the biggest growers are. There, we got heat-protection legislation passed. It includes things like paid breaks, training and shade. So we've taken the California standards and (are trying to expand) so that farmworkers nationwide can have protections from heat. Same thing with overtime: We finally got overtime pay for farmworkers passed in California in 2016. Now it's expanding into New York (and possibly Washington, where a court case could set national precedent).

How much did you have to push the growers to get a deal on the Farm Workforce Modernization Act?

We started negotiating alongside other farmworker groups with the major industry associations, and we came to an agreement with them on how to have a legalization program for farmworkers.

(The growers) want something done, and so do (farmworkers); we just have different interests. And that's fine. They want to secure their labor force. What we want is to protect the labor force that's coming in and to protect the workers who are here.

The first part (of the FWMA) is to legalize a process whereby farmworkers can win their citizenship. They need to show they've been working in agriculture for at least 180 days in the previous two years. Second qualifier: They have no criminal record, no felonies. Third, and this is more of a Republican thing, they have to pay a fine, because they supposedly broke the law. So there's a $1,000 fine.

That's a lot of money.

So, again, we had to compromise. We said farmworkers often don't have that much money, but we had to secure Republican support. Farmworkers would be able to get a visa, a "blue card" that would allow them to work here legally, allow them to go back and forth to their home country.

If they want to get permanent residency, they would have to continue working in agriculture. That's the growers' interest in trying to secure their labor force. They could eventually apply for a green card. If someone doesn't qualify, they would be able to get into the H2A program (for temporary agricultural workers) without having to go back to their home country. We also included protections for guest H2A workers (including rights in federal court, Labor Department protections and wage standards.)

After workers have an opportunity to adjust their status, then the whole agriculture industry would be required to use E-Verify (a system that confirms a person's eligibility to work in the U.S.).

When do you strike, and when do you compromise?

It's a fine dance with the power you have. Is the workforce ready for some sort of major action? And what exactly are we trying to achieve? It's more on a case-by-case basis. There are certain things the workers simply won't accept, and it's about what the workers want, not necessarily what the organizers want.

That's why we compromised on the modernization act. We figured out what's politically feasible. And we get flak on both sides, because people say, "No E-Verify!" And I say, "I don't want it either, but how else are we going to get something done?" When you go into negotiations, you want the Cadillac, but sometimes you got to settle for a Chevy.

"So, again, we had to compromise. We said farmworkers often don't have that much money, but we had to secure Republican support."

What's been the impact of the Trump administration's immigration policies on farmworkers?

It's a huge impact. More than anything it's the fear tactics, the rhetoric that has scared workers. And not just the rhetoric — they're seeing the enforcement. ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) is just doing blanket sweeps. A year ago, in the San Joaquin Valley, we identified 45 farmworkers who had been picked up in one sweep. Five of the 45 had an actual deportation order, but the other 40 just happened to be there. It creates panic. It creates fear. Workers don't want to go to work or even go outside to take their kids to school.

Tell me how you got into UFW organizing.

I graduated from high school and wanted to go to college — didn't have the money to do that. So I enrolled in the Air Force. When I got back to California and started going to junior college, I got involved in the UFW through a student group. Early on, I was able to convince a worker to stand up and start taking action on his own behalf. When I started talking to that worker, he was very afraid of even speaking up. I ended up having to leave the area, but then I came back two months later, and to my shock the worker was in front of a meeting talking to other workers about the importance of speaking up. You could see the total difference in him. That, to me, was the biggest payday: When you see workers who feel they can't say anything, that they don't have a voice, and then they find their voice, man, you can't take that away from them. To me, that's the pay right there.

REVIEW

The fascinating Mitzi Bearclaw

Mohawk director Shelley Niro crafts an entertaining tale about a millennial Indigenous woman returning home.

