

High Country News

NO PLACE
LIKE HOME



Vol. 53 / January 2021
No. 1 • hcn.org

What's ahead for
the Salton Sea

The politics of
second homes

Fighting for
the Black Hills

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/PUBLISHER
Greg Hanscom

INTERIM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Katharine Lanpher

ART DIRECTOR
Cindy Wehling

FEATURES DIRECTOR
McKenna Stayner

DIGITAL MANAGING EDITOR
Gretchen King

ASSOCIATE EDITORS
Emily Benson, Paige Blankenbuehler,
Graham Lee Brewer, Maya L. Kapoor

PHOTO EDITOR
Roberto (Bear) Guerra

ASSOCIATE PHOTO EDITOR
Luna Anna Archey

ASSISTANT EDITORS
Jessica Kutz, Carl Segerstrom, Anna V. Smith

EDITOR AT LARGE
Betsy Marston

COPY EDITOR
Diane Sylvain

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Nick Bowlin, Elena Saavedra Buckley,
Kalen Goodluck, Ruxandra Guidi, Jane C. Hu,
Michelle Nijhuis, Jonathan Thompson

CORRESPONDENTS
Leah Sottile, Sarah Tory

EDITORIAL INTERNS
Jessica Douglas, Victoria Petersen,
Eric Siegel

DIRECTOR OF PHILANTHROPY
Alyssa Pinkerton

SENIOR DEVELOPMENT OFFICER
Paul Larmer

DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATES
Hannah Stevens, Carol Newman

DIRECTOR OF PRODUCT & MARKETING
Gary Love

**EVENTS & BUSINESS PARTNER
COORDINATOR**
Laura Dixon

IT MANAGER
Alan Wells

DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS
Erica Howard

ACCOUNTS ASSISTANT
Mary Zachman

CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGER
Kathy Martinez

CUSTOMER SERVICE
Karen Howe, Shannon Kinne, Mark Nydell,
Pamela Peters, Tammy York

GRANT WRITER Janet Reasoner

FOUNDER Tom Bell

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Brian Beitner (Colo.), John Belkin (Colo.),
Seth Cothrun (Ariz.), Jay Dean (Calif.),
Bob Fulkerson (Nev.), Wayne Hare (Colo.),
Laura Helmuth (Md.), Samaria Jaffe (Calif.),
Nicole Lampe (Ore.), Marla Painter (N.M.),
Bryan Pollard (Ark.), Raynelle Rino (Calif.),
Estee Rivera Murdock (Colo.), Andy Wiessner
(Colo.), Florence Williams (D.C.)

DIRECTOR EMERITUS Luis Torres (N.M.)



Cows graze in front of the unfinished Crazy Horse Memorial in the Black Hills of South Dakota. **Tailyr Irvine / HCN**

Know the West.

High Country News is an independent, reader-supported nonprofit 501(c)(3) media organization that covers the important issues and stories that define the Western U.S. Our mission is to inform and inspire people to act on behalf of the West's diverse natural and human communities. High Country News (ISSN/0191/5657) publishes monthly, 12 issues per year, from 119 Grand Ave., Paonia, CO 81428. Periodicals, postage paid at Paonia, CO, and other post offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to High Country News, Box 1090, Paonia, CO 81428. All rights to publication of articles in this issue are reserved. See hcn.org for submission guidelines. Subscriptions to HCN are \$37 a year, \$47 for institutions: 800-905-1155, hcn.org. For editorial comments or questions, write High Country News, P.O. Box 1090, Paonia, CO 81428 or editor@hcn.org, or call 970-527-4898.



EDITOR'S NOTE



Homescapes

“HOME” IS OUR FOCUS this month — how shelter and connection to place define our lives and the lives of the people around us. This feels especially compelling right now, with a global pandemic forcing us to stay inside, or perhaps, if we’re essential workers, to live away from home.

2020 has shifted our idea of what makes a home. It used to be that the list of necessary rooms included kitchen, bathroom, bedroom. You can add “office” to that now. Thanks to ubiquitous Zoom meetings and television shows, we’ve all become voyeurs, peeking inside the homes of others, checking out their books or beds or kitchens as they work, intimate yet far away. The freedom to work remotely has had serious economic consequences, which we break down in our Facts & Figures department. Check out the eye-popping numbers that accompany the urbanites fleeing to small Western communities, creating new boom towns, now called Zoom towns. This mass migration has driven home prices so high you’ll think we misprinted the numbers. We didn’t.

Our feature this month looks at an offshoot of this phenomenon: What happens when wealthy second-home owners try to change the politics of a place with their dollars? Nick Bowlin tells the epic tale of a recent election in Gunnison County, Colorado, where disgruntled second-home owners fought back after county officials asked them to leave when COVID-19 came to town. It’s an examination not just of how far money can take you, but of what makes a community, what causes us to call a place “home.”

In “What Works,” we hear about the rogue constables of Pima County in Arizona, led by Kristen Randall, who put away gun and badge and just started talking to people she was supposed to evict in Tucson. Two colleagues joined her, and the trio helped people stay in their homes and even saved the county money. Now the rebel constables are hoping their method can inspire other communities.

Lastly, meet Kimberly Myra Mitchell, the winner of this year’s Bell Prize, the essay contest for young writers that celebrates *High Country News*’ founder, Tom Bell. In her work as a wildland firefighter, she found an unexpected balm for her grief over her father’s death, a reminder that, no matter what happens, we still carry our people — our true homes — with us.

From our homes to yours, we wish you a good 2021.

Katherine Lanpher, interim editor-in-chief

FEATURED CONTRIBUTORS



Nick Bowlin
Gunnison, Colorado
@npbowlin



Jessica Douglas
Oregon
@jessicadd29_



Nick Estes
Albuquerque,
New Mexico
@nickwestes



Kimberly Mitchell
Bell Prize Winner
Davis, California



Mark Olalde
Palm Springs,
California
@MarkOlalde



Victoria Petersen
Anchorage, Alaska
@vgpetersen



Carl Segerstrom
Spokane, Washington
@carlschirps



Gabbriel Schivone
Tucson, Arizona
@GSchivone



Reid Singer
Santa Fe,
New Mexico
@reid_singer



FEATURE

Second Citizens

When the pandemic hit, a rural Colorado county kicked out nonresident home owners. They hit back.

