

High Country News

DISSENT AT A

DISTANCE

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On the trail of a
poaching gang

Don't tread on
what, exactly?

Navajo Nation
vs. COVID-19

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In late March, a woman relaxes by herself on an unusually sunny day at Judkins Park in Seattle. **Kiliii Yuyan / HCN**

Know the West.

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EDITOR'S NOTE



Don't despair. Dissent.

IT IS SAFE TO SAY that the pandemic will not end any time soon. The longer the crisis persists, the more we'll need to seek out bright sides and hidden lessons, to find hope in isolation as we rediscover the value of connection with families, friends and neighbors — of hugs, nudges, high-fives and handshakes. For many, this period will rank as one of the most challenging times of our lives. At the same time, we are learning more about the ability of people to adapt and face difficulties head-on.

That's important beyond this bewildering moment, I think, because even as the pandemic continues, other challenges remain. Inequality abounds; the Earth continues to warm; and environmental protections are being dismantled at speed. In the name of liberty, displays of guns and extremist views now accompany demands to open the country, while vulnerable populations contract COVID-19 at high rates. Meanwhile, as an election approaches, voters face systematic disenfranchisement. Despite all this, people across the Western United States are finding new ways to do good work. This issue of the magazine is a good reminder.

I find these creative approaches encouraging — the adoption of telemedicine to address the pandemic, for example, and the formation of programs to bring younger activists into the environmental movement. In Arizona, face-masked, safely distanced activists are protesting inhumane detention policies. On the Navajo Nation, community health workers confront a COVID-19 hot spot, bringing aid and comfort to people in need. José González, the founder of Latino Outdoors, reminds us that open spaces must be made available to all as restrictions lift, while Dina Gilio-Whitaker, a scholar, author and member of the Colville Confederated Tribes, sketches out the need for a new environmental ethic. Beyond the pandemic, this issue highlights other everyday ethicists, including game wardens who work tirelessly to curb wanton poaching.

Things are not easy. But even in the toughest moments, we can look to the people doing good, hard work, and be inspired by them. Whether the pandemic lasts another month, another year, or more, take heart in the people around you. Support them, or join them, but do not despair. There is much to do, even now. Especially now.

Brian Calvert, editor-in-chief

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Activists converge on the Eloy and La Palma immigrant detention centers in Arizona in April for a "COVID-safe" car protest to call attention to the threat that detainees face from the coronavirus. **Roberto (Bear) Guerra / HCN**

Washington State Fish and Wildlife Sgt. Patrick Anderson uses a GPS mapping system in his car. He was part of the state's investigation into a poaching ring that killed more than 100 animals (*above*).

Leah Nash / HCN

Volunteers and staff distribute food to community members at the Galilee Center in Mecca, California, where agricultural workers have had their hours cut or else have been furloughed (*right*). **Andrew Cullen / HCN**



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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.

NO TRICK OF LIGHT

I found Lynell George's piece "No Trick of Light" (May 2020) profoundly moving. As an expatriate Californian living in Colorado, I was stirred by her references to a certain play of light, the peculiar sound of wind among native and non-native trees, the cooing of doves, and the ever-changing topography of desert and hills going down to the sea. Settling in the San Francisco Bay area as a young adult, I would take jaunts to Los Angeles, never fully understanding the geography until later years. It's such a mega-phenomenon, sprawled across ranges and valleys, with a panoply of communities scattered up canyon or down coast, all blending together and still somehow unique. That Los Angeles is a city of great cultural significance in all its legendary opulence and sometime squalor is not to be disputed, a place as unique and full of promise and peril as just about any place else in the world. But the sense of place, and the capacity to find the natural in a city mishmash inflicted on the land by questing and grasping humanity, is what came through for me in reading this loving and questioning essay. If you think about it, all the pretty places are dangerous. But if you let yourself open up, you can find what is special and to be treasured wherever you are. Thank you for reminding me to be open to the natu-

ral splendor that can be found around me, even in the midst of the most urban of locations.

Ed Behan
Fort Collins, Colorado

This is the best thing I've ever read about Los Angeles, and one of the best things I've ever read about anywhere.

Lara Disney, via Twitter

LAND-GRAB UNIVERSITIES

"Land-Grab Universities" (April 2020) rubbed me the wrong way. Not that the reporting was inaccurate, but that it left out mountains of context. For starters, how is it more sinful for a land-grant university to make money selling land than for a railroad to do the same? Or a farmer or rancher making money off Native lands? Or an oil company? Or any real estate agent who makes money simply off the change in title of

these lands? Or any other university selling land that was given to it? Would it really have been more noble for land-grant institutions to sell the land to others at cost? And that 11 million acres transferred to land grants: Is that really so big compared to the 181 million acres handed to the railroads, or the more than 270 million acres homesteaded? Or the millions of acres dedicated to state-run public education?

All of America is built on land stolen or obtained in poor faith from Native peoples. Had this story used the documentation for land grants as a gateway to a broader discussion about the debt owed Native peoples, I think it would have worked for me, especially as Easterners are more neglectful of their gains from these land grabs. But as written (and especially as headlined), it is making it sound as though the greatest villains of the conquest of North America were land-grant colleges, when this use of seized lands was arguably the most noble of all the ultimate uses of the land. Just because it is easier to track the gains of institutions still present in the modern day does not mean that those institutions were the worst players.

Craig Jones
Boulder, Colorado

For three years, Cornell had a faculty-led project on land grabs, some domestic and most abroad. I co-led the project and investigated U.S. Indian land grabs, but

I resoundingly overlooked what you've uncovered. I'm both humbled and grateful. Today, I forwarded a message to scholars and lawyers around the United States who share this interest. I ended with a suggestion for action: Imagine a \$1/acre in lieu tax on the 10.7 million acres going into a scholarship fund for Indigenous youth wanting to attend a land-grant university of their choice, or toward health care. Why not?

Charles Geisler, emeritus professor, Cornell University
Ithaca, New York

Thank you for the eye-opening article on land-grant universities. However, *High Country News* failed to state what the tribes would have been entitled to had their treaties been ratified. Coercion and duress may be used to set aside a modern contract, but even though coerced, the tribes may want to enforce the treaties to receive their promised benefits under the bargain. Apparently, the United States received its benefit of the bargain under the treaties. Perhaps providing the tribes what their ancestors were promised under the treaties may be another option to answer the implied question posed by *HCN* at the end of the article: What do we do now?

Barry Spear
Hesperus, Colorado

"Imagine a \$1/acre in lieu tax on the 10.7 million acres going into a scholarship fund for Indigenous youth wanting to attend a land-grant university of their choice, or toward health care. Why not?"

Virtual house calls

The pandemic has pushed health care into cyberspace. Some rural practitioners might stay there.

BY HELEN SANTORO

BACK BEFORE THE TIME of coronavirus, Elizabeth Powers, a family doctor in the tiny town of Enterprise, Oregon, carefully examined patients in her office in an effort to arrive at a diagnosis and treatment. She still pays attention to the physical details — the color of her patients' skin, their breathing, any signs of swelling — only now she does it via computer screen. "I'll adjust their medication and talk about lab tests or follow-ups," she said, treating them just as she did when they came to the clinic. "It's very customizable, based on the patient's needs."

Millions of workers in various fields have been pushed into cyberspace by the pandemic. Powers is one of them. For her, however, the transition was relatively smooth because Winding Waters Community Health, where she works, has been integrating virtual visits into its practice for years to better serve its rural clientele.

When the pandemic is over and social distancing is no longer necessary, Powers will see patients in her office once again. But now she — and many other health professionals across the country — will be better prepared to use virtual visits when necessary. This "telemedicine revolution," as some medical

providers call it, is especially vital in the rural West, where hospitals and doctors are few and far between.

According to a 2019 "Life in Rural America" survey by NPR, Harvard University and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, about one in four people living in rural areas say they're unable to access health care, often because the nearest clinic or hospital is too far away. And the problem is getting worse as small-town hospitals and clinics shut down, baby-boomer doctors retire and newly graduated medical students gravitate toward larger cities in search of better opportunities. Meanwhile, the refusal of many states to expand Medicaid coverage has greatly increased the odds of rural hospital closures, according to research out of the University of North Carolina.

Winding Waters is one of the only clinics in Oregon's Wallowa County. Some patients have to drive up to two hours to reach it, which is why the center has spent years working to incorporate telemedicine into its practice. They were one of the first members to implement telehealth with OCHIN, a Portland-based nonprofit that assists underserved health centers with technological support. Now, with the pandemic

in full swing, the effort is paying off. In early March, just before COVID-19 hit, 5% or fewer of the clinic's patients had telemedicine appointments. As of early April, that number had jumped to 45%. "It has definitely made the transition to social distancing easier," Nicolas Powers, CEO of Winding Waters and Elizabeth Powers' husband, said.

This jump reflects a greater trend across the nation. According to OCHIN, the number of video visits in its 500-odd health centers has skyrocketed since the coronavirus was declared a pandemic. This April, there were 10,418 video calls, a 291% increase from March. The crisis has also prompted the Federal Communications Commission to create the COVID-19 Telehealth Program, which will provide \$200 million for telecommunication services. "It took a pandemic to really force a lot of the changes that needed to happen in an expedited manner," said Jennifer Stoll, OCHIN's executive vice president of government relations and public affairs.

Yet barriers remain — including limited access to high-speed internet in many rural communities. One in five rural adults in last year's survey said that this was a

problem, impacting their family's ability to use telemedicine. "It's a very complicated thing in the rural West because of our low populations, which makes it difficult for a business to care about investing (in rural broadband)," said Debra Hansen, Washington State University's extension director for Stevens County. She has been working on expanding internet access for over 20 years. It doesn't help that the FCC database on broadband availability erroneously says that Stevens County is already 100% covered. "That's absolutely not true," said Hansen.

The current rise in telecommunication will help pinpoint weaknesses in the broadband system, and ideally drive officials to fix these problems. Online health-care appointments will never replace face-to-face visits with a provider, nor are they intended to. Some medical issues need hands-on care, and maintaining the intimacy of the provider-patient relationship is crucial, Powers said. But for many isolated patients, telemedicine offers an easy and secure way to get help from the comfort of home. For rural providers, there's a silver lining there. "We have to keep moving forward," Stoll said. "We can't go back to how we were pre-COVID." ✱





A crew with Borderlands' Earth Care Youth Institute works on an erosion control project. The Institute teaches young people valuable skills for future job opportunities. **Borderlands Restoration Network**

REPORTAGE

Arizona's new wave of activists

How a small desert town is building ecological resilience.

BY RUXANDRA GUIDI

DRESSED IN MULTI-POCKETED beige vests and big hats, a group of elderly tourists gathered on a recent bright spring day at the edge of the Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve in southern Arizona. Behind them, a dry-erase board listed the birds they'd seen so far that day: golden crown sparrows, vermilion flycatchers, violet-crowned hummingbirds.

This 873-acre preserve, which is owned by The Nature Conservancy, takes up about 60% of the land in the town of Patagonia, a popular springtime destination for bird-watchers eager to check species off their list. After coming here, they typically move on to the Audubon Society Paton Center for Hummingbirds. Just a mile down the road, and beyond, the Forest Service manages one of the most ecologically diverse regions in the country.

With a population of around

800, Patagonia is an ecotourist and ecoactivist's paradise. As in so many other Western rural communities, conservation efforts here have been steered by a group of financially secure, older white residents. Now, local nonprofits are trying to change that by reaching younger, more ethnically diverse activists. The environment's sustainability, they argue, depends on the commitment and hard work of young environmental shepherds.

Without them, places like Patagonia will age out, losing ecological resilience and the ability to face daunting challenges like climate change. A small group of activists hopes to combine the traditional spirit of conservation with the renewed sense of urgency felt by younger generations.

AT 31, CALEB WEAVER looks as young as the teenagers he works

with; sand-colored shaggy hair frames his face, and he smiles at just about everything. Seven years ago, he found work with Borderlands Restoration Network, one of 10 environmental nonprofits in Patagonia. "We're surrounded by nature," Weaver told me last February at the Borderlands office, which stands on a windy hill overlooking the Santa Rita and Patagonia mountains. "There are so many kinds of different folks here, who, over time, have set aside land for the natural world."

Weaver joined a tight-knit hippie activist community that first came together in the 1960s to oppose silver-, copper- and zinc-mining and promote ecological restoration. Ron Pulliam, 75, who founded Borderlands, is a distinguished ecologist who served as science advisor to President Bill Clinton's Interior Department.

"Their shoes are hard to fill," Weaver said. "These are the people who have laid the groundwork for what we're doing; they're the ones who helped bring around the recycling movement, the Environmental Protection Agency."

Weaver hopes to take that generation's passion for conservation and seed it across age, ethnicity and class. He runs Borderlands' Earth Care Youth Institute, which teaches teenagers that landscape restoration can translate to conservation and a more sustainable way of life, together with jobs that pay at least \$300 a week. All this nourishes Patagonia's own resilience, its ability to face the changes to come.

"Some (young) people are like, 'Oh, I really love the environment,' " Weaver said. "And some are like, 'I really need a paycheck.' In my opinion, it's important to engage all sides of the community, especially if we want to help actualize change."

Almost half of Patagonia's population is Latino and

Spanish-speaking. Traditionally, they found employment in nearby mines and ranches or left town in search of opportunities elsewhere. "I don't think there are many obstacles that inhibit participation from the Hispanic community," longtime local leader German Quiroga, a 68-year-old retiree who's president of the Patagonia Museum, told me. "Perhaps it has more to do with whether you are for or against the mines, whether you seek job security." Given current demographic shifts, groups like Borderlands are seeking to engage the younger people who will eventually take over.

Tall, slender Anna Schlaht, who has the quiet stoicism of someone decades older than her 27 years, is a good example. Schlaht, who is based in the border town of Bisbee, divides her time between home, Tucson and Patagonia, often working from coffee shops, as she was on the spring day we met, laptop and cellphone in hand. She appreciates having the freedom to work remotely, using her knowledge of marketing and outreach to serve the Patagonia Area Resource Alliance, or PARA, a citizen watchdog group that monitors the mining industry around southern Arizona.

"(PARA's board) told me, 'Keep doing what you're doing so that we can focus on the things that we're good at and that the older generations have,' " Schlaht said, quoting Glen Goodwin, PARA's founder and a board member. Goodwin, who grew up on a ranch in Patagonia, came to activism two decades ago as a fire lookout for the Forest Service on nearby Red Mountain. "I got to see the legacy of mining in Patagonia and grew concerned with what was left of our ecosystems and watersheds."

Twenty years ago, Goodwin said, no young person would have wanted to work for a local nonprofit. But now, the town needs young people to get involved, creating new networks and encouraging others to stay and see a future at home. "Once a nucleus starts," he said, "it just drives more people in." ❁

Aid and isolation

Navajo Nation confronts an overwhelming pandemic.

BY KALEN GOODLUCK

LUCINDA CHARLESTON'S CHILDREN reminded her that she wasn't young anymore. But despite their worry, she assembled an emergency public health team to tackle the Navajo Nation's first coronavirus outbreak. The pandemic hit Chilchinbeto, a small town in the northeastern corner of Arizona, in mid-March. As deputy commander for the Navajo Nation Incident Command Center, Charleston was tasked with delivering aid, isolating the community and tracking the sick and vulnerable. During those weeks, Charleston (Diné) had one recurring thought: "I'm not the only person that has family. Everybody on my team, we all have families that we need to go home to."

The novel coronavirus has ravaged much of the world, yet its impact has been particularly acute on the Navajo Nation, where it is pushing the tribe's public health system to its limits. Decades of negligence and billions of dollars in unmet need from the federal government have left tribal nations without basic infrastructure like running water and sewage systems, along with sparse internet access and an underfunded Indian Health Service. All this compounds the life-threatening danger the virus poses to the elderly and immunocompromised. Front-line workers endure shortages of protective equipment, such as masks and gloves, to help communities with already-dire health disparities, including high rates of chronic illness and lower life expectancy. In response, relief efforts have sprouted to gather and deliver food, water, cleaning supplies and other goods — all jobs the federal government is treaty-obligated to do.