BY JASON ASENAP

The Incredible 25th Year of Mitzi Bearclaw/Film still

THE INCREDIBLE 25TH YEAR *of Mitzi Bearclaw* just so happens to be one of the stories we're missing in cinema: It's about a young Indigenous woman who, at 25, doesn't always make the right choices. There are plenty of Indigenous stories and films that take on a host of serious subjects — poverty, alcoholism, land and water rights, boarding school trauma. But *Mitzi* is simply a coming-of-age story — and a fun watch.

This is a, dare I say it, contemporary movie, and that's a term I don't like using. Tommy Orange's novel, *There There*, is often called "contemporary," a word that non-Indigenous folks usually take to mean a serious look at Indian people living in the 21st century, sans powwow regalia, maybe living in poverty — contemporary in their terms. But Indians have been contemporary for a long time, and we're not always in such disrepair.

I'd like to redefine "contemporary" on our terms. Contemporary doesn't mean that we still "exist" outside of old, outdated Western notions of Indigenous culture. It means exploring overlooked characters in Indigenous stories. *Mitzi Bearclaw* is contemporary because the lead is a multidimensional young Indigenous woman who isn't going through a horrible traumatic experience. This is not to say Indigenous movies on serious subjects aren't important, of course — but it is nice, once in a while, to see a story that isn't so laden with postcolonial trauma. And there are a multitude of truly contemporary Indigenous stories like this that have yet to be touched upon.

Upon receiving a letter about her ailing mother, Mitzi is called home from her creative life in downtown Toronto, where she designs funky hats and her boyfriend is a photographer. Family obligations throw her back into small-community life on a fictitious coastal reserve in Southwestern Canada. There, she faces old enemies and unresolved relationships, including a mother who was never supportive and an old rivalry with a childhood enemy. Mitzi left all this small-town drama behind when she moved to Toronto, but these are the things she must confront in order to grow as an adult.

The movie gives us a peek at a year in the life, month by month, of a young Indigenous woman trying to figure out her next steps. Near the beginning of the movie, Mitzi laments in a fit of narcissism, "Why does everything happen to me?" Clearly, she will have to figure out that it's not all about her in order for this story to work. The movie is edited to move from one chapter to the next at a steady pace; scenes don't linger or overstay their welcome. There's a nice mixture of different styles of upbeat music in the score. I'll even forgive that quick flourish of flute music.

Mitzi is played by Morningstar Angeline Freeland, who was a lead in *Drunktown's Finest*, a movie by Navajo director Sydney Freeland, her elder sister. Morningstar Freeland is effervescent and charming here. Mitzi is different from many of her past roles: In *Drunktown's Finest*, she played Nizhoni, a girl in search of her birth parents. In Lakota/Navajo filmmaker Razelle Benally's short film *Raven*, she played a young mother mourning her lost child. Her role in Vincent D'Onofrio's *The Kid* is listed as simply "Young Whore." Suffice it to say that Freeland rarely gets to cut loose and play roles like Mitzi. She sets the tone at the beginning: Right before Mitzi and her boyfriend are about to feed a group of hungry people in a park, she chuckles and teases him, "Look at you, all serious." It's refreshing to hear, because we know Mitzi's sass is going to keep us on our toes.

As entertaining as the movie is, there's a lot of sickness in it. Mitzi's diabetic mother hints at her own disease by saying, "Sugar gets everyone." Mitzi's cousin, Charlie B., gets progressively worse from an undisclosed illness throughout the movie. Cayuga actor Gary Farmer shows up, but then we attend his character's funeral later on in the movie. He, too, must have been sick. Director Shelley Niro gets that life is full of such experiences, but stays committed to a comedic tone. She deals with the sad events but keeps the movie moving forward.

While not life-changing, *The Incredible 25th Year of Mitzi Bearclaw* is an enjoyable cinematic experience. There's not a moment that moves too slowly, which is a good sign: It means the film is engaging. In a perfect world, there would be more movies like this, designed for the overlooked demographic of mid-20s Indigenous young creatives. It's a story about growth, feelings and maturation, all the things that young Indigenous people are doing when they aren't protesting or rapping or singing or praying or whatever social media tells you that young Indigenous people do. It's a simple movie about the simple things we all go through, the trials and tribulations of finding love and your place in this world, and that's all right.

