High Country News

PREDATOR (MIS)PERCEPTIONS

Sarah Gilman | Ethan Linck

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A Bundy update

Little Shell recognition

Wyoming's billionaires

A crowd gathers on Pyramid Lake Paiute tribal lands on the shore of Pyramid Lake north of Reno, Nevada, to witness the release of 22 bighorn sheep. **Kalen Goodluck / HCN**

High Country News is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) independent media organization that covers the important issues and stories that define the Western U.S. 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. High Country News (ISSN/0191/5657) publishes regular issues monthly, in addition to one "special issue" per quarter, for a total of 16 issues per year, from 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.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Reintroductions

THIS MONTH, the U.S. Justice Department will argue for a chance to retry Cliven Bundy and his supporters for their armed standoff with federal officers in 2014, following a mistrial two years ago. Lately, one of Cliven's sons, Ammon, has been traveling around the West, looking for a place to spark another conflict, "an eager, strike-anywhere match," as *HCN* Correspondent Leah Sottile writes. The Western United States is full of flashpoints, and in this issue we re-examine many of them.

In Colorado, a potential ballot measure to reintroduce wolves to the state could come to a vote in November. As biologist and essayist Ethan Linck writes, the decision over wolves will be informed by science but ultimately driven by the feelings of voters, calling into question the value of research in public decisions. In Washington, longtime contributor Sarah Gilman asks whether our fear of mountain lions is justified, reminding us that the Bureau of Land Management's current acting director, former anti-fed lawyer William Pendley, once "accused cougar defenders of condoning 'human sacrifice.' "

From Nevada, Editorial Fellow Kalen Goodluck reports on the Pyramid Lake Paiute's reintroduction of bighorn sheep to tribal land from which the animal had been absent for nearly a century. Meanwhile, President Donald Trump, who has already derailed dozens of environmental protections, is now targeting one of the nation's most important laws, the National Environmental Policy Act.

These conservation issues are important, of course, in defining the West, but so too are the injustices that gnaw at Western communities. Elsewhere in this issue, we describe how the detention system is bankrupting immigrant families. We also report on the impediments to reproductive health that women face in Indian Country and the ways in which billionaires are reshaping the Western landscape. We look at efforts to legalize more drugs in Western states, and examine how independent Indigenous zines are helping young people navigate their identities.

As *High Country News* moves into its 50th year, we hope to show readers the Western U.S. in full, so that anyone who lives in the region (or watches it from afar) will understand it better. As editor-in-chief, I hope that we can help you make meaningful decisions about this unique place, and that we'll inform, inspire and challenge you to act on its behalf. It is our aim to reintroduce you, again and again, to this complicated West.

Brian Calvert, editor-in-chief

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Carbondale, Colorado-based muralist Valerie Rose works on one of four murals she's done for the Rocky Mountain Wolf Project since early 2018. This one is at Green Spaces in Denver. **Cheney Gardner**

Ammon Bundy *(right)* outside a conference in Whitefish, Montana, last year. **Lauren Grabelle / HCN**

FEATURES

ON THE COVER
Original illustration by Sarah Gilman / HCN

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REPORTAGE

The residual power of Ammon Bundy 20

He made it out of two separate standoffs with the government — and two federal trials — unscathed. Now he's hunting the West for new confrontations. BY LEAH SOTTILE

REFLECTION & REVIEW

DEPARTMENTS

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.

ON THE NEW ISSUE

Congratulations on the February issue of your redesigned publication. In it was an email from Patagonia criticizing an article. It also had a full-page ad from the company. Kudos to the magazine for running an article critical of an advertiser, and kudos to Patagonia for continuing to advertise.
John Kendall, via email

WTF has gone wrong with *HCN*? I understand your need to diversify, but a lot of recent issues stray too far from your roots and from many readers' interests. The January issue is another issue on cultural diversity, but this one entirely devoted to it? I always save my *HCN*s, looking forward to reading them later if I don't have time. But this issue goes straight into the recycling! I've never had to do this to an issue. What a waste. How about some science, rangeland and resource issues, energy development on public lands, political struggles in Western states, uranium poisoning on Native lands, etc.? This has got to stop, or I will not re-subscribe. If a rare issue captures your former great coverage of Western issues, I'll just borrow a copy. I have friends who feel the same way — that we are being alienated by a paper, an institution, that some of us have stuck with for decades.

You're making a big mistake!
Mark Sterkel, via Facebook

BACKWARDS THINKING

In "Perfectly natural" (*February 2020*), Brian Calvert seems to want to redefine the term nature so that it includes humans and their machines. One of the great advances in human civilization and environmental ethics was the recognition that what we call nature was not placed on this Earth for the benefit of humankind to be consumed and exploited. We now recognize the importance of natural ecosystems that are unaffected by human industry for both the health of the planet and the preservation of all species, including humans. Attempting to include humans and their disproportional impact on the global environment is a step backwards.

Humans were once a part of the natural world. We have been traveling on foot over snow for hundreds of thousands of years. Our fiberglass skis and plastic boots are evolutionary descendants of the wood and leather artifacts of our predecessors. However, there is nothing "natural" about a human traveling up to 60 mph perched on a 500-pound machine powered by an internal combustion engine emitting 100 decibels of noise and noxious chemicals out the tailpipe. Calvert wants to change our ethics. What is wrong with the old ethic of "Do what you want, but do not harm others"? We should add, "and do minimal harm to the environment" to that.
Jim Gibson, via email

READ DEEPER

Having read Mary Slosson's review of *Deep River* ("*Wading into murky waters,*" *11/11/19*), I picked up the novel from my local library against my better judgment. Imagine my surprise when I found, in lieu of the reactionary, stereotype-laden, and politically tone-deaf work described by Slosson, a novel focused on the struggles of working people in the Northwest at the turn of the century. Karl Marlantes' novel centers as much around an IWW organizer and her desperate attempts to organize the lumber camps as it does any sort of tentatively Trumpian immigrant narrative.

While reasonable people can draw different interpretations from literature, Slosson does not even mention Marlantes' extensive focus on the efforts of the Wobblies, or his evocative portrayal of the immigrant women who worked and fought for basic rights alongside immigrant men. The claim that Marlantes "valorizes extractive industries" is incredible, given his portrayal of those same industries as ones that broke men, women and the natural world alike in order to enrich a few among the ownership class. If Marlantes portrays the American Dream's hold over some immigrants and native-born citizens, he also offers a picture of its antidote in the Wobblies' organizing strikes and advocating for a vision of worker solidarity that both transcends racial boundaries and emancipates women.

I am left wondering if Slosson and I read different books. The Northwest's history of genocide, white supremacy and natural devastation defines our present. There is no disputing this, but there are many stories to be told about it. One of those stories is the story of white supremacy, the devastation of Indigenous people here, and the exclusion of Japanese, Chinese and Black immigrants. Concurrent with this is another about people who resisted, in the ways available to them, the hatred and extractive logic of their day, and who sought to organize their communities against the brutality of capitalist-extraction and for a more just world. These two stories are inseparable.

Read *Deep River*, or better yet, read the preamble to the IWW Constitution, and when considering our shared past remember: "Don't mourn, organize!"
Seth Douglas, via email

CONSERVATION JUSTICE

I'm more than a little dismayed by your interview with Sergio Avila and his great crusade to bring Mexicans into the outdoors

"There is nothing 'natural' about a human traveling up to 60 mph perched on a 500-pound machine powered by an internal combustion engine emitting 100 decibels of noise and noxious chemicals out the tailpipe."

(*"Conservation justice," February 2020*). As a wildlife biologist and outdoor enthusiast, I'm offended and angered by the level of ignorance and pandering in this interview. If you wanted to get a sense of how Latinos, Latinx, Mexican-American (or whatever the woke nomenclature is these days) experience the outdoors, then perhaps you should have gone to a trailhead in Saguaro National Park, or the Arizona Game and Fish regional office. There you would have seen plenty of Americans of Mexican descent enjoying the outdoors and working in wildlife conservation. Avila's contention that white people are somehow excluding others from the outdoors is ludicrous. You either come to this lifestyle organically or you don't; no one is keeping anyone from going outside.

Nate Gwinn, via email

Thank you for the interview with Sergio Avila. It was informative and humbling about the many aspects of equity and social justice in preserving and exploring nature.

R. Gibbons, via email

CONSERVATION HISTORY

Brian Calvert's recent commentary on the cowboy hat's symbolism in the West is an accurate portrayal of the Trump administration's values regarding non-whites in our society (*"Worse for wear," January 2020*). However, one must be careful about conflating the ideas that Euro-American Manifest Destiny was in any way related to the creation of parks or wilderness. Calvert writes: "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." The idea that Teddy Roosevelt removed tribal people to create Yellowstone Park is obviously wrong, since Roosevelt was only 14 years old when Yellowstone was created, in 1872. Indigenous peoples were relegated to reservations to make the West safe for the exploitation of nature by miners, ranchers, loggers, settlers and railroads. It would have been laughable if anyone proposed "protecting wilderness" in 1872. Yellowstone was not any different than the surrounding tens of millions of acres. The original goal of park creation was to protect the geological features from private resource exploitation. It had nothing to do with putting tribes on reservations. In all these early dealings with Indigenous peoples, there was no talk about preserving "wilderness or parks." That is simply made up by people with little understanding of conservation history.

George Wuerthner, via email

MORE SCIENCE, PLEASE

As a reader and contributor since the 1980s, I've noticed a trend in the reporting. *HCN* used to be a paper about the Rocky Mountains, public lands and related issues. Now I see the paper becoming a periodical largely about social justice. The ultimate environmental issue — climate change — is presented as "climate justice" with the focus on people affected by global heating rather than on science or the environment. This change will appeal to some readers but maybe not others.

I appreciated the piece on nuclear power (*"Waste not, want not," January 2020*). In it, you look at Palo Verde in Arizona, the largest nuclear plant in the U.S., which was built in 1976. This old technology is a dinosaur compared to new plant designs coming out of Europe and Oregon, which are smaller, use far fewer resources and produce a fraction of the waste. People need to know that nuclear technology is evolving fast; given the extremely urgent nature of the climate crisis, we may need to keep an open mind to this technology if we are to slash greenhouse gas emissions. Time is getting short.

Tom Ribe, via email

"The reason that NEPA has not made more progress is because agencies don't want to tell the public the truth."

NEPA HASN'T FAILED

In my mind, NEPA did not fall short, but we have (*"Where NEPA fell short," January 2020*). The only real requirement that NEPA provided was the environmental impact statement process, which gave citizens a process of public participation, review, and comment that was not optional. The reason that NEPA has not made more progress is because agencies don't want to tell the public the truth. They have fought NEPA from its inception and used every trick they know to ignore, avoid, mislead and do a poor job on EISes and their responsibility to the public. NEPA is not costly in the entire scheme of a project, but agencies use this excuse, or lie at every opportunity. Let's ensure that agencies "do the right thing" and tell the public the truth every time.

Brandt Mannchen, via email

As I read Adam Sowards' perspective, "Where NEPA fell short" (*January 2020*), I reminisced about my long-ago days at the Environmental Protection Agency during the second term of EPA Administrator Bill Ruckelshaus (May 18, 1983, to Jan. 4, 1985). I disagree with the assertion that NEPA fell short. It did not. It was, and still is, the accumulation of bureaucrats that fall short, those who lack the fortitude to abide by their agencies' missions and charters. They chose, or choose, to kowtow to politics and budgets. Today, we might well replace the "P" in "EPA" with "pillage" or "plunder." I'm sure Ruckelshaus, who passed away in November 2019, was deeply saddened by the current administration's "streamlining" of NEPA and other policies and protective acts.

Bill Christie, via email

STRAYED REPORTING

I've been reading *HCN* for over 30 years and have always appreciated your coverage of issues concerning the American West. But lately, many of your articles have strayed into ultra-liberal and one-sided territory, failing to examine multiple points of view.

One such article was January's "Rent control." Rather than portraying landlords as evil money-grubbers, look at some of the other causes of unaffordable rentals. In Seattle, my hometown, property values and thus rentals have skyrocketed. In the rural community where I currently live, the cost of living is similarly high, and incomes much lower. The average carpenter, plumber or electrician — if you can get them — is around $80/hour and the average building cost is $250 to $300/square foot. Tough to build affordable housing with these expenses, property taxes and property insurance. Well, they just keep going up.

Eviction is a dreadful process and one to be avoided at all costs. That's why landlords try to screen their tenants so rigorously and, some may think, unfairly. Eviction can take up to three months — three months where you get no rental income and are unlikely to ever recover it, and your property might be damaged maliciously. In the rural community where I now live, a housing trust nonprofit is successfully buying land and building affordable housing. The wait list is long, but it's a start.

Michelle Schmidtke, via email

Indigenous zines

The craft's lack of limitations allows for powerful storytelling.

BY KALEN GOODLUCK

WHEN RAVEN TWO FEATHERS entered middle school, little guidance was available for adolescents grappling with gender and sexuality. Later, Two Feathers — who uses both he/they pronouns and identifies as Two Spirit, an Indigenous nonbinary gender identity — started considering "top surgery," a procedure used to remove most breast tissue to make the chest look and feel more masculine that is sometimes part of transitioning. But they couldn't find any fellow Two Spirit people for advice. "There's plenty of information on top surgery, but it's mainly from white guys," said Two Feathers, who lives in Seattle.

In response, like Indigenous do-it-yourselfers before them, Two Feathers and illustrator Jonny Cechony are self-publishing a 32-page autobiographical comic book zine, designed to raise the visibility of Two Spirit people who are seeking to make sense of themselves. The creative exercise of zine-making astonished Two Feathers: It encouraged them to be open about their transitioning and affirm their own existence.

"I knew that if I had had the resources, like the zine, when I was little or even a teenager, my life would be very different," said Two Feathers, who is Cherokee, Comanche, Seneca and Cayuga.

Indigenous zinesters have been producing booklets since at least the 1980s, many focused on activism, history, art and poetry. The term "zine" is derived from the science fiction "fan magazines" of the late 1920s and early '30s. Today, zines run the gamut of genres. They're often photocopied and passed hand-to-hand, distributed by mail order or sold in alternative bookstores, usually the counterculture kind associated with punk, grunge and radical politics. "The ability to tell stories without limitation or an editor saying, 'You can't say this' or 'Tone this down' — zines help people to be authentic," said Chris Wilde, co-founder of the Queer Zine Archive Project in Milwaukee. "And that is one of the biggest things that I know for myself and others I've spoken to over the years, that zines change lives." Many Indigenous zines dig into history, providing a space for exclusively Indigenous narratives. For Two Feathers, they are filling the vacuum where the Two Spirit experience should be.

"To be able to craft your own nature without white interpretation of history and a colonial gaze — that's where I find the power of Indigenous zines, whether they are queer or not. That power is there for a direct statement," said Wilde, who is non-Native.

With its vibrant collage artwork, hand-drawn illustrations and edgy cropped text, the zine series *Atrocities against Indigenous Canadians for Dummies: A zine series created out of emotional exhaustion* offers a punchy, raw look at Canada's gruesome colonial history — a history often left out of class curriculums. Jenna Rose Sands, a Nehiyaw, Anishinaabe and Lenape woman living in Ontario, explores Indigenous issues, ranging from powwow etiquette — do not touch dancers' regalia without their consent, for example — to the residential schools that stole a generation of Indigenous children and the missing and murdered Indigenous women along the notorious "Highway of Tears." Sands writes, "If the government wishes to continue a practice of ignoring history (and current problems, let's be honest) then we need to get rage-y and educate others, right?"

In a stark 40-page black-and-white booklet, John Redhouse details the complex history behind the so-called land dispute involving Navajo and Hopi people. Redhouse, known for his scholarship and Indigenous rights activism in the Southwest during the Red Power movement, published his zine *Geopolitics of the Navajo-Hopi 'Land Dispute'* in the mid-'80s. He was writing in response to the U.S. government's relocation of Navajo and Hopi people, which began in 1974, from a former joint-use area on ancestral land in northeastern Arizona. Redhouse begins his account with an early history of Navajo-Hopi relations, describing how the two tribes lived side-by-side in the supposedly "disputed area" before the U.S. plundered title to their homelands. In returning land to the Navajo by executive order in 1882 to create the Navajo Nation Reservation, Redhouse writes, the U.S. government "partitioned along arbitrarily drawn lines on a range management map and forcibly segregated the two tribal neighbors."

In Seattle, the art collective yəhaẇ packs a serious anthology of work into its limited zine series *d3ék'w: An Indigenous Art Zine*, which was created to accompany art installations, performances, workshops curated by Tracy Rector (Choctaw Seminole), Asia Tail (Cherokee) and Satpreet Kahlon. The work includes literature, poetry, paintings, graphics, interviews and more. The title *d3ék'w* means "to travel, to wander," which makes sense, because the work feels like a walkabout, beginning with a land acknowledgment for living and producing this zine in the traditional Coast Salish people's territory. Among the featured artists, as it happens, is Raven Two Feathers, whose own zine — *Qualifications of Being* — will be released on Valentine's Day.