Chilchinbeto's chapter house, church, school and its over 400 housing units are nestled beside a modest mesa. Charleston and her team drove through town, making an initial field assessment for their difficult mission — delivering aid, contact tracing and isolating the community. For the next three weeks, the team would live in the hospital in Kayenta, just over 20 miles north of the unfolding outbreak. Charleston found refuge in Room 118, away from her family, emerging each day to face the virus.

"Yes, we were afraid," Charleston told me over the phone in mid-April. "But there are some people who run away from fire and some who run towards fire."

As is true elsewhere, health officials suspect the outbreak was amplified by a "superspreader" event: a rally hosted by the evangelical Church of Nazarene in Chilchinbeto and attended by people from all over the Navajo Nation. From Singapore to the United States, churches have been linked to outbreaks of COVID-19. In France, a five-day church event exploded into around 2,500 cases. In April, the Pew Research Center found that stay-at-home directives in 15 states had religious exemptions. Six of them were Western states, including Arizona.

Charleston faced a daunting task. She wasn't familiar with Chilchinbeto, and yet she had to reach as many people as possible as soon as possible, keep them in isolation and deliver aid — all without knocking on doors. She and her team decided the safest method was to call each household and have a member pick up food and supplies at the chapter house, one at a time, maintaining a zero-contact policy. The town's officials and community health representatives, or CHRs, would prove invaluable for Navajo Nation Strike Teams.

The more than 140 CHRs monitor the health of community members and visit and assess the elderly, *(continued on page 36)*



"Navajo COVID-19 PSA" by the artist Jetsonorama, photographed outside of Tuba City, Arizona, in early May. **Jetsonorama**

Protesting during a pandemic

Will new forms of collective action lead to permanent societal changes?

BY JESSICA KUTZ | PHOTOS BY ROBERTO (BEAR) GUERRA

LATE ON A FRIDAY AFTERNOON in April, protesters clad in face masks and bandannas gathered in a truck stop parking lot off the freeway between Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona. The posters taped on their cars read “Free Them All” and “Detention Is Deadly.”

This unique protest, planned by grassroots groups, including Puente Human Rights Movement, a Phoenix-based nonprofit, and No More Deaths, a humanitarian aid organization, called for the release of detainees who are currently exposed to COVID-19 behind bars.

The car-only rally was advertised on social media as a “COVID-safe” action. Using an app called Telegram, which functioned as a one-way walkie-talkie, organizers sent out audio instructions along with a map of the protest’s route.

“Finding a way to do action even in such a weird and dramatic time is really vital,” one protester explained as we waited in the parking lot.

At around 4:30 p.m., the cars snaked down the road to the Eloy Detention Center and La Palma Correctional Center, driving in loops past the concertina wire fence. Protesters honked their horns and beat pots and pans. Over a hundred supporters showed up.

According to U.S. Immigration and Customs and Enforcement (ICE), 30 La Palma detainees have already tested positive for COVID-19 as of May 4. Advocates fear that conditions inside the facilities will cause the virus to spread even further. The Eloy Detention Center has seen bouts of contagious diseases in the past, including a measles outbreak in 2016 that sickened 22 detainees and employees.

Protesting against immigrant detention isn’t new, but doing so in the era of social distancing is. Large gatherings have been canceled, but activism continues, Puente organizer Máxima Guerrero said. In fact, COVID-19 has made it

even more necessary. “The urgency doesn’t go away,” she said. “It’s a time to ask, ‘How can we still add pressure? How can we still expose the abuses that are happening?’”

Since late March, lawyers and advocates have succeeded in getting medically vulnerable detainees released on a case-by-case basis in states like Colorado and Washington, while New York and California are releasing hundreds of incarcerated persons from prisons. And advocates say more should be let out now, given the risk of COVID-19 and the fact that, as of March, 61% of immigrant detainees were being held without a criminal conviction. “It just proves there is no reason those folks should have been locked up in the first place,” Guerrero said. “Hopefully, (their release) shifts this narrative or this assumption that, in general, our society needs to hold people behind bars.”

Activists are organizing car rallies along with digital actions like virtual protests and teach-ins. Researchers from the United States and England are tracking new forms of collective action, ranging from mutual aid networks to worker and rent strikes. “Far from condemning social movements to obsolescence, the pandemic — and governments’ responses to it — are spawning new tools, new strategies and new motivation to push for change,” they wrote in *The Guardian*. According to a study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a D.C.-based think tank, in the last three years, 11.5 million Americans have participated in 16,000 anti-government protests across the country.

Activists see the pandemic as an opportunity to “seize the moment,” said Pamela Oliver, a sociologist at the University of Wisconsin — a chance to build support for a cause by helping people in tangible ways, such as fundraising to pay bonds. “(Organizers) see that as part of

their political work, as part of building those connections and community, which they think are essential to a better society.”

Since that first successful car protest in early April, Puente has organized other “United for Freedom” caravans at other prisons, jails and detention facilities. For at least one activist, these protests are personal. Noemi Romero, a DACA recipient and Puente organizer, was detained at Eloy in 2013 for using her mother’s Social Security number to work at a grocery store. Romero was held in a pod with dozens of other women, in dirty cells where cleaning supplies were lacking, while medical care was slow and inadequate, she said.

A spokeswoman for CoreCivic, the private contractor that operates Eloy and La Palma, told HCN that staff adhere to all CDC recommendations regarding COVID and that allegations that staff ignore medical needs were “patently false.” But Romero remembers a different reality. “You would have to be almost dying for them to give you medical attention right away,” she said.

As the car rally came to a close, Romero stood outside Eloy and posed for a picture. Her fist thrust in the air, she looked defiantly at the camera, her eyes barely visible over her white mask.

“At least on our end, the detainees inside know that they are not alone,” she said. “We are protesting for them.” ✨

Puente organizer Noemi Romero is a DACA recipient who was detained at Eloy in 2013. When asked about the conditions inside, she says, “You would have to be almost dying for them to give you medical attention right away” (*top, left*). A protester bangs on a pot to make noise while driving past Eloy Detention Center (*top, right*). Though protesters often hung out of the windows and roofs of their vehicles, they all maintained a social distance (*right*).





Hundreds of people lined up to receive a box of groceries on April 3 at the Galilee Center's facility in Mecca, California.

COVID-19

'Essential' and vulnerable

California's farmworkers turn to each other for support.

BY EILEEN GUO | PHOTOS BY ANDY CULLEN

FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS, Juanita, a resident of the border town of Mexicali, Mexico, has spent the spring and summer seasons in Southern California's Eastern Coachella Valley, picking grapes, beets, blueberries and bell peppers, and then heading north for similar work in Northern California come

July, once Coachella's daytime temperatures become unbearable — 120 degrees Fahrenheit. This year, however, the 66-year-old grandmother finds herself unexpectedly idle. At the end of March, she was working only two days out of six. "They cut all of our hours," she said, wondering just how much longer she could afford to linger here, waiting for work — and pay.

In California and across the country, agricultural businesses have remained open, classified as

"essential." The farmworkers who are still employed continue to work, despite the lack of protective gear or unemployment benefits if they fall ill. Farmworkers are especially vulnerable, given the difficulty of social distancing in the fields and the underlying health conditions, like asthma, diabetes and long-term exposure to pesticides, associated with agricultural work. Many also share housing as well as the buses that bring them to and from work.

Coachella Mayor Stephen Hernandez is not surprised by the furloughs. The closure of restaurants, schools and large businesses has affected the farms' bottom lines, and some can't afford to keep their workers employed. One report, from the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, projects that shutdowns of nonessential businesses may cause small farms selling locally to lose up to \$688.7 million. Eastern Coachella Valley is "probably another two or three weeks from plowing unsold crops into the ground, as has happened in other

parts of the country," Hernandez said.

The Coachella Valley stretches 45 miles from Palm Springs to the Salton Sea. The west side's mid-century homes, draped in blooming bougainvillea, and its lush green golf courses vanish as you move to the east, where many of the region's low-wage workers reside. There, rundown mobile homes and squat abodes appear even smaller against the vast desert and intermittent fields and orchards, which produce 95% of the country's dates and nearly a billion dollars in fruits, vegetables and other agricultural products.

The western valley is "a place where presidents go to retire," said Anna Lisa Vargas, a lifelong Coachella Valley resident and community organizer. In the eastern valley, on the other hand, some residents still lack paved roads, sewage systems and municipal water — creating "a Third World within a First World."

Over 97% of Eastern Coachella Valley's roughly 147,500 residents are Latino, compared to 69.5% in

Note: Some names have been changed in order to protect sources with undocumented status.

the Coachella Valley overall, and an estimated 14% in the unincorporated communities are undocumented. About a quarter are farmworkers, while another 40% work in low-paying jobs in the food, health-care and service industries. Up to half of the eastern valley's residents live below the federal poverty line, with people in the unincorporated communities making a median income of just \$18,700. Foreign-born residents, who work in the fields at higher rates, earn up to a median of \$3,000 less per year.

Even before the pandemic, many lived "paycheck by paycheck," said Gloria Gomez, the co-founder and executive director of the Galilee Center, a nonprofit located in Mecca. Galilee provides food, clothing, shelter and cash assistance to the area's neediest residents, many of whom are seniors who still work in the fields, despite their increased risk of contracting the coronavirus. To survive, they have to work, she said. Since December 2017, the Galilee Center has also operated a migrant shelter that accommodates between 75-100 workers nightly. For \$5 a night, workers have access to a clean bed, shower, air conditioning, WiFi and three meals a day. Still, Galilee is unable to accommodate everyone, and during the height of the harvest season, some 50 farm workers still sleep on the packed earth of the vacant lot across the street, as they have for decades.

This year, Galilee will be able to house even fewer migrants owing to social distancing guidelines: When beds are placed 6 feet apart, the shelter can provide only 30 of them. The shelter has set up a separate isolation area for anyone who exhibits COVID-19 symptoms. Other preventive measures include temperature and symptoms checks at the door, an earlier curfew, rotating shifts for staff members to limit the number of people in the office, and a full cleanup of the facilities every two hours. "We're concerned," Gomez says, "but we're

here to serve," so she has no plans to close.

The demand for Galilee's services, meanwhile, has gone up. Its food distribution, which, by early April, had moved to car-only, is now held only once a week to limit the number of large gatherings. Galilee has gone from giving out 250 food baskets, before COVID-19, to 700. Even so, it cannot meet the demand.

At first, the coronavirus seemed to be targeting the geographically more mobile communities of the West. But by early April, that trend had reversed, with over half a dozen agricultural workers at a date-packinghouse in the Eastern Coachella Valley testing positive. "We know it (the coronavirus) is going to happen at one point or another, but up to right now, we (at the center) have no symptoms," Gomez said in April. Gomez adds that the center has seen an increase in requests for help in paying rent, utilities and even diapers. At the same time, its own finances are increasingly precarious, with donations dropping 50% in March alone. Special COVID funds have helped, however, including a grant from the Desert Healthcare District, while continuing emergency assistance funds have kicked in for one of its partners, the FIND Food Bank.

With the coronavirus entering her community, Dominga, a 20-year resident of Mecca, an unincorporated community in the Eastern Coachella Valley, doesn't want to go into the fields. Not working is not an option, however. The 37-year-old mother of three daughters has worked an average of four or five days out of a six-day work week, planting and picking red bell peppers, since the coronavirus hit.

"We're only 24-26 people working two fields together, when before just one field needed around 30-32 people," she said. "With so many people that are unemployed right now, I tell myself that I'm fortunate to be working. I have my daughters, and every day I think about them when I leave." ❀



Galilee Center founder Gloria Gomez at the shelter in Mecca, California.



Demand for food assistance at the Galilee Center had more than doubled by early April due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



A closed playground area on the beach at Seaside, Oregon, on April 9.

‘If I can move, I feel much better’

Why staying indoors is so hard right now.

PHOTOS BY KILIII YUYAN | TEXT BY ROBERTO (BEAR) GUERRA

EVEN AS STATES throughout the West relax their stay-at-home orders, this spring will long be remembered as a moment of separation from friends and community. But while the pandemic forced isolation, it also helped create new values and connections, including for people aching to get outside.

Photographer and Seattle resident Kiliiii Yuyan was one of them. In April, he hit the road — with his protective gear in place and a plan to maintain social distance — in an effort to document how people were getting out there.

What he found speaks to this unique moment and creates new ways to think about what being outside really means. Most people were doing their part to control the pandemic: Beaches were nearly empty, and playgrounds were devoid of raucous children. Sunshine and warm weather tempted some residents to take walks or bike rides, while others hopped on their skateboards, surfboards or windsurfers. Most were conscientious about maintaining social distance.

Yuyan’s work demonstrates the deep human need to be outside, to do things, and it

demonstrates why prolonged isolation orders will continue to be challenged in the months ahead. Of the need to get outside, Lila Danielle, a lone dancer on Oregon’s Cannon Beach, told Yuyan: “I can’t not dance. If I sit inside, it’s not the best way to be emotionally and mentally healthy. If I can move what I feel inside through me, I feel much better. The natural beauty here calls me. It brings me peace.” ☀

This story was produced in collaboration with Outside Magazine.



Lila Danielle dances alone near her home in Cannon Beach, Oregon (*above left*).



"I hope everyone is staying safe, getting outside and getting rid of stress — taking into account the community around them, thinking about not just ourselves, looking out for everyone else," says Bobby Johnston, Hood River, Oregon (*above right*).

A bicyclist rides along the typically crowded seashore in Seaside, Oregon, after all the beaches were officially closed in early April (*right*).



Shortly after the March closure of the University of Washington campus, Seattlites maintained a social distance while exercising and viewing the school's famous cherry blossoms (*below*).



Widespread suppression

A comprehensive report shows how Indigenous voters are disenfranchised.

BY ANNA V. SMITH

IN 2018, MONTANA VOTERS approved a law that was originally framed as a way to address election fraud. The Ballot Interference Prevention Act, introduced by state legislators, put tight restrictions on who can collect a voter's ballot and on how many they can collect. It also added a "registry form" for each ballot and a \$500 fine for violations. But voting rights advocates say the law is part of a nationwide pattern of disenfranchisement of Native voters.

"It's really creative how the Native vote is being disenfranchised by different states," says Lillian Alvernaz (Dakota, Nakoda), the Indigenous justice legal fellow at the ACLU of Montana. "People were kind of fear-mongered into passing this law. Voter fraud is not an issue in Montana."

Ballot security is often used as the rationale for voting restrictions, including Montana's ballot collection regulations and South Dakota's identification requirements. But voter fraud is "vanishingly rare," according to the nonpartisan Brennan Center for Justice. In Montana, Secretary of State Corey Stapleton alleged fraud in the 2017 elections, then later walked back the claim, citing more ambiguous "voter misconduct."

Within the last decade, a host of new laws have appeared that further disenfranchise marginalized voters, including Indigenous voters, according to the Native American Voting Rights Coalition, a nonpartisan alliance of voting rights

advocates. In May, the coalition published a detailed report on widespread Native disenfranchisement.

The coalition tracked Native voting rights across the U.S., holding field hearings with tribal citizens who offered firsthand testimony about structural impediments, including long distances to polling sites off-reservation, inadequate language assistance with voter guides or ballots, and poll officials' rejection of tribal IDs.