REVIEW

West of Al-Maghrib

In Laila Lalami's 'The Other Americans,' a Moroccan-American family seeks a sense of belonging in California.

BY ALEX TRIMBLE YOUNG

IN HER BRILLIANT FOURTH novel *The Other Americans* (Pantheon, 2019), Moroccan-American writer Laila Lalami paints an unsparing portrait of the American West, deliberately rejecting the familiar frontier stories of redemptive violence or restorative wilderness. Instead, Lalami's West is a place where outcasts and immigrants struggle to coexist in a desert that sprawls between a national park and a military base. Simultaneously lyrical and accessible, *The Other Americans* is both an engaging whodunit and a profound meditation on identity and community in the contemporary American West.

The Arabic word for Morocco, "Al-Maghrib," also means "the West." American literary expatriates such as Paul Bowles and William Burroughs, who made Morocco their home during the middle of the 20th century, drew mythological connections between Al-Maghrib and the American West, imagining Morocco as a new frontier on which they were countercultural pioneers. Lalami has long been a trenchant critic of the outsized influence these writers have on the American understanding of Morocco. Lalami's latest novel, a National Book Award finalist, turns the tables on their frontier rhetoric through the story of a Moroccan immigrant family living a few miles down the road from Pioneertown, California, a ramshackle settlement in the Mojave Desert built amid the ruins of a defunct Western film set.

The Other Americans is set into motion when Moroccan immigrant Driss Guerraoui dies in a suspicious hit-and-run accident while crossing the highway outside the diner he owns in the town of Yucca Valley. The novel pieces together Driss' life with interwoven accounts from his family and the diverse cast of desert dwellers drawn into the investigation of his death.

There are elements of Driss' story that resonate with a well-known American narrative: An immigrant flees political oppression and arrives in a Western town where he builds his own business, raises a family, and comes to identify with his new nation and the land itself. *The Other Americans* notes that Driss buys his diner from "a pair of homesteaders" who built it on "land that belonged to Chemehuevi Indians." Otherwise, like so many Westerns, the novel is problematically empty of Indigenous history or characters. Driss' status as an immigrant frontiersman is reinforced by his name, which references Moulay Idriss, the venerated descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, who travelled West from the Arabian Peninsula to found the Kingdom of Morocco. In his later years, Driss buys a cabin amid the Joshua trees, where he enjoys the solitude of the desert like a Maghrebi Edward Abbey — or so it seems.

As the investigation into the accident unfolds, the Guerraoui family's hopeful frontier story begins to unravel. The driving force behind the investigation and the narrative is Driss' daughter Nora, a promising jazz composer struggling with the austere realities of having a creative career in the United States. She returns to Yucca Valley from San Francisco hoping to find out who was responsible for her father's death, while also questioning where her own story went wrong. Instead of clear answers, she finds the cluttered assemblage of love and loss, adultery and addiction that is revealed when most family histories are probed closely enough.

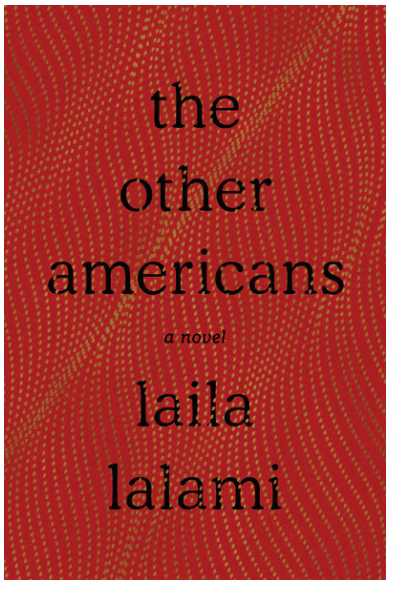
Throbbing below the dissonant melodies of the Guerraoui family's story is a bass line of fear engendered by the militarism and virulent anti-Arab racism that crescendoed after 9/11. From ethnic slurs in the school hallway to an unexplained arson at the family's doughnut shop, the racism associated with the ongoing "war on terror" constantly threatens to overwhelm the Guerraouis' acceptance into American life. Their very name resonates with the French *la guerre* — the war.