Indigenous zines harness personal and historical accounts, artistic and poetic techniques, in a world that has traditionally erased them. Perhaps most important, they seek to create human connections, showing that we aren't as alone as we might think. "If there's someone who's like me, or if I could almost help a younger version of me, that's really where the spirit of this piece came out of," said Two Feathers.

Excerpt from *d3ék'w* by Romson Regarde Bustillo *(top)*. **Courtesy of yəhaẇ**

Excerpted pages from *Qualifications of Being (bottom)*. **Courtesy of Raven Two Feathers and Jonny Cechony**

waiting for the #7

whisper to each other...

how much we suffer

with our hearts

that without knowing

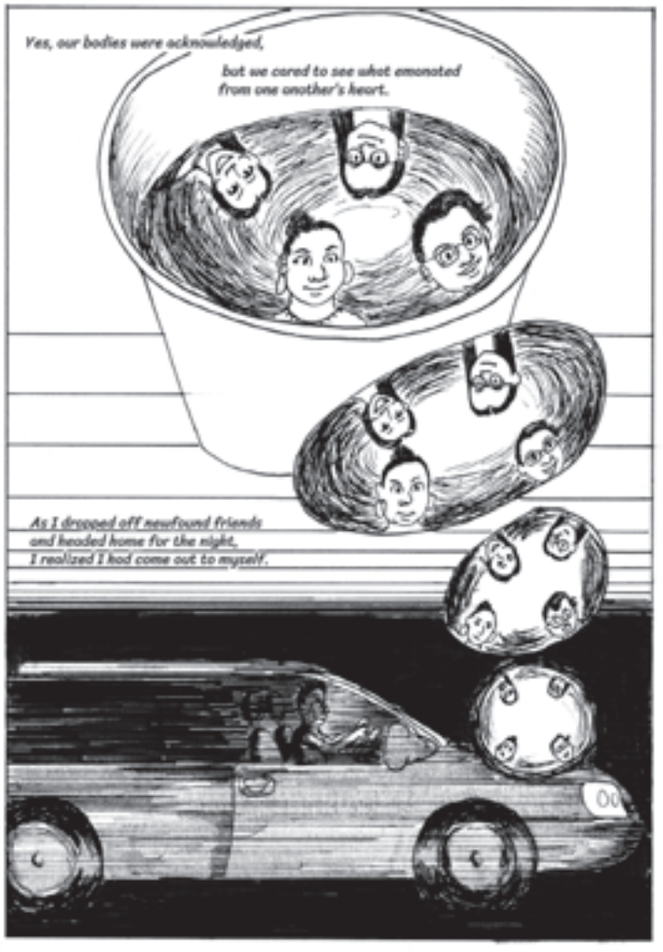
what of others

those things

that are said

are not heard

Self-portrait (image)
of others (text)
Rommon Regarde Bustillo
(Mindanaw Bisaya of the Philippines)



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REPORTAGE

Citizen psychedelics

The new push for legalization.

BY NICK BOWLIN

IN 2011, MATTHEW KAHL of the 101st Airborne came home from his second tour in Afghanistan with a damaged spine, brain injuries, a facial fracture and chronic pain. A small piece of his jaw was missing. His psychological scars ran deep: He had seen horrors and learned how to kill, and the memories crushed him. Over the course of a few years, he took more than 90 drugs and medications for post-traumatic stress disorder. Opiates and mood stabilizers, benzodiazepines and SSRIs — pill bottles several rows deep filled an entire double-door medicine cabinet in his home in Divide, Colorado. Videos taken by his wife show him slumped on a couch, falling asleep in the middle of a sentence and unable to track the conversation from seconds before. Kahl became suicidal. Eventually, he turned to cannabis. That helped end his dependence on opiates, but, on the inside, he still felt broken.

In 2016, Kahl and a few other veterans who struggled with PTSD decided to try psychedelic medicine, traveling to Florida to take ayahuasca. Ayahuasca is a hallucinogenic, traditionally associated with the Indigenous peoples of the Amazon Basin. Growing evidence suggests that psychedelic drugs can help treat depression, anxiety and addiction. Kahl says the experience helped him face his trauma; he came away renewed, free from the profound sense of loss and emptiness.

Kahl wanted to help others the way he had been helped. So he joined a Denver effort last spring to decriminalize psilocybin, the psychoactive chemical in mushrooms. He became one of the campaign's most public figures, adding the authority of a veteran's voice to a movement often associated with Colorado's vibrant drug culture. Denver voters narrowly passed the measure in May. A month later, the city council in Oakland, California, went a step further and decriminalized all plant and fungal psychedelics, including ayahuasca, peyote and DMT. Other psychedelic advocates took notice. Across the West, several decriminalization efforts are organizing 2020 campaigns, often using Denver's direct democracy model of ballot initiatives, the strategy that worked so well in legalizing cannabis.

BRYAN KIM, AN ORGANIZER with Decriminalize Nature Portland, hopes to emulate Denver's voter-driven approach. "The ballot initiative process presents a direct path to power for everyday people," he told me. Kim's group plans to put an amendment before Portland voters that would decriminalize psychedelic plants and fungi, including psilocybin, ibogaine, ayahuasca and mescaline. Two other public questions could go on Oregon's statewide ballot: one to create the nation's first legal psilocybin-assisted therapy program, and the other decriminalizing all illegal drugs in the state. In California, meanwhile, yet another group is collecting signatures to get a psilocybin decriminalization measure on the November ballot.

For Kahl, these grassroots initiatives represent one of the few ways American citizens can exercise their power as such. Kahl speaks about the U.S. Constitution with genuine reverence. He believes that the document's stated principles of individual liberty and equality are real, vital — and under attack. "The war on drugs," he said, "is a war on the people of America and is eroding their freedom." As Kahl sees it, the same desire for control that's responsible for draconian drug policies sent him to Afghanistan, to a pointless war that ruined his life and continues to this day. What he saw overseas informs his decriminalization work at home. Citizens, he believes, must stand up and reclaim their freedoms from government overreach. If they do not, the federal government will continue to expand its gaze over every aspect of our lives.

Kahl takes pride in the fact that both psilocybin decriminalization — and the cannabis legalization that preceded it — started in Colorado, the birthplace of the Libertarian Party. A self-described outsider from both main parties, he notes a "particular libertarian streak that runs through (Denver) and much of Colorado," a blend of hippie drug culture and suspicion of government overreach that infuses many of Kahl's own political principles. Since the Denver vote, Kahl is working to help like-minded citizens around the country. Now a leading figure in the psychedelic-access push, he has advised local decriminalization groups from Missouri to Arizona. His nonprofit, Veterans for Natural Rights, helps other veterans struggling with PTSD. Veterans are his focus, but Kahl believes this movement can help, well, everyone. He sees psychedelics as a potential source of healing for countless Americans. "The vast majority of people have some sort of trauma in their lives that they can benefit from facing," he said. "This is where psychedelics fit into America."

THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL momentum of the psychedelic-access movement is growing, even as the research, which is slim thanks to U.S. drug policy, struggles to catch up. Since 1970, psychedelics have been federally listed alongside drugs like heroin as a Schedule 1 substance, which carries the harshest penalties. But in recent years, as cities and states broke down legal barriers to the medical use of cannabis, the federal government has slowly allowed clinical trials of certain psychedelics. Several randomized, placebo-controlled psychedelic treatment trials are underway, and advocates expect the Federal Drug Administration to allow some medical treatment using MDMA and psilocybin in the next few years.

Broadly speaking, the available clinical research shows associations between various psychedelics and treatment for depression, addiction, and terminal illness-related anxiety, among other conditions. Brain-imaging scans suggest drugs like psilocybin allow parts of the brain that normally do not interact to do so. This is why Kahl and others so often report fresh perspectives, long-absent positive feelings and new understanding of their pain. Even so, the evidence does not meet the scientific standard for causation, according to Natalie Gukasyan, a psychiatrist and researcher who studies psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy at Johns Hopkins University. There is not enough evidence yet to declare psilocybin an effective treatment for depression or PTSD.

Still, Gukasyan wholeheartedly agrees with Kahl about the need for improved trauma treatment: "It's absolutely true that the treatments available for PTSD are not effective for everyone, and it can be a very debilitating condition," she said. "That's why we're doing the research."

The speed of decriminalization also sidesteps the fact that Indigenous communities have long used psychedelics like peyote and ayahuasca in cultural practice. Though such use is legal today, the federal government long criminalized religious ceremonies involving these substances. Now, Indigenous advocates fear that decriminalization will race ahead without properly consulting or including Native peoples. In a recent article, the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) argued that advocates "must also consider the historical context in which the 'psychedelic renaissance' is happening, and work to ensure the intellectual property rights of indigenous cultures are protected from theft and misuse by the pharmaceutical industry."

WHILE PSYCHEDELIC ACCESS still has a long road ahead, the personal changes Kahl experienced seem to have lingered. Even in conversation, the difference is clear. A recently released documentary called *From Shock to Awe* followed Kahl and others as they took ayahuasca. In the opening scenes, Kahl appears scattered; he

Matthew Kahl shares an embrace with two friends after Kahl took ayahuasca, an experience that he says helped him face his trauma. (*above*)

Kahl stands before his medicine cabinet, which holds the 90 drugs and medications he took for post-traumatic stress disorder before turning to psychedelic drugs for treatment. (*below*) **From Shock to Awe / Documentary film still**

speaks in short bursts and struggles to interact with his children. In conversation today, he is sharp and passionate in speaking about the dark days of his past. Roughly once a year, he undergoes some sort of psychedelic treatment. He has not returned to cannabis or opiates.

Since the documentary came out, Kahl has been on the road wrapping up a nationwide screening tour for the film. Recently, he visited the Texas chapter of Veterans for Natural Rights, as well as Washington, D.C., where he participated in a congressional briefing on psychedelics and veterans with PTSD. In short, Matthew Kahl is a busy man. But the most important use of his time — and newfound mental well-being — is spent with his family.

Kahl has begun homeschooling his oldest son, whose adolescence coincided with the tough years of his father's recovery. "I was either deployed, and when I was back home, I was either angry or at work or on medications, or in convalescence," Kahl told me in January. "Even though I was there, I wasn't there." When his son started showing behavioral problems in school, Kahl saw it as a cry for the attention he had failed to provide. "This was my chance, my one chance," Kahl said of the homeschooling, choking up, "to try and fix what I had done so wrong over all the years and give him the attention he needs."

REPORTAGE

Barriers to reproductive rights

Across Indian Country, advocates for Indigenous women claim that the Indian Health Service is failing them.

BY ALLISON HERRERA

INDIGENOUS WOMEN WHO experience sexual violence are finding little to no support at Indian Health Service (IHS) facilities, despite the fact that Indigenous women are twice as likely to experience sexual assault as other women in the U.S. Some IHS facilities lack rape kits altogether, and until recently, birth control was not widely available. Meanwhile, there are significant barriers to obtaining an abortion. Advocates argue that IHS is failing to live up to its federal responsibilities, but despite lawsuits, reprimands and regulations, the agency continues to drag its feet in achieving compliance.

"They don't care," said Charon Asetoyer, executive director of the Native American Women's Health Education Resource Center (NAWHERC). "They don't want to have federal agencies with any kind of abortion services."

A 2002 study published by the Native American Women's Health Education Resource Center, a South Dakota-based nonprofit that advocates for Indigenous women, found that only 25 abortions were performed in the IHS system since 1976, when the Hyde Amendment was passed. (The Hyde Amendment prevents the use of federal funds to pay for abortion services, with rare exceptions.) That 2002 study is one of the few to track abortion statistics specifically among Indigenous women. *High Country News* filed a Freedom of Information Act request for more recent data from the Indian Health Service, but it has gone unanswered.

When clinics are able to provide an abortion, it comes with strict conditions: The procedure can only be performed in the case of rape or incest or when a woman's life is in danger. Furthermore, IHS policy states that rapes must be reported within 60 days in order for women to receive abortion care.

"We know that most rape victims don't report at all," said Sarah Deer, a citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, who has been recognized for her work on reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act. "So if they don't make that report within 60 days, then they are no longer eligible for even that exception."

IHS also requires signed documentation from a law enforcement agency and a health-care facility, along with a police report filed within 60 days of the incident. "Additionally, the incident in question must meet the definition of rape or incest as defined by law in the state or tribal jurisdiction where the incident was reported to have occurred," the policy states. The Bureau of Justice Statistics, which tracks crime nationally as well as in Indian Country, reported that in 2016, Alaska Native and Native American women experienced higher rates of sexual violence than their white and Latinx counterparts did.

Access to contraceptives such as Plan B, commonly known as the "morning after pill," is also an issue at IHS clinics. Plan B, which acts as emergency birth control when other methods fail, is an over-the-counter medication available at pharmacies like CVS or Walgreens. Native women

sometimes don't use those pharmacies, choosing instead to obtain their medication at IHS clinics. "Every other woman in this country has access to it except for Native women," said Asetoyer. "We jump through all kinds of hoops to get it."

The Plan B pill wasn't available at IHS clinics until a 2010 lawsuit from the Native American Women's Health Education Resource Center forced IHS to make it available. Two years later, NAWHERC found that more than half of tribally run health centers were out of compliance when it came to providing the medication. Even after those findings, NAWHERC found that barriers remained. Some clinics still required a prescription, while almost a third failed to stock Plan B at all.

"Why should we be denied access to Plan B when it is perfectly legal?" said Asetoyer.

Some of the facilities that did not provide Plan B were in Oklahoma, particularly in the Creek, Chickasaw and Shawnee nation health centers. Emergency contraceptives were not available, allegedly because they were not in stock.

The Indian Health Service maintains that it is understaffed, and that every year, the amount of money the federal government allocates to hire, train and staff its clinics shrinks. Long waiting times and delayed care are part of Indian health care. Asetoyer says that, even with budget cuts, this lack of care is a violation of the federal government's trust responsibility. The treaties that tribal nations signed with the United States specifically stated that, in exchange for land cessions, the federal government would provide medical care and supplies for tribal members and citizens. The Indian Health Service did not comment for this story by publication.

The Indian Health Service was cited by the General Accounting Office in 2011 for its slow response time to sexual assault. The GAO examined the ability of the Indian Health Service and tribally operated hospitals to collect and preserve the medical evidence needed for criminal prosecution in cases of sexual assault and domestic violence. It also analyzed what, if any, special challenges these hospitals face in collecting and preserving such evidence, and what factors besides medical evidence contribute to the decision to prosecute such cases.

The General Accounting Office made three recommendations: Develop a new plan and policies for treating sexual assault; provide better training for hospital staff who handle sexual assault victims; and update the process followed when medical staff are subpoenaed to testify.

In 2017, Amnesty International stepped in and filed a Freedom of Information Act request asking about the number of rapes and sexual assaults reported each year, as well as the number of rape kits clinics had on hand and how often they were requested. The group also asked how often Indian Health Service staff were asked to testify, and how many had done so on behalf of a client. If a request to testify was declined, Amnesty wanted to know on what grounds. The worldwide human rights organization also inquired about the number of sexual assault nurse examiners and whether victims were offered emergency contraceptives at the time of their visit. But according to Tara Dement of Amnesty International, this request was denied.

Despite this setback, Amnesty and NAWHERC continue to lobby for more accountability when it comes to these essential services. Recently, they met with members of the staffs of Rep. Deb Haaland, D-N.M., and Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., urging them to keep pressure on IHS to provide requested information and make sure these services are available to Indigenous women.

"This is not a fulfillment of U.S. obligations under its own treaties or under international human rights standards," Dement said.

"Why should we be denied access to Plan B when it is perfectly legal?"

Sarah Deer, left, has worked to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act. Charon Asetoyer, right, is executive director and a founder of the Native American Women's Health Education Resource Center. **Jolene Yazzie / HCN**

THE LATEST

Mauna Kea conflict

Backstory

Starting last summer, thousands of Native Hawai'ians blocked the sole access road to Hawai'i's largest mountain, Mauna Kea, the proposed site of the Thirty Meter Telescope. Astronomers say the billion-dollar project would offer unparalleled views of the cosmos, and the state issued a building permit for it last year. The mountain, which is on state public land, is sacred to Native Hawai'ians, however, and the protests raised issues regarding the development and use of public lands that are important to Native people ("*The legacy of colonialism on public lands created the Mauna Kea conflict*," 8/6/19).

Followup

In December, Hawai'i Gov. David Ige said that state law enforcement would vacate the mountain, according to CNN. The company behind the project will not proceed with construction for now, though Mauna Kea remains its preferred location for the telescope, and Ige said that the state would support the company should it resume work. Meanwhile, KITV4 Island News, a local television station, reported that protesters would be leaving the area, which has reopened to public access. — Nick Bowlin

REPORTAGE

Return to Lake Range

For the first time, the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe is reintroducing bighorn sheep on tribal lands.

BY KALEN GOODLUCK

THE DAY BEGAN EARLY for the crew of scientists, state and tribal officials — long before the sun rose across the snow-covered sagebrush. "How many are you going to give us?" asked Alan Mandell, vice chairman of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe. "Twenty to 25," said a biologist, rubbing his palms together in the cold. "That's a great start," Mandell said, smiling.