The coalition initially focused on states with a poor record on voting rights, such as Arizona, South Dakota and Utah. But they were soon asked to expand the study and eventually interviewed 125 witnesses covering 17 states and representing dozens of tribal nations. According to the report, attorneys were "shocked at the depth and breadth of the violations across the country." They were also surprised to find that tribal members in the Pacific Northwest, California and the Great Lakes region — none of them particularly known for voter access problems — experienced similar impediments, said James Tucker, pro bono voting rights counsel to the Native American Rights Fund (NARF), which is a member of the coalition.

The coalition found that Native voters still face "first generation voting barriers," meaning basic access like difficulty in registering to vote or casting a ballot. Some state election officials have taken steps in response. New Mexico's

Native American Voting Task Force, for example, is made up of 10 Indigenous members. Created in 2017, the group is tasked with making recommendations to state election officials and developing an action plan to increase tribal voter registration and election participation. But other state officials have failed to actively engage or work with tribal nations. In San Juan County, Utah, Tucker said, "you've got local election officials actively trying to suppress the Native vote."

The report also describes the strategies of state redistricting plans that use a method called "cracking" to split a reservation into different voter districts, diluting voting strength. "Cracked" districts create a majority of non-Native voters despite a substantial Native population. The Yakama Nation in the Pacific Northwest was "cracked" into two districts: When a Yakama citizen ran for state Legislature in 2012, half the tribal members couldn't vote for him. More recently in 2019, Utah state legislators contemplated a bill that could split counties like San Juan County, which is majority Navajo, shortly after a protracted fight for Indigenous representation on the county commission and a court-ordered redistricting plan. Similar cracking stories came from the Colville Tribes and Lummi Nation in Washington and the Crow Tribe in Montana.

The report paints a clear picture of the structural and behavioral barriers that keep Native Americans from voting, Jacqueline De León (Isleta Pueblo), a staff attorney at NARF who co-directed the project, said. "Native Americans just face really unreasonable obstacles when it comes to voting. Frankly, the overt racism that we saw throughout the field hearings, I think, would be shocking to the average American. Most people don't think that type of racism exists anymore, but we did see directly hostile actions towards Native voters."

Examples include an elderly non-Native poll worker registering voters in an Indigenous community in South Dakota, who asked to sit

somewhere "safe," saying she didn't want to be around "people who are drinking" or "people who are going to harass us." In Wisconsin, voters felt intimidated when police officers stayed outside polling places in a community that was largely Indigenous. In Guadalupe, Arizona, 100 miles from the U.S.-Mexico border, a similar instance occurred when a Border Patrol van parked in front of a polling place. And in South Dakota in 2014, a 12-person non-Native community received its own polling site along with early voting and registration; meanwhile, a nearby town of 1,200 on the Crow Creek Sioux Reservation was allowed just one voting site on Election Day, with neither early voting nor registration available. Whether it's intentional, caused by a lack of action or the personal prejudice of local election officials and poll workers, De León says, it "makes it all the more reason why we need federal action to ensure Native access."

In February, De León testified in Congress in support of the Native American Voting Rights Act, a piece of legislation informed by the coalition. The act calls for a Native American Voting Task Force grant program to address the unique needs of Native voters, with funding attached: \$10 million annually through 2035. Introduced by Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., and Rep. Ben Ray Lujan, D-N.M., in 2018 and again in 2019, the act has received widespread support from voting rights advocates like the ACLU, National Congress of American Indians and the Southern Poverty Law Center. But it has yet to advance in Congress, despite 2020 being a general election year.

In lieu of federal action, which could be stymied for some time while Congress focuses on the COVID-19 pandemic, some states have taken action on their own. In 2019, Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee of Washington signed the Native American Voting Rights Act, which will make registration easier for Native voters. It also allows nontraditional addressing, a



common need on reservations that don't conform to state addressing systems.

Meanwhile, in March, the Native American Rights Fund and the American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit against the state of Montana on behalf of the get-out-the-vote group Western Native Voices, alleging that the Ballot Interference Prevention Act disenfranchises Native voters.

The lawsuit argues that ballot collection is a regular and necessary practice for Native voters. Indigenous people in the state's rural areas often live much farther from polling locations than non-Natives do, making ballot collection by friends, organizers or community members a common-sense practice. (And as the COVID-19 crisis deepens, such practices could prove essential to the safety of vulnerable

voters.) After the new law went into effect in 2019, criticism from election officials was blunt. "This is a way of suppressing voters," Casey Hayes, the elections administrator for Gallatin County, told the *Independent Recorder*.

The legal fight against the restrictive ballot-collecting law will continue into the summer. In May, a judge granted the ACLU's request for a restraining order on the act, meaning ballot collection would be allowed for the primaries. Montana's primary is June 2, and many people already have their ballots. "There have been so many attempts, historically and in contemporary times, to disenfranchise the Native vote," Alvernaz said. "That's why it's especially important that we support people and make it easier to vote, rather than harder." ✱

"Frankly, the overt racism that we saw throughout the field hearings, I think, would be shocking to the average American. Most people don't think that type of racism exists anymore."

Jacqueline De León sits in the study at her mother's house in California, where she is practicing social distancing. **Morgan Lieberman / HCN**

THE LATEST

BLM's eternal interim

Backstory

In July 2019, Interior Secretary David Bernhardt appointed William Perry Pendley acting director of the Bureau of Land Management. During a decades-long legal career, Pendley opposed federal oversight of all kinds. As recently as 2016, he argued for the privatization of public lands. (The BLM oversees about one-third of all federal lands.) The Trump administration has avoided the Senate confirmation process by letting Bernhardt extend Pendley's appointment multiple times. As director, Pendley has relocated BLM headquarters to Grand Junction, Colorado, a move that employees fear will

disrupt agency functions ("BLM staff confronts leadership over headquarters move," 10/14/19)

Followup

On May 5, Bernhardt extended Pendley's appointment for another month, meaning that Pendley has led the agency for more than 10 months without being confirmed. Now, two environmental groups are suing Bernhardt in federal court, arguing that this avoidance of Senate confirmation violates the Constitution and federal law. —Nick Bowlin



Anchorage, Alaska-based fisherman Wes Tibbetts and his family and crew pick sockeye salmon from their setnet. Tibbetts' family has been fishing in Bristol Bay since 1975. **Nathaniel Wilder**

REPORTAGE

Running hot

Climate change has setnetters worried about Alaska's sockeye.

BY MIRANDA WEISS

LAST SUMMER, ACROSS southwest Alaska's Bristol Bay region — home to the largest sockeye salmon fishery in the world — tens of thousands of fish washed up dead along riverbanks. Rivers running at temperatures above the threshold for salmon health were killing the fish even as record numbers of them were returning

from the ocean to reproduce.

On the Ugashik River, a wide, muddy tributary of the bay, salmon schooled near the river's mouth, hunkered down in the deeper, cooler water, but they refused to swim upstream into the too-warm waterway. Because no salmon were reaching spawning grounds upriver, the state closed commercial fishing

on the Ugashik in early July, right at the normal peak of the run.

Unable to wet their nets and unsure when the fishery would reopen, Ugashik fishermen bided their time at seasonal camps, looking on as jumpers pocked the water all day long. "You're pretty much watching your income go by," Catie Bursch, a commercial setnetter on the Ugashik, said later. As Bristol Bay fishermen gear up for this year's salmon season — one beset by fears that COVID-19 could overwhelm this remote region as thousands of seasonal workers from across the world descend on fishing communities with scant medical resources — they must also contend with a slower-moving hazard: the warming temperatures that threaten a \$1.5 billion industry and the people it supports.

Every year, millions of salmon return to the Bristol Bay watershed on their annual summer migration

to the headwaters where they spawn. This 250-mile-long nook in the Bering Sea is largely undeveloped — an area the size of Iceland, riddled with lakes, streams and wetlands that provide some of the planet's best habitat for anadromous fish.

The Ugashik is a muddy world, where fishermen slog through knee-deep muck to secure nets along the edge of the river at low tide. A single net can yield thousands of pounds of salmon, which fishermen pick by hand from small open skiffs and then deliver to buyers on tenders anchored downstream. Some of the Ugashik setnetters have fished here each summer for decades, living in plywood bunkhouses in a dozen or so camps, bathing in handmade saunas and riding four-wheelers into Pilot Point, a village of fewer than 100 residents, where milk costs \$20 per gallon.

Bristol Bay, which produces

nearly half of the global sockeye harvest, has been called “America’s fish basket.” The salmon season passes quickly, with many fishermen making their annual living in five exhausting weeks.

In addition to being the region’s economic driver, salmon represent a primary food source for the residents in remote towns and villages, most of whom are Yup’ik, Dena’ina and Alutiiq. Each summer, Mark Kosbruk, an Alutiiq setnet fisherman on the Ugashik, puts up about 200 fish — canned, smoked, dried, salted — for home use. Last summer’s closure was “nerve-wracking,” Kosbruk told me recently. Dogged by the concern that he might not get to fish at all, Kosbruk fixed everything he could around his camp, topped off all of his engines with oil, then waited.

The state stipulates that water temperature must not exceed 59 degrees Fahrenheit in order for salmon to stay healthy during upstream migration. Last summer, however, river temperatures in Bristol Bay reached 76 degrees. That spells problems for the fish: When salmon can’t avoid warm water, they can sicken or die. Warm water adds stress at a time when fish are already tackling the herculean task of returning to headwater lakes and streams to spawn, making them more susceptible to diseases and speeding up their already-taxed metabolisms. Something like a heart attack can follow: Warm water holds less oxygen than cooler water, but at higher temperatures, salmon actually need *more* oxygen to survive. Under those conditions, their hearts can’t pump blood fast enough to support their brains and bodies.

In Bristol Bay, state biologists manage salmon by opening and closing commercial fishing to allow enough fish to reach the areas where they spawn. Each river system has a target number of adult salmon that should evade capture — an “escapement goal” that is designed to ensure the future of the population. But last summer, Alaska sizzled with heat, and

warm river water pressed down the Ugashik, preventing salmon from heading upstream. Along Bristol Bay, rubber raingear melted. Some fishermen fished wearing only underwear and waders. The weeks of sunny, windless weather baked the region’s lakes and rivers.

Then, three weeks into July, a change in the weather brought winds out of the northwest, cooler temperatures and a little rain. Finally, the school of salmon that had been hunkered down near the Ugashik’s mouth surged upstream, and the state opened the river on July 19. A bonanza of fishing followed.

But because the fish moved all at once in a huge slug, faster than the fishermen could catch them, thousands more passed upstream than the escapement goal. Those salmon could have been netted had the run been more gradual, or if fishermen had been allowed to fish when the temperatures were high. Bursch, who houses her crew in a 100-year-old cannery building in one of the bigger operations on the river, calculated that Ugashik fishermen took a collective hit of \$1 million.

FISHERMEN LIKE BURSCH

and Kosbruk are expecting plenty of sockeye to return again this year. That’s because, somewhat ironically, salmon runs in Bristol Bay have been huge in recent years: Last summer’s return of some 56.6 million fish was the fourth-largest

on record, 45% higher than the 20-year average. Warming seas are likely the reason. With warmer-than-average ocean temperatures still well below heat thresholds for salmon, smolts have been surviving their first months at sea in greater numbers.

Although wild salmon runs have failed in most of the rest of the world, in Alaska, there’s optimism that the fish will keep returning, even as temperatures rise. “Sockeye salmon have a lot of flexibility in their lifecycle, (and) that makes them resilient to climate change,” said Daniel Schindler, an ecologist at the University of Washington who has been studying Bristol Bay salmon for more than 20 years. “We should give them the opportunity to adapt.” This includes, he explained, reducing competition at sea from millions of hatchery salmon and prohibiting industrial development — such as the proposed Pebble Mine — in salmon watersheds.

In recent years, Bursch and other Ugashik fishermen have noticed the rising river temperatures. They typically chill their fish in totes of ice, or, on larger boats, with onboard refrigeration systems to get a better price per pound; salmon coming out of warmer water are warmer, and it has been taking noticeably longer to cool them. But last summer’s 10-day closure, and the conditions that caused it, came as a shock. According to Sue Mauger, a stream

ecologist at Cook Inletkeeper who has been monitoring salmon streams in Alaska for nearly two decades, temperatures as high as last year’s match the projections for 2069. “We knew it was warming, but we didn’t expect to see that result that quickly,” Bursch said.

Dozens of new protocols were put in place in an effort to keep the commercial fishing industry and the region’s communities safe from COVID-19 this summer, and the scramble to follow them has largely eclipsed concerns over last summer’s sweltering heat. But not for Bursch. She plans to work with Mauger to deploy cigar-shaped underwater temperature loggers on the Ugashik — part of a region-wide effort Mauger has helped lead to set up hundreds of these devices throughout the watershed. Of course, there’s no easy cure for the rapidly climbing temperatures. Still, “the more information you have,” Bursch said, “the better decisions you can make.” ☼

Fisherman Catie Bursch steers her 23-foot-long open skiff after the end of salmon season (below left). **Tom Bursch**

Sockeye salmon stack up in a hold during the height of the sockeye season in Bristol Bay, Alaska (below right). **Nathaniel Wilder**



Reg wreckage

Under a pandemic, Trump's rollbacks gain steam.

BY JONATHAN THOMPSON

IN LATE MARCH, as COVID-19 case numbers and fatalities continued to rise, President Donald Trump suggested ending social distancing, because, he said, "We cannot let the cure be worse than the problem itself."

This was not just another off-the-cuff Trumpism. Rather, it was a tidy encapsulation of the administration's ideological approach to regulations in general: The cure (any regulation that might diminish the corporate bottom line) is always worse than the problem (pollution, unsafe food, dangerous working conditions). Therefore, regulations should be discarded.

Over the last three years, the Trump administration has employed this logic to eviscerate or eliminate dozens of environmental rules. Since the pandemic took hold, the pace of rollbacks has only increased, with the administration slashing rules on automobile efficiency and emissions, the disposal of toxic coal ash, the killing of migratory birds and more.

The starkest — though by no means only — display of this administration's attitude toward cures and trade-offs was the April 16 dissolution of the legal basis for the Obama-era Mercury and Air Toxics Standards rule, or MATS, which required coal-fired power plants to reduce emissions of mercury and other hazardous air pollutants.

MATS, which went into effect in 2012, has helped prevent up to

11,000 premature deaths, 4,700 heart attacks and 130,000 asthma attacks every year, according to an analysis by the Obama administration's Environmental Protection Agency. According to the Trump administration, however, the public health benefits weren't enough to justify the projected \$9.6 billion-per-year price tag. Trump's EPA concluded: "The costs of such regulation grossly outweigh the quantified hazardous air pollution benefits."

As is often the case, when the administration worries about "cost," it prioritizes and inflates any costs to industry, while ignoring or diminishing those that society would incur without the regulation. The Obama-era analysis of MATS, for example, found that its health benefits, if monetized, would amount to as much as \$90 billion per year. And the automobile efficiency standards that the administration is discarding would have saved consumers money on gasoline in the long run.

The architects of the rollbacks, from Interior Secretary David Bernhardt to EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler, have spent most of their careers serving industry, anti-regulation ideologues or both. A few examples of the rollbacks pushed under the shadow of the coronavirus reveal that the winners are invariably corporate interests or ideologues, while the losers, most often, are the rest of us. ☀

Disposal of Coal Combustion Residuals From Electric Utilities (2015)

THE RULE

Coal combustion waste — one of the world's largest industrial waste streams — contains harmful materials that get into the air, groundwater, lakes and rivers. The 2015 rule gives the EPA authority to regulate coal ash and other solid waste as hazardous under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. When it was first created, it was criticized for being too weak.

THE ROLLBACK

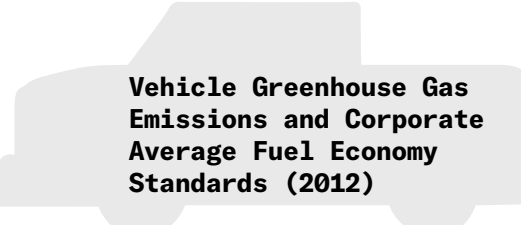
Opens a loophole in the rule that allows power producers to dispose of waste in unlined impoundments. (March 3, 2020)

WHO WINS?