BY NICK BOWLIN | PHOTOS BY LUNA ANNA ARCHEY / HCN

ON THE COVER

Lisette Lopez rides her bike in the strong wind that blows in her neighborhood in Salton City, near California's Salton Sea. **Mette Lampcov / HCN**

32

Houses on the outskirts of Crested Butte, Colorado, in Gunnison County, where second-home owners are battling locals for political control (*above*).

Luna Anna Archey / HCN

A resident of Desert Shores, California, holds a picture taken in 1996, when water levels were much higher than they are now, and when people could swim and boat in the Salton Sea (*facing*).

Mette Lampcov / HCN



Access to subscriber-only content:

hcn.org

hcne.ws/digi-5301

Follow us **@highcountrynews**

Sea change

18

Decades have passed and millions of dollars have been spent, yet little has been done to restore the Salton Sea. But California officials say the future is bright. BY MARK OLALDE | PHOTOS BY METTE LAMPCOV



The rebel constables of Tucson 7

Amid the COVID-19 crisis, officers expected to enforce evictions are instead helping tenants stay in their homes.

WHAT WORKS BY GABBRIEL SCHIVONE

Capturing the seasons of a plague 9

Disaster researchers take a Prius'-eye view of how COVID-19 is changing Seattle. BY JANE C. HU

A reset for environmental justice 10

Former EPA program leader Mustafa Santiago Ali discusses how to help communities go from merely surviving to thriving.

Q&A BY CARL SEGERSTROM

Students and faculty urge deeper look at land-grant legacy 12

University officials face pressure over HCN's 'Land-Grab Universities' investigation.

BY JESSICA DOUGLAS

The battle for the Black Hills 14

Nick Tilsen was arrested for protesting President Trump at Mount Rushmore. Now, his legal troubles are part of a legacy.

BY NICK ESTES

Abandoned boats pose problems above and below the waves 23

An 80-year-old tugboat in Juneau illustrates the cost of dealing with vessel-littered coastlines.

BY VICTORIA PETERSEN

The Zoom boom 24

Remote workers are flocking to Western towns.

FACTS & FIGURES

BY JONATHAN THOMPSON

From boxes of memorabilia, sifting out a life 46

In her debut memoir, Danielle Geller researches her elusive mother — and the meaning of family.

Q&A BY JESSICA DOUGLAS

A space to heal 48

A wildland firefighter finds solace in an unexpected place.

BELL PRIZE-WINNING ESSAY

BY KIMBERLY MYRA MITCHELL

Resistance on the gridiron 49

In a Wyoming wartime internment camp, Japanese American high school students find release in football.

REVIEW BY REID SINGER

#iamthewest 52

Helen Leung, community activist, LA Más, Los Angeles

BY STELLA KALININA

DEPARTMENTS

3 EDITOR'S NOTE

6 LETTERS

13 THE LATEST

26 50TH ANNIVERSARY

27 DONORS / READER PROFILES

50 HEARD AROUND THE WEST

LETTERS

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 media, or email us at editor@hcn.org.

BOOM-BUST EVANSTON

Good work on “Divided Prospects,” December 2020. Uinta County, Wyoming, keeps trying to figure out a way out of the boom-bust business. I always said that if I ever moved back to Wyoming, I’d pick Evanston. Close enough to Salt Lake City, to skiing and the Wasatch. Thanks for your writing, Sarah Tory! Great photos in the article as well.

Ken C. Erickson
Mountain Center, California

Everything about “Divided Prospects” is fantastic. From its analysis of rural economies to the photography — worth every penny of a subscription. Incredible work from writer Sarah Tory and photographer Russel Daniels!!

Chris Parri
Boise, Idaho

DON'T DRINK THE WATER

This is a serious infrastructure situation across much of the country, not just here in the rural West (“When you can’t drink the water,” December 2020). Obviously, Flint,

Michigan, is the poster child for this, but it wouldn’t surprise me if 50 million Americans have compromised drinking water. Of the many things that this country should be investing in, both from a moral and economic standpoint, this is very high on the list.

Ken Parsons
Fullerton, California

Good article on rural water problems. The agencies involved, and anyone who does R&D in water, are myopically focused on central grid/pipeline systems — the bread and butter of the engineering firms/banks that finance municipal bonds, and the municipalities that charge for your water bill.

Obviously, a point of use or distributed solution is the only fit for far-flung, small communities. That is deliberately ignored.

Marc Andelman
Worcester, Massachusetts

OUTLAW RODEOS

With all due respect to Black cowboys and their rightful place in Western history (“Black cowboys reclaim their history in the West,” December 2020), be aware that every animal welfare organization in North America condemns rodeo due to its inherent cruelty. For most of the animals involved, the rodeo arena is merely a detour en route to the slaughterhouse.

Most of rodeo is bogus from the git-go, having little to do with either ranching or agriculture. Working ranch hands never

routinely wrestled steers, barrel-raced, practiced calf roping or rode bulls or bareback as a timed event. Nor did they put flank straps on the bulls and horses, or work them over in the holding chutes with painful “hotshots,” kicks and slaps. Some “sport!” Indeed, rodeo is not a “sport” at all — it’s a macho exercise in domination.

Famed Black cowboy Bill Pickett created the rodeo’s steer-wrestling event back around the turn of the 20th century. Pickett’s technique was to bite the hapless steer on the nose and lip, so that sheer pain kept the animal on the ground, hence the event’s common name: “bulldogging.”

The United Kingdom outlawed rodeos back in 1934. Can the U.S. be far behind?

Eric Mills
Oakland, California

COMPLICIT ARCHAEOLOGISTS

While I know this case is complicated (“A whistleblower speaks out over excavation of Native sites,” December 2020), I think that archaeologists would be lying if we didn’t admit that we recognize the patterns and structures reported on here.

I know we wouldn’t have to try hard to find many stories like this one. Because it’s actually less about individual practices/individual archaeologists and much more about the absolute failure at a structural, cultural level of archaeology to be in good relation.