All fell silent as a helicopter approached from the horizon above Nevada's snowy Sheep Creek Range. "We have four," crackled a voice over the radio. In the distance, the payload dangled in slings from the chopper's haul: California bighorn sheep, carefully blindfolded. Emily Hagler, biologist and wetlands environmental specialist for the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, stood back and watched the first one touch down in a swirl of snow. Teams rushed to the site, weighed the bighorns and placed them on tables for medical examinations.

It's finally happening, Hagler thought, eyeing the bighorns. After decades of on-and-off negotiations between state and tribal agencies and time spent seeking grant funding as well as gathering tribal council and community support, the bighorns were coming home.

"We lost almost our entire fisheries that we've been working decades to recover," said Hagler. "This is just the next step in restoring another native species that has been lost."

For the first time in roughly a hundred years, the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe will have a flock of bighorn sheep on tribal land that was once a part of the sheep's historic habitat. Not only will the effort help restore the species; it will also renew hunting and tanning traditions and support ceremonial uses — practices disrupted as the sheep population declined. The bighorns will be closely monitored for nearly three years to create a tailored conservation plan. "We won't know what the herd will need to thrive until they're on the landscape," said Hagler. Restoring an animal to its native habitat is a time-consuming and expensive task. It's also uncertain at times; sheep don't always survive the stress of capture, and they are lethally susceptible to local livestock diseases. And after release, they're on their own.

Once the sheep are captured, veterinarians collect blood samples, make age estimations, take nasal and throat swabs, and measure horns and necks for radio-collar fitting. Stressed-out bighorns that begin to overheat are wrapped in cold wet towels, packed in snow and given oxygen.

Over the last few decades, the Pyramid Lake Paiute's natural resources department has been focused on recovering its fisheries in Pyramid Lake, home to two imperiled fish species. These efforts have taken a lot of resources and prevented tribal partnerships with the state during earlier bighorn reintroduction efforts. The endangered cui-ui, from which the tribe gets its name (Cui ui Ticutta, meaning "Cui-ui Eaters"), began to decline in the 1930s due to unrestricted water diversion and drought. Today, however, the population is increasing, thanks to tribal management and water regulation. The cui-ui, which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service describes as a "large robust sucker," weighs nearly 8 pounds and can live for over 40 years. A rare fish with a royal blue tailfin, it can only be found in Pyramid Lake. The tribe also manages the threatened Lahontan cutthroat trout, which can only be found in a few lakes and streams in mid-eastern California and central Nevada. The Lahontan cutthroat lives between 5 and 15 years, but what it lacks in lifespan it makes up in mass, weighing up to 40 pounds. Now, thanks to a partnership with the Nevada Department of Wildlife, the bighorn sheep has joined the tribe's conservation roster after decades of colonization, commercial hunting, urbanization and livestock overwhelmed the state's bighorns.

"In terms of sovereignty, we could be pushing more of a Native management style that's based in traditional management practices," said Marissa Weaselboy, a citizen of the Yomba Shoshone Tribe and environmental specialist for Pyramid Lake. "Maybe some of it could be like tending areas that they could frequent, so they could carry seeds for replanting. I'm hoping how they work with the environment is they help with revegetation."

Both written and archaeological records, based on bones and petroglyphs, reveal that bighorn sheep once thrived across Nevada. Revered as a "trailblazer" and "one of Nevada's greatest heroes," at least by some state officials and archaeologists, John Charles Frémont (1813-1890) carried out orders from the War Department to survey land across the West to further U.S. expansion efforts, including the "unknown land" that would later become Nevada. On one of these trips, he chronicled the bighorns that he saw, in writings that would later help the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identify the animal's historic habitat. "We saw herds of mountain sheep, and encamped on a little stream at the mouth of the defile, about a mile from the margin of the water, to which we hurried down immediately," Frémont wrote. The Frémont name is found everywhere in the West, from a casino-lit street in Las Vegas to the names of many plant species, and from the Fremont-Winema National Forest in California to the town where my mother grew up in the Bay Area.

At noon, another gust of snow from the chopper signaled the arrival of the last five bighorns. The sheep-count capped at 22, with the rest packed in two Department of Wildlife stock trailers just beyond the veterinarian medic stations. With all the bighorns accounted for, the caravan set off for Lake Range, toward the eastern shore of Pyramid Lake, land normally off-limits to non-tribal members.

The sun set on the west side of Pyramid Lake. Its waters were aquamarine. Clouds circled the mountains. Two stock trailers rumbled down the dusty road. Participants were told by the state scientists to form a "V" around the trailer's gate to direct the bighorns into the mountains.

In a matter of seconds, the ewe flock was gone, darting up a rocky slope to settle somewhere in the dark. Then, *whoosh*, a second flock of rams charged out of the gate. In 10 years, Emily Hagler hopes the population will be sustainable, with bighorns born from the flock and even more reintroduced from across the state.

"I just see herds of bighorn sheep all over the reservation in 20 years," she said.

A crowd gathers on the shore of Pyramid Lake to witness the release of 22 bighorn sheep onto Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe land. **Kalen Goodluck / HCN**

"This is just the next step in restoring another native species that has been lost."

No. 574

The Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians celebrates federal recognition.

BY TAILYR IRVINE

The Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians has been seeking federal recognition since the 1930s. In December 2019, the Little Shell became the 574th federally recognized tribe in the United States, and on Jan. 25, in Great Falls, Montana, tribal citizens celebrated their victory and remembered those who helped pave the way for it.

Federal recognition will give Little Shell members access to health care and social services. At the same time, however, it highlights the role the federal government and non-Indigenous policymakers play in deciding who is Indigenous.

"We had to go through a system that the federal government put in place," said Little Shell Tribal Chairman Gerald Gray. "The same government that tried to get rid of Indians. I don't like it, but it's the system we were forced to operate under — and we did it. They get to tell me I'm Indian now." Ninety-three-year-old Theresa Juraskovich, the oldest living tribal member, said recognition made her feel like a person. "I felt like, without recognition, I wasn't somebody," said Juraskovich. "Today, I feel like I'm valued." Other attendees came to represent Little Shell members who died before recognition was achieved. "I wept for three days when I found out we were getting the recognition," said Scott Jenkin, 47, who carried a portrait of his grandmother, Alice LaTray Schnabel. "I wanted her here in spirit. It's her blood that makes me Little Shell."

U.S. Sen. Steve Daines, R-Mont., gave the tribe a copy of S. 1790, the congressional act that included a provision granting federal recognition to the Little Shell Tribe.

Scott Jenkin carries his grandmother's portrait into the commemoration. She died before the tribe was federally recognized. *(above)*

Days after the Little Shell gained federal recognition, Chris La Tray tattooed the tribe's new federal number on his knuckles. La Tray said his feelings about recognition remain complicated; he feels happy and yet is still ambivalent. "I view it as not something given to us but something that was returned to us. To me, it's the government admitting their mistake." *(left)*

At 93 years old, Theresa Juraskovich is the oldest living member of the Little Shell Tribe. *(middle)*

Clarence Sivertsen, first vice chairman of the Little Shell Tribe, weeps during the commemoration. *(right)*

The Little Shell Cultural Center is one of the two places where tribal members regularly gather in Great Falls, Montana. With federal recognition, the Little Shell are now looking at ways to expand their community.

Students from the Great Falls Public School Indian Education Department dance during the commemoration. (*opposite*)

The Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council President Rynalea Whiteman Pena presents a gift basket to the Little Shell Tribe during the commemoration. Little Shell Tribal Chairman Gerald Gray said the support of their sister tribes was invaluable in the Little Shell's battle for recognition.

REPORTAGE

The residual power of Ammon Bundy

He made it out of two separate standoffs with the government — and two federal trials — unscathed. Now he's hunting the West for new confrontations.

BY LEAH SOTTILE

DAYS AFTER BEING EVICTED from their home by the Clearwater County Sheriff's Office in late November, the Nickerson family was perched high above the 50-acre plot outside Orofino, Idaho, that they still considered theirs.

Despite 10 years of nonpayment on their mortgage, a protracted court battle, foreclosure and the armed police officers who removed them from the property — called Peace of Heaven Ranch — the Nickersons assured anyone who would listen that they weren't going anywhere. They claimed their eviction had nothing to do with mortgage payments. "It's because we are Christian," Donna Nickerson told me one cold afternoon.

Under a green pop-up shelter, the family of three men and five women had neatly set a long table for a dinner of chicken and potatoes roasted over a roadside campfire. They'd sleep inside a long white van with an American flag decal and a warning affixed to its side: "It Happened To Us. It Could Happen To You."

This story — of religious persecution and a squabble over property ownership — rode on the fierce winds of social media until Ammon Bundy caught a whiff of it. Bundy, one of the West's most divisive figures, hopped in a car alongside members of the Real Idaho Three Percenters militia to see what was going on for himself. He knew he had the power to get answers no one else could.

The 44-year-old is best known for his confrontations with the federal government: first, in 2014, when he helped lead an armed standoff against federal agents at his family's Nevada ranch in Clark County; and then, two years later, when he led the occupation of the federally managed Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Harney County, Oregon. In Oregon, Bundy was inspired by the story of Dwight and Steven Hammond — local ranchers, a father and son, who'd been resentenced to prison for setting fires on public land. (President Donald Trump pardoned them in July 2018.)

In both situations, Bundy, his father, brothers and supporters operated from a belief that the Constitution doesn't allow the federal government to own land — a theory that has no legal basis. Despite this, a jury acquitted Bundy of charges for the Oregon events,

Supporters of the Nickerson family stand next to a smoldering campfire overlooking the ranch they were evicted from. The family claims the eviction was motivated by their religious beliefs. *(opposite)*
Pete Caster / The Lewiston Tribune

Ammon Bundy at the New Code of the West Conference in Whitefish, Montana, where he urged audience members to take a stand in their own communities, as he has done. *(above)*
Lauren Grabelle / HCN

and he walked out of jail a free man after the Nevada standoff when a federal judge declared a mistrial in January 2018.

In March 2020, Department of Justice prosecutors will make oral arguments to a U.S. Court of Appeals judge, asking for another chance to try Bundy and his family for the 2014 Nevada standoff.

If the government loses again, the family's notoriety — and power — will only continue to grow. In the past two years, Bundy has inserted himself into squabbles over land ownership around the West, lecturing about federal overreach. "People contact me … expressing how their property rights are being infringed upon," he told me. "So we go and we research it, just like we did with the Hammonds." When he shows up in a town — from Whitefish, Montana, to Smithfield, Utah, to Modesto, California — his reputation precedes him. People wonder: Will my town be the site of the next big standoff?

The Nickerson situation had the potential to be the right kind of tinder, and Bundy is an eager strike-anywhere match. "Get as many people as you can there," Bundy urged his followers in a Facebook Live video. "Please respond. I think this warrants our action. Thank you."

The phones at the Clearwater County Sheriff's Office started ringing immediately. Angry calls came from Texas, Minnesota, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Wisconsin, Arkansas and every Western state. "My staff (was) pulling their hair out," said Chris Goetz, the sheriff. "These people are calling, yelling at them, saying, 'Let me talk to the sheriff.' And (my staff would) ask to take a name and number, and they'd hang up."

As Bundy and the militia members drove toward Orofino, Goetz steeled himself for the worst. "Once he did that first video that he was going to Orofino, the media requests came from across the West. All these people are interested because Ammon Bundy threw his name in there," he said. "It's real: The number of people that were on their way and were calling here because he said, 'Go help these people.' "

Soon, Goetz's phone rang once more. This time it was Bundy himself calling — just like he called sheriffs in Clark County, Nevada, and Harney County, Oregon, years ago. He wanted a meeting.

The sheriff knew he had to say yes.

WHEN THE MALHEUR National Wildlife Refuge standoff pushed Harney County, Oregon, into the headlines, David Ward — the county sheriff — was at the center, trying to keep the peace. Four years later, neighbors there are still divided … *(continued on page 43)*

Bankrupting immigrants

As corporations cash in, mixed-status families are thrown into deep poverty.

BY JESSICA KUTZ

IN MARCH 2009, at dinnertime, Myrna Obeso got a call at her house in Tucson, Arizona. At first, the busy mother of two didn't pick up. Robo-callers were always bugging the family at that time of night. On this particular evening, the caller was more persistent than usual. Exasperated, she finally answered.

"Pima County Jail," a recorded voice said.

As her mind struggled to make sense of the call, another voice came through: that of her husband, Gustavo Velasco. He was supposed to be at his second job, working nights as a cook at a nearby restaurant.

For years, Velasco had been using a fraudulent Social Security number. This was back before E-Verify — a government tool that allows employers to verify work documents — when jobs were easy to find if you could supply convincing documents.

A couple of years before, however, the state passed laws resulting in undocumented residents caught using fake documents to be charged with felony identity theft. Previously, the felony charges were used to prosecute people who benefited from fraudulent documents to do things like rack up credit card debt, not those who were merely seeking jobs. Advocates like Puente Arizona, a migrant justice organization, say the changes were aimed specifically at undocumented workers. Because of these laws, former Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio was able to charge hundreds of undocumented workers with felonies during his controversial workplace raids.

Velasco's arrest that March 2009 night would also end in a felony charge. He spent five months in the Pima County Jail and was eventually offered a $10,000 bail. But because Velasco was undocumented, he not only had to fight those charges, he had to fight his detention and possible deportation. The time he spent inside Eloy Detention Center, in the cactus-speckled desert of rural Arizona, exacted a psychological toll on him. He never knew how long he'd be locked up, or if he'd be deported; in fact, he still doesn't. But the financial impact on his wife and two children — and the life they had built here in the U.S. — would prove equally devastating.

UNTIL VELASCO'S ARREST, Obeso was a stay-at-home mother raising two elementary-age children. During the five months he spent inside a jail cell, she was suddenly left scrambling to pay bills while raising money for his bond. "I was paying for rent and utilities, everything," she told me from her festively decorated living room. She emptied their saving accounts — they had been on track to buy a house — and sold their car. She started selling manicures, baked goods and Mexican desserts like flan, as well as the silver jewelry that a friend gave her in order to raise money. Eventually, she began cleaning houses, too. She had started the process to sign up for food stamps for her children, who are U.S. citizens, but her lawyer advised against accepting any public benefits.

Detention is designed to target people who are here illegally. But for Obeso and the estimated 16 million others who are part of mixed-status families, it can have an impact that ripples far beyond the individual families and communities entangled in U.S. immigration laws. When a relative is arrested, a family spends, on average, $9,228 on costs related to detention and deportation proceedings. Once other indirect costs, such as lost wages, are factored in, the true financial loss is closer to $24,000, according to a report released last October by the Binational Migration Institute at the University of Arizona. What's more, a significant number of those financially impacted are already U.S. citizens or are here legally, said Geoff Boyce, the report's lead researcher. This means that the distinction between those who are targeted by immigration enforcement and those impacted by detention and deportation needs to be examined more thoroughly. "We need to think much more broadly about what the social and economic repercussions are for this (enforcement) and who is absorbing those," Boyce said.

In Tucson, where the study was conducted and where Obeso lives, 81% of the 125 households surveyed reported that the person detained was a primary breadwinner. Subsequently, the median average income for a household dropped to approximately $22,000 after an immigration arrest.

"(It's) taking families and throwing them into deep poverty," Randy Capps, director of research for U.S. programs at the Migration Policy Institute, told me. "That is the number-one impact on the family. Of course, there are psychological impacts, too."

Obeso was eventually able to pay Velasco's county bond. But because Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, had been informed of his immigration status, he wasn't set free. Instead, he was handed over to federal immigration authorities and sent to Eloy Detention Center. He would remain there for another two months while he waited for the outcome of his case.

After his release, life reached a new normal. The family downsized to an apartment and adjusted to living on a smaller budget. It was hard, Obeso said, but they never lacked basic necessities. They were able to make it work.

Then, early in the morning in April 2010, two ICE agents and a Border Patrol agent came to their apartment. Obeso wasn't surprised when she opened the door. Her pro bono lawyer, Margo Cowan, had called a few weeks before to warn Obeso that her husband might be detained again. Velasco's case had ended in a felony conviction, making him a target for deportation — just as the 2007 and 2008 state laws had intended. The agents entered with a bright flashlight and let her husband change out of his sleeping clothes before escorting him out. Obeso remembers her eldest son asking her, "Mama, my dad went in that white van. Where is he going?"

He was headed back to the Eloy Detention Center, this time for nearly two years. Obeso and a public defender continued fighting from the outside: If they could get his case dropped to a misdemeanor for false impersonation, then he'd no longer be a priority for deportation. Velasco had no prior criminal record, had been living in the U.S. for over a decade and had two U.S.-born children, so he had a decent chance. Ironically, however, according to a report from the American Civil Liberties Union, this made him even more

"It's taking families and throwing them into deep poverty. That is the number-one impact on the family. Of course, there are psychological impacts, too."

Myrna Obeso stands in her Tucson, Arizona, neighborhood. **Laura Saunders / HCN**

During a public legal clinic, Margo Cowan meets with her clients. (*above*) The Velasco family leaves a Sunday service at their church. (*below*) **Laura Saunders / HCN**

vulnerable to prolonged detention. People like Velasco are more likely to fight their cases because they believe they have a shot at winning, and that usually adds up to a longer detention time. Those who don't have much of a case move through the system more quickly, and end up deported.