- ▶ Electric utilities and power producers that can cut costs by not lining disposal cells.
- ▶ Anti-regulatory ideologues.

WHO LOSES?

- ▶ Wildlife and people who live near and drink water affected by the impoundments. A 2016 U.S. Civil Rights Commission report found that, more often than not, low-income people of color are most likely to be harmed. Coal ash impoundments at the Four Corners Power Plant in northwestern New Mexico, for example, contaminated groundwater in an area where nearly all of the surrounding population is Indigenous and at least one-third live below the poverty line.



Vehicle Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Corporate Average Fuel Economy Standards (2012)

The transportation sector is the nation's largest source of greenhouse gas emissions. The Obama-era standards required automobile manufacturers to increase fuel economy across the new car fleet by 5% each year, thereby also reducing carbon dioxide and other tailpipe emissions by an estimated 2 billion metric tons over the lives of those vehicles.

In order to “Make Cars Great Again,” the Trump administration is revamping the rules so that, among other things, they will require only a 1.5% annual increase in fuel economy.

- ▶ The petroleum industry, which, under the Obama standards, would have seen oil consumption drop by about 2 million barrels per day.
- ▶ The automobile industry, which will be able to cut costs, and car buyers, who will save around \$1,000 per new car thanks to the rollback — assuming the automakers pass on their savings.

- ▶ Any living thing that depends on a stable climate.
- ▶ The 444 to 1,000 people who will die prematurely each year because of increased pollution.
- ▶ Drivers, who will spend at least \$1,000 more on gasoline over the life of a less-efficient vehicle.



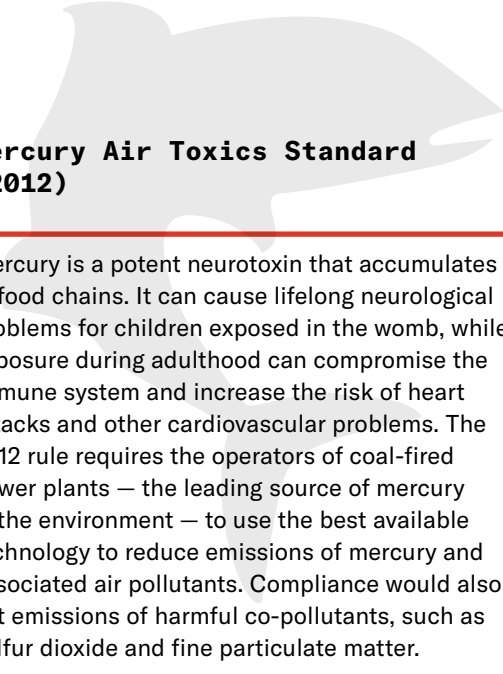
The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (1918)

By the early 1900s, at least a half-dozen bird species, from the Labrador duck to the passenger pigeon, were extinct due to unregulated hunting. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act endeavors to avoid future extinctions by prohibiting the capture or killing of protected birds. By imposing fines as high as \$15,000 per killed bird, the MBTA incentivizes industry to minimize “incidental” kills.

In January, the Trump administration finalized a 2017 decision to ignore the prohibition on incidental takes. Now, if a protected bird is killed by a wind turbine blade, industrial pesticide, a commercial fishing longline, a toxic oil-waste pit or mine-tailings pond, there are no legal consequences.

- ▶ The oil industry, which no longer need worry about the million or so birds it kills annually in pits and ponds. (The Independent Petroleum Association of America specifically requested the rollback just before the Interior Department crafted its legal opinion.)
- ▶ Companies like Montana Resources and Atlantic Richfield, the owners of the Berkeley Pit, which got a taste of winning when the Trump administration refused to fine them for the 3,000 snow geese that died in the mine's toxic waters.

- ▶ The millions of birds killed each year by industrial infrastructure.
- ▶ The wetland conservation projects that are funded by penalty fines, which can be substantial: BP was fined \$100 million under the MBTA for the 2010 Deepwater Horizon spill.
- ▶ Bird lovers (and everyone else).



Mercury Air Toxics Standard (2012)

Mercury is a potent neurotoxin that accumulates in food chains. It can cause lifelong neurological problems for children exposed in the womb, while exposure during adulthood can compromise the immune system and increase the risk of heart attacks and other cardiovascular problems. The 2012 rule requires the operators of coal-fired power plants — the leading source of mercury in the environment — to use the best available technology to reduce emissions of mercury and associated air pollutants. Compliance would also cut emissions of harmful co-pollutants, such as sulfur dioxide and fine particulate matter.

Trump's EPA is not directly rolling back the mercury rule. Rather, it's undermining its legal foundation by determining that it is not “appropriate and necessary” to regulate hazardous air pollutants from power plants under the Clean Air Act. That makes the mercury rule vulnerable to legal challenges. The administration is also altering how costs and benefits are calculated, inflating the costs for compliance while downplaying the benefits.

- ▶ The coal industry could reap the most from the rollback, which was included in a deregulatory “action plan” that coal baron Robert E. Murray sent to Trump early in his term. However, the industry benefits only if utilities burn more coal, which is currently unlikely, given that coal's woes are economic, not regulatory.
- ▶ The utility industry, which could probably cut costs by shutting off pollution-control equipment. Many utilities have already spent the money installing equipment, however.

- ▶ Anyone breathing the hazardous air, especially if they live near coal-fired power plants.
- ▶ People who eat fish. Mercury emitted into the air often ends up in the water, where it becomes highly toxic methylmercury and works its way through the aquatic food web.

79

Minimum number of regulatory rollbacks by the Trump Administration thus far.

23

Number of those rollbacks that directly benefit the oil and gas industry.

14

Number that directly benefit the coal industry.

6

Number that directly benefit the hardrock mining industry.

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Dear Friends

Coronavirus has impacted communities across the country, including High Country News. But even as we remember lost loved ones, we take heart in the feathered friends brightening our spring.

Digital Editor Gretchen King's bird feeders are attracting a crowd, including a brilliant Bullock's oriole, and Development Associate Hannah Stevens was happily surprised on Earth Day by the arrival of two baby chicks. The intrepid mother hen stowed her hatchlings away in a hanging bushel basket in a shed for weeks of freezing temperatures.

As college classes move online, our staff members are helping out whenever they can. Associate Editor Emily Benson gave guest lectures to three different classes at the University of Idaho, focusing on science and environmental journalism. Photo Editor Roberto "Bear" Guerra joined the Global Oneness Project for a discussion about the relationship between human and natural landscapes.

We are sad to announce the passing of John Freemuth, a frequent contributor and source for *HCN*, in early May. Freemuth was a public policy professor at Boise State University, where he taught classes on public lands, authored several books and mentored hundreds of students. "The kindness and willingness to teach and share his knowledge with generations of young students and journalists is something many of us at *HCN* will remember John for," said Assistant Editor Carl Segerstrom. Our thoughts are also with board member Marla Painter and her husband, Mark Rudd, whose son, Paul, passed away unexpectedly from COVID-19 complications.

Some corrections: "Public workers innovate around social distancing guidelines" (May 2020) was updated to reflect that Nogales is in Santa Cruz County. "A captive orca and a chance for our redemption" (April 2020) originally misstated the distance from her home that Tokitae, the orca, could die, what offshore killer whales eat, the area of the pool in which the whales lived and the number of southern killer whales harvested off the British Columbia and Washington coasts between 1962 and 1973. We regret the errors.

—Helen Santoro, for the staff





By Leah Sottile | Illustration by Jason Holley

Who's Treading Now?

The Gadsden flag is now an anti-government symbol.
Sort of.

The year was 2017, the month was August. America was 241 years old, and totems of its racist past were crumbling.

One of the Northwest's largest tributes to Confederate soldiers — an 8-foot-high marble fountain erected in Helena, Montana, in 1916 — was about to come down, too. To protest its removal, a small group of Montanans rallied at the fountain, waving signs and flags: Confederate flags, but also the bright-yellow, unmistakable Gadsden flag, the Revolutionary War banner with a coiled rattlesnake at its center atop the words “Don’t Tread on Me.”

“Tyranny ... you’re watching it unfold right here,” one man told reporters.

That summer, Confederate monuments were falling across the country after a woman

was killed by a white supremacist at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. The Charlottesville demonstrators, too, waved banners: Confederate, Nazi and, again, the Gadsden flag. Afterward, the Montana state Legislature’s eight-person American Indian Caucus authored a letter urging removal of the Helena fountain. “Public property in Montana should not be used to promote Nazism, fascism, totalitarianism, separatism, or racism,” they wrote.

According to the Helena protesters, removing the fountain meant rewriting history. State Rep. Shane Morigeau, one of the letter’s authors, spoke out against that idea. Morigeau — a Democrat who is running for state auditor this year and is an enrolled member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes — says context is everything. “We know what the Confederacy stood for and what people who fly the Confederate flag — what the meaning is to them.”

But when the protesters waved the Gadsden

“So many of the militia folks that are out there view themselves as the modern-day version of this country’s founders.”

flag, Morigeau found the message confusing. The bright yellow banner is not a Civil War symbol; rather, its forthright message read like a dare, a taunt — sort of a Colonial Era “Come at me, bro” — aimed at the British during the American Revolution.

In recent years, however, the classic rattlesnake flag has come to mean something very different. Some of the most violent and vehemently anti-government figures in the West have recast the ready-to-strike rattlesnake as a warning against the American government itself. Still, some Montanans say they’re not ready to cede the Gadsden flag to those who would use it as the new logo for right-wing extremism.

For Jamar Galbreath, who works for Empower Montana, a nonprofit dedicated to combating injustice, the Gadsden flag evokes something sinister: an 1846 Edgar Allen Poe story, “The Cask of Amontillado.” In it, a man pledges revenge on another man. While luring his victim toward his death, he speaks of his family coat of arms: a snake biting the foot that is stepping on its body, with the Latin words *Nemo me impune lacessit* — “No one strikes me with impunity.”

“Every time I see that flag, I think about that,” Galbreath said. “Who is crushing who?”

THE YEAR WAS 1751, the month was May. America wasn’t a formal thing yet, but colonists seeking independence from the British were growing weary of the Crown’s continual meddling on this side of the ocean.

That month, an editorial ran in the pages of Benjamin Franklin’s *Pennsylvania Gazette*, floating an idea for an act of revenge. Britain was using North America as a penal colony, shipping felons over by the boatload. The editorial suggested paying colonists to catch rattlesnakes, which would then be corralled onto ships headed for England. There was something about a beast that slithered and

poisoned that appealed to those early Americans. It wasn’t regal, but it was fearsome.

Three years later, Franklin published a political cartoon in *The Gazette*, depicting Colonial America as a rattlesnake that had been hacked into eight parts, each labeled with the name of a colony. Below the image was a message: “JOIN, or DIE.” Alongside it, an article argued that the colonial governments must band together, lest they be sliced to pieces. “That kind of solidified it, in a way, as a symbol of rebellion against the British,” said Marc Leepson, a historian and author of the book *Flag: An American Biography*.

Historians point to Christopher Gadsden — a slave-owning South Carolinian — as the namesake for the iconic yellow flag. Gadsden, a colonel in the Continental Army, is believed to have presented the commander of the Continental Navy with a flag to fly above his fleet. Over time, it was adopted by the other armed forces. But by the 20th century, the rattlesnake flag had found favor with extremists: In the late 1960s, Ku Klux Klan leaders embraced it, and in the 1970s, organizers of the radical environmental group Earth First! gave speeches from Gadsden flag-draped stages.

In 2009, the flag started popping up at Tea Party meetings across America. In adopting the Gadsden as its symbol, the party redefined the enemy doing the treading to fit its message: The treader was no longer foreign, but domestic.

It was around this time that the Gadsden rattlesnake also slid its way onto laser-etched gun accessories, hats and the arm tattoos of Second Amendment advocates. In response, the flag became the subject of endless internet memes. A rudimentary, pencil-drawn spoof of it appeared on 4Chan, an online forum devoted to crass imagery: “No Step on Snek,” it read — the misspelling intentional, as if to poke further fun at those embracing the flag as theirs.

With the Gadsden as its logo,

gun-rights advocates and Tea Partiers were claiming righteousness. “(They) feel that they’re the true Americans,” Theda Skocpol, a Harvard professor and co-author of *The Tea Party and The Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, told me. “The most common thing people said to us in our interviews was, ‘We are working to save America.’”

THE YEAR WAS 2014, the season was spring. America was 238 years old, and the militia movement was about to score a victory in its decades-long fight against the federal government.

By then, anti-government groups were locked in a cycle of violence and revenge with the feds that continues today. Militia activity surged in the 1990s after federal agents shot and killed Vicky Weaver and her teenage son during the high-profile Ruby Ridge standoff in Idaho. It lurched forward further when federal agents stormed the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, killing 76 civilians. As payback, Timothy McVeigh bombed the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people, in April 1995.

These stories were still in the air when Jerad and Amanda Miller, husband-and-wife street performers, arrived in the dusty desert town of Bunkerville, Nevada, in April 2014. They came for a protest at a small cattle ranch and melon farm, where an old rancher claimed the next Waco was brewing.

Cliven Bundy, for 20 years, had neglected to pay grazing fees to the Bureau of Land Management, citing his belief that the federal government couldn’t own land. When it appeared that the BLM was finally going to impound his cattle, Bundy called on militias for help. They came, their members bearing .50 caliber machine guns and Gadsden flags. “I really don’t want violence toward (the government),” Jerad Miller told a TV reporter. “But if they’re gonna come bring violence to us? Well, if that’s the language they want to speak, we’ll learn it.”

Six weeks later, the Millers walked into a Las Vegas pizza parlor and shot two police officers. They draped one of the bodies in a Gadsden flag and a swastika, and pinned a note to the other: “This is the beginning of the revolution,” it read.

In 2017, a man named Jeremy Christian thrust Nazi salutes into the spring air at an alt-right march in Portland, Oregon, while all around him people waved Gadsden flags. Weeks later, Christian lobbed racial slurs at two teenage girls on a crowded commuter train. When three other passengers confronted him, Christian slashed their throats with a knife, killing two of them. In court, where he would be convicted of murder, Christian was photographed holding up a small Gadsden flag.

“It’s become a symbol of anti-government, Patriot and militia members,” Travis McAdam, program director at Montana Human Rights Network, told me. The revival and repurposing of the Revolutionary symbol makes sense to McAdam: “So many of the militia folks that are out there view themselves as the modern-day version of this country’s founders.”

THE YEAR WAS 2020, the month was April. America was 244 years old, and the struggle for control over an American symbol of freedom was far from over.

From Olympia, Washington, to Lansing, Michigan, Gadsden flag-carrying protesters railed against COVID-19 stay-at-home orders handed down by state governments. Ammon Bundy, son of the Nevada rancher, even sermonized about the flag in Emmett, Idaho, where he had gathered a group of people who deemed the virus harmless and the restrictions tyrannical.

“On the Gadsden flag we have a snake, and it says, ‘Don’t tread on me.’ We’re gonna flip that around. What we want to become, what we will become, we are going to be like a den of rattlesnakes,” Bundy said. “We will be so venomous if our

“There’s a moment where we have to step up, too, and talk about the real history on this and not let these people ... make it a symbol of hate.”

rights are even threatened one bit!”

The way the flag was being embraced by extremists reminded Morigeau, the Montana representative, of the fight to remove the Confederate monument in Helena — as if it was another chapter in the same book. Like that monument — erected long after the war’s end, far from any Civil War battlefield — the Gadsden flag has come to function as an extremist dog whistle: “Things can take on new meaning. It can be used as a tool,” he said. “Some people are trying to take liberty and defiance to the extreme.