Valerie Bondura
New York, New York

MAKES THE GRADE

Carl Segerstrom’s piece (“Food Forward,” November 2020) about

alternative distribution systems for small farm operations is A+.

Tate Tischner
Webster, New York

COUNTRY COVERAGE NEEDED

We in the hinterlands are being increasingly poorly served by *High Country News*.

Soil, food and water will become more critical to our nation’s health and security as we face the future. Consequently, we need fewer essays on effective protesting, or page after page devoted to metropolitan matters. *HCN*’s November issue was encouraging: Stories about insightful marketing by the Spokane-based Local Inland Northwest Cooperative, or LINC, and the Lazy R Ranch; preserving wildlife corridors; the Redwood Summer; and Sarah Keller’s experience out where the antelope stay are fodder of facts and inspiration to those of us seeing important cultural and economic challenges out here.

Please, please, please keep “Country” in *High Country News*. Otherwise, we would suggest changing *HCN*’s masthead while expecting canceled subscriptions, including ours.

Jim Cotton
Stevensville, Montana

NAILED IT

Alex Carr Johnson nailed it in his well-written essay, “Now that you’ve gone West, young man,” in the September issue. We certainly have accumulated a terrible debt through our conquests, biased historical accounts and attending mythologies. I share the shame.

Bob Snow
Tucson, Arizona

“It wouldn’t surprise me if 50 million Americans have compromised drinking water. Of the many things that this country should be investing in, both from a moral and economic standpoint, this is very high on the list.”

The rebel constables of Tucson

Amid the COVID-19 crisis, officers expected to enforce evictions are instead helping tenants stay in their homes.

BY GABBRIEL SCHIVONE

ON A WARM NOVEMBER AFTERNOON, Kristen Randall, a red-haired woman in a blue button-down shirt, knocked at the door of a rundown apartment in Tucson's east midtown. After three rounds of patient knocking, a woman named Angie Bevins opened the door.

Randall identified herself as a Pima County constable, a court-mandated officer tasked with enforcing evictions. A sudden tension washed over Bevins, who stood behind a metal screen door that was frayed at the edges. She had been dreading the day she would be forced out of her apartment. She said her landlord had warned her that this would happen.

In a subdued voice, Bevins told Randall that she had written to the landlord, citing the

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's eviction moratorium order, a temporary halt in evictions "to prevent the further spread of COVID-19." Man Tran, Bevins' landlord, filed in court to have Bevins evicted despite the CDC order, justifying it because Bevins is a subletter. Contacted by *High Country News*, Tran did not comment about the letter, but noted that Bevins was not on the lease.

Bevins, however, showed Randall the letter she'd written. That was enough for Randall, who considered Bevins a resident as outlined by CDC guidelines.

Bevins, however, showed Randall the letter she'd written.

That was enough for Randall, who considered Bevins a resident as outlined by CDC guidelines.

"I'm going to delay the eviction," Randall told her, explaining that Bevins would have until Dec. 31. Randall gently urged her to look for other housing — just in case — and gave her the names of local agencies that could help. Bevins' relief was stark and immediate. "Thank you so much," she said.

Later, Randall told me, "The threat of the constable was being wielded as a weapon against (tenants)." Her voice hardened. "I don't like being used as a threat."

DURING RANDALL'S FIRST TWO MONTHS on the job, just a year and a half ago, she did as





In Tucson, Arizona, Constables Kristen Randall and Joe Ferguson talk to a tenant in early December about options for avoiding eviction (*left*). Ferguson posts a notice of eviction. Personal details have been blurred (*below*). **Roberto (Bear) Guerra / HCN**

she was trained to do: showing up at people's doors and flashing her badge, with a locksmith in tow to shut people out of their homes. Renters were given just two weeks to make an appointment to collect their belongings. Like other constables, Randall was armed, with tactical gear and body armor. "You wouldn't be able to tell the difference between (us) and a (Tucson Police) officer," she said. She put people out on the street during those two months, and had problems sleeping at night. When she was still in her teens, she went without housing herself at one point.

Randall worked as a hydrologist for the U.S. Geological Survey for several years before becoming constable, an elected position in Pima County. She learned that 90% of tenants in eviction proceedings do not even show up in court. Randall wanted to find out why, and so she started doing "courtesy stops," just as she did with Bevins, on her own time, wearing casual clothing, putting aside her badge and gun and tactical uniform for what was, essentially, social work.

According to Randall, numerous residents expressed shock, telling her they had never been notified. In many Western states, including California, Utah and Nevada, tenants must be notified prior to eviction. But Arizona has no such law. As Randall did more of her rogue courtesy stops, the rate of evictions tumbled — replaced by a new model of tenant advocacy, something she dubbed the "minute-entry program." Soon another constable in a different precinct — Bennett Bernal, a former city councilmember's aide — followed Randall's lead, as did Joe Ferguson, an *Arizona Daily*

Star journalist-turned-constable. Together, their three precincts, out of Pima County's 10, accounted for most of the county's eviction cases. But they were determined to change that.

Beginning in early March 2020, well before Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey, R, issued an executive order halting evictions, Randall, Bernal and Ferguson unilaterally stopped doing them. Little was known about COVID-19 beyond its contagiousness, and it was clearly spreading faster among people who were unable to shelter in place. Under Randall, Bernal and Ferguson, the Pima County Constables' Office had broken ranks with every other constables' office in the state. Their reasoning was simple: "We know that there's a health crisis, we don't have the right PPE, and we don't have direction from either the Legislature or governor, or our own health department on how to do an eviction," Ferguson said. "So, we're not going to do any whatsoever."

Soon Randall, Bernal and Ferguson were joined by their seven other colleagues.

This approach angered some. "We've had some pushback from landlords and their attorneys who feel like we are taking sides in the eviction process," Ferguson said. "The reality is that we were giving people information — we were doing it on our own time — and all we were doing was telling them resources they had available about shelter and rental assistance agencies."

Some constables dislike the extra work involved. Michael Stevenson, a retired police officer who was elected in 2016, says a lot of extra data must be collected before he can decide whether to implement the new approach in his precinct. He's concerned about the potential

cost of extra services, such as the courtesy visits conducted by Randall and her colleagues.