This tension between the family's identity as American and its labeling as the "other" in the war on terrorism heightens when Nora reconnects with an old flame from high school, Jeremy, a sheriff's deputy recently home from a military tour in Iraq. Traumatized by their experiences on either side of the racial "frontier," Jeremy and Nora bond while confronting the truths that might bring some meaning to Driss' death — and life — even as they battle a community eager to dismiss the hit-and-run as an accident.

In its poetic meditation on traumas at once personal and political, Lalami's novel calls to mind the work of another celebrated California writer: Joan Didion. In Didion's first novel, *Run River*, protagonist Lily McClellan concludes a meditation on her pioneer family's violent history by declaring that "it had above all a history of accidents: of moving on and of accidents."

Lalami shares Didion's unsentimental perspective on the West, and the startling conclusion of The Other Americans refuses both self-righteous moralizing and melodramatic redemption. But while Didion emphasizes the contingency of Western history, Lalami forces readers to confront the fact that the violence of that history is anything but an accident.

As the investigation unfolds, the Guerraoui family's hopeful frontier story begins to unravel.



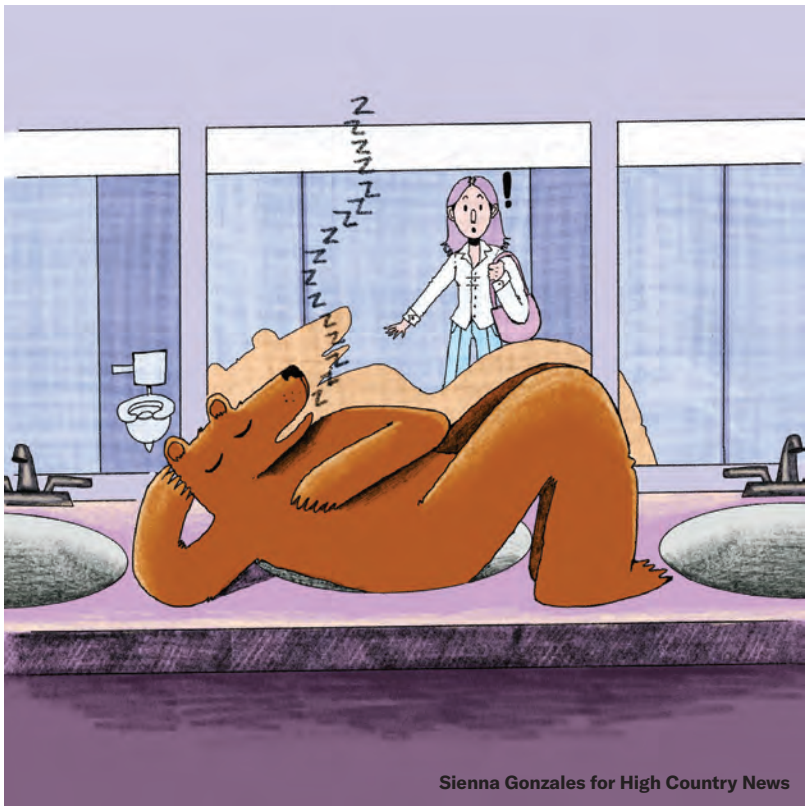
Heard Around the West

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

BY BETSY MARSTON

MONTANA

One thing about bears: They tend to do what they want to do, not what we humans might prefer. A hotel in Big Sky, Montana, learned this after a young black bear climbed through a window into a ladies' bathroom. Once inside, he curled up in a sink and fell fast asleep. Buck's T-4 Lodge tried various ploys to persuade the bear to depart, but the sleepy animal only woke up long enough to shift positions, abandoning the sink for a "nap across the countertop," reports *Weird News*. It took a team of police and wildlife officers to tranquilize the already relaxed bear and carry him out of the bathroom, still out like a light. He was safely released in the wild, where he presumably resumed his interrupted snooze.