“There’s a moment where we have to step up, too, and talk about the real history on this and not let these people ... make it a symbol of hate,” he told me. “I might just go buy a damn flag now and put a sticker on my car because of this conversation.”

Later that day, Morigeau texted me an Amazon link for a \$6.99 vinyl Gadsden flag sticker. “A great way to showcase your political views!” the description read. By the next week, he’d affixed it to the window of his pickup. He texted me a photo, along with a note: “I’m not going to let the Tea Party repurpose a flag and tread on its universal meaning.”

In Montana, conversations about the flag often do come down to car decorations. In 2017, Montana became the only state in the West to offer residents the option to put a bright yellow “Don’t Tread on Me” specialty license plate on their vehicle. As of March 2020, nearly 2,800 Montanans had one.

The plate was the creation of a Billings nonprofit called the 1776 Foundation, which is focused on upholding “traditional American values, historic civil liberties, the Montana Constitution and the Constitution of the United States of America.” The organization — which did not respond to multiple requests for comment from *High Country News* — earned \$61,000 from the plates in 2019 alone.

The nonprofit is the work of Jacob Eaton, a combat veteran and campaign manager for Republican

Rep. Greg Gianforte’s gubernatorial run. Eaton served as the executive director of the Montana GOP until 2008, when he stepped down in a flurry of controversy after unsuccessfully challenging the validity of 6,000 voter registrations — particularly of Indigenous people and residents of liberal-leaning counties — in federal court. The state GOP backed off, but not before U.S. District Court Judge Donald Molloy took a swing at Eaton: “One can imagine the mischief an immature political operative could inject into an election cycle,” he wrote, “were he to use the statutes, not for their intended purpose of protecting the integrity of the people’s democracy, but rather to execute a tawdry political ploy.”

Around the state, the Gadsden plates are perceived as a symbol loaded with conflicting messages — even by those who know the emblem’s history.

A member of a proud military family, William “Bill” Snell Jr., who lives in Billings, Montana, and is an enrolled Crow tribal member, grew up respecting the Gadsden flag. And even though his reverence for the flag is lifelong, Snell says he would not fly one — or put the plate on his car. “I think people would label me. And I really don’t need that,” he said. “I would definitely fly some other flags, including tribal flags, but that particular flag I probably wouldn’t, just because of the misinterpretation it might bring to me and my family.”

Still, his attitude toward the flag might help explain its persistence, and its ominous warning. “It demonstrates strength; it demonstrates authority,” Snell said. “To me, it indicates that whole philosophy that everything is good, but don’t mess with us in a bad way. ... If you see a nail, don’t step on it. Because there’s a consequence. There’s always a consequence.” ✱



Washington State Fish and Wildlife Officer Tyler Bahrenburg works at his office in Ridgefield, Washington. The deer head and pelts hanging on the wall above him were seized from illegal hunts. He was part of the state's largest poaching ring investigation, which involved dozens of wildlife department officers and resulted in charges against eight suspects across several counties for crimes committed in Washington and Oregon.

DIGITAL SHADOWS

HOW A TROVE OF ELECTRONIC EVIDENCE BROUGHT DOWN A GANG OF POACHERS

By Bryan Schatz
Photos by Leah Nash





Denis Budai, a Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife officer who sometimes works undercover, stands in the storage locker of the agency's facility outside Ridgefield. The skull he is holding, from an elk shot by Billy Haynes, was seized in the investigation.

O

N A FRIGID BLACK NIGHT in December 2016, Officer Tyler Bahrenburg stood in the garage of a rundown home in Longview, Washington, looking for the heads of two poached deer. The faint stench of death hung in the air of the building, a hoarder's den of tools and refuse. Small drops of blood led out the back door. Bahrenburg, a Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife game warden with an easygoing attitude, followed the narrow path they made out of the shop. The home's occupant, 25-year-old Billy Haynes, trailed behind.

The deeper into the yard they went, inching toward a rusting GMC Jimmy wet with rain, the faster Haynes' breathing became. "I want to go back inside," he stammered.

Bahrenburg, one of four wardens at Haynes' house that night, reached the GMC, and that's when he saw it: a pile of black trash bags, each one bursting with antlers. He stooped and scanned under the vehicle with his flashlight — more bags with antlers. In the bed of the truck, still more. "What is all this?" he said.

A foul odor erupted when Bahrenburg opened the bags. Some of the heads were fresh; others crawled with maggots. There were at least a dozen. He looked up at Haynes, a paunchy man with a scruff of red beard, and saw that his chest was heaving. One of the other officers, a hot-headed rookie named Denis Budai, shouted in frustration: "You better be fucking honest and tell us what else you have here."

It cracked Haynes wide open. These were deer from Oregon, Haynes admitted. He told the officers that he and another man, Erik Martin, had been on a long hunting trip — what amounted to a two-week killing spree of illegal, late-night spotlighting sessions. And these weren't the only heads they had: There were 14 more at Martin's house.

The wardens split up, two to Martin's house, two staying with

Haynes to collect evidence. It was midnight by the time the wardens met at a storage facility they kept on the outskirts of town. They formed a production line, tagging and filing the antlers and heads until 4 a.m., exhausted but ecstatic. The improbable turn — a search for two poached deer skulls that ended with 27 — marked one of the biggest cases any of them had ever worked.

But even after the evening's staggering discoveries, the officers had no idea how much darker the case would become. Billy Haynes and Erik Martin knew something the officers didn't: For years, the men had been illegally killing wildlife in the wooded Oregon-Washington borderlands, and they hadn't been doing it alone. The investigation that began that cold night would be unlike any the wardens had known before, ultimately pushing the boundaries of what they imagined people were capable of — and what they themselves could endure.

POACHING IS DIFFICULT to prove. It occurs in remote areas with few, if any, witnesses; the evidence is easily destroyed; and the wildlife agencies involved are strapped for resources and staff. Convictions are infrequent and penalties minor — a suspended hunting license, a small fine, or, in more serious cases, maybe some community service or a brief stint in jail. In Washington, high-profile grizzly killings have led to tougher poaching laws, including a 1996 state initiative that outlawed using bait and hounds to hunt big game. But legally, there was no distinction between poaching a single deer and engaging in large-scale, wanton killing until a brutal 2011 case — that of 20-year-old James Cody Stearns, nicknamed “the Headhunter,” who was suspected of killing more than 100 animals — spurred a new spree-killing law in the state. It’s not a law that gets much play, but its relevance was about to become apparent to the Washington game wardens.

They had searched Haynes’ house in response to a call from state troopers in Oregon, who suspected the men of poaching in a remote swath of Oregon forest where hunters were reporting strange cases of deer carcasses with their heads lopped off. The Oregon troopers had, critically, already seized Haynes and Martin’s phones, and as the wardens dealt with the 27 deer heads, the troopers were combing through cellphone data. Two weeks passed, and they called the game wardens again. The troopers had videos they needed the game wardens to see. The case, they said, had “broadened.”

Washington game warden Patrick Anderson, a wiry, quick-witted 10-year veteran of the department, drove down to Hood River, Oregon, with Bahrenburg. They filed into a briefing room alongside the Oregon state attorney general, a prosecutor and the state troopers’ sergeant. A hell of a lot of important people are here for a wildlife crime, Anderson thought. The troopers queued up a video recorded by a

phone’s unblinking eye: a blur of brown and green and the sharp pitch of dogs baying, voices yelling about a bear in a tree, then the crack of a gunshot followed by a split second of silence as a black bear fell noiselessly through the air before hitting the ground to ecstatic shouts. Another: dogs, at least six of them, howling at a black bear, this one sitting on its haunches, exhausted after a long chase, and a man yelling, “Head shot!” followed by a shotgun blast. The bear crumples over. “Let ‘em loose!” someone yells above the noise of the hounds. “Get ‘em, boys. Get that motherfucker!”

Video after video played, each eerily similar to the last, the men’s hands and faces coated in blood spray from point-blank shots. The troopers had found evidence of far more crimes occurring throughout southwestern Washington, mostly in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, 1.3 million acres of thick woods flanked by Mount St. Helens to the west and Mount Adams to the east. What varied was the level of gore, the type of prey and the people involved; this was a much larger group than just Haynes and Martin. Most notably, it included a father-and-son duo whose reputation for illegal hound hunting was well known to the Washington game wardens: In 2008, the son, Joe Dills, was convicted of several charges for his role in a gang of poachers called the Kill ‘Em All Boyz. A state Fish and Wildlife officer had spent six months undercover to bring them down. “In their mindset, the bear, cougar, bobcat were all there for them to kill — that was their only purpose,” the officer, Todd Vandivert, told me later. “And the game laws and all that were just in their way.”

In the Hood River office, the wardens viewed a tiny sampling of the tens of thousands of text messages and hundreds of videos the phones contained. The sheer volume of evidence, and the brutality of it, felt overwhelming. How many animals had these people killed — dozens, hundreds? They

The digital trail

From the evidence files of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

FROM BILLY HAYNES

5/30/2015 4:05:27 p.m.

TO: ERIK MARTIN

Hey those videos you got you can send them through a private message on Facebook and they will go through that way

4:06:18 p.m.
I will try

4:07:40 PM
Alright. I just remembered that you can do that cause I sent Julie some videos I had from new years through Facebook and they were like 5 minutes long

4:40:06 PM
Did u get it

4:40:51 PM
Yeah just got it. Go ahead and send the others

4:42:35 PM I am working on it it’s wanting to be slow

A text message thread between Billy Haynes and Erik Martin.

“This video starts with a camera focusing at a tree as loud barking noises can be heard in the background. The camera then zooms in on the tree and a black bear can be seen in the tree.”

—Investigator’s notes on a video found in a text message thread between Billy Haynes and Erik Martin.

didn’t yet know. And why? The poachers didn’t appear to harvest much meat; they rarely kept pelts. Heads, when they took them, were apparently often chucked behind old trucks. Their trophies mostly seemed to be the pictures and videos they took and shared with each other.

The wardens had seen poaching cases before, but the sheer coldness of this, and the scale, struck them. They wondered how so much violence could have occurred in the areas they patrolled without them knowing about it. But the answer was obvious: A sweeping expanse of wilderness, the Gifford Pinchot is four times the size of Los Angeles, with only a handful of officers to patrol its maze of unmarked forestry roads. Heavily walled with hemlock, fir, cedar and bigleaf maple, boxed in with dense tangles of underbrush, the forest had a way of hiding what occurred within it.

Anderson and Bahrenburg returned to Washington stunned, with “the sense of standing at the base of a tall mountain,” said Anderson. Already, the clock was ticking. The first crime they had evidence for was the poaching of a black bear in the summer of 2015; it wouldn’t be long before the two-year statute of limitations would expire. Their captain grasped the gravity of the crimes and knew what the wardens needed to sleuth through the digital evidence and build an airtight case: giant computer monitors, a lot of time and no interruptions. Fortunately, they had just the right barren, isolated place for that kind of work.

ON THE OUTSKIRTS of Kalama, Washington, just across the Columbia River from Oregon, sits a metal-clad, five-bay shop, the same facility the wardens had visited during the first night of the case. It was tucked at the bottom of a canyon and shielded from cellphone reception. Rimmed by barbed wire, the property was forgettable in its industrial pallor; the wardens called it “the black hole.” “Nobody can get ahold of you unless they physically



Washington State Fish and Wildlife Officer Tyler Bahrenburg, Sgt. Brad Rhodin and Sgt. Patrick Anderson (pictured from left) visit a kill site located in the upper Lewis River watershed in Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

drive out to talk to you,” one told me. “You can just go and disappear there.”

It was mid-January. Snow was falling in the Gifford Pinchot by the foot; in the canyon, sheets of rain poured down. Sitting at their desks day after day, the wardens dove into the digital evidence. They took a hundred screenshots or more for some videos — images of the patterns made by branches and stumps and rocks that indicated the exact spot in the forest where the poachers had killed an animal. “We would sit there for 12-plus hours a day sometimes and just do nothing but read text messages, write stuff down,” said Budai, who had just four months on the job. There was “a spider web of people,” involved in the crimes, and the investigators had to figure out how they were all connected.

When the wardens slowed down the videos enough, they could see the water spraying off a bear’s fur where a bullet struck it on a rainy day. They came to know the poachers by the sound of their voices, the vehicles they drove, the dogs they owned, the guns they favored. Budai and his colleagues streamlined the complex cases, creating an ever-expanding master spreadsheet detailing each kill. They filled in all the available information and gathered additional clues however they could. Were there Instagram posts and videos corresponding to the crime? What were the GPS coordinates — hidden in the metadata of many of the pictures — telling them where each crime occurred? And were there text messages and Facebook posts with even more details?

Budai was assigned to inves-

tigate Haynes, whose Facebook messenger archive was a rich repository of shared kill videos. Seeking more, the officers scoured social media and found that Joe Dills was particularly prolific. He had no privacy controls, broadcasting his posts for all to see, including shots of poached animals. His distinctive brown-and-red pickup truck was also visible in a host of kill videos. Dills and the others seemed to be propelled by the same narcissistic tendencies that fuel so much human behavior — the need for recognition from a group of peers. “He was trying to gloat to people,” said Bahrenburg: “‘Look at this bull I shot.’”

Indeed. And when you have a like-minded group of people for an audience, even illegal and unethical behavior can quickly become normalized, said Nikita Malik, the

director of the Centre on Radicalisation and Terrorism in London. “Criminals want to legitimize very bad things in their own minds and with their group of friends and followers,” she said. “You know what you’re doing is to some extent wrong, but you want a community that will tell you that what you’re doing is special or right.”

For the poachers, however, that impulse would be their ruin, as it has been for others in recent years. In 2017, two men in Florida bragged on Snapchat about poaching deer and were soon arrested. In April 2019, a Georgia group similar to the Kill ‘Em All Boyz was arrested. “They would dispose of an animal as soon as they had taken pictures and/or taken the antlers,” an investigator told the local ABC affiliate. Later that year, three hunters using free-running dogs were arrested

for poaching a mountain lion in Wyoming's Yellowstone National Park after they posted celebratory pictures on social media.

That kind of nonchalance is common, said Malik, and not just among poachers; she saw similar behavior in the early days of the Islamic State. Sympathizers of the terrorist group would post their intentions and actions, giving the FBI what it needed to land arrests and convictions. "There are no considerations to long-term effects of this. It's a kind of short-term validation," she said. "It's like, 'I'm breaking the rules, and cheer me on for doing it.'"

In Washington, every game warden on the case was a hunter. But what these guys were doing? These were massacres. "I don't think you'll find any true houndsman out there that would support essentially anything they did," James Van Geystel, a celebrated hound hunter the Fish and Wildlife Department has hired to help with ecology, public safety and depredation cases, told me. "The sport is not necessarily about killing an animal. I haven't filled a mountain lion tag in a few years, and it's not because I didn't have one in my pocket," he said. "What those guys did was just killing."

One picture stuck with Budai: a mother and her cub up a tree, Joe Dills and the dogs surrounding it at the bottom. There was a text message that may have been about it, but there was no video of the hunt, and no clear evidence of how it ended. It is a generally accepted rule among hunters that you don't shoot pregnant animals and mothers with their young. But these weren't the kind of hunters who cared much for rules. Budai wondered: Did they kill the sow and her cub?

The wardens had mounds of digital evidence, but now they needed to find and visit the kill sites, scattered across the deep, mossy forests of northwest Oregon and into the Gifford Pinchot's lake-dotted alpine reaches. They thought about the ways they could

lose in court. Would a jury trust, or even fully understand, the digital evidence alone? Could an attorney instill acquittal-inducing doubt by asking, "Do you *know* that a bear died at this location?" Finding carcasses in the vastness of the entire Gifford Pinchot seemed like a long shot. But there was a chance bones still littered the forest floor, and locating them would bullet-proof the case.