But Randall and her colleagues achieved their goal: Their visits resulted in fewer evictions and saved their precincts money. And in October, they worked with the Pima County supervisor to create a new permanent position in the constables' office: a behavioral health specialist, who would make courtesy stops and work with tenants facing eviction. Randall and her colleagues had previously put in countless hours of extra work, going door-to-door, speaking to vulnerable tenants on their own time. "I want to make sure that everybody in the county has access to the same information," Randall said. "This is a way of balancing that out."

Recently, Ferguson called the program a "movement," saying that "in most cases, the approach that we've been taking has been really important, and I think can be replicated elsewhere ... in Arizona, and across the country." 🌿



Capturing the seasons of a plague

Disaster researchers take a Prius'-eye view of how COVID-19 is changing Seattle.

BY JANE C. HU

JUST BEFORE 7 on a cool, misty Seattle morning, Jacqueline Peltier stands alone on the University of Washington campus. Nearby, squirrels and rabbits frolic in the morning dew. Peltier, part of a National Science Foundation-funded research team, will spend the next hour securing a 360-degree camera to the roof of a rental Toyota Prius Prime, ensuring that it's level and synched with its smartphone controller. In the past, this setup traveled to Puerto Rico, capturing the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. Today, Peltier is crisscrossing Seattle on a 100-mile route to document a different emergency: the COVID-19 pandemic.

The idea arose in the first days of COVID-19's spread across Seattle. Joe Wartman, Peltier's colleague, an environmental engineer who studies natural disasters, was walking home from work one day when he noticed the empty streets, abandoned businesses and quiet sidewalks. "It struck me how much Seattle looks like a disaster zone," he said.

Unlike earthquakes or hurricanes, however, the pandemic has been raging for months. Since March, public health recommendations have tightened and loosened, businesses have closed and reopened, and travel has ebbed and flowed. Peltier and Wartman, along with a team of public health researchers and engineers, are capturing how COVID-19 policies and the behavior of Seattle residents have changed the look and feel of the city. "We haven't had a pandemic at this scale in modern history," said study co-investigator Nicole Errett, an assistant professor ... (continued on pg. 31)

Scenes from Jacqueline Peltier's drive around Seattle, Washington, in early December, nine months into the pandemic. **Kiliii Yuyan / HCN**





Mustafa Santiago Ali is the vice president of environmental justice, climate and community revitalization at the National Wildlife Federation. Ali left his 24-year career with the EPA's environmental justice program when the Trump administration upended the program. **Courtesy of Mustafa Santiago Ali**

how President-elect Joe Biden could reset that agenda. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What is environmental justice?

It deals with the disproportionate impacts that are happening in communities of color and lower wealth and on Indigenous land — from exposures to pollution, to the lack of access to the decision-making process. It is the creation of these sacrifice zones that we have across our country, where we place everything that nobody else wants: coal-fired power plants, incinerators, petrochemical facilities and waste treatment facilities.

Communities of color, low-wealth white communities and Indigenous folks are often the ones dealing with this and having a difficult time being able to access basic amenities: clean air, clean water and clean land. The disparities are also that in many instances in the past, they have not had an active seat at the table in the framing-out of policy and the prioritizing of their communities. That's the environmental injustice — the environmental racism — side.

The environmental justice side is: How do we help communities move from surviving to thriving? How do we revitalize communities? How do we help to build capacity and power inside of those communities so that they are no longer seen as dumping grounds, but as healthy, vital and sustainable communities?

How has environmental justice work evolved within the federal government over the last two and a half decades?

It's always been more about the communities, because they're doing the work seven days a week, 24 hours a day. The role of the Environmental Protection Agency is to help communities better under-

A reset for environmental justice

Former EPA program leader Mustafa Santiago Ali discusses how to help communities go from merely surviving to thriving.

BY CARL SEGERSTROM

A CAP-AND-TRADE system to cut toxic air emissions; a bipartisan agreement to strengthen the Clean Air Act; a federal program to ease the unjust burden of pollution in minority communities: All this sounds like an environmental to-do-list for President-elect Joe Biden. But it's actually a list of federal actions taken by the George H.W. Bush administration in the early 1990s.

Mustafa Santiago Ali joined the Environmental Protection Agency in 1992, during Bush's

tenure, as part of a program to get college students from minority communities more involved in environmental issues. Over his 24-year career with the EPA, Santiago Ali helped lead the agency's environmental justice programs, working to undo the toxic burden of pollution in minority, Indigenous and poor communities.

Then, in 2017, the Trump administration upended the program, proposing to zero-out its budget. Santiago Ali left

the agency. He's now the vice president of environmental justice, climate and community revitalization at the National Wildlife Federation. There, he has helped lead the conservation community's growing efforts to recognize the racist legacy of the predominantly white-run world of big green organizations.

High Country News spoke with Santiago Ali about the Trump administration's impacts on the federal government's environmental justice work, and

stand (laws and regulations) and how those are supposed to work and how to utilize them. It is about helping to get the science in place, helping people to understand various policies, and getting other offices in the agency to integrate environmental justice (into their work). It's also about making sure that enforcement is happening, especially in communities that have often been unseen and unheard.

The work ebbed and flowed. Under certain administrations, there was more of a focus on environmental justice, and for others, not as much. But never anything like you saw in the Trump administration, where they tried to destroy all the work that had happened over the years around environmental justice and other program offices that are critical to the work that front-line communities are doing and need help with.

Can you explain what that destruction looked like inside the EPA?

Years and years of work went into building relationships with communities, and that trust has been broken. That has its own set of ripple effects. Folks have lost confidence. The current administration decided to take steps backwards with the Clean Car Rules and the Clean Power Plan and all these things that they didn't see any value in.

Folks inside the agency have been really concerned that enforcement has not been happening to the level that it needs to be to make sure that (communities) are being protected. Folks have also been really disappointed in how science has been weakened. Unfortunately, the current administration has not honored science.

Also, more recently, the executive order and then the memo that came out that said, "You can't talk about race." When you're trying to figure out the best way to keep people protected through policy — and you're saying that systemic racism is not a factor — then it makes it really difficult to address

environmental racism and environmental injustices.

What do you think is the most important step to rebuild trust?