ACCORDING TO THE MIGRATION Policy Institute, profit is one of the driving forces behind the increasingly punitive immigration policies lobbied for by the detention industry. SB 1070, for example, known colloquially as the "Show Me Your Papers Law," was drafted in part in 2010 at a private event held in Washington, D.C., by the conservative nonprofit American Legislative Exchange Council, or ALEC, prior to its introduction in the Arizona Legislature. Attendees included private prison lobbyists from industry giants like the Corrections Corporation of America, or CCA — now doing business as CoreCivic. A CoreCivic spokeswoman says the company did not help draft the legislation. NPR found that 30 of the law's 36 co-sponsors in the Legislature had received campaign donations from private prison operators. CoreCivic

maintains that it "does not, under longstanding policy, lobby for or against policies or legislation that would determine the basis for or duration of an individual's incarceration or detention," according to its website.

State laws like SB 1070 and changes in federal immigration policy have encouraged overpolicing and a rise in immigrant detention. But these laws and the ideology behind them aren't new: They were built slowly over the decades, designed to accustom Americans to the idea that jailing immigrants is an acceptable way to deal with illegal migration, argues César Cuauhtémoc García Hernández in his new book, *Migrating to Prison*. Much to the benefit of the booming detention industry, evolving immigration policy reinforces the idea that immigrants should be exceptional to be accepted into the country. This exemplifies the perverse idea of American exceptionalism, García Hernández writes.

As immigration enforcement grows even more punitive under the Trump administration, the private immigrant detention industry is seeing its profits rise yet again: A record 49,000 people are kept in detention facilities on average, and for longer periods of time. To meet the demand, detention facilities are popping up in new places.

CoreCivic, which runs Arizona's Eloy Detention Center, saw its stocks soar by 43% the day after the election of Donald Trump. It is currently seeking to build a new 1,000-person facility in Evanston, Wyoming, to house immigrants transported from Utah. The Department of Homeland Security has requested yet more bed space to house migrants for fiscal year 2020, asking for a total of 54,000 beds, 2,500 of which would be used for family units. As the for-profit detention industry continues to grow and prosper, families like Obeso's become the collateral damage.

VELASCO FOUND DETENTION maddening. For 20 months, he watched others come and go from Eloy, and he wondered why he wasn't leaving, too. Prior to his ordeal, he'd thought about starting a food truck, but now his plans were on hold indefinitely. With Cowan's encouragement, he assembled a book of recipes from around the world from his fellow detainees. He maintained a cordial relationship with the guards and took on landscaping and maintenance work inside the facility for a paltry hourly wage. (Corrections facilities in Arizona pay anywhere between 20 to 80 cents an hour, according to the Prison Policy Initiative.) He needed to keep busy, to keep from going crazy.

Meanwhile, on the outside, Obeso was yet again thrust into a precarious position. She couldn't keep up with the rent on her apartment, so for the last three months of her lease her church helped out. "But when I had to move, I had nowhere to go," she told me. On the brink of homelessness, she and her two children moved in with a volunteer from a local organization called Keep Tucson Together, a group of community organizers and lawyers who help immigrant families caught in the detention and deportation cycle.

According to Boyce, the lead researcher behind the Binational Migration Institute report, housing insecurity affected a quarter of the households in his study. Seven of the families interviewed reported that they had foreclosed on a house, and four were evicted. Others, like Obeso, saw their living situation change dramatically as they had to move in with relatives or friends. "It was really hard to cover our expenses, even more so because my children were little," Obeso said. Her father, who lives in Nogales, just on the other side of the border, helped out with smaller purchases, like tennis shoes for the kids. Her church helped her with school supplies and meal vouchers. She kept working.

In 2012, with the help of his lawyer, Velasco's felony was dropped to a misdemeanor. Once the judge downgraded the charge, he was no longer a priority for deportation. Yet he remained locked up in Eloy. Eventually, he was able to get a bond hearing, and Obeso once again raised money with the help of her community. Finally, in November 2012, Velasco was released. His immigration case was closed, and every year since he's been able to apply for — and get — a work visa.

That is, until this July. Seven years after his case was closed, he and Obeso were told that it would be reopened under new Trump administration rules. The message was clear, said Capps of the Migration Policy Institute: "Everyone who is removable should be removed." When Obeso got the news, she broke down in tears, worried that her husband faced detention for a third time.

ON A BRISK FALL EVENING, children play between the long blue tables of the Pueblo High School Cafeteria as families gather to assess what options they have to stay in the country. Different stations offer legal council and assistance in filling out paperwork for immigrants seeking to fight deportation. One volunteer keeps a list of those waiting to be helped, calling out their names over the din of chatter. Almost everyone is talking in Spanish.

Obeso's lawyer, Cowan, is one of the founders of these weekly legal clinics hosted by Keep Tucson Together. Besides her pro bono work, she's a public defender for Pima County. Despite the heavy workload, she's neither frantic nor stressed; she exudes an aura of patience amid the thrum of all the activity. Volunteers routinely go up to inquire about specific cases as a printer at her table spits out important documents.

"I feel really pumped up," she told me. "I think the magic of the clinic is you take a very negative, scary, kind of horrific emotional charge, and you flip it, and then you do something, and it is so powerful." It's a way for the community to fight back.

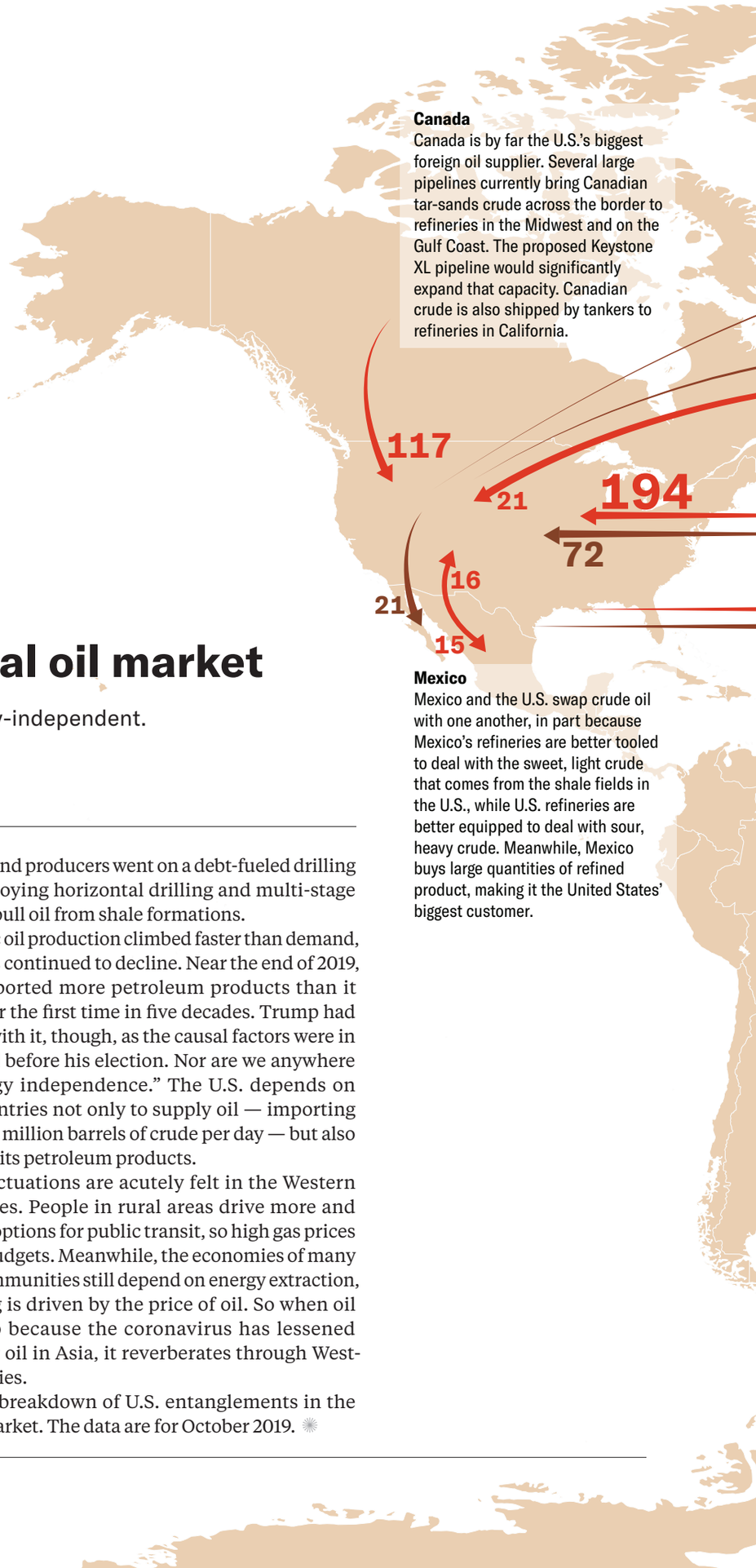
Velasco's is just one of many cases that have been recently reopened. Every few days, Cowan hears about more clients who will have to once again fight their immigration cases. The clinic helps mitigate the costs for those her team can help. The cost of an immigration lawyer can be prohibitive: On average, it takes around $3,700 to fight an immigration arrest. But hiring a lawyer makes a big difference: Those who have legal representation see immigration relief at a rate 5.4 times higher than those who don't, according to Boyce's research. And there are still more costs associated with having a loved one caught up in the system. People who can opt out of detention and agree to be tracked through an ankle monitor are charged $420 a month, for example.

"It's just so punitive, because those companies hold people hostage," Cowan said. "You want out, and you get ordered an ankle monitor." The longer someone is in detention, the more the bills pile up. "It's a business," Obeso told me, as she listed off the extra expenses she's had to pay to facilities over the years for things like phone calls and commissary items. "All the detention centers are companies that the government pays to keep people."

Obeso now works as a volunteer at the legal clinic. Initially, she worked with people on their bonds; now she helps them with their paperwork so they can adjust their status. She's become something of an expert herself, having been through the immigration maze with her family. She tells me she wants those who come to the clinic to be received with a positive attitude, and she works hard to be understanding. She knows how frustrating it all can be when you are in the middle of it, and every path looks like it's blocked by a wall.

Today, Obeso and her family appear to be closer to finding the exit. Obeso and Velasco's 21-year-old son, Arym, can now sponsor his father. But others won't be so lucky.

That evening at the clinic, a young man dressed in University of Arizona gear approaches Obeso. "Are you Myrna?" he asks. He'd been sent to her to talk about his situation. She's dressed in a warm red sweater, her hair pulled back in a ponytail that bobs as she asks him questions about his case. A cop had checked his immigration status during a traffic stop. She's warm and charming as he tells her that he's lived here for a long time, he has kids and a life here.



The tangled web of the global oil market

The U.S. is a net exporter of petroleum, but it is not energy-independent.

BY JONATHAN THOMPSON

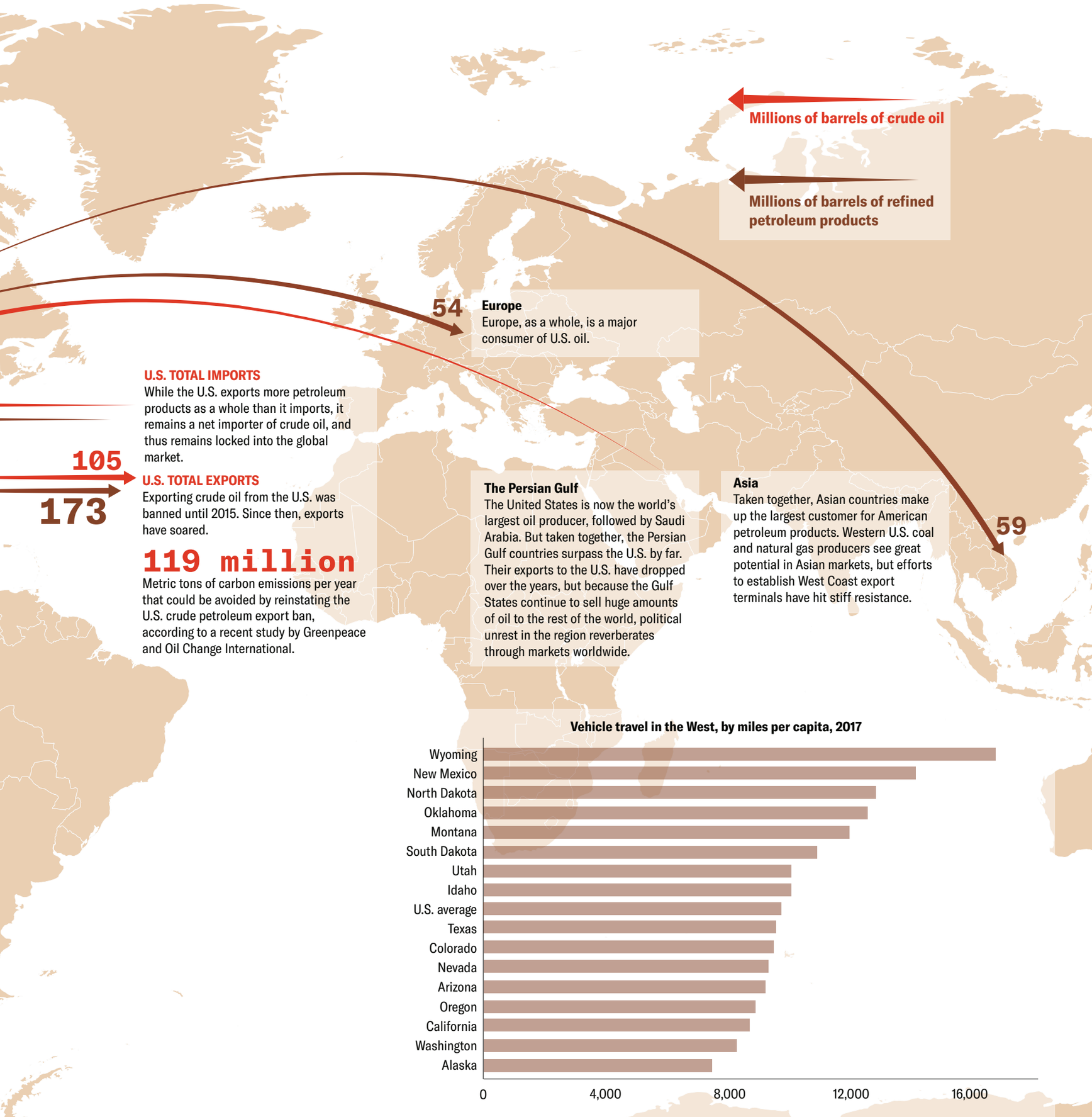
AFTER ORDERING A DRONE STRIKE on Qassem Soleimani, Iran's elite forces commander, President Donald Trump told the media that the assassination was made possible by the United States' newfound energy-independence. Previous presidents had refrained from such acts, fearing higher prices at the pump, he said, but now, "we are independent, and we do not need Middle East oil." As is often the case with Trump's statements, this one is problematic and inaccurate. The U.S. may not need oil from the Persian Gulf, but we are not energy-independent, and never will be. But that hasn't stopped presidents from trying to spin oil independence into policy justifications.

"Americans will not have to rely on any source of energy beyond our own," Richard Nixon declared, seeking to quell public angst over the 1973 oil embargo. Yet Americans continued to guzzle petroleum, and oil imports rose, reaching a 10 billion-barrel peak in 2006. In 2009, a number of factors collided, reversing the trend. Americans drove less during the financial crisis; domestic consumption decreased, and imports fell. Meanwhile, the Federal Reserve implemented policies that encouraged investment in high-risk endeavors, including drilling. Global oil prices rose again, as demand from Asia increased. And producers went on a debt-fueled drilling frenzy, deploying horizontal drilling and multi-stage fracking to pull oil from shale formations.

Domestic oil production climbed faster than demand, and imports continued to decline. Near the end of 2019, the U.S. exported more petroleum products than it imported for the first time in five decades. Trump had little to do with it, though, as the causal factors were in motion well before his election. Nor are we anywhere near "energy independence." The U.S. depends on foreign countries not only to supply oil — importing more than 8 million barrels of crude per day — but also to purchase its petroleum products.

Price fluctuations are acutely felt in the Western United States. People in rural areas drive more and have fewer options for public transit, so high gas prices can break budgets. Meanwhile, the economies of many Western communities still depend on energy extraction, and drilling is driven by the price of oil. So when oil prices drop because the coronavirus has lessened demand for oil in Asia, it reverberates through Western economies.

Here's a breakdown of U.S. entanglements in the global oil market. The data are for October 2019.



Vehicle travel in the West, by miles per capita, 2017

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—Meryle A. Korn, Bellingham, Washington

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Dear Friends

Panels galore, a trip to sunny Tucson, and a feature story that keeps on giving: Here's what we've been up to over the past month.

In late January, the normally dispersed editorial squad gathered in Tucson, Arizona, for our biannual editorial retreat — but not a full surrender. In between conflict-resolution training — not that journalists ever butt heads — and a feature-writing workshop, some staff found time for a saguaro-filled hike up nearby Tumamoc Hill.