By March 2017, months into the investigation, there were many questions that the two original phones alone couldn't answer, chiefly: Who else was involved, and to what extent? It was time to gather every wildlife cop the state could lend and execute a huge round of search warrants. The officers prepped tirelessly, made a list of everything they wanted to seize, and set a date for a coordinated hit on the suspects' homes.

MID-AFTERNOON on March 12, dozens of law enforcement officers — a third of the state's entire wildlife force — huddled in anticipation: The poachers were out of town, and the officers couldn't search their properties until they returned. Lookouts waited on the highways entering Washington and around Longview. Plain-clothes detectives kept tabs on the poachers' homes while the rest of the force was secreted away in a nearby town, preparing to pounce on three of the houses simultaneously, with 10 officers assigned to each. Budai, fully aware of how new he was to the job, was anxious, but he had a good feeling. He planned to interview Haynes, and he had a hunch he'd be able to extract the information he needed from him — if only he'd ever show up.

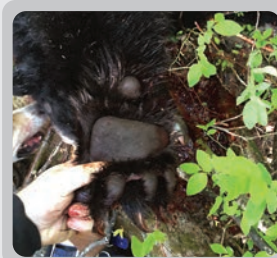
Finally, their radios crackled to life. "I've got your vehicle. It's coming across the bridge right now," said an officer posted at the highway connecting Oregon to Washington. It was almost time. They grabbed their gear and paced, waiting for the final word. Then it came: Billy Haynes arrived at his home, and then Joe Dills did, too.

9/7/2015 2:27:09 PM
From: Mom
Have u made it home yet with a kill hopefully a cougar

Almost home. Didn't kill anything. ...

A text message exchange between Billy Haynes and his mom.

FROM BILLY HAYNES
5/18/2016 10:38:17 AM
To: My Babe
Hey baby. I'm done hunting already. I killed a huge bear about 400 pounds this morning about 2 feet from me on the ground. Now we are headed to joes to drop the dogs off except for jip and stormy. Jip has about a 10 inch gash on her back leg and storms stitches pulled out so we're headed to get them fixed



10:40:52 AM
From: My Babe
Mom said she wants claws

10:41:12 AM
I only got one claw off it

10:42:29
I love you baby

A text message exchange between Billy Haynes and his girlfriend.

5/26/16 6:32:25 PM
To: Joe Dills
IMG 6416.jpeg

6:33:18 p.m.
That's a pretty cat

6:40:42 PM
Yeah it is

7:00:01 PM
Send the other pics of the bear and could u send pics of that cat's feet?

A text exchange between Billy Haynes and Joe Dills.

Over-caffeinated, under-slept and running on adrenaline, the officers finally jumped in their trucks, blared the sirens and screamed toward their targets.

The reputation Joe Dills and his father, Eddy, had for being "Top Dog" hound hunters, as Bahrenburg put it, meant that the investigators suspected they were the nucleus around which all the other poachers orbited. Because of this, and because of Joe Dills' role in the Kill 'Em All Boyz, most of the officers were eager to hit the Dillses' home, imagining a treasure trove of evidence and information. When the wardens reached the narrow ridge-top property the Dillses shared, their search was fruitful — an illegal leg trap, elk heads stacked in a shed, a full decomposing bobcat hanging from a tree. But their interviews were a bust; the Dillses kept their mouths shut.

Budai, however, had predicted that it would be Haynes who would do the most talking. Somehow, Haynes still seemed boyish, eager to find a community and be accepted. He had not excelled in high school, Budai knew. But hound hunting? He was good at it, and this crew of poachers praised him for his skill. Maybe, Budai thought, he had gotten in over his head and wanted to be free of his secrets.

Haynes was on his stoop when Budai arrived. After three months of living under a microscope, he had begun to unravel. Much like the last time they saw him, he was nerve-wracked, his breathing a labored, visible effort. When Budai asked for an interview, Haynes paused, spat, "That son of a bitch Joe is going to rat me out," and then invited him inside.

Presented with crimes that took place over a two-year period, Haynes recalled every kill in piercing detail — who shot the video, who pulled the trigger, how the blood splashed. "I was amazed," Budai told me later. Haynes cried. He said he'd messed up, and he started naming names. The officers seized plenty of evidence,

including a gun that was a family heirloom. At that, Haynes' father, who'd been pacing nearby, choked back tears. "I didn't raise him to be this way," he told Budai. "He should have never gotten involved with these people."

All told, it was a bountiful haul — trucks, elk meat, bear skulls and GPS-enabled dog collars that synced with both handheld devices and systems hardwired into the trucks, the kind of setup that makes for easy following when dogs are on the chase.

The officers searched more suspects' properties soon after, collecting even more evidence, including one unexpected item that would prove critical: an old JVC video camera that belonged to Aaron Hanson, who was connected to the Dillses through a mutual friend. After being caught poaching in 2014, Hanson had learned some of the wardens' investigative techniques. A JVC doesn't contain metadata; it's easy to change the display to reflect a different date and time — easy to intentionally place events beyond the two-year statute of limitations. Hanson and a few others had been careful. They turned off their cellphones on poaching trips so that no cell towers could track them. They avoided being photographed. They didn't mount illegal heads on their walls. When the officers seized their phones and the JVC, they laughed. "Good luck," Hanson smirked. "There's nothing on there."

AFTER SEVERAL RAIDS, the game wardens now had about a dozen phones to explore. Once again, they sat at their computers. Spring was well underway elsewhere in Washington, but in the Gifford Pinchot, snow still gripped the forest. The "black hole" remained cold and quiet and mouse-infested, and as the excitement from the search warrant windfall faded, pressure to charge the poachers mounted. The statute of limitations was racing to a close, and the bones they needed to lock in their case were still buried deep



Washington State Fish and Wildlife Officer Tyler Bahrenburg at a kill site where the bones of a bear were found. **Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife**

under snow.

The first round of videos had turned up acts of brutality, but this latest batch was worse. At times, young children were the ones pulling the triggers; in other clips, they laughed nervously alongside the men as the carnage unfolded. In one video, the hounds tore apart a wounded young bobcat still clawing for its life. "I remember looking at that and watching it and ... I just couldn't believe that they would bring their children," said Bahrenburg. "I just look at the sheer violence, and if you're teaching your kid violence from a very early stage in life, how is it going to impact them later in life?"

A major break came when, on one hunt, whoever was holding the JVC panned down and zoomed in on the screen of a handheld GPS showing the exact location and the true date and time. When Brad Rhodin, the warden managing the case, saw that, he cracked up. They could now calculate the difference between the date and time displayed on the JVC and reality.

"That was our 'aha!' moment," he said. "We got 'em." With that, more and more puzzle pieces began falling into place.

They could finally link up all the different data points. Whenever a truck started, it triggered the GPS system, leaving a breadcrumb trail that revealed where the poachers and their dogs had gone. From there, the wardens would search the phones and, sure enough, find pictures or videos that matched the GPS coordinates. In some cases, Instagram and Facebook posts soon followed. "It just perfectly lined up," said Anderson.

The revelations could not have come at a more critical juncture. They'd been sleuthing for months. Countless times, Budai told his wife he'd be home in seven hours, only to actually return 20 hours later. "It takes a toll. I have two little girls," Budai said. On long days, Anderson wondered: *Is it ever going to be over?* When Bahrenburg was alone at the black hole, he felt trapped. Early on, the carnage sickened him. But as the months wore on

and the violence continued apace, it became unnervingly normal, almost mechanical. And that was alarming in its own way. "I lost a lot of emotions," he said. "You just become desensitized to it."

Now, if only the weather would cooperate. The snowdrifts were still head-high. They watched with dread as the days fell on the calendar, clock ticking against their two-year limit, cabin fever a constant state of being. When May arrived, they tried to reach a kill site only to get stuck, forced to dig themselves out of the wet snow and call for a tow. There was nothing to do but pace and worry, and keep slogging at their computers.

JUNE 5 WAS A HOT, cloudless day. The forest had finally shed its snow cover. Anderson and Bahrenburg hopped in their truck and punched in a set of GPS coordinates from a phone video. It was a recording of the first bear kill they had evidence for, on Aug. 29, 2015, when Eddy Dills had touched his finger to a bear's open eye to make sure it

was dead. After two hours of driving, they were as close to the GPS coordinates as they could get by vehicle. They parked, then picked their way through the woods, down a slight grade toward a towering hatchwork of hemlock and Douglas fir. Before long, they were right on top of the pinging GPS point. They separated, scanning the trees, and then each started walking in concentric circles, covering more territory with every rotation. Looking at the green and brown maze before them, they strained to see the exact tree on a slight hill where the bear was shot, where it hit the ground, where it tumbled before coming to a lifeless rest.

Suddenly, Anderson registered a flash of white. Looking closer, he saw it — the top half of a bear skull and canine tooth, sticking out of the soil. *Holy shit*, he breathed. He bent down, looked at the contours of the forest floor, and everything came into focus: the tree, the shape of the earth. After spending so many hours staring at photos and video frames, he knew this spot well. “Oh, my God,” he shook his head. “This is it.” The bear had been killed almost two years before, and here it was, as it had been left. Tufts of its brown fur still gripped the earth.

Until then, the team had doubted they would ever find anything, worried that the GPS coordinates weren’t precise enough, or that so much time had passed that the remains would have rotted away or been covered with foliage, perhaps picked apart by scavengers beyond detection. But those worries were now put to rest.

They broke into teams, and for two more months they scoured the Gifford Pinchot. They found more bones, shotgun shells and bare patches of ground where decomposing carcasses had prevented new growth from rising. And even though no one ever admitted to the kill, and there was no photo confirming it, Budai made what was for him the most consequential discovery. “I remember when I walked to one of the kill sites, and

we got on the tree,” he said, trailing off. “We found the cub, its bones.” Budai paused, took a breath. “It really pissed me off. It makes your blood boil. ... You get really fatigued emotionally, trying to go through this every single day. Stuff like that gives you fuel to keep going. This was one of those moments.”

Finally, they had everything they needed. Just three days before the statute of limitations was up, they filed scores of charges against eight poachers for crimes spanning multiple counties and two states. Eventually, more than a dozen would be charged.

THE POACHERS NEVER stood a chance. The charging documents — which, collectively, detailed the largest poaching case Washington had ever seen — were hundreds of pages long. They described the kills in excruciating detail, linking up digital and physical evidence to eliminate any doubt about what had occurred. Hundreds of animals had perished in less than two years.

Depending on their level of involvement, the poachers received up to several thousand dollars in fines, and a few were sentenced to more than a year in jail. Haynes and the Dillses got the harshest sentences. (Haynes died unexpectedly before he could report to jail.) From the wardens’ point of view, considering the hours and resources they’d put into the investigation, the penalties seemed light.

That’s not how it felt to Joe Dills, who had recently finished serving his time when I reached him via Facebook in January. In his view, he and the others were simply doing “wildlife management,” a task he felt the game wardens had failed to properly undertake. “Washington state has a predator problem that needs to be addressed and I addressed it. The deer and elk populations continue to drop while the predator populations rise,” he said.

“That these individuals make any reference to killing predators to try and help the deer and elk population is ridiculous,” Rhodin

“Several photos showed numerous antlered deer skulls in Martin’s living room. There were other photos showing W. Haynes with a dead bull elk. There were also videos of bear hunting with the use of dogs.

“... W. Haynes’ cellular device was able to capture GPS coordinates for these images. The GPS coordinates were recorded as Latitude 46.116225 and Longitude -122.950844. I entered the GPS coordinates into a mapping system. The coordinates came back to a location in Longview Washington. Upon further review of the photos I noticed all photos of this dead bear taken between 7:51:48 AM and 7:58:50 AM have the same GPS Coordinates in Longview Washington.”

—From the charging document for Billy Haynes, referring to videos, photos and text messages obtained from a search warrant on cell phones seized from Haynes and Erik Martin.



The cell tower ping map, top, that helped investigators locate kill sites, and a GPS tracker investigators used to find evidence of a bear that had been poached.

told me later. “If they were trying to save deer and elk, why did they go out and poach so many deer and elk in areas closed to general hunting?” Now Dills, a lifelong hound hunter, has lost his hunting privileges for good.

Last fall, I drove up Highway 12 with Bahrenburg, Anderson and Rhodin, following twisting Forest Service roads to reach one of the kill sites. We parked where dead-fall blocked our path, then walked another 20 minutes before entering the woods. The soil was damp. An undulating slope led to a seasonal creek and then a stand of tightly packed timber, the trees like towering sentries in the low-hanging mist. Just 100 yards in, the scene looked the same in every direction: trees and stumps and moss and rocks, each patch nearly indistinguishable from the next.

The wardens had learned a lot from the case — where the poaching hot spots were, that they needed to extend their patrols deeper into the forest, how technology is both ubiquitous and overlooked, a powerful tool in taking down a group so destructive. At the same time, little had changed. They still had miles and miles of remote roads and backcountry to traverse with limited personnel, and they often returned empty-handed. They knew that there could be plenty more poaching going on in the Gifford Pinchot, just out of earshot, and they might not ever find out.

Near the GPS coordinates, we started moving in circles, as the investigators had done the year before, trying to spot a specific stump where a bear had been shot. Within a few minutes, Anderson found it, recognizing the way the trees rose up around it and the bare patch of earth before it, where the bear had collapsed and its bones had settled into the ground. By now, the bones were gone, scattered by scavengers and covered up by a year’s worth of fallen leaves. ☀

(continued from page 9)

many of whom speak only Navajo, delivering medication and making hospital referrals. Many of their clients have chronic illnesses. “There are some anxieties within them (CHRs), because we don’t have all of the necessary personal protection equipment. But they know that they have to get out into the community,” Mae-Gilene Begay (Diné), the tribe’s CHR program director, said. “I have some CHRs that had to go into the self-quarantine for a week, but they got called back, so they returned to work.” Because of the coronavirus, home visits have become impossible, and long hours are inevitable.

Shortly after the church rally but before the outbreak was apparent, Begay went to a Navajo chapter meeting in Chilchinbeto. She was lucky, she said. She kept her distance, didn’t shake hands. Less than a week later, one COVID-19 case had become 26, and it wasn’t long before people were dying. According to CNN, as of May 18, the tribe’s infection rate has surpassed that of New York and New Jersey, previously known as the U.S. “epicenter” of the pandemic. On May 17, the Navajo Nation Department of Health documented 4,002 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 140 deaths.

“Yes, we were afraid. But there are some people who run away from fire and some who run towards fire.”

Owing to the shortage of hospitals, respirators and trauma care, it can be difficult to find out where loved ones are receiving treatment. One of Begay’s relatives, who went to the Nazarene church rally and returned home to Hardrock, died from COVID-19. “Right now, I have an aunt and uncle that are in the hospital,” Begay said in mid-April. “They flew out my aunt two days ago, and we don’t know which hospital she’s at, and we don’t know how she’s doing. But we were able to find out where my uncle is.”

Larissa Martin (Diné), who has worked as a CHR for six years, worries that people are falling through the cracks and not getting the care and support they need. “We know who our elders



The New Mexico Department of Health offers free drive-up testing for COVID-19 at a local mall on April 27 in Gallup, New Mexico. **Sharon Chischilly**

are, especially those who don’t have family support or limited support, those who have fixed income,” Martin said. Many of the families and elderly that she oversees on the east side of the reservation, in Chichiltah and Bááhááli, lack internet access, telephones and adequate cleaning supplies, as well as coal for heat or even enough food and water.

“I wish we would be able to provide transportation,” Begay told me. “We do realize there is a lot of urgent transportation need, but we don’t have the proper PPE. We are very short on cleaning supplies, and we don’t have enough masks and gloves to clean the vehicles.”