To rebuild trust means you have to spend some time with folks. They've got to know that their voices are being honored in the process, and that they are a priority in what's going to be developed, and they're playing a role in that. You've got to honor science, but that science comes in lots of forms and fashions. There are the traditional science models that we operate from, but there's also that science that comes from traditional environmental values that our Indigenous brothers and sisters bring. There's science that comes from community-based participatory research. Many communities are doing their own sets of analyses and have their own sets of suggestions and solutions to minimize many of these impacts that are going on.

When we talk about rebuilding the capacity, we've got to make sure that those who come from front-line work, who are interested, have a real opportunity with some of these jobs that will be opening up. You really need a diversity of ideas and a new set of innovation and ingenuity.

I really appreciate (President-elect Joseph) Biden's administration saying that it's an all-hands approach, where all of these federal agencies and departments are going to have a role to play. Because if you really understand environmental justice, and the work that happens in that space, you're talking about housing and Housing and Urban Development, and the Department of Transportation, and Health and Human Services, and the Centers for Disease Control, and the Department of Labor, and so forth and so on.

What would be a sign that the federal government's on the right path toward environmental justice?

Words are important. I'm hopeful that our new president will be sharing with the country the commit-

ment in that space. And then also seeing a couple things: One is people building their budgets and making some financial choices. They've said environmental justice is a priority, so we'll see that play out, and how resources will flow.

The other part will be on the capacity side, both in the White House and in the agencies and departments. When I was in the federal government, I was the only senior advisor for environmental justice for the entire federal government, which just doesn't work. I mean, you can get things done, but you need to have senior advisors in each of those agencies and departments as those secretaries and administrators are making budgeting decisions and policy decisions, so there's real representation there.

What do you think is most important for moving the cause of environmental justice forward?

A set of opportunities I definitely want to highlight is: How are we going to properly engage young people? All these incredible young leaders across the country have invested so much in trying — whether it's environmental justice or the climate crisis — to get actions and solutions in place.

Hopefully, we will now be moving into a time when we don't have to deal with so many egregious sets of actions. We've spent enough time just trying to push back, and, you know, we only have so much energy. I wish we would've spent that time on moving forward and not continue slipping backwards and backwards.

So I'm looking forward to, you know, doing what I can, and also seeing how all this plays out over the next four years. By the time we get to the end of this administration, we'll know. It'll be very clear if we're going to be able to win on climate change. Hopefully, we'll be more clear also on where our country stands on racial justice issues. Because, I think, on both of those, the sand in the hourglass continues to tick down, and hopefully, we'll end up on the right side of history. ✨

"How are we going to properly engage young people? All these incredible young leaders across the country have invested so much in trying to get actions and solutions in place."

Students and faculty urge deeper look at land-grant legacy

University officials face pressure over *HCN*'s 'Land-Grab Universities' investigation.

BY JESSICA DOUGLAS

WHEN *HIGH COUNTRY NEWS* published "Land-Grab Universities" last April, the two-year-long investigation shed new light on a dark open secret: One of the largest transfers of land and capital in the country's history had masqueraded as a donation for university endowments.

HCN identified nearly 11 million acres of land, expropriated from approximately 250 tribes, bands and communities through more than 160 violence-backed treaties and land cessions. Now, in the wake of the investigation, land-grant universities across the country are re-evaluating the capital they built from these stolen Indigenous lands.

More than 150 years after President Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Act — the legislation that transferred the lands — new discussions about the universities' moral and ethical responsibilities have forced Americans to re-examine the law's legacy. Land-grant institutions have long prided themselves on their accomplishments as beneficiaries: They used the proceeds generated by the land to broaden access to higher education, thereby contributing to economic development across the nation. But many of those institutions paid next to nothing for the public lands

they received and sold.

By far the largest beneficiary was Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, which acquired almost 1 million acres from Ojibwe, Miwok, Yokuts, Dakota and other Indigenous nations through 63 treaties or seizures. The land came from 15 states, and by 1935, when the last parcel was sold, Cornell University had generated nearly \$6 million for its endowment, the largest of any land-grant institution. Adjusted for inflation, it raised over \$92 million.

Now, as the country reconsiders long-standing issues of racial equity and justice — focusing on everything from local political races to national legislation — students and faculty alike are pressuring administrators to address the investigation's findings.

On Indigenous Peoples' Day, Oct. 12, 2020, members of Native American and Indigenous Students at Cornell (NAISAC) put forward a list of 10 demands in the form of a petition. The demands include turning the American Indian and Indigenous Studies Program into a university department; recruiting new Indigenous faculty and students, specifically Indigenous students affected and/or displaced by the Morrill Act; waiving tuition for those students; acknowledging

the land of the Gayogohó:nq', or Cayuga Nation, before every Ithaca-based event; and reinstating an ad-hoc committee on Native American Affairs to oversee the approval of these demands.

"If the president's office was responsible, then they would meet each of these demands to the extent that we've laid them out in our petition," said Colin Benedict (Mohawk), the external relations chair for NAISAC. "Each of these demands in my mind is completely 100% justified and should already have been implemented by the university decades ago."

As of Dec. 1, the petition had more than 900 signatures from students, staff, alumni and community members. The president's office has yet to respond publicly, but in an email exchange, it stated, "The Office of the President is in receipt of the NAISAC petition, and the President is looking forward to working with the Native American and Indigenous community at Cornell on these issues."

A faculty committee, headed by American Indian and Indigenous Studies Program Director Kurt Jordan, launched the Cornell University and Indigenous Dispossession Project. The project will research Cornell's Morrill Act land history, identify the

A banner hangs on a statue of Cornell University's founder, Ezra Cornell, on Indigenous Peoples' Day this year.
Della Keahna Uran



Indigenous communities affected, and foster discussion of possible remedies.

"We've had a number of statements that have been made by the administration in light of the George Floyd murder, Black Lives Matter, and all of the other things that have been happening this year about the need for Cornell to really address its legacy, its historical roots, its complicity in ... to some degree, with white supremacy," Jordan said. "Benefiting from stolen Indigenous land has to be part of that."