Earlier, the Indigenous Affairs Desk's Associate Editor Tristan Ahtone, Assistant Editor Anna V. Smith and Editorial Fellow Kalen Goodluck paneled a speaker series by the University of Arizona's Indigenous Peoples Law and Policy Program. Editor-in-Chief Brian Calvert joined Contributing Editor Ruxandra Guidi for two talks, one to an audience of readers and another to a roomful of University of Arizona students.

Shortly after Tucson, Brian also hosted a panel discussion at Los Angeles' Autry Museum of the American West, which is hosting a *High Country News* exhibit in celebration of our 50th anniversary. Contributing Editor Graham Lee Brewer and *LA Times* writer Gustavo Arellano joined Brian in discussing myths of the West and the region's complicated past and present. Some 80 people attended. So many panels!

Meanwhile, Contributing Editor Elena Saavedra Buckley recently appeared on the popular true crime podcast *Criminal*, where she discussed her feature story on a funeral home's body-brokering scheme (*"None of this happened the way you think it did," 6/10/19*). And back in western Colorado, development staff Hannah Stevens and Laurie Milford met *HCN* supporters Jean Dewart, Kelly Gwendolyn Gallagher and some New Mexico friends on a trail in the Holy Cross Wilderness.

We are sad to announce the passing of Doris Teals, a longtime member of our customer service team. Doris will be remembered for her kind heart, sassy sense of humor and painstaking attention to detail, not to mention the Dove chocolates she shared with everyone. She will be greatly missed.

Finally, a correction: "One woman took a stand against tribal disenrollment and paid for it" (*February* 2020) mischaracterized the familial relationship between Carmen Tageant and LeAndra Smith. It has been corrected online. We regret the error.

—Kalen Goodluck, for the staff

CHASING GHOSTS

The human relationship with cougars has more to do with story than science

STORY AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY SARAH GILMAN

LAST WINTER, I WENT WALKING on a gray afternoon between storms. Meltwater pattered the snow around the ponderosas. Fog wound through overhanging boughs. My dog, Taiga, strained at her leash. We turned up a ravine, climbing toward an outcrop above our home where we could watch clouds river down the narrow Methow Valley, on the east slope of Washington's North Cascades.

I turned my head and froze. Through the trees, a brown shape closed in. Not coyote. Not bobcat. Rounded ears; a long bow of tail. Seeing itself seen, the cougar dropped to a crouch a few paces from me. It was still woolly with kittenhood, but big enough to send a chill down my spine. Its golden eyes locked on mine.

Time suspended for a moment; I watched from outside myself.

I grew up in cougar habitat on Colorado's Front Range. Summer camp came with instructions on what to do if you saw one. In 1991, the year I turned 10, a cougar killed a young man for the first time in the state's recorded history. When I was a teenager, two little boys died in attacks. Later, backpacking and building trails in the state's high Rockies, my friends and I told dark stories of cougars, making them the ghosts that haunted our adventures. But I had never met one.

Now, I numbly ran through that old camp advice: Don't run; make noise. I yelled and hoisted Taiga over my shoulder. The cougar circled us, settled again. When I started to walk away, it padded after me. I raised my voice to a scream. It paused, uncertain, then vanished into the trees.

I soon heard from others in our neighborhood who encountered the cat — on the trail, peering through a glass door. A husband and wife woke one night to noises like wind in a tunnel. In the moonlight beyond their window, they saw an adult cougar sing-songing to a young one, a sound, the man said, "like nothing I've heard before or since."

The couple phoned Lauren Satterfield, a cougar researcher who works in the valley. She set up motion-sensing cameras that revealed

two juveniles and two full-grown cougars wandering among our forest-scattered homes. Satterfield and her crew captured one of them — not the half-grown cat I met, but an adult female. They fitted her with a GPS collar, then released her to transmit secrets about her life.

The familiar woods felt upended. I walked them now with a sense of vertigo, disoriented by these fleeting brushes with a creature of foreign compass, who navigated the serrated mountains and the tumbling tributaries of the Methow River, the small towns of Winthrop and Mazama and their Nordic skiing trails, according to experience and rules wholly its own. To recover my bearings, I called Satterfield and asked if I could follow her following cats.

SATTERFIELD IS DIRECT and plainspoken, and was blunt about my odds of seeing anything more. Collaborating with the state Department of Fish and Wildlife for her Ph.D. at the University of Washington, she's studying how cougars are affected by wolves' return to the state. I could join a collaring excursion, she said, but the cats are so elusive that, even with houndsmen and their tracking dogs, a team might collectively snowmobile 400 miles a day over a weekend and still catch nothing.

That invisibility has helped cougars persist, argues Jim Williams, regional supervisor for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, in his book *Path of the Puma*. European colonists obliterated the cats in most of the East and Midwest. But unlike wolves and grizzlies, cougars hid well in the rugged West, and their preference for hunting over scavenging protected them from poison and traps. After bounty-killing programs ended in the '60s and '70s, the survivors reaped the benefits of rebounding deer and elk numbers, as well as growing public sympathy for predators. Cougar-hunting rules grew more protective. In the 1990s, voters ended cougar hunting altogether in California and banned the use of hounds for hunting them in Washington and Oregon. More than 90% of Washington residents surveyed in 2008 saw cougars as an essential part of ecosystems, with an inherent right to exist. Today, an estimated 30,000 wander the West, overlapping with people nearly everywhere, mostly unseen and thus, unremarked.

But cougars' invisibility has a downside. "Since mystery is the mother of exaggeration, the animal gradually acquired a reputation for prowess and lurking danger far beyond what it really deserved," naturalist Claude T. Barnes wrote in 1960. Later, the West's human population ballooned, sending more homes and recreationists into cougar habitat, and attacks on people rose from practically nonexistent to vanishingly rare. They total about 20 deaths in North America since 1890, and attacks on livestock and pets have risen, too — plenty enough to keep old terrors alive. In 1997, William Perry Pendley, then president of the Mountain States Legal Foundation, now acting director of the Bureau of Land Management, accused cougar defenders of condoning "human sacrifice."

This mythologizing cuts both ways. Without direct contact, it's as easy to revere cougars as harmless avatars of nature as it is to cast them as monsters. People whose families have lived in the woods for generations usually know a fair amount about cougars, said Satterfield. But others simply "know that they're there, and that's all they know," she added, unless they've tried to learn more.

Into that cougar-shaped hole in experience go all kinds of visions, blotting the animal from clear sight just as fully as do its proclivities for cover and darkness. But with the help of camera traps, GPS tracking and other methods, science has drawn cougars partially into focus — and out of the shadows of story.

I MET SATTERFIELD and field crew lead Nate Rice on a cold March dawn. Frost haloed the river-bottom vegetation. Wind cheese-grated our faces as we snowmobiled along a ski trail, scanning among deer and domestic dog prints in the hard-packed snow for coaster-sized tracks —

four toes with no mark from the retracted claws, lined over a large pad. Where dogs wend, Satterfield told me, a cougar walks deliberately, from somewhere to somewhere. But the only cat tracks we found appeared suddenly, four shallow skins of ice, then vanished.

Defeated, we trucked the snowmobiles to the rolling hills above the valley, abstract swaths of dun and white. Satterfield's hands on the wheel were chapped with cold, crisscrossed with scars and scabs. The houndsmen helping with the study were waiting for us at a snowed-in road.

"I'll tell you one thing," one of them said after Satterfield passed him the telemetry antennae to check a collared cat that was nearby. "You'll sure see the dogs run. I don't know what it is out there" — he glanced at the dark forest beyond the road — "the cats learn to fly or something." The hounds hauled at their leads, baying and eager to chase a cat into a tree, where it could be more easily tranquilized and collared. Let loose, they raced in the direction opposite from the one we'd expected.

Chaotic as it looked from behind four retreating dog butts, studies like Satterfield's have revealed patterns in cougars' lives. "What's interesting to me is how dynamic they are," she observed. "They navigate down in the river bottom and all the way to these slopes up here. They've been able to find a way to live in everything from Patagonia to Florida swamps, to the desert, to the forests here, to western Washington." They chirp like birds to their kittens. And they're individuals. "As soon as someone says they never do 'X,' " she said, "some animal out there is going to go do that exact thing."

Ambush predators, cougars are undeniably spooky, sometimes stalking silently for an hour or more before springing onto their quarry and delivering a crushing bite to neck or throat. Cougars also build worlds: By keeping deer, their primary prey, on the move and populations in check, they help vegetation thrive, sheltering a host of other species. In the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, cougar-killed carcasses have been shown to sustain 39 species of scavenging mammals and birds, and 215 species of beetle.

The cats have their own social order. Older males maintain large territories slotted together like puzzle pieces across available habitat, and females nest smaller home ranges inside. To establish a territory, young males must fight or leave; many die. That may be why cougar populations level off at consistent densities instead of exploding, as some critics warn. A male and the females in his territory may also form a sort of cougar neighborhood, where individuals occasionally share kills, perhaps on the assumption that the favor will be returned. "For an animal to exhibit reciprocity, it needs to be smart enough and have a brain developed enough to interact based on memory," said researcher Mark Elbroch, author of the forthcoming book *The Cougar Conundrum* and director of Panthera's Puma Program.

The upshot of these intricate interactions is that hunters may cause social disarray if they kill too many cats, opening once-stable territories to an influx of younger cougars. That could boost cougar activity in residential areas, as well as complaints.

But there is also evidence of how little most cougars want to do with humans — and how well they avoid us, even at close range. Near developed areas and high human traffic, cougars restrict their activities to between dusk and dawn, when people hunker inside. Even close to homes, they heavily favor wild prey over easier-to-catch domestic animals. Studies have shown they will flee from hard-won kills at the mere sound of a human voice. "We would probably be dumbfounded if we knew how few encounters are even recognized as such," said Justine Smith, a wildlife ecologist at UC Davis.

Satterfield hopes to explore similar dynamics here in the Methow, where cougars flow down from the mountains in winter, perhaps following mule deer seeking forage in the valleys — habitats people also favor. Fitbit-like technology on some collars helps her suss out how homes like mine affect cougars' hunting, for good or ill. They alert her crew to location-specific bursts of speed, so they can assess tracks in that spot, translating the animals' remotely sensed movements into readable language.

By afternoon, though, Satterfield's team had pursued only dogs through the hills, doubling back and again until the last was collected, still howling with the search. The most dramatic chase was one we found drawn in snow. Bound marks led from the shade of a big ponderosa into a wide depression, where one muscled body collided with another. A spreading pink stain. A drag mark. And finally, the spraddled remains of a deer, its ribcage hollowed, its hooves skyward. All around, tracks in blood and shadow — magpie, raven, eagle — the traceries of wingtips brushing the drifts, a roil of life pouring in after the cat's kill, shown clear on the canvas of winter.

SCIENCE MAY NEVER fully dispel cougars' mystery, but it can suggest better ways for us to make space for their lives. After years of study in collaboration with universities, for example, in 2013, Washington became the first state to restructure its sport hunt to preserve cougar social structure. Yet a lot of research is still ignored or not believed, said Department of Fish and Wildlife cougar and bear specialist Rich Beausoleil. "We've made incredible progress in some aspects of cougar management, but perception still outweighs science on so many fronts."

And though public cougar appreciation has swelled, it's distributed unevenly between urban areas and the rural places where people are more likely to contend with the animals. Outsized fear remains. In Alberta, Canada, in 2008, for instance, researchers found that more than half of survey respondents believed that their risk of a cougar attack was at least as great as their risk of a car wreck. That might be due to "cognitive illusion," where people overestimate the occurrence of rare events because they're memorable. And no wonder: Many get wildlife information from the media, which typically covers only extraordinary cougar behavior, like attacks on people.

In California, the number of complaints resulting in permits to kill cougars climbed steadily with human population growth from the '70s through the '90s. Then, after cougars killed two people in 1994, they ballooned — something researchers attributed less to a rise in cougar activity than to hyper-vigilance stoked by fear.

Something similar may be happening in Washington. The state logged nearly twice as many cougar reports in 2019 as in 2018, largely due to a jump in unconfirmed sightings. Cougars could be changing their movements because of changes in prey, and the state has stepped up efforts to encourage reporting. But it's also notable that a cougar killed a person in Washington in 2018 — the second in state history. And like California in the 1990s, the state steeply increased the number of cougars it killed in 2018 and 2019 for attacking livestock and pets.

Those removals are concentrated in the state's conservative northeastern corner, where wolves' return has frazzled local nerves and left some feeling powerless. At a March 2019 wildlife commission meeting, area residents testified for two hours that a "serious overabundance of predators" was obliterating deer, slaughtering domestic animals and threatening people. The commission initiated an early revision of the cougar hunt, raising worries that the state will increase hunting in places where it already regularly exceeds guidelines set to preserve cougar social structure.

"We are at a precipice now with large carnivores," said Anis Aoude, Washington state game division manager. With many species recovering, the next generation of biologists will face difficult questions: "How do

they live on a landscape that's dominated by people? Is that even possible in some places?" Cougars need big, wild land, but they're better than most at living alongside humans. We are everywhere, increasingly. Can more of us accept visceral, actual proximity — and what that entails?

In theory, I'd say yes. My cougar encounter had come to feel lucky, and beautiful. But stepping into the woods with my dog at night, I remembered the fix of its inscrutable gaze. I had learned ways to lessen chances of trouble: Leash dogs; don't feed deer; fence the attractive dry space under porches; keep pets indoors and chickens, goats and sheep in covered enclosures at night. "It's like buckling your seatbelt," as Satterfield said. I was starting to realize, though, that my gathering facts about cougars wasn't the same as coming to understand them. The complicated mix of awe and fear I felt had little to do with what a cougar is likely to do, and everything to do with what it's capable of doing. Layered with this was the guilty knowledge that, if something happened, it could easily be my fault — and the cat would be the one to pay.

ON OUR FINAL DAY together, Satterfield backtracked possible cougar meals, indicated by multiple GPS points sent from the same location over time. We were on the trail of the cat she had collared in my neighborhood. Satterfield pulled the truck up to a rustic home in sage hills a few miles from my place. The couple who lived there, devoted wildlife watchers, told us they had noticed perfect tracks down their snowy driveway the previous fall.

"Most people aren't surprised, but they're usually interested in finding out what the cat was doing there," Satterfield said. That's part of what makes carnivore work challenging and engaging, she added. "People care, whether they like them or hate them, or they're somewhere in the middle."

We paced back and forth on a scrubby hillside near the two-week-old signal until we smelled the sourness of vegetation spilled from a deer's stomach. Then, behind some bushes, a pile of wind-dulled hair and bone fragments. Satterfield jotted on a data sheet and we walked in widening circles, looking for a skull, a pelvis, any shard of story. There was nothing but a flock of juncos and some scat — the lion and the land keeping their own council, the invisible presence of the one rendering visible the wholeness of the other.

Later, I began to notice tracks in the snow. I found them along the road to my house, atop my own at the riverside. I knew the cat's path had nothing to do with me: The river is a travel corridor with good cover and lots of deer. Still, each time I walked alone, I glanced behind me. That awareness was both uncomfortable, and a gift. It is easier to know a place as sentient if you feel it watching you back. Easier, too, to understand you play a part in its fate.

In November, I caught up with Satterfield in her final field season. My neighborhood's collared cougar still wandered the valley, she told me, showing me a camera-trap photo on her phone. In it, the cougar stood sidelong, the bright night-coins of her eyes lit by the flash. It was my first glimpse of her. Perhaps, I thought, she felt herself watched, and, seeing no one, hurried into the night with a chill down her own spine. Then again, she seemed to look directly at me. I couldn't shake the feeling that she had seen me before. ✺

Sarah Gilman first wrote about her experiences with Satterfield and cougars for *The Methow Valley News* and *The Last Word on Nothing*.

THROWING WOLVES TO THE VOTE

SHOULD DEMOCRACY TAKE OVER WHERE SCIENCE ENDS?

By Ethan Linck

THE LAST WOLF resident in Colorado in the 20th century died in 1945 at the edge of the San Juan Mountains, where a high green country falls into dark timber near the headwaters of the Rio Grande. It was caught by its leg in the ragged jaws of a steel trap, set by federal authorities following reports that it had killed 10 sheep.

If the wolf was mourned, it wasn't mourned by many. Contemporary newspaper articles reflected widespread support for ridding the West of wolves. "Wolves are like people in that they must have their choice morsel of meat," wrote Colorado's *The Steamboat Pilot* in an April 1935 story on the retirement of William Caywood, a government contract hunter with over 2,000 wolf skulls to his credit. "(Some would eat) nothing but the choice parts of an animal unless they were very hungry. Wolves are killers from the time they are a year old."

Seventy-five years later, public perception has changed, and otherwise clear-eyed Westerners regularly wax poetic over *Canis lupus*. "Colorado will not truly be wild until we can hear the call of the wolf," opined one writer in a recent editorial for *Colorado Politics*. "That mournful sound rekindles primordial memories of our ancestors, and to most of us, brings a state of calmness that nothing else can approach."

Wolves, it turns out, may be a part of the world we want to live in after all.

This about-face is more than conjecture. According to a recent poll of 900 demographically representative likely voters, two-thirds supported "restoring wolves in Colorado," echoing similar polls over the past 25 years. Yet state wildlife officials have been reluctant to comply, wary of the toxic politics surrounding reintroduction in the Northern Rockies.