While tribes waited nearly six weeks for a limited, 60% distribution of the CARES Act \$8 billion relief package, online fundraising campaigns sprang up around Indian Country to address immediate needs. The Navajo and Hopi Families COVID-19 Relief Fund, created by former Navajo Nation Attorney General Ethel Branch in mid-March, has raised over \$3.8 million dollars to purchase bulk food and supplies — about \$10,000 per community. “It seems like a lot of money, but it’s really not,” Cassandra Begay (Diné), a spokesperson for the Fund, said in mid-April. “We already had a first round of food deliveries, but they are going to be hungry again in a week or two.” U.S. Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., called the federal relief package “too little, too late” and demanded full release of funds to tribes in early May.

For decades, tribes, advocates and a handful

of lawmakers have been calling attention to the drastic underfunding of the Indian Health Service and Indian Country’s lack of infrastructure. In 2003 and in 2018, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission found that tribal infrastructure was chronically underfunded by billions of dollars. Since virus prevention requires access to information, electricity, running water, cleaning supplies, food and medical care, many Navajos are already at a disadvantage.

Charleston and her team employed public health and health-care providers to learn who was sick or being treated for COVID-19 at the Kayenta Health Center, keeping everyone safely isolated. She had to establish communications between Indian Health Service medical staff and the Navajo Nation’s Incident Command Team, sharing COVID-19 information while maintaining patient confidentiality in order to track medical conditions. They came up with ingenious solutions: repurposing raincoats for PPE, for example. They scoured the reservation in search of janitorial supplies for the constant sanitation required. But the lack of infrastructure just made everything even more overwhelming.

Charleston returned home in April, three weeks after deploying, with her whole team safe. The Navajo Nation is currently facing scores of new coronavirus cases a day, but Charleston has not lost hope. “We can outlive this virus,” she said. “But we have to look at each step to be more creative.” ☀

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A moose wades in Denali National Park and Preserve, Alaska. Kent Miller/NPS

High
Country
News

AS THE COVID-19 pandemic takes hold across the country, residents are called to practice public health measures in our parks and the outdoors. This includes practicing social distancing and avoiding outdoor recreation towns that cannot afford the risk of caring for infected visitors.

The message has been straightforward: *Stay away from these towns and public lands; if you're irresponsible, we'll close the trails and parks down.* At the same time, suggestions and guidelines are offered on how we can still get outdoors safely: *Stay close to home, engage with nearby nature, and hike in your neighborhood.* These instructions are necessary, but they are based on the assumption that everyone has the privilege of outdoor access and will be affected the same when it is taken away.

As the founder of Latino Outdoors, a Latinx-led organization that connects the diversity of Latinx communities with the outdoors, and someone who has spent years working to make the outdoors a more equitable space, I think it's important to keep frameworks of equity and inclusion in mind, especially during times when inequalities are being amplified. If we don't, we risk perpetuating existing inequities that have a real cost in terms of the health of communities of color as well as others who have historically lacked equitable access to the outdoors.

Across the West, people of color have long experienced unequal access to outdoor spaces. In a 2018 study, researchers David Scott and KangJae Jerry Lee note data from the National Park Service Visitor Services Project showing that Hispanics and Asian Americans comprised less than 5% of visitors to the national parks surveyed, while fewer than 2% were African Americans. The 2018 Outdoor Industry Association Participation Report put ethnic outdoor participation percentages for whites, Hispanics, Blacks and Asian Americans at 74%, 10%, 9% and 6% respectively.

One study by the University of



PERSPECTIVE

The privilege of open spaces

As we limit outdoor access, consider the impact on underrepresented communities.

BY JOSÉ GONZÁLEZ

British Columbia found that while income and education are strong factors, “racial and ethnic factors show stronger negative associations with urban vegetation in larger cities.” In other words, white residents had more positive associations with green spaces than Latinx and African American residents did.

So how do we avoid harming communities of color by sending them yet another message to stay away from the outdoors? We can first assess and acknowledge the impact our messaging might have on some of these populations.

As Nina Roberts, professor at San Francisco State University, and Caryl Hart, commissioner at the California Coastal Commission, wrote in their article “To Close or Not To Close,” which appeared in *Bay Nature* at the end of March, these closures compound an existing problem. “Generally, by preventing people from obtaining (park) benefits and more, even amidst a pandemic, we create additional problems not solu-

tions,” they wrote. “Furthermore, other research also shows how low income and other under-resourced communities incur greater stress due to lack of access to parks in times of need.” This makes it clear that in addition to having to cope with a global pandemic, these communities disproportionately face physical and mental health problems that are amplified when the parks are closed.

As we move forward, it is important to take into account the human need to connect with the benefits of nature and the outdoors — especially when it comes to the most seriously impacted populations — while protecting the public health of everyone.

Parks and agencies, for example, can use this time to better ensure public health for disproportionately impacted populations by working with community-based leadership through groups and coalitions. The Parks Now Coalition in California and the Next 100 Coalition in Colorado, for example, are already

Sections of some Denver streets have been closed to cars to provide more room for the public to be outside during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Rachel Woolf / HCN**

invested in making the outdoors a more equitable place. Both groups were formed to increase park and outdoor access for underrepresented communities.

In the West, we have other good models to follow when it comes to ensuring equitable access to the outdoors during COVID-19: Cities like Denver, Colorado, for example, are blocking off streets to cars to provide more recreational space for urban residents. Such efforts have similar effects to “pop-up parks,” the temporary reuse of space to provide park benefits. Other cities, including Oakland, California, have recently followed suit; Oakland opened up 74 miles of streets to walkers, joggers and cyclists.

The outdoor recreation and conservation community could do its part by shaping its messaging around going outdoors ethically with an eye toward equity. Helpful messages might include:

- ▶ Reflect on what it means to have restricted outdoor access now that you are experiencing it, and consider that this has long been the norm for others.
- ▶ Donate, if possible, to a community-based organization that supports outdoor access — much as you would to a food bank.
- ▶ Speak up as an anti-racism ally when you are in public spaces, especially given the current rise in anti-Asian hate crimes.

Without such actions and considerations, I'm concerned that our decision to limit and close off park and outdoor access will take a disproportionate toll on the communities that need it the most, even as we debate the issue in our privileged spaces. ☀

José G. González is a Chicano educator with experience as a K-12 public education teacher, environmental education advisor, outdoor science education instructor and university adjunct faculty. He resides in Sacramento, California.

Life lessons

The pandemic has a lot to teach us, especially about Indigenous knowledge.

BY DINA GILIO-WHITAKER

BY NOW, IT'S CLEAR that the coronavirus pandemic is one of the most serious collective events most of us alive today have ever faced. The spread of the virus has been a massive wake-up call for humankind, and not just in a scientific, logistical or even personal sense. It has also shown us that the way we live on the planet is fatally out of balance. We should think of COVID-19 as a warning.

We must change the way we inhabit the planet, or otherwise face self-destruction caused by our own negligence, if not by the pandemic then by environmental destruction (or both). The changes we need to make are not just economic and scientific; they are philosophical and practical, and they concern the things we value. We need to seriously re-examine and revise the philosophical frameworks that undergird modern society. Indigenous peoples who have lived sustainably in the same territories for thousands of years have important knowledge systems that can productively intervene in the destructive social structures currently orchestrating our downfall. But first, societies need to listen.

The world as we know it — shaped by centuries of technological advancement, aggressive migration and colossal population growth — is the result of particular beliefs about how humans should live on the earth. Perhaps most recognizable to us would be the belief that the earth's resources are there for unrestrained human taking. So deep-seated is this view that entire populations of

Indigenous peoples were considered expendable by way of germs and warfare in order to give way to more “advanced” societies who would use the land “properly.” As Indigenous people, we know all about foreign diseases.

A 2015 white paper produced by the Rockefeller Foundation-Lancet Commission, which gave birth to the budding field of planetary health, concluded that not only do failures at the governmental and implementation level contribute to many of our current problems, so too do failures of imagination and knowledge, including the over-reliance on economics as a measure of human progress. Altogether, these reveal that societies based primarily on a utilitarian and extractive orientation are based on a worldview that has gone horribly wrong.

Mushrooming social movements and a huge body of academic literature have for decades criticized unquestioned, unlimited capitalist economic growth, including its impacts on planetary health — the study of the ways in which commercial development affects the environment and their consequences for human health. Recent media stories, for instance, have highlighted the ways zoonotic diseases and pathogens cross from animals to humans, unleashing hellish illnesses as a result of our unending exploitation of the natural world. Ebola, SARS, MERS, Lyme disease, the ever-mutating avian influenza viruses, and our most recent coronavirus, COVID-19, are perfect examples.

Indigenous societies, on the other hand, are based on worldviews where human needs are balanced with the needs of other life forms. This worldview inherently acknowledges the constraints of an ecosystem, the essence of sustainability. When the integrity of an ecosystem is guarded, the integrity and very existence of human communities are guarded as well. In a philosophical system that respects other life forms as relatives, an ethic of respect, responsibility and reciprocity automatically follows, mediated by reverence. This is the opposite of the vulgar, endless extraction of resources for short-term economic gain.

Just as scientists are finally waking up to the ways Indigenous knowledge can inform climate science, so planetary health scientists should also look to Indigenous knowledge to fill in the gaps of the failures of imagination, knowledge and implementation.

As Indigenous peoples, we have always understood that ecocide — the killing of an ecosystem — is commensurate with genocide. In the U.S., this socially acceptable form of genocide continues in the way our lands and resources are still targeted for toxic development, as the Dakota Access Pipeline and countless other fossil fuel projects make clear. Now, coronavirus shows that the entire human race faces the ramifications of ecocide and biodiversity loss. But applying Indigenous thought patterns today presents a challenge.

Indigenous knowledge involves the application of particular knowledge in particular contexts. It is not universal like universalist religious and capitalist value systems. Before Indigenous knowledge can be incorporated into research and policy toolboxes, powerful entities will need to learn how to partner with local Indigenous communities in ways that are respectful, equitable and non-extractive.

It might, at first, sound like lunacy: Expecting societies to begin valuing the knowledge of the peoples they have systematically been trying to eradicate for centuries. I am not naive about that. But as a teacher and an “almost elder,” it is not the older generation I place my faith in. Instead, I look to the youth. Historically, it has always been the younger generations who fought the hardest for change. With their futures at stake, now will be no different. It is up to us as elders to help lay a transformative philosophical foundation for them. And the sooner the better, because as scientists tell us, this will not be the last — or the worst — pandemic we are likely to see. ☀

Dina Gilio-Whitaker is a lecturer in American Indian Studies at California State University San Marcos, and an independent educator and consultant on Indigenous environmental justice policy. She is the author of As Long As Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock (Beacon Press, 2019).

*In a philosophical system
that respects other life forms
as relatives, an ethic of respect,
responsibility and reciprocity
automatically follows, mediated
by reverence.*



Q&A

Lauren Crow / HCN

In both *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* and *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment*, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz digs into the roots of violence buried deep within the country's history. From the election of Donald Trump to the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, American violence has been on unprecedented display. The pandemic has likewise exposed some of the nation's starkest disparities, not only in justice and health-related issues, but also along racial and class divides. Now, as states consider relaxing stay-at-home orders in response to the economic crisis health restrictions have led to, the country is witnessing the

Armed and contagious

How America's violent history helps explain coronavirus protests.

BY GRAHAM LEE BREWER

armed occupation of state capitols, emotionally charged protests and the outright denunciation of science and research.

Dunbar-Ortiz helps put these contemporary events in a historical context. "The United States was founded as a capitalist state

and an empire on conquered land, with capital in the form of slaves," she writes in *Loaded*, as she traces violence from the nation's founding to today. "The capitalist firearms industry was among the first successful corporations. Gun proliferation and gun violence today are

among its legacies." This legacy helps explain American gun culture and the conspicuous display of firearms at the COVID-19 "reopen" protests.

High Country News recently spoke with Dunbar-Ortiz about what these events have to say about the nation's propensity for violence, tolerance of white supremacy and the push for profits over the health of the populace. The following conversation has been edited for length.

Do you think the armed protest at the Michigan Statehouse was allowed to happen because the perpetrators were white and by extension not considered a threat to those in authority?

It's complicated. No one can imagine an all-armed Black group coming to the Statehouse at all, for anything. They would be killed, massacred. Or let's say Asians, or Native Americans or Latinos. Of course, it's white privilege. But what I think is that it's not that (those in power) don't see it, it's (that) they actually fear the power of these people. Politicians are not stupid, and they know in their hearts when the president of the United States gives practically an order, certainly permission, for these types of people to act, then that's power. Even here in California, they've come to Sacramento twice. They had an armed protest at City Hall in San Francisco. And you really saw our governor here stepping back and saying, "Well, yeah, maybe some of the smaller counties, it may not apply to them." It's really scary, because it works.

This notion that certain segments of the population should die for the economy is striking. How is the acceptance of mass casualties — whether of Indigenous peoples, children in school shootings, or the elderly and immunocompromised during a pandemic — part of the American psyche?

U.S. capitalism has always had to have surplus labor — half of the people unemployed — in order to keep wages down. But with technology and the end of industrialized mass labor, they're no longer needed by the system. With mechanized agriculture, they're not needed as agrarian workers. Back in the '80s, it was almost uncontroversial when Earth First!, the most radical of the environmental movements, the most militant, came up with this anti-immigration thing at the border because of overpopulation — the idea that the border should be tightened, taking that reactionary stance for the environment rather than reviewing how capitalism works and attacking the kings of capital.

The practice of eliminating people is baked into the country's founding, Constitution and mili-

tary, so of course it worms its way into everyone's mind that it is OK to just eliminate a whole group of people, so more white farmers can have land. At the core of the country, it's always there as a possibility, not just for people who have bad immune systems or are old or who are homeless. This idea to just get rid of them. "Herd immunity" — it shouldn't be used that way — to "cull out" the older people and those who are at risk, and that will be a good thing. But you know, of course, for Native people and Latinos and most African Americans, most people really revere their elders as sources of knowledge and teaching. I realize, though, that that has changed a lot, because I think these arguments that a lot of the scientists were giving on the national level, and the governors, that you have to do these things to protect your grandparents. I don't think that really counts for anything when people are so broken down and (culturally) separated from their family.

When you look back over time, from the founding of the United States to today, do you see variations in that reliance on violence or death, or does it just take new forms?

The advent of capitalism came with the looting of the Americas, that accumulation of wealth, and then the founding of capitalist states, and with the Industrial Revolution — which, in the United States, was based on slavery. When slaves freed themselves, Reconstruction didn't work, and they continued to be necessary agrarian labor. Capitalist states kept importing immigrants to keep surplus labor.

They really worried, after World War II, when so many young men were killed from every country in Europe. In Western Europe, they were absolutely frantic, because the workers could demand such high wages. They could bargain. That's why, in Germany and France and Britain, they have such good unions, free health-care systems. They won all of that because there

"But instead of organizing against that system of capitalism, they are easily redirected — because of white supremacy — to attack the immigrants coming in and 'taking their jobs.'"

was no surplus labor. And then those countries started importing Turkish labor, Kurdish labor, African labor, to create surplus labor. That's how capitalism works: Its only real profits come from what the wages are for workers.

With the technological shift from industrial production — although it's still going on; it's just exported to China, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, where they're still working factories — in the United States surplus labor is no longer needed for profits. So much of it is finance or specialized or highly technical that the unemployed of every class, especially the white and unemployed, are the most worried. But instead of organizing against that system of capitalism, they are easily redirected — because of white supremacy — to attack the immigrants coming in and "taking their jobs." Of course, these are jobs they won't do anyway. They're not going to work in meatpacking plants and the fields of California. But the system is so good at diverting their attention to people of color as the enemy — to get rid of them, and everything will be all right.

That seems like it would inevitably lead to more conflict.