History professor Jon Parmenter recently discovered that Cornell is in possession of over 420,000 acres of mineral rights in the Central and Southwestern U.S., a portion of which was retained through Morrill Act lands. In its petition, NAISAC urged the university to release a statement acknowledging the amount of land acquired, the interest accrued and mineral rights funds received, and pledging to refrain from mineral and resource extraction on those lands.

Over 2,500 miles west of

Cornell, faculty and students at the University of California, Berkeley have also made strides. Established in 1868, the university received almost 150,000 acres from the Morrill Act. The land raised \$730,000 for the university's early endowment, and, adjusted for inflation, has generated over \$13 million. The university paid nothing in return.

The presence and history of Indigenous people has been largely erased from the UC system, said Phenocia Bauerle (Apsáalooke), director of Native American Student Development at the University of California, Berkeley. Two years ago, Bauerle and the Native American Student Development center created a land acknowledgment to honor the Ohlone tribal lands that the university sits upon. However, the university has yet to adopt an official acknowledgment.

According to a California audit, UC Berkeley is the worst offender among the schools when it comes to complying with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), which grants Indigenous nations the right to regain ancestral remains and objects from museums. UC Berkeley has only repatriated 20% of its 500,000-artifact collection. In comparison, the University of

California Los Angeles has repatriated 96% of its collection.

"A lot of it comes down to, well, they see these issues as historical and not of the present because they see Natives as historical and not of the present," Bauerle said. Since the dispossession occurred in the past, contemporary people don't see themselves as responsible, and they feel no pressure to address the issue today. However, " 'Land-Grab' gave us several concrete (points)," Bauerle said. "This dispossession of Native land that this whole country benefits from — here's a specific way that we can show you that Berkeley actually played a part in it. These are the receipts. This is how much money you got."

Bauerle partnered with Rosalie Fanshel, a doctoral student in environmental science, policy and management and the program manager for the Berkeley Food Institute, to organize a conference on the Morrill Act and Indigenous land dispossession.

"The UC Land Grab: A Legacy of Profit from Indigenous Land" was held in two parts in September and October. The conference dug deep into the history of California's genocide and the founding of the University of California. Participants called for action, including shared land stewardship, research opportunities and tuition

options for Indigenous students.

More than 500 people attended both days of the conference. David Ackerley, dean of the Rausser College of Natural Resources in Berkeley, was among them. "I felt like I was learning so much that I had not been aware of," he said. "This is part of our story, I want to be part of this. I want to learn. I want to figure out where we're heading."

Other attendees included staff from the office of UC President Michael V. Drake, the office of the chancellor at UC Berkeley and the governor's office, as well as deans and administrators from various UC campuses and units.

One of the panelists, Brittani Orona, a Ph.D. candidate in Native American studies and human rights at UC Davis and a member of the Hoopa Valley Tribe, was surprised by how many people within the university system had no knowledge of the history of land-grant institutions. "I think with Native people and Native students, you know that our land, our places have been taken away from us, from many different institutions and at many different points of time," Orona said.

At the conference, Orona spoke about the history of genocide in California. "Scholars of California Indian genocide will say it ended in 1873, but I argue it is a continuous process," Orona said. "Many Native

and Indigenous people in the state and across the world have been made promises since colonization, and they've been broken. It's hard not to remember that legacy; I live in that legacy."

Orona, who will complete her Ph.D. in the coming year, hopes that future Native and Indigenous students have a different experience than she did. "What does that mean, when you're having California Native students pay out of pocket on land that has been dispossessed from them? I appreciate the discussions that are going on, but I'll believe it when I see it — and when it moves beyond acknowledgment towards actual actionable items that make life easier for Native and Indigenous students and peoples."

As of Dec. 4, UC Berkeley Chancellor Carol Christ has yet to respond about the conference publicly. In an email, however, she wrote, "To achieve this inclusive campus culture, we must acknowledge how our history, including the Morrill Land Grant Act, impacts Indigenous people. Now more than ever, we, as a university, must take immediate action to acknowledge past wrongs, build trusting and respectful relationships, and accelerate change and justice for our Native Nations and Tribal communities." 🌻

THE LATEST

Pupfish Peak

Backstory

In the spring of 2016, three Nevada men got drunk, broke into a gated enclosure guarding a deep limestone cavern, and plunged into the warm water of Devils Hole, a unit managed by the National Park Service. While trampling around the fish's only habitat, one of the skinny-dippers, Trent Sargent, killed one of the tiny, rare Devils Hole pupfish, which were among the first creatures listed as endangered in 1967. Sargent was sentenced to a year of prison for violating the Endangered Species Act ("The scene of the crime", 4/15/19).

Followup

In early November, the Domestic Names

Committee of the U.S. Board of Geographic Names voted unanimously to name a peak in Nevada's Amargosa Valley, outside of Death Valley National Park, for the endangered Devils Hole and the Ash Meadows Amargosa pupfishes. Pupfish Peak "will serve to remind people to be stewards of important landscapes and treasures within Nevada," the National Park Service wrote in a statement. Even though there aren't any pupfish at the top of the 4,355-foot peak, climbers "can overlook their habitat, marvel over the tenacity of fish." In the last official count, the Devils Hole pupfish population reached 136 — up from an all-time low of 35 in 2013.

—Paige Blankenbuehler



REPORTAGE

The battle for the Black Hills

Nick Tilsen was arrested for protesting President Trump at Mount Rushmore. Now, his legal troubles are part of a legacy.

BY NICK ESTES | PHOTOS BY TAILYR IRVINE

FROM A DISTANCE, the green pines and the blue-gray haze that gently hug the valleys of the Black Hills merge into a deep black. The Lakota name “He Sapa” — meaning “black ridge” — describes this visual phenomenon. This is a place of origin for dozens of Native peoples and a revered landscape for more than 50 others. The land’s most recent, and perhaps longest-serving, stewards — the Oceti Sakowin, the Dakota, Nakota and Lakota people — hold the mountains central to their cosmos.

The Black Hills are also central to the political territory drawn by the 1851 and 1868 Fort Laramie treaties. And they continue to be a crucial part of the strategic position that sustained Native resistance to white encroachment. They have become an international symbol of the call to return stolen land to Indigenous people. That’s why President Donald Trump chose to hold his July 3 rally at Mount Rushmore, said Nick Tilsen, who is Oglala Lakota. The faces of U.S. Presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore

Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln are carved into the side of the granite mountain that is the heart of the Lakota universe.