In response, activists seized an unprecedented strategy. A coalition of nonprofit groups in Colorado, led by the recently formed Rocky Mountain Wolf Project, spent 2019 tirelessly gathering support to pose the question to voters directly through a 2020 ballot initiative. They succeeded, delivering more than 200,000 signatures to the Colorado secretary of State. Initiative 107 was officially ratified in January and will be voted on this November. (Meanwhile, neither politicians nor wolves have stayed still. In January, a state senator introduced a controversial bill to regain legislative control of the issue; in the same week, Colorado Parks and Wildlife confirmed that a pack of at least six wolves was now resident in northwest Colorado, though it's far from clear they represent the start of a comeback. For the moment, the future of wolves here still likely rests on the initiative.)

A new transplant to Colorado from the Pacific Northwest, I learned about the campaign from a canvasser outside Whole Foods in north Boulder on a sunny June day last year. In a parking lot filled with Teslas and Subarus, the tattooed volunteer stood opposite a wall-sized advertisement for the store, featuring the smiling faces of ranchers and farmers on the Western Slope.

It was a scene that would have done little to assuage fears that urban liberal voters were forcing reintroduction on rural residents. The canvasser caught my eye as I left the store. "Can I talk to you about reintroducing wolves to Colorado?" he asked, waving a pamphlet. I demurred and walked back to my bike. But the initiative and its backers — happy to use scientific justifications for their cause, paired curiously with populist rhetoric about its overwhelming public support — lingered in my head.

The initiative fascinated me, beyond its potential to transform the landscape of my adopted home. As an academic biologist, I tended to think science should be both privileged in debate and somehow above the fray. But my own environmental ethic operated on an independent track — drawing on the scientific literature when it supported my opinions, and claiming it was beside the point when it didn't. The Rocky Mountain Wolf Project reminded me uncomfortably of this contradiction.

If voters decide to reintroduce wolves to an increasingly crowded state from which they were effectively absent for over 70 years, Colorado's ecosystems and rural communities may change rapidly, in unexpected ways. Yet unlike nearly all other major wildlife management decisions, the choice would rest not with a handful of experts, but with the public.

The case poses a thorny set of questions. What will happen if wolves return to Colorado? When, if ever, can science tell us what to do? And, in the face of empirical uncertainty, could direct democracy be the best solution?

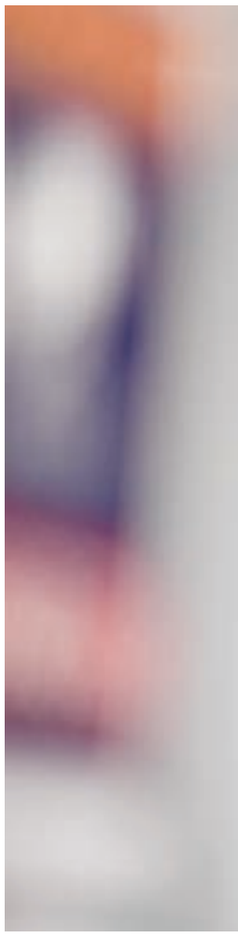
I wondered: If I knew my own research could dramatically affect ecosystems and livelihoods, would I want it to play more of a role in public life — or less?

CONSERVATIONISTS OFTEN HESITATE to frame arguments in moral terms, leaning on the perceived authority of empiricism to buttress their positions. At the same time, many conservation debates are complicated by the collision of disparate worldviews, where evidence is almost beside the point. Large carnivores — intensively studied and politically controversial — fall squarely in the center of this push-and-pull between data and belief.

In 1995, federal biologists released eight gray wolves from Alberta, Canada, in Yellowstone National Park, seeding a population that eventually grew to as many 109 wolves in 11 packs. With the wolves came the unique opportunity to test the theory that their influence on elk numbers and behavior reduced grazing pressure on riparian vegetation,

Darlene Kobobel, a wolf supporter, wears a wolf earring at the Colorado secretary of State's offices in December, as more than 200,000 signatures are dropped off in support of getting gray wolf reintroduction on the ballot.
AAron Ontiveroz/ MediaNews Group/ The Denver Post via Getty Images

Unlike nearly all other major wildlife management decisions, the choice would rest not with a handful of experts, but with the public.



with consequences for the very structure of rivers themselves.

Preliminary data suggested that this process — known as a *trophic cascade* — was indeed in effect. Elk numbers were down, grazing patterns were different, tree growth was up, and at least some river channels appeared to recover. A tidy encapsulation of the idea that nature had balance, it had broad appeal: In a viral YouTube video from 2014, British environmentalist George Monbiot breathlessly described these changes over soaring New Age synthesizers and stock footage of an elysian-seeming Yellowstone, calling it "one of the most exciting scientific findings of the past half century."

Yet ecology is rarely simple, and as the mythology surrounding the return of wolves grew, so, too, did skepticism in the literature. Over the past 15 years, a cascade of papers has called into question most of the findings taken for granted in the popular account of Yellowstone's transformation. Elk browsing might *not* be reduced in areas with wolves; streams and riparian communities had *not* returned to their original state; maybe *beavers* were more fundamentally important to these processes than wolves were. In sum, a 2014 review paper suggested that there are no "simple, precise, or definitive answers" to the question of whether wolves caused a trophic cascade in the park; another evocatively concluded that "(the wolf) is neither saint nor sinner except to those who want to make it so."

Yellowstone represented a single experiment — one possible outcome among many. In a different corner of the West with more people, or different habitats, or more or fewer elk — in Colorado, for example — would wolves have had the same effect? Last June, a paper in the journal *Biological Conservation* attempted to answer this question indirectly by aggregating data on species reintroductions and introductions around the world and asking whether their removal or addition caused a reversion to historic conditions. Unsurprisingly, the answer was "it depends": Restoring predators has unpredictable, complex consequences.

That paper's lead author, Jesse Alston, was a graduate student in the Department of Zoology at the University of Wyoming. I met him on a bright fall day in Laramie, at a coffee shop in a strip mall on the east side of town. Driving up from Boulder the same morning, I marveled at the abrupt transition in landscape at the border between Colorado and Wyoming: In the span of only a few miles north of Fort Collins, the sprawl of the Front Range fades away, and the

Jesse Alston (left), a doctoral student at the University of Wyoming, uses a whiteboard to explain research conducted by by Mark Hebblewhite on trophic cascades in Canada's Banff National Park.
Rick Osborne / HCN

Longtime wolf advocate Rob Edward (right) speaks at the Colorado secretary of State's offices alongside some of the boxes containing signed petitions to include the wolf question on the Colorado ballot. **AAron Ontiveroz / MediaNews Group / The Denver Post via Getty Images**

High Plains begin rolling up into a sepia-colored saucer from the flatter, hotter agricultural land of eastern Larimer County.

Alston spoke quietly and slowly, in the cautious manner of someone who anticipated a long future working with wildlife and wildlife-related controversies. Though he thought the evidence favored trophic cascades in Yellowstone, he was circumspect about predicting whether wolf reintroduction in Colorado would have the same effect. "(It) really hinges on the idea of there not being adequate predation currently. And there are a lot of hunters in Colorado." But hunters are a minority of trail users, he added, and recreation of all kinds can influence elk behavior much the way fear of wolves does.

I asked him to elaborate on the role of science in justifying carnivore restoration and whether he thought it might backfire. He paused, thinking, then said: "I think the people who would be most turned off if you don't see large-scale ecosystem effects are the people who are least inclined to listen to science anyway, so I don't see that being that big of a deal. But I do think that — as scientists, particularly as *good* scientists — that we should be sure that our ideas are buttressed by empirical findings."

Of course, there are empirical findings, and then there are the caveats that always accompany them — the reasons we can't say for sure what will happen when wolves return. "I think really where the science-policy nexus is most problematic has been when there's misunderstanding of uncertainty," Alston continued. "I think it's good to advocate for causes that we believe in, but we should be pretty straightforward about discussing the uncertainty that comes along with that."

IF WOLVES ARE NOT an ecological magic bullet, it is not readily apparent in the literature of the Rocky Mountain Wolf Project, which nonetheless aims to "disseminate science-based information" as part of its mission. On its website, a blog post suggests that since wolf reintroduction to Yellowstone, "the ecosystem has balanced." This isn't wrong, necessarily. But it isn't correct, either, and the simplification belied a willingness to use science as a political battering ram. I was on board with the group's mission as a voter, a Coloradan. As a scientist, though, it made me uneasy.

Though the Rocky Mountain Wolf Action Fund is itself young — founded at the end of 2018 — its roots go back nearly to the release of wolves in Yellowstone, through its Boulder-based predecessor, Sinapu. In 2008, Sinapu — whose name was taken from the Ute word for wolves — was folded into Santa Fe-based WildEarth Guardians, which also sought to restore large carnivore populations to the Southern Rockies. On an October evening at a brewery in South Boulder, I asked Rob Edward — founder and president of the board of the wolf fund, longtime Sinapu employee and the public face of wolf reintroduction in Colorado for decades — why the group had chosen to emphasize what might be described as the spiritual resonance of the effects of carnivore reintroduction on ecosystems and landscapes.

Edward was eloquent but blunt, a middle-aged man who dressed in a way that suggested he was as comfortable in the rural parts of the state as in Boulder. His wife, Anne Edward, also a longtime wolf advocate, joined us; she was quieter, with gray hair and eyes that lit up whenever wolves were mentioned. They had chosen their language based on polling data, Rob Edward said. "They use that term — 'restoring the balance of nature.' Now, is it an oversimplification of a tremendously complicated system? Absolutely. Do I care? Not really." At the same time, he said, the connection to research and its perceived authority was important. "The public as a whole places a tremendous amount of stock in scientists."

While it was clear the couple would support reintroduction even if they were the only two people on earth in favor of it, they nonetheless viewed public opinion as validating. A ballot initiative was a necessary last resort, a way to force the state and its slow-moving wildlife officials to comply with the will of the people of Colorado. "We're not excluding experts, we're simply telling them, get it done!" Rob Edward said, pounding the table in a gesture that passed unnoticed against the backdrop of his general animation. "Figure it out! Don't keep machinating about it for another five decades. Get it done!"

As I listened to him, I again found myself deeply conflicted at the prospect of the ballot initiative, and at putting major wildlife management decisions up to a simple

vote. On the one hand, I appreciated that it was a creative solution to an intractable political problem, on behalf of a natural system divorced from the political ebb and flow of Denver. On the other, it seemed to set a dangerous precedent. As the history of our complicated relationship with wolves shows, popular opinion can be capricious. Was it really right to pose complex questions — questions at the limit of expert understanding — to a largely naive public?

Laws that translate science to policy can give a voice to a nonhuman world that cannot advocate for itself. Yet in our society, democracy is haunted by the question of whose voices matter. Edward was clear that polling showed clear majorities of Coloradans support wolf reintroduction across the state, including groups that you might expect to oppose it: Rural residents on the Western Slope, hunters and Republicans all support it by a substantial majority. But Colorado is changing, becoming less white, and he was unable to refer me to data broken down along racial and ethnic lines — particularly among historically disadvantaged groups that remain underrepresented at the ballot box.

Nor have the views of Indigenous people — who have the longest history of cultural connection to wolves, and whose lands in Colorado will likely be among the first impacted by a rebounding wolf population — been highlighted in the debate. I was unable to reach wildlife officials with the Southern Ute Tribe by press time, but they are clearly watching the issue closely. In a statement on the initiative, the tribe clarified that it does not have an official position on wolf reintroduction and is "simply evaluating whether (to) support, oppose, or remain neutral on the subject."

SCIENCE IS VERY GOOD at addressing the *how*, but often fails when confronted with the *should* — the biggest questions, which veer into the realm of values. There is no experiment we can conduct to say whether we should proceed with wolf introduction, no data that can tell us if it is the right thing to do. It comes down to how evidence is filtered through our worldview: whether we think of humans as a part of nature or separate from it, and whether we think changes in grazing habits and water channels — and the presence of wolves themselves — add up to a fundamental good worth fighting for.

"They have wolves on the Gaza Strip. They have wolves in Italy. They have wolves in Northern-freaking-California. Why can't we have wolves here?"

But, like conservationists, scientists often shy away from such moral judgments, and for valid reasons: the fear of being perceived as not impartial, thereby undercutting the authority of their research; a sense of obligation to the politically diverse taxpayers who fund their work; an acute awareness of the limitations of their data, statistics and the scientific method itself. In the public sphere, however, this feigned objectivity can have the negative consequence of suggesting there are scientific solutions to philosophical questions.

That wolf reintroduction advocates lean on science rather than those weightier themes is understandable. Yet arguing that having wolves in Colorado is an intrinsic good — because they represent what we want Colorado to become, not because they will have a net benefit on aspen growth or stream hydrology — would be more honest, and might win people over in unexpected ways.

Back at the brewery in suburban Boulder, Rob Edward vacillated between polished language justifying reintroduction in scientific terms and moments of raw emotion: "They have wolves on the Gaza Strip. They have wolves in Italy. They have wolves in Northern-freaking-California. Why can't we have wolves here?"

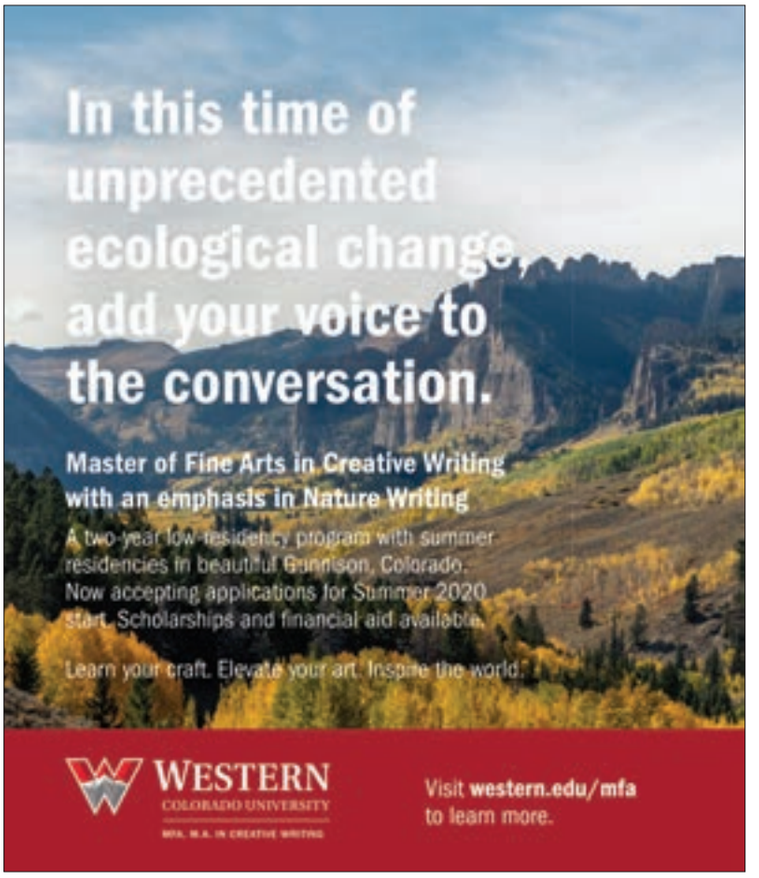
IF THE BALLOT INITIATIVE passes this November, a three-year planning process begins, followed by what Anne Edward described as "paws on the ground" — the release of the first few wolves — in 2023, almost certainly in the San Juan Mountains. Advocates anticipate that this process will be difficult, and they are prepared for a fight.

A successful reintroduction would be a remarkable accomplishment, given the fraught history of wolves in Colorado, as well as a landmark event in the gradual return of large carnivores to the 21st century West. It would also be a remarkable reflection of the blurring lines between science, belief and politics in the 21st century. As political gridlock becomes a feature of daily life, and environmental degradation — the cancerous rot of the Anthropocene — metastasizes, the impulse to circumvent collapsing institutions in response to crises is likely to become more common. In these circumstances, what role should scientists and science play? How much should uncertainty prevent action, and how much should empiricism determine our value system?

There are no easy answers here. If the basic question of whether or not to reintroduce wolves to Colorado is largely beyond the purview of science, then perhaps putting it to a vote is the most responsible option. The messiness of democracy can be terrifying. Still, there may not be a better way. After all, the language of values has been a part of the modern conservation movement since its birth — the Endangered Species Act of 1973, for example, states that endangered species provide "esthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, and scientific value to the Nation."

Toward the end of my conversation with the Edwards, thinking of their many years of advocacy and of the curious arc of history, I asked them what it was like to see an end in sight. "Do you allow yourselves to get a little carried with the fantasy of it?" I asked. "Things are in your favor — have you started imagining 'paws on the ground'?"

Both were quiet for a moment, and the noise of the bar washed over us. "I've been working on this for 25 years," Rob said, his voice breaking into a sob as Anne reached out and gripped his arm. "I certainly do."



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... *(continued from page 21)* over the federal government's role in the county.