Sienna Gonzales for High Country News

ARIZONA

What you might call "vintage trash" — garbage that's more than 50 years old — is considered "historic" in Arizona's Petrified Forest National Park and carefully left *in situ*. National Park Service staffers, reports *Atlas Obscura*, preserve old steel cans (the kind that used church keys), marbles, bottles, door handles and even toys that tourists driving Route 66 — aka the "Mother Road" — chucked out of their cars decades ago. Most of the discards landed about 10 to 15 feet from the highway and slowly disappeared into the dirt, yet goodies can still be found. Petrified Forest, better known for its sculptural, multicolored rocks, is the only national park that contains a segment of Route 66, which represented travel through the American West at its quirkiest from the 1930s through the 1950s. You could set out from Chicago for Los Angeles, more than 2,000 miles away, and drive for what seemed like forever under big skies, trying out homemade food from roadside stalls and stopping to explore tiny towns and funky roadside attractions in the middle of nowhere. In 2006, the park created a turnoff to commemorate the nostalgia-ridden highway, featuring artifacts taken from what staffers have dubbed the "throw zone." The park's 800,000 visitors can admire a 1932 Studebaker propped up on concrete supports, or consult a "Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program" that includes oral histories and an itinerary for road trippers. William Parker, the chief of science and resource at the park, relishes the irony: "It's funny that someone would throw these bottles or cans out and not think that in 50 years they'd be in a museum somewhere." Yet every day, he added, "things are constantly becoming historic." As the writer William Faulkner memorably put it, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

SOUTH DAKOTA

The Twitter world had a great time mocking South Dakota after it unveiled its new, million-dollar-plus anti-drug slogan: "Meth. We're on it," but the state's governor appeared unfazed by the fuss. Republican Kristi Noem, the state's first woman governor, called out her critics, saying, "Hey Twitter, the whole point of this ad campaign is to raise awareness. So I think that's working. ..." Like many states, South Dakota is battling a meth problem: *The New York Times* reports that from 2014-2018, South Dakota saw a 200 percent increase in people seeking treatment for it. "We were looking for a way that would cause citizens to stop, pay attention and understand that we do have a meth issue and that there are resources available," said Laurie Gill, head of the Department of Social Services. The point of the campaign, she added, is that "you don't have to be a user to be affected by meth. Everybody is."

UTAH

The Beehive State may be overwhelmingly white, conservative and Republican, but when it comes to welcoming the world's refugees, it steps up. After President Trump signed an executive order this fall allowing states and cities — for the first time — to veto local refugee resettlement, Utah responded by saying, in effect: *Send more!* Republican Gov. Gary Herbert wrote the president: "We empathize deeply with individuals and groups who have been forced from their homes and we love giving them a new home and a new life." He added that the newcomers become responsible citizens and workers, and "they have been an asset to Utah," reports the *Washington Post*. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also reaffirmed its support, encouraging its members to "create welcoming communities," reports the *Salt Lake Tribune*.

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CESAR ORTIGOZA
Armadillos Búsqueda y Rescate
Oceanside, California

I came undocumented, and I had to jump through the fence in San Ysidro. It was easy, really easy, in those days. Knowing what people have to go through now, in the desert, I felt like we had to do something. For us to call up those parents and say we found your family, we found your son, knowing that all of us did that much and we got tired and we got thirsty and we got hungry and that didn't keep us from going and finding this person, it makes me feel really proud. I love doing this, and I would like to keep doing it until I can't walk any more. The desert, it's really beautiful. But you have to be really respectful, and know that you have the heat as your enemy.

Do you know a Westerner with a great story?
Let us know on social.

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