That is a problem, and it's a permanent problem, even with the overthrow of capitalism. What do people do who are so work-oriented? I know we used to have dreams, when I was a young activist, of a world without so much work, where we could work two hours a day and still get wages. This would be the kind of socialism that works for people's good and not for profits, so people find a lot of things to do when they're not on the job, or spending most of their lives in jobs that they don't like. There's a necessity to have things to do. They feel that purpose, but mainly it's that you have to have that in order to eat, survive or feed your family, not because you love the work. ☀

Closed doors

'The Dispossessed' makes human the hardships of asylum seekers.

BY SARAH TORY

ONE DAY IN OCTOBER 2016, in a village on El Salvador's Pacific Coast, 24-year-old Arnovis Guidos Portillo accidentally collided with a local gang member's brother during a soccer game. After word reached the gang leadership, men came to Arnovis' parents' house, looking for him. He began receiving threatening phone calls. *Sos tumba*, they said. *You're dead*.

"Just leave," his brother, Miguel, said. But in gang-controlled El Salvador, relocating to a new town was not enough: Arnovis had to leave his country entirely.

For John Washington, Arnovis' story is a familiar one. A longtime immigration reporter, Washington has spent years documenting the escalating violence that is driving ever more people to flee Central America's Northern Triangle and parts of Mexico. In his first book, *The Dispossessed: Welcome and Refusal at the U.S. Border*, Washington chronicles the fate asylum seekers face in the United States. With global refugees now numbering more than 70 million, why, Washington asks, is the world's richest country refusing to protect them?

The Dispossessed follows Arnovis' three unsuccessful attempts to gain asylum in the U.S., interspersed with the stories of other asylum seekers. Along the way, Washington adds political, historical and literary context to the idea of asylum, beginning with Ancient Greece, and the questions it raises. Washington asks: "Should the obligations we have to foreigners and those we have to our fellow citizens be weighed on a common scale?"

BEFORE THE SOCCER FIELD incident, Arnovis had no desire to go to the U.S. He was happy in his seaside village, working at a sea turtle hatchery and climbing coconut trees for extra money. He made his mother laugh by performing Juan Gabriel songs.

Fear derailed everything. But, as Arnovis discovered, it was not enough to qualify him for asylum in the U.S. Applicants must establish that they fear persecution from their home government, and that the persecution stems from their membership in a particular social group — their race, religion, nationality or political opinions. But many of today's asylum seekers are fleeing nongovernmental actors, such as gangs and drug cartels, and their fears are compounded by systemic threats including poverty, climate change and sexual assault. In 2017, more than 331,000 people applied for asylum at the U.S. border, roughly six times as many as in 2010. The U.S. denied 90% of them.

Washington seeks to validate asylum seekers' stories and debunk the myth that most are economic migrants out to game the system. If there's a hole in his reporting, it's that except for the occasional anecdote from a lawyer or a Border Patrol agent quoted in a report, we rarely hear from the people on the other side of the system. This is a missed opportunity. The union that represents asylum officers, for example, has begun filing briefs against its own employer, calling its ever-more-restrictive policies "fundamentally contrary to the moral fabric of our Nation."

On Arnovis' last attempt to reach the U.S., in 2018, he brought his 5-year-old daughter, Meybelín. His brother in Kansas helped pay for a "proper" coyote to make the journey safer than his previous attempts. Neither Arnovis nor his brother imagined the trauma that he and his daughter would face inside the United States.

Just a few months earlier, the Trump administration had announced a "zero tolerance" approach to unauthorized immigration, mandating that parents who cross the border without permission — even to seek asylum — would be separated from their accompanying children with no plan to reunite them. After Arnovis and Meybelín crossed the Rio Grande, they turned themselves in to Border Patrol agents to ask for asylum. The agents took them to a migrant detention center in Texas and held them inside large cages. A few days later, a Border Patrol officer took Meybelín from Arnovis and transferred her to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

"Where's my daughter?" Arnovis asked Border Patrol officers before he was transferred to another detention center without her. They told him they didn't know he had a daughter.



Krystal Quiles / HCN

Distraught, Arnovis could only wonder: *What happened to my daughter? Who had her? Who knew where she was?*

Three weeks later, he still had no idea where his daughter was. In desperation, he signed his own voluntary deportation order. He never had a chance to apply for asylum.

Recounting Arnovis' experience, Washington admits that it is not possible for any single country to extend its protection to everybody. But if there are limits to our compassion, he suggests, there should also be limits to our cruelty.

Near the end of the book, Washington visits Arnovis in El Salvador after he has been reunited with Meybelín. His life is still in danger, but Arnovis has no plans to flee. It's a perverse sign that the architects of America's current system are achieving their goal: Make the U.S. miserable enough for asylum seekers, and they will stay away. Washington wonders if this response is emblematic of something more troubling. "Perhaps," he writes, "we can't extend our roof because the foundation is in shambles." ✨

The Dispossessed: Welcome and Refusal at the U.S. Border

John Washington

352 pages, hardcover: \$26.95
Verso, 2020.

When the 'war on terror' comes home

'Acceleration Hours' is an honest, rare look at American militarism.

BY ALEX TRIMBLE YOUNG

"GEORGE, YOU'RE A FUNNY MOTHER-FUCKER." Thus begins "Green Lungs, Purple Hearts, Orange Kidneys," a story in Jesse Goolsby's new collection, *Acceleration Hours*. The George in question is President George W. Bush, with whom the story's narrator, a U.S. soldier from Utah, is having an imaginary conversation. As he patrols the streets of Samarra, Iraq, the narrator shares some harsh truths with his commander in chief: "You're a believer, a rich boy, but that's not your fault."

The narrator's thoughts then wander to the Purple Heart he earned on his last deployment. He fantasizes about taking the president to a swimming hole in Utah's Green River, a place he remembers from his youth, where a rope swing hangs dangerously close to a submerged rock. He and George watch brash swingers brutally injure themselves jumping into the water, and they award them the imaginary medals referenced in the story's title. The Purple Heart, symbol of a sacrifice made in the name of a sacred duty, is transformed into a grotesque token of the random violence and arbitrary death that can attend summers on the Green River as surely as patrols in Iraq. "Or better yet," the narrator goes on, George should "skip Utah and come on out to Samarra."

At such moments, Goolsby collapses the geographies of the Western United States and the Middle East, thereby unsettling some of the core pieties about the democratic aims of U.S. military intervention and the noble ideals of sacrifice used to sell the "war on terror" to the American people.

This is surprising, considering Goolsby is a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Air Force whose career has included stints at the Pentagon and the Air Force Academy. What does it mean that one of the very officers communicating the United States' strategic goals and teaching

its future officers holds this outlook? *Acceleration Hours* offers an answer in the disquieting connections it draws between the far frontiers of American wars and the violent masculinity Goolsby witnessed growing up in the West.

The narrators in Goolsby's stories range from a small town convenience store clerk, who develops an unlikely friendship with a World War II vet, to a renowned filmmaker embedded with a militia plotting the takeover of a Sierra Nevada town. Goolsby's voice is most incisive, however, in stories like "Green Lungs" that focus on the psychology of white male service members and veterans from the U.S. West. Unfortunately, this focus often comes at the expense of other voices:

Krystal Quiles / HCN



The Iraqis and Afghans in Goolsby's stories, for example, exist only as ghosts that give voice to the trauma of the U.S. servicemen at their center.

The collection's focus is amplified by Goolsby's unusual decision to include pieces of autobiographical nonfiction. In "Waiting for Red Dawn," he reflects on incidents in his own family history relating to gun ownership and the fear of household and national invasions. Starting with a terrifying tale in which he and his father nearly shoot a neighbor knocking on their door, Goolsby recalls his long-time fascination with the 1984 action film *Red Dawn*, in which a plucky band of rural Colorado youth use hunting rifles and survival skills to defend their town from a Soviet invasion. In many ways, the story reflects Goolsby's own disillusionment with the film's paranoid nationalism.

But if Goolsby is not quite a believer in the violent culture exemplified by *Red Dawn*, he is not *not* a believer, either. He owns firearms and plans on teaching his children how to use them, writing, "I pray my children will be prepared to do more than hide and wait" should a terrorist attack or mass shooting occur. Goolsby writes about the property he owns in southern Colorado and his secret fantasy of surviving a foreign invasion there with his family. "So yes," Goolsby admits in his conclusion, "I'm waiting for *Red Dawn*."

This is an admission of uncommon honesty. Even as *Acceleration Hours* strips away so many of the mythologies that Americans use to justify violence at home and abroad, Goolsby nonetheless admits to harboring a survivalist fantasy that cannot be wholly disconnected from a scene of the mythic Old West — in which settlers, alone on their homestead, rifles trained on the surrounding darkness, are idealized as defenders of peace rather than invaders of Indigenous land.

Some readers will criticize Goolsby's seeming inability to imagine the world otherwise. But in the United States — where patriotism has never polled lower, even as we maintain, by an order of magnitude, the world's largest defense budget — the contradictions in Goolsby's thought illuminate a more disturbing paradox. Faith in the democratic ideals of this "empire of liberty" may be waning, but the idea of America as an outpost of civilization, precariously defended against an imagined savagery, persists. ☀

Acceleration Hours: Stories

Jesse Goolsby

208 pages, hardcover: \$24

University of Nevada Press, 2020

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.

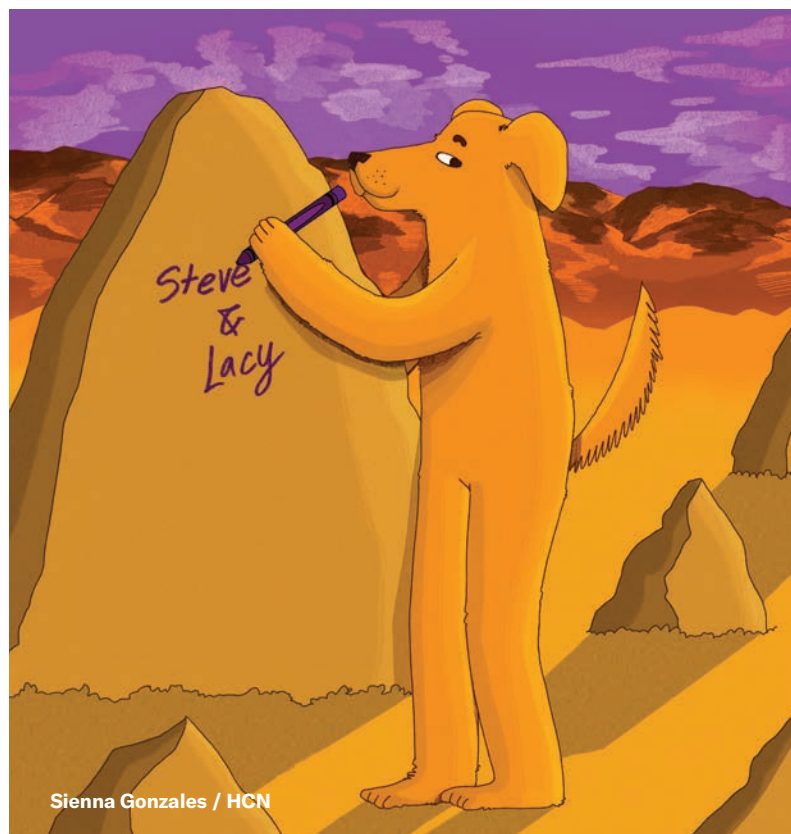
BY BETSY MARSTON

WASHINGTON

What do you do when you're bored and frustrated because COVID-19 is keeping you from working as a sous chef? If you're avid bicyclist Matthew Fleming, you get on social media and offer to pedal to any house in Tacoma, Washington, and bellow out the greeting of your customer's choice. In these days of social distancing, there's a market: On one five-hour day, Fleming delivered 17 messages and told *The News Tribune* he hadn't had a day off in more than a week. Many messages are "weird inside jokes between friends," but a lot just say "I miss you." Fleming doesn't deliver negative messages, but there have been a few saucy ones, like: "Hey, Alyssa! When I get naked, the shower gets turned on!" Despite charging a mere \$1 a shout-out (some customers pay more), he's done well enough to donate his earnings to a bike shop, Second Cycle on Hilltop. He's also resolved to take a day off: "My legs kind of hurt. ... I also think I'm starting to tear some vocal cords." But he plans to continue: "People are so happy. I can see their smiles from the middle of the street."

COLORADO

In the 34 years Chere Waters has lived in the small town of Creede, Colorado, she's hiked many nearby trails. On April 18, she felt prompted to leave Bachelor Loop Road and climb up a hill to an abandoned silver-mine shaft that's been an open hazard for more than a century. "I don't know what it was, but something was drawing me to go up there," she told the *Silverton Standard*. So she asked her hiking



partner to hold her legs while she peered over the edge. At the bottom of the 30-foot shaft, to her shock, a large animal lay sprawled. It looked like a deer, and, astonishingly, was still alive. Once state wildlife officer Brent Woodward came on the scene, he drugged the stranded animal — which turned out to be an elk — with a tranquilizer dart, and then carefully roped it and hauled it up. It was "pretty beat up," he said — not surprising, since it might have been trapped down there for two or three days. But once the elk revived enough to stagger shakily to its feet, "she moved a few yards, turned and looked at us for a few seconds and then trotted away," Woodward said. "It was great we could get her

out alive." As for the elk's rescuer, Waters said she was glad she'd been "called to go to that place."

THE NATION

Indur M. Goklany, who started working for the Interior Department in the 1980s, never attracted much attention until the Trump administration promoted him to an important job in 2017. Once he began reviewing the agency's climate policies, however, his co-workers took notice, even coining the term "Gok's uncertainty language" to describe his knack for inserting misleading wording into scientific reports, reports *The New York Times*. In at least nine reports, Goklany took it upon himself to completely

change scientific opinion. Instead of acknowledging that the climate is warming to a dangerous degree, for example, he concluded, "Some scientists have found the earth to be warming, while others have not." He also cheerfully noted that even if it was warming, plants might benefit from more carbon dioxide in the air. Here in the West, some worried about Goklany's impact on watersheds. The altered language in environmental impact studies, said the *Times*, "could be used to justify allocating increasingly scarce water to farmers at the expense of wildlife conservation and fisheries." Samuel Myers, a Harvard research scientist, was putting it diplomatically when he called Goklany's slant "extraordinarily misleading." But the Bureau of Reclamation eagerly embraced Goklany's wrongheaded approach, likely figuring that there's not a dam thing the agency's environmentalist critics can do about it anyway.

CALIFORNIA

A tourist from Grand Forks, British Columbia, yearned to tell the world about his love for his dog, so in 2019, and more recently this year, he left the words "Steve & Lacy" on a well, rocks and several historic structures in Death Valley. National Park Service staffer Abby Wines appealed to the public for tips leading to the perpetrator, and surprisingly, one of the tipsters turned out to be "Steve" himself, who confessed and also apologized. "The man's cooperative attitude will likely be a mitigating factor," Wines said. As for Lacy, the Park Service press release said she's just a dog — though we're sure she is a very good dog — and is therefore considered "blameless." ☀

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#IAM THE WEST

SHEENA DHAMSANIA

**Music Educator
Jackson, Wyoming**

Growing up in metro Detroit, I'd never really seen the magic of mountains, and I was always really intrigued by the lifestyle. So I came out here sight unseen and made my home in Evanston, Wyoming, a beautiful place where I was able to teach for the first couple years of my career. Being a music educator, for me, is one of the highest missions and purposes you can have, because you get to be the conduit or create the space for children to have tools to creatively self-express and have an emotional outlet. Music for me was such an emotional outlet when I needed it most. It saved my life. It provided me the path to be able to move forward and to not be a victim of my traumas. So whenever I see a kid pick up a new instrument that they never thought they could play and play it, it really fulfills me on the deepest possible level.

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