Tilsen is the president and CEO of NDN Collective, a Native-run nonprofit based in Rapid City, South Dakota, which launched a campaign on Indigenous Peoples’ Day in 2020 to return He Sapa to Native people. Many Lakota people, like Tilsen, view the national monument, which attracts 2 million visitors a year, as a desecration of a spiritual landscape. “What South Dakota and the National Park Service call ‘a shrine to democracy’ is actually an international symbol of white supremacy,” Tilsen said. He was among 20 arrested for protesting Trump’s visit. If convicted, he faces up to 16½ years in prison for four felonies and three misdemeanors.

According to Tilsen, the protesters had negotiated the blockade with the Pennington County Sheriff’s Office and the South Dakota Highway Patrol. The activists blocked the road, using three disabled vans to bar the way. “It was to hold space and connect our issue to

the world,” Tilsen explained. Tilsen and others worked throughout the day to keep the protests organized, even speaking directly with park authorities to ensure that elderly activists and children were allowed to move away before any arrests were made. Soon, deputies announced that the assembly was unlawful, and the Air National Guard moved in, dressed in riot gear, pushing the protesters back and firing pepper balls at the retreating crowd.

“A lot of the protectors had coup sticks, eagle feathers, and (sage) smudge sticks — and everything that you could think of that was sacred to us,” Laura Ten Fingers, one of the young Lakotas who helped organize the protest, recalled. A group of Trump supporters stood behind the police line, she said, shouting at the crowd “to go back to where you come from.” “It was really heartbreaking to hear them to say, ‘Go back,’” she said. “He Sapa was our home, and we came from there.”

During the confrontation, Tilsen took a National Guard riot shield. He was arrested and charged with felony theft and robbery. When the shield was returned, the word “POLICE” had been spray-painted over and replaced by the slogan “LAND BACK.” That slogan put the Black Hills at the center of a movement whose unequivocal demands are rooted in a long, hard-fought history.

“I DON’T WANT TO BE the next Leonard Peltier,” Tilsen told me, referring to the legendary American Indian Movement activist, who has been imprisoned since 1977 for the murder of two FBI agents. (Peltier has always maintained his innocence.) Tilsen believes the police are trying “to coin me as a radical fringe activist.” He’s a father of four whose organization is currently running a nationwide emergency COVID-19 relief effort for Native communities. “I was a speaker at the Chamber of Commerce a year and a half ago. NDN Collective is on Main Street in Rapid City,” he said. Still, Tilsen would never deny his connection to Leonard Peltier or the American Indian Movement. It is, after all, deep in his family history.

His Jewish grandfather, Kenneth Tilsen, was a prominent civil rights attorney, who with his wife, Rachel (daughter of the celebrated socialist writer Meridel Le Sueur) defended draft resisters during the Vietnam War. Later, the couple helped form the Wounded Knee Defense/Offense Committee for the American Indian Movement (AIM) leadership trials. Tilsen’s Lakota mother, Joann Tall, worked with her uncle, Pedro Bissonette, and the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization, a group led by Lakota elders who had asked AIM for armed protection

against a repressive tribal government in Pine Ridge in 1973. Tilsen's parents met during the siege, when federal officers fired more than 200,000 rounds of ammunition at Native protesters — killing two, including Bissonette — at the very site where the 7th Cavalry, George Armstrong Custer's former regiment, massacred hundreds of Lakota Ghost Dancers in 1890. All that happened just down the road from Tilsen's home.

Raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the birthplace of AIM, Tilsen spent his summers in Pine Ridge, where he was born, immersed in the movement. He returned to the reservation at 19 to live and work. "The Black Hills issue is part of my identity," he said.

Also down the road from Tilsen's home, just outside of Porcupine on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, is KILI, "the voice of the Lakota Nation" — the radio station his parents helped jumpstart in the 1990s. A tribal radio station was among the original demands behind the 71-day armed takeover of Wounded Knee; activists hoped that publicly broadcasting council meetings would end tribal government corruption.

In Lakota Country — where the shadows of history linger, on the land and in one's family tree — a new generation is continuing the fight. The loss of the Black Hills has come to represent all the injustices Lakota people have suffered. "It's not just about physical land back," Tilsen said. "It's also about undoing what was done to us as a people."

Land theft brought material deprivation. The Lakota and Dakota people inhabit several of the poorest counties in the United States. Tilsen's home, Oglala Lakota County, is one of them. "As Indigenous people, we have the lowest economic conditions of anyone in America," he said. Native American children in South Dakota have the lowest rates of economic mobility in the nation, according to a 2017 Annie E. Casey Foundation report.

"A more ripe and rank case of dishonorable dealings will never, in all probability, be found in our history." That is how a 1980 U.S. Supreme Court opinion described the theft of the Black Hills from the "Sioux Nation of Indians." The court awarded the tribe \$102 million; today, with the accumulated interest, it comes to nearly \$2 billion. But the Lakota position remains unwavering, as shown by the popular slogan, "The Black Hills are not for sale!" The relationship with He Sapa cannot be translated into money. The land itself, the tribes said, must be returned.

BEFORE JACKHAMMERS and dynamite chiseled the heads of presidents into the cliff faces, miners cut deep into the Black Hills, in search of a subterranean El Dorado.

Custer, a Civil War veteran turned Indian fighter, discovered gold in 1874 near the town that now bears his name. In a treaty signed at Fort Laramie just six years earlier, the United States had pledged that a reservation — a 35 million-acre "permanent home" encompassing the entirety of what is currently the half of South Dakota west of the Missouri River — would be "set apart for the absolute and undisturbed use and occupation" of the Sioux Nation. A bloody war erupted over Custer's trespass into treaty territory, a sin for which he and 250 of his men paid with their lives. By the time the dust settled, the place was booming.