But in December, Ward put it all behind him: He resigned, because his department was underfunded. The standoff is "a closed chapter of my life," he said. But perhaps more than any sheriff in the West, he can speak best to the unique sway Bundy has over people. "I don't think he's going to stop interjecting himself," Ward said. "People probably reach out to them every time they have a grievance. He's their knight in shining armor."

During the Malheur occupation, people in Clearwater County watched closely as the standoff dragged on, said Goetz. Orofino's an old mining town at the county's edge, a small city bifurcated by the rumbling Clearwater River, attracting floaters and fishermen to its rugged beauty. The county is home to the Clearwater and St. Joe national forests and the federally owned Dworshak Dam. Malheur, Goetz said, "could happen here." He called a meeting of local leaders to discuss, "What are we going to do if it does?"

It's interesting to hear this from Goetz, who has aligned with causes many Bundy supporters would also agree with: In 2017, he supported terminating the law enforcement arms of federal land-management agencies, such as the Forest Service. (He does, however, believe those agencies should keep their investigative departments.) He's a "Constitutional Sheriff" — part of a movement of sheriffs who believe their authority is the highest law in the land. But he's not as radical as the sheriffs who've come to the Bundys' side; he actually works closely with federal officials. "I support some of (the Bundys') positions, but I don't support their tactics," he told me. "Taking over the refuge in Oregon? I'm not sure what they were trying to accomplish with that."

But quickly, Goetz saw how Clearwater County residents felt about Bundy. Just as soon as Bundy announced he was coming to Orofino, locals told him to stay away. "There were more people than I thought that said, 'We know what happens when you show up,' " Goetz said. And that comforted him. "They had confidence that I'm doing the job."

By the time the Nickerson story reached Bundy, Goetz had been dealing with it for months. He said the family set up a booth at the local fair where they repeated their message — "It Happened to Us, It Could Happen to You" — and told people they wouldn't leave their property. "The Nickersons made numerous threats that they wanted a Ruby Ridge," Goetz said, a reference to a deadly 1992 standoff. (Donna Nickerson denies the allegation.) "They told one of the court clerks that 'we're going to win either way; we're going to stay there or they're going to shoot us all and we'll be with God.' "

When Bundy later repeated those words — "Ruby Ridge" — in a Facebook video, it was a not-so-subtle dog whistle to his followers in the Patriot movement, a call to lace up their boots. The incident on a remote Idaho mountaintop looms large in the hearts and minds of anti-government activists. After separatist Randy Weaver failed to appear for a court date, an 11-day standoff unfolded between Weaver's family and federal agents. In the end, it left three people dead: one U.S. marshal, Weaver's 14-year-old son, and his wife, Vicki — shot in the head by a sniper while holding the couple's infant daughter.

"They said it enough times and to enough people I had to take it seriously," Goetz said. "These threats got to the governor's office, the senator's office. The governor's office was particularly worried about these Ruby Ridge threats."

But when he sat down with Bundy and the Real Idaho Three Percenters in Orofino, Goetz showed them paperwork proving the Nickersons simply hadn't paid their mortgage. They met for over an hour. "I had really researched all these issues. When they asked questions, I had answers," he said. The meeting ended politely. Bundy seemed satisfied. And within hours, he made a new video calling off his followers: They needed to stand down. He said the Nickersons had lied to him.

All of a sudden, the phones in the Clearwater County Sheriff's Office went quiet.

BUNDY HAS WEIGHED IN on several other conflicts, too. This fall, he was in Ravalli County, Montana, with the militia, investigating a fight over public lands and private property. They questioned, in a video, if it could be the site of the next standoff. And in January, Bundy turned his attention to an Oregon Child Protective Services case. "You will be challenged to the end," he yelled, addressing a CPS worker in a Facebook video, "whatever that end is. ... You can say I'm threatening. I don't really care."

People take him seriously now, Bundy told me. "The elected representatives open their doors to us, and the sheriffs and bureaucrats. In Orofino, we went to the county courthouse. They were as cordial and helpful as anybody could possibly be," he said.

Peter Walker, author of *Sagebrush Collaboration: How Harney County Defeated the Takeover of the Malheur Refuge*, thinks counties across the West closely watched the 2016 occupation and won't stand for anything like it. "People in (Clearwater County) pretty quickly — and these are very conservative people — said, 'You don't know what you're talking about, this isn't your community, go away,' " he said.

Still, Bundy has power he didn't have before the 2016 occupation, Walker told me, particularly among people already inclined to anti-government sentiment. And David Neiwert, author of *Alt-America: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump* and an expert on right-wing extremism, agrees. "I think that the entire Patriot movement is constantly looking for situations like this where they can create these standoffs," he said. "It's mostly a matter of being a situation where they feel like they can make a public justification for it ... and also it has to be one where they can actually succeed."

In Orofino, a woman behind a cash register at a gas station said everyone in town heard Bundy was on his way. But "there was no trouble with the gentleman at all," she said. He was there, and then he was gone. He looked into the Nickerson case and concluded they were "just a bunch of bums sitting up there."

And so, as the *Los Angeles Times* reported, "Ammon Bundy's rush to save an Idaho ranch ends without a standoff." That Ammon Bundy did not lead people to take up arms against the government again is now a newsworthy event. But what didn't make headlines was the hypocrisy that informed his decision: How Bundy, in the past, has led two standoffs under the guise of a lie about the government, and yet chose not to indulge a new lie in the Nickerson case. And that says a lot about the source of his power. It comes from fear — a fear that he and the militia could strike anywhere, anytime. If the conditions are just right, if the lie is compelling enough and enough people want to believe it, maybe he'll lead gun-toting people to take over your town, too.

But the Nickerson case wasn't right. So there the family was: camping on the rocky shoulder of a steep mountain road. No snow was on the ground yet, but the November breeze cut like razors. Bare hands found their way into sweatshirt pockets, and the first embers of a campfire snapped. "(Bundy) spent just minutes with us. He spent all his time in town making deals? I don't know," Donna Nickerson said. "We are the victims here, but he tried to change that."

The Nickersons continue to add new videos to their website. In one, the family, wearing jet-black fake beards and thick black eyebrows, sings a song about Chase Bank. "We'll fight all the way for our home," they sing. "Yes, we'll fight all the way for our home."

At the end of January, the Nickersons were still out there on the side of the road.

The Elon Musk dilemma

When big thinkers think badly.

BY BRIAN CALVERT

SpaceX CEO Elon Musk talks about the challenges of a permanent human settlement on Mars at a 2017 aerospace conference. **Mark Brake / Getty Images**

BACK IN 2009, nearly three in four Americans believed climate change was real. In the run-up to the 2008 presidential election, Sen. John McCain, a Republican, even had climate action as part of his election platform. After Barack Obama's election, however, Republicans changed their tune on the climate, to denialism. When the message changed, the number of those surveyed who believed "global warming is happening" plunged, from 71% in 2009 to around 57% the following year, according to surveys by the Yale Climate Program. Anthony Leiserowitz, who directs the Yale program, told *Harvard Business Review* recently that the drop was driven by "political elite cues," which, he said, "is just a fancy way of saying that when leaders lead, followers follow."

That means we need good leaders, leaders who consider the consequences of their actions and rhetoric. Elon Musk, the billionaire businessman, is not that leader. But a look at his rhetoric can help separate big thinking from bad thinking. Musk's two biggest ideas — electric vehicles and the settlement of Mars — are underpinned with fallacies as specious as those of land speculator Charles Wilber, who claimed in 1881 that the arid West could be colonized because "rain follows the plow."

Consider Musk's electric vehicles. Musk regards technology as a kind of wonder, citing science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke, who said, "A sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." But tech isn't magic; it's material. And it requires material resources. A world full of electric vehicles (which, granted, would have some environmental benefits) would also demand a massive power grid, and that would require either burning more fossil fuels, building more nuclear facilities, or plastering open spaces with solar panels, wind turbines and hydrodams. It would also require huge amounts of rare materials, aggressively mined at great cost to landscapes, wildlife, plants and people.

Tesla is currently being sued, along with Apple, Dell, Google and Microsoft, for allegedly contributing to dangerous forced child labor in the cobalt mines of Congo. Musk's massive battery factory east of Reno, Nevada, meanwhile, will use as much water as a small city. A recent *USA Today* investigation found a high rate of injury in the so-called Gigafactory, which has also strained Reno's first responders, exacerbated a housing shortage and, ironically, clogged roads with traffic. Musk has suggested "high-quality" mobile homes as an answer, but so far, none have been built.

Musk, who was born in South Africa in 1971 and arrived in California in 1995, made a fortune with digital endeavors, including the development of PayPal. Like many successful entrepreneurs, he espouses a jingoistic brand of Americanism. In explaining his desire to expand into space exploration, Musk expresses a deterministic view of American greatness that is deeply problematic. "The United States," he told Caltech graduates in 2018, "is a nation of explorers … (and) a distillation of the spirit of human exploration." This romantic view of imperialism echoes John O'Sullivan, the man who coined the term "Manifest Destiny" and who declared in 1839: "The expansive future is our arena. We are entering on its untrodden space, with the truths of God in our minds. … We are the nation of human progress, and who will, what can, set limits to our onward march? Providence is with us, and no earthly power can." Such thinking was used to justify the genocide of North American Indigenous peoples.

Musk's romantic worldview holds another assumption: that humans would be inherently better off as a multi-planet species, rather than a single-planet one. Thus colonization of other planets will help us in case this one fails. "I think things will most likely be OK for a long time on Earth," Musk told the Caltech graduates (a dubious claim in itself). But on the small chance that Earth won't be OK, he said, we should "back up the biosphere" and create "planetary redundancy" on Mars. That's not great thinking. Consider the stellar wisdom of astronomer Lucianne Walkowicz, at a 2015 TED Talk: "For anyone to tell you that Mars will be there to back up humanity is like the captain of the *Titanic* telling you that the real party is happening later on the lifeboats." There is no reason to assume a cosmic destiny toward expansion, just as there is no reason to assume that American colonialism is attributable to an inherent benign spirit.

Musk's "elite cues" are misdirections. They may not be as despairingly cynical as the GOP's climate denialism, but they are dangerous nonetheless. Those of us concerned with the climate crisis need a vision of the future that admits the trouble humanity is in and understands the myth of progress. We need a vision that does not require magic vehicles or the settlement of inhospitable planets. We need to seek out and support leaders who point us in the right direction — and that direction, I suspect, is earthbound.

Trump targets a bedrock environmental law

Three years of rollbacks have taken a toll, without delivering real benefits.

BY JONATHAN THOMPSON

"I'M APPROVING NEW dishwashers that give you more water so you can actually wash and rinse your dishes without having to do it 10 times," President Donald J. Trump told a crowd in Milwaukee in January. "How about the shower? I have this beautiful head of hair, I need a lot of water. You turn on the water: drip, drip, drip."

While this may sound like just another Trumpism intended to distract his base from his impeachment troubles, the words nicely encapsulate the administration's disastrous approach to environmental policy. First, he gins up a false problem. Then he blames the false problem on "regulatory burdens." Then he wipes out said regulations with complete disregard for any actual benefits or possible catastrophic consequences.

Trump followed this pattern in January, when he announced one of his most significant rollbacks yet, a drastic weakening of the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA — the bedrock law passed during the Nixon era that requires environmental reviews for projects handled by federal agencies.

Trump said the overhaul is necessary because the law imposes interminable delays on infrastructure projects, hampering economic growth. "It takes many, many years to get something built," he said in an early January speech at the White House. "The builders are not happy. Nobody is happy. It takes 20 years. It takes 30 years. It takes numbers that nobody would even believe."

Maybe nobody would believe them because — like Trump's assertion that modern toilets must be flushed "15 times" — they simply aren't true. Every year, the nonpartisan National Association of Environmental Professionals analyzes the implementation of NEPA. The group has found that over the last decade, full environmental impact statements have taken, on average, less than five years to complete. Only about 5% of all reviews take longer than a decade, and less than 1% drag on for 20 years or more. These rare cases can be caused by a project's complexity, or by delays or changes made by its backers that have nothing to do with NEPA or any other environmental regulations.

Trump isn't letting facts get in his way, however. The proposed changes would "streamline" reviews, according to the administration, and, most notably, "clarify that effects should not be considered significant if they are remote in time, geographically remote, or the result of a lengthy causal chain."

A project's potential contribution to climate change, in other words, would be discounted. Indeed, environmental effects will no longer be considered significant — except for the most direct, immediate ones. A proposed highway plowing through a low-income neighborhood, for example, would result in more traffic, leading to more pollution, leading to health problems for residents and exacerbating global warming. But since all of that is "remote in time" and the result of a "lengthy causal chain," it would not necessarily be grounds to stop or modify the project. By discounting long-term and cumulative impacts, this seemingly simple change would effectively gut a law that has guided federal agencies for a half-century.

That, Trump claims, will speed up approvals and create more jobs. But a look back at the effects of his previous regulatory rollbacks suggests otherwise.

Since the moment he took office, Trump has been rescinding environmental protections. He drastically diminished Bears Ears National Monument, he tossed out rules protecting water from uranium operations, he threw out limits on methane and mercury emissions, weakened the Clean Water Act, and, more recently, cleared the way for the Keystone XL pipeline, yet again. According to Harvard Law School's regulatory rollback tracker, the Trump administration has axed or weakened more than 60 measures that protect human and environmental health since he took office.

Trump often boasts that his policies have created 7 million jobs during his term. Correlation, however, does not equal causation. Even as the overall economy has boomed — a trend that was already in place when Trump took office — the sectors that should have benefited the most from Trump's rollbacks continue to flail.

Trump killed or weakened at least 15 regulations aimed at the coal industry in hopes of bringing back jobs. By nearly every measure, the industry is weaker now than it was when Trump was elected. Trump shrank Bears Ears National Monument to make way for extraction industries and rescinded regulations on uranium in part to help Energy Fuels, a uranium company. But in January, the company laid off one-third of its workforce, including most of the employees at the White Mesa Mill, adjacent to Bears Ears. Nearly every one of the protections that Trump killed were purportedly "burdening" the nation's mining, logging and drilling industries. Regardless, the number of people working in that sector is down 20% from five years ago.

Rolling back environmental regulations will no more create jobs than removing "restrictors" from showerheads will give Donald Trump a thick head of hair — it won't. It will merely result in more waste, dirtier air and water, and a more rapid plunge into climate catastrophe.

Now, Trump is going after energy-efficient lightbulbs, and his reasoning is as specious as ever. "The new lightbulb costs you five times as much," he told his followers at the Milwaukee rally, "and it makes you look orange."

Even as the overall economy has boomed … the sectors that should have benefited the most from Trump's rollbacks continue to flail.

The perils of placelessness

Boeing's history shows the connections and disconnections of the West's economy.

BY ADAM M. SOWARDS

RECENT EVENTS HAVE upended Boeing and its 737 Max project. After two crashes and nearly 350 deaths, the company president lost his job, and production of the plane was suspended, prompting concerns that the nation's gross domestic product could drop. In the Seattle metropolitan area, specifically Renton, Washington, where the 737 Max is built, workers have been reassigned. This is not a new situation: The region's fortunes have long been intertwined with those of Boeing, the area's leading employer through most of the mid-to-late 20th century.

From Seattle's perspective, the company's financial problems pale compared with previous events. In 1971, after a federal contract was canceled, Boeing cut its workforce from a high of 100,000 just four years earlier to fewer than 40,000 people. A billboard appeared in the city: "Will the last person leaving SEATTLE — Turn out the lights." Such booms and busts are common in the Western U.S., reflected in the region's ghost towns and hollowed-out timber mills. But Boeing's history exemplifies a deeper trend: how many corporations, once rooted in specific locations, have eroded the geographic connections that once nurtured and defined both those businesses and the places themselves.

Born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1881, William E. Boeing built a successful timber company in western Washington in his 20s. Long fascinated by aviation, he turned to airplanes in his 30s and, in 1916, incorporated what would became today's Boeing Company, the largest aerospace corporation in the United States. The enterprise, based on Seattle's Duwamish River, grew fast and benefited during World War I from the government contracts it received.

Boeing innovated and diversified. By the time World War II broke out, the company occupied an advantageous position: Not only did it have more than two decades of experience building airplanes, but it was close to both the Pacific Theater and the hydropower projects in the Columbia River Basin. Grand Coulee Dam furnished the power to smelt the aluminum for one-third of all planes built during the war. Boeing opened new plants, and for the first time it expanded its labor force, grudgingly, to include significant numbers of African Americans and middle-class white women.

The Cold War accelerated these trends; the company moved into space and expanded its commercial line. Those middle decades of the 20th century boosted Seattle, too, as all along the West Coast military spending helped metropolitan populations and economies grow. The benefits were mutual, but the situation fostered a frustrating dependency.

By the 1960s, Boeing was the foundation of Seattle's economy. Then the Boeing Bust peaked in 1971, leading to that notorious billboard. The company hemorrhaged jobs, and the regional economy went into a tailspin. In response, policymakers worked to diversify, laying the groundwork for the Microsoft- and Amazon-led tech boom that characterizes Seattle's economic culture and identity today.

Meanwhile, the knot between Boeing and Seattle continued to unravel. In 2001, the company moved its headquarters to Chicago, saying it needed to be in a more neutral and convenient domestic location. Philip Condit, chair of Boeing's board at the time, said, "We don't want to be off in a corner of America."

Although Boeing still builds planes in the Seattle area, its management now looks out on Lake Michigan, not Puget Sound. In today's global political economy, capital is nimble, supply chains long, and corporate decision-makers live far from where their actions affect the lives and hometowns of workers. Corporate loyalties often lie with the friendliest government — in 2001, Chicago offered Boeing around $60 million in incentives — but even this isn't new. Early in its history, Boeing threatened to relocate to Los Angeles if local officials refused to build a bigger airfield; King County responded by constructing what Seattleites know as Boeing Field.

Clearly, neither Boeing nor this moment is unique. Many businesses start off grounded in a particular place because of the region's resources or other advantages. Today, the economy appears to transcend such locales, but corporate legacies remain inescapable — both locally, like the history of toxic chemicals leaking into the Duwamish River, and much farther away, like the 2,800 estimated layoffs for Boeing's biggest supplier in Wichita, Kansas. Ultimately, the balance sheet always seems to reflect powerful asymmetries, with the communities forced to accommodate the companies, never the other way around.

Crowds gather at the Boeing plant in Seattle in December 1962 for the first look at the new Boeing 727 jet airliner. **Central Press/Getty Images**

Abi Stevens / HCN

REVIEW

The underbelly of pastoralism

In 'Vantage,' Taneum Bambrick digs for refuse along the Columbia River.

BY AUSTYN GAFFNEY

I become a part of this garbage crew
empty cans along
the Wanapum pool.
Peel condoms off rock
beside fire pits —
call them snakeskins.
I learn quick.

So begins Taneum Bambrick's poem "Litter," unspooling her experience as a young person, and a woman, on a six-person garbage crew in eastern Washington. She fictionalizes this period of her life in her first collection, *Vantage*. Circling the reservoirs of two massive dams on the Columbia River, the narrator uses litter grabbers to retrieve bodies from the water: pit bulls, goats, cats, king salmon, even people. She learns to clean trashcans with lighter fluid and a cigarette, to issue commands and to set beaver traps. Together, she and her co-workers navigate the sexism, classism, paternalism and intimacy that both build and corrode their relationships. In these poems, Bambrick offers an alternate vantage point on the working environment, and how we see the people who work within it.

The Columbia River divides the town of Vantage between working class and wealth. The original town — located near Hanford, one of the world's largest nuclear contamination sites — no longer exists. In the 1960s, its 20-mile basin was drowned to build a hydroelectric dam, one of 60 cutting across the massive river, undoing its ecosystems. The waterway is misshapen by human ingenuity and its errors: Fish ladders and hatchery ponds are built to save aquatic populations. Beyond the dam, the region is carved by power lines, agriculture and I-90. The Yakama Indian Reservation lies to the southwest, and members of the Wanapum Tribe live in Priest Rapids Dam, roughly 25 miles from Vantage. At times, Bambrick alludes to the area's longer history, reflecting on the erasure of Wanapum land as part of the dam's construction.

Instead of showing a bucolic riverside, Bambrick's poems focus on the landscape's human architecture. Her work takes pastoralism and flips it, revealing its vulnerable underbelly. The theme of refuse turns elegiac in this environment. The remains of 27 elk that shot off the canyon's rim to their death become a curiosity residents call "Elk Splat": *Whoever'd spooked the elk was the kind of person we liked to imagine as one-rich-kid. What we were better than.* We see the bodies of women turned into objects by the gaze and language of men. The narrator herself jumps from the company truck — clipping her forehead on the open passenger door — and onto orchard grass to escape this gaze from a co-worker.

But the narrator's own gaze is critiqued, too. She recalls a day when two men showed her and a crewmember the bloody bodies of 80 seagulls shot to protect salmon. Referring to *our girl*, they bring out the crown jewel of their collection — a heron with a hole blown through her chest by a hatchery cannon. When the narrator cries at the sight of one dead heron instead of the pile of dead seagulls, one man asks: *What's the matter … Didn't you care about the gulls or were they too ugly?* Her father tells her it's hard to get funding to restore the sturgeon fishery: *It's an ugly fish, he says, it's difficult to elicit sympathy for them.*

Within a puzzle of forms, including the lyric essay, it's the pitch and precision of detail in Bambrick's prose poems that glean tenderness. In "Gaps," during the drive to work, her co-worker asks her to turn off her loud music and pay attention to the morning, the stillness of the *hill-cut light* and *the quiet on the highway. I'm not denying this is a shit hole,* he says. *It's the last one though.* He is asking her to recognize this job is one of his last options, and to offer him some grace.

Climate change is already flooding our communities. More severe weather means the environmental damage we've already wrought is likely to get more ugly and more complicated, more expensive and more violent, especially for low-income communities and communities of color. Bambrick could highlight these dynamics more: She doesn't linger for long over how the displacement of one town compared to the displacement of Indigenous communities along the river. Some disappearances play larger roles than others.

Still, in looking beyond pastoralism, *Vantage* tries to write a place out of destruction. Bambrick wants us to witness madness along with the redemptive moments woven through it — to see that highlighting violence could be an act of dismantling it. The attention she draws to one place could be drawn to many. No place is more worth saving than the next: They're all worth saving. The seagulls and the heron, the wasps and the mice, the cyclist and the sturgeon, the workers and the elk. As Bambrick writes, any attempt to save the river can only come with our collective memory of what the river means.

I'm not denying it's a shit hole. It's the last one though.

Vantage By Taneum Bambrick
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Rachel Woolf / HCN

Q&A

A haven for the wealthy

Sociologist Justin Farrell explores how the ultra-rich shape Teton County and the Western U.S.

BY CARL SEGERSTROM

Jutting more than 7,000 feet from the valley floor, the Teton Range offers some of the United States' most dramatic vistas. But the jagged peaks are mirrored by equally sharp economic divides in the communities below. Lured by both natural beauty and favorable tax codes, the ultra-wealthy have flocked to Teton County, Wyoming, making it home to the highest level of wealth inequality in the country.

For Justin Farrell, a sociologist at Yale University who was born in Wyoming, Teton County provided the perfect location to interrogate income disparity's impacts on both natural and human communities. His new book, *Billionaire Wilderness: The Ultra-Wealthy and the Remaking of the American West* — the result of hundreds of interviews with both the area's haves and its have-nots — reads like a blend between an extended case study and investigative journalism.

As Farrell introduces readers to the thinking of millionaires and billionaires on issues like environmental conservation and rural authenticity, he toggles between documenting the unvarnished opinions of the über-rich and his own critical deconstruction of the myths that mold this elite class. *High Country News* recently caught up with the Denver-based scholar to discuss how inequality is shaping the modern West.

Why are the ultra-wealthy so attracted to the West?

In some ways, there's always just been this magnetic pull from this region. Culturally, it has to do with this rat race that a lot of these folks have been running for several years. They need to downshift, they need to find a place where they can relax, they need to find a place where they can "connect with nature." The other reason is economic: Wyoming is a tax haven, and it's lucrative to move to Wyoming.

Part of what shapes Teton County and the attitudes of its ultra-wealthy residents is something you

call the "environmental veneer." What is that?

The environmental veneer is the sense that conservation or environmentalism is always this vague, altruistic good — that saving and protecting nature is a public good, it's for the common good, it can't benefit you economically, it doesn't benefit you socially, and that it doesn't benefit your lifestyle. So it creates this candy-coated veneer that masks other environmental problems, like climate change, ocean acidification, the burning of fossil fuels. It just allows folks to escape or downplay or even not enter into those ideas in their mind.

I'm all for conservation, but we need to be real about the history of conservation, which is still not well understood by most people. The removal of Indigenous people to create national parks is part of this veneer, and people don't want to hear that. And they don't want to hear that you can use environmental work to achieve social status, to sustain your own societal advantages, to reinforce social and environmental problems.

Why are the ultra-wealthy in Teton County so much more willing to invest in environmental causes or donate to a land trust than, say, support organizations dealing with issues like homelessness and hunger?

When you're moving to this paradise, the last thing you want to hear about is eviction and that you're causing home values to go through the roof, and there is homelessness in the grade school. So part of it was not wanting to acknowledge that this is a real community and that the West is populated by actual people. To acknowledge all that is to admit there are holes in this myth, and paradise isn't what it's cracked up to be.

It's pretty astounding how much money has flowed into this area and how little social services groups have received. That says it all.

You set out to observe and study the ultra-wealthy, but in the book, you're not shy about calling out their hypocrisy and questionable environmental ethics. How did you balance your roles as both an observer and a critic?

It's very difficult. I did it through going back and talking with people to clarify their positions, and then having the courage to report what I think is happening, and report the struggles that the working poor are enduring and tell it like it is.

As a sociologist, I pin blame on us as a society. I pin the blame on lawmakers who won't enact policies that can help certain groups. I'm not sure if I would do anything different if I were ultra-wealthy. I hope I would, but they're playing within the rules of the game for the most part. So I could tell the truth, because I knew that I wasn't attacking one or two individuals unfairly.

You focus a lot on the wealthy, but you also found differences within the working class on how they view wealthy people. What did you observe in interviewing those on the other side of the inequality that defines Teton County?

One group recently immigrated from a small town in Mexico, and their quality of life is, they would tell me, definitely improved. Largely, this group (of newly arrived immigrants working multiple jobs) is so strapped for time and so tired they just say, "We're thankful for our jobs," and "The ultra-wealthy people I work for treat me fine," and "I'm just trying to get by, trying to survive."

Then there's a group of folks who are starting to organize a little bit. They're understanding what's going on, and they're understanding the levers that they can pull within the political system to try to effect some change — for example, to protect them from being evicted without notice and perhaps encourage affordable housing. One person said, "Enough is enough, we need to do something." They are on their feet a little bit more, and they're able to confront this veneer of community that exists — that we're a small-town community, small-town character, and we all get along.

"The environmental veneer is the sense that conservation or environmentalism is always this vague, altruistic good."

How do the lessons and insights from your research in Teton County extend around the West?

This isn't just about Teton County. Teton County was a perfect case study because everything's in sharp relief there that is happening elsewhere. Places like Spokane, places like Boise, Reno, you could name 10 or 15. You have growing wealth disparity, affordable housing problems, evictions and an influx of new immigrant communities.

We need to look, especially in Wyoming, at economic policies. I'm not an economist, so I tread lightly there, but it's obvious that these income tax havens, corporate tax havens and loose oversight of what counts as being a resident need to be looked at more closely by lawmakers.

I advocate for requiring more from those who have more money than anybody can spend in 100 lifetimes. That's more of a moral claim for me, but there are economic consequences. Employees in Teton County can't live there anymore. For example, the restaurant at the top of Jackson Hole (Mountain Resort) had to close for a while because they couldn't hire any employees. That gets the wealthy's attention, of course, and it's sad that's what it takes.

So if the problems are economic policies, and they only gain the attention of the ultra-wealthy when they affect their leisure activities, what will it take to change that dynamic?

We need to end this perception that we're reliant on affluent folks and their philanthropy to solve the problems. We can't rely on the goodwill of a handful of wealthy people to prop up organizations in the community; we have to raise funds elsewhere to have a consistent flow of income to provide educational systems and all of that.

Moving forward, the real question is: If philanthropy does decline, what's going to take its place? It's not even really working right now. So what's going to happen in the future?

One of the reasons I work in these areas is because I want to provide some sort of baseline knowledge about what's going on and then work with folks to help find solutions. I want this book to make an impact not just locally, but with lawmakers in the state, lawmakers nationally — but also people who are interested in and care about the West and want a reliable picture of what's going on, on the ground on an issue of great importance.

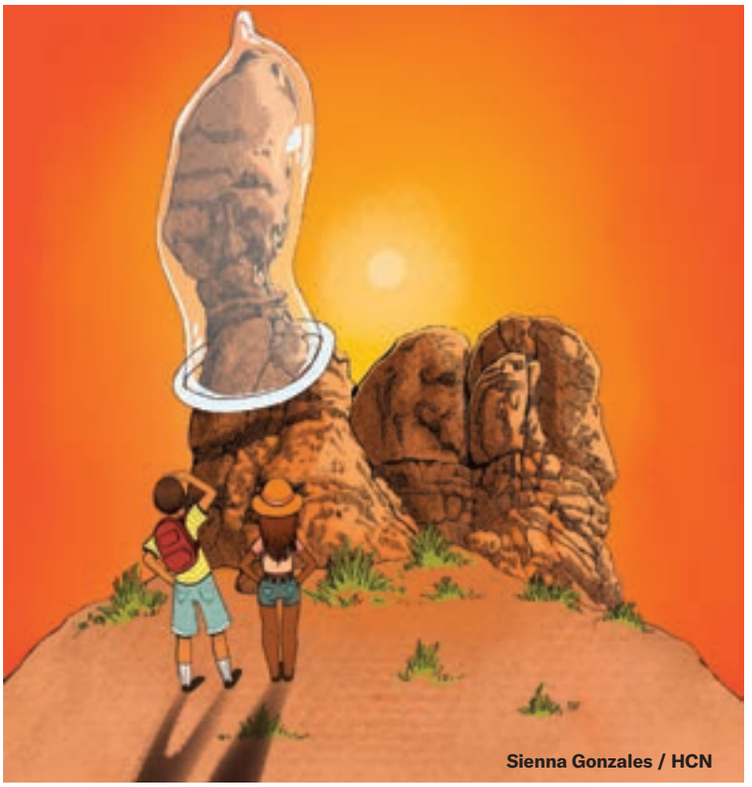
Heard Around the West

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

BY BETSY MARSTON

UTAH

As the *Guardian* observed, Utah is not the first state to create "cheeky condoms" to encourage people to deploy them and help prevent the spread of HIV. Wyoming displayed Devils Tower on its condoms, along with the slogan: "Protect your landmark," while Alaska's image of an oil rig came with the words: "Drill safely," and others featured a fishing boat with the words: "Avoid bycatch." But when Utah's public-health HIV campaign featured condoms with the saucy saying, "Uintah sex?" and "SL,UT" — shorthand for "Salt Lake City, Utah" — Republican Gov. Gary Herbert put his foot down. The governor understands the importance of HIV prevention, his office said, but "he does not, however, approve the use of sexual innuendo as part of a taxpayer-funded campaign." That halted the health department's distribution of 100,000 condoms, in an act of gubernatorial *coitus interruptus*.



Sienna Gonzales / HCN

THE BORDER

President Trump's "perfect" wall suffered a blow in late February, when high winds ripping through the California-Mexico border blew over some panels as if they were made of paper. CNN showed the wall — whose new concrete base had apparently not set — collapsing and landing on trees alongside a road in Mexicali, Mexico.

Meanwhile, in southern Texas, some 45 miles from Corpus Christi, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection suffers daily assaults from 300 angry vultures. The big birds really, *really* abhor the agency's 320-foot radio communication tower, so they're "pooping all over" it and "vomiting onto buildings below the tower," reports the *Washington Post*. As if this wasn't bad enough, every now and again the vultures use their leftovers as bombs, dropping carcasses "from a height of 300 feet, creating a terrifying and dangerous situation for those (below)." This has gone on for six years, reports the online business publication *Quartz*, so the entire tower and office buildings are now coated with the birds' vile-smelling "excretion," which is so corrosive that it destroys metal. The agency plans to install a "Vulture Deterrence Netting System" once the tower and buildings are scraped free of yuck and repainted.

COLORADO

We've gotten to know a generic-looking black cat with an unusual lifestyle. The cat is called Cluck because she not only lives with chickens, she appears to think she is one. Cluck hangs out at a small farm just outside Paonia, in western Colorado, and though not a housecat, she will allow herself to be petted while she nibbles on her kibble. Usually, though, she disdains humans and eyes strangers warily. After Cluck wandered onto James and Carol Schott's place a year ago, she immediately settled in among their flock of chickens. When a neighbor dropped by one day, the mystery of Cluck's past was illuminated. "A fox killed every one of our chickens, and right afterward, Cluck vanished," the neighbor explained. "She must have missed her buddies." At the Schotts', Cluck leaves the flock at night once the henhouse is closed and sleeps underneath the floor or inside the barn. Come morning, she waits outside the henhouse until the door is opened again. During the day, she follows the chickens as they peck up food, and then joins them in the henhouse when they sit on their nests. Carol started wondering: Could Cluck behave as nicely to humans, maybe even let herself be held? So Carol tried to pick her up. She flaps her arms to show what happened next: "Cluck exploded!" If the cat had feathers, she says, they would have been flying. Moral: Never try to cuddle any cat that thinks it's a chicken.

NEW MEXICO

Five years ago, Albuquerque ended an urban experiment: It closed its Fourth Street Pedestrian Mall and allowed cars to drive through again. It was a "clumsy policy response to the fact that the two-block pedestrian mall had been taken over by the homeless," a former city reporter reported on the *Better Burque* blog. Not long ago, however, the blog reported that the street was closed to traffic again, and another homeless camp appeared to be emerging. Turns out it was an artful fake: The encampment was being specially constructed by a movie crew, apparently because none of the real homeless camps in the West had enough of the right "star quality." As the blogger concluded: "You just can't make up shit that good."

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Brooke Warren / HCN

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