In 1877, under the administration of President Ulysses S. Grant, the former Union general, the 1868 treaty was abrogated. The Black Hills were seized, the people threatened with starvation. Prospectors hoping to strike paydirt moved in, and frontier towns like Deadwood — notorious for their trade in women, gambling and violence — sprang up, forming the bulwark of white settlement. For 125 years,

miners attacked the earth, drawing 10 percent of the world's gold supply from its ore-rich veins.

The rise of automobiles and the tourist industry created new fortunes for the interlopers. In the 1920s, South Dakota's first state historian, Doane Robinson, proposed building a massive sculpture to attract visitors to the remote location. But finding an artist willing to undertake such a feat wasn't easy. Robinson had been moved by the recently constructed memorial at Stone Mountain in Georgia, which honored the defenders of the Civil War's inglorious "Lost Cause." He contacted its flamboyant sculptor, Gutzon Borglum, who quickly accepted the offer.

Mount Rushmore came to South Dakota by way of a Southern, white supremacist ideology that blended easily with the West's sense of Manifest Destiny. Borglum himself was a bridge: The child of a polygamist Mormon family of Danish settlers in Idaho, he made a name for himself as an artist in service of the Ku Klux Klan. On Thanksgiving Day 1915, the so-called "Invisible Empire" was reborn in a torchlight ceremony atop Stone Mountain. The site is still sacred to the Klan and Confederate sympathizers. The next year, the Daughters of the Confederacy drafted a plan to commemorate the occasion with a memorial. By 1923, Borglum was a trusted Klan insider who served on the Klonselium, the highest decision-making body, second only to the Grand Wizard. He was a natural candidate for the Stone Mountain job.

The Klan hardened Borglum's strident xenophobia and belief in European — meaning Nordic — racial superiority. But Stone Mountain was too geopolitically specific — too distinctly Southern — to capture his grand nationalist vision. He saw the Black Hills as ideal, "so near the center of our country or so suitable for (a) colossal sculpture." His monument would "symbolize the principles of liberty and freedom on which the nation was founded," he later wrote.

More fundamentally, it would assert white possession, not just over the Black Hills but over the entire continent. The ancient granite hills would bear both gold and glory for the United States with the busts of four of its presidents. In a letter to Robinson, Borglum warned that if his masterpiece wasn't constructed properly, "we will only wound the mountain, offend the Gods, and deserve condemnation for posterity." In 1936, an awestruck Franklin Delano Roosevelt echoed Borglum as he gazed up at the nearly completed shrine. Its size, its "permanent beauty" and "permanent importance" meant that "ten thousand years from now" Americans would meditate in reverence here. Almost a century later, Trump proclaimed, "Mount Rushmore will stand forever as an eternal



The head of George Washington is carved into the side of a mountain at the Mount Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota's Black Hills (opposite).

NDN Collective President Nick Tilsen, 38, in his office in November in Rapid City, South Dakota. Tilsen is facing charges for his role in protesting President Trump's visit to Mount Rushmore in July (left).

tribute to our forefathers and to our freedom.” The crowd chanted, “USA! USA! USA!”

LAKOTA PEOPLE HAVE occupied the Black Hills for generations. In 1970, at the height of the Red Power movement, John (Fire) Lane Deer, a

Lakota holy man, climbed the monument and sat on Teddy Roosevelt’s head, “giving him a headache, maybe.” Native students and activists had taken over Alcatraz Island in the San Francisco Bay a year earlier. Lane Deer was at a protest camp on top of the monument, with

a banner that read “Red Power — Indian Land.”

Frustrated by getting no response from the federal government, Lizzy Fast Horse, a Lakota grandmother and one of the camp’s founders, and some accomplices decided to take back the Black Hills themselves. Fast Horse was among those calling for the United States to return 200,000 acres of Oglala Lakota land that had been confiscated during World War II for a gunnery and bombing range. She and two other Lakota women hid from park rangers and police, braving lightning storms as they made their way up the mountain. “We got braver and braver, and now we’re not afraid of anyone,” Fast Horse said at the time. Lee Brightman, the Lakota founder of United Native Americans, explained the camp’s goals: “We want payment for the Black Hills, for all the minerals mined, for the timber taken out. And we want our sacred mountains back.”

Those demands go far back, according to Charmaine White Face, the first Oglala woman spokesperson for the Sioux Nation Treaty Council. “It was illegal to talk about the (1868) treaty” when the treaty council formed in 1894, “just like the language was prohibited, just like our religion was prohibited by the American government.” But times have changed: White Face believes that her grandmother’s treaty knowledge, which survived government suppression, can be useful for the “land back” campaign.

This history is why Nick Tilsen loves the slogan. “You have elders saying ‘land back,’” he chuckles. “You want your land back? Hell yeah, I want my land back. I’ve been wanting my land back.” No one owns the phrase, he said; it “has lived in the spirit of the people for a long time.”

“Not only has this been a long generational battle, it is also part of this current moment,” said Krystal Two Bulls. The Northern Cheyenne and Oglala Lakota military veteran heads NDN Collective’s LandBack campaign, which was launched last Indigenous Peoples’ Day with the goal of returning public lands in the Black Hills to the Oceti Sakowin, starting with Mount Rushmore. “Public land is the first manageable bite,” she said, “then we’re coming for everything else.” This would usher an era of free and prior informed consent; tribes would form



Sioux Nation Treaty Council spokesperson Charmaine White Face, 73, at home in November in Rapid City, South Dakota (top left).

Laura Ten Fingers, 18, initiated calls to protest President Trump’s visit to Mount Rushmore in July (left).

meaningful partnerships to promote land stewardship and equitable housing, and address more than a century of wrongdoings.

In the Black Hills, the idea has traction. In 1987, New Jersey Sen. Bill Bradley, a former New York Knicks basketball player, introduced legislation drafted by Lakota people to return 1.3 million acres, targeting Park Service land, not private land. The bill died in committee.

Two Bulls sees land return as a moral issue more than a legal one. It's not about ownership, she said, but stewardship. "As a Northern Cheyenne woman, part of my original instructions is to be in relationship with the land as a steward."

To Laura Ten Fingers, the idea of ownership doesn't entirely mesh with Lakota relations with the land. "To me, 'land back' means that — it's not that we own the land," she said. "The land owns you. It's a way of ensuring it's protected and preserved by the people who originally took care of it, which is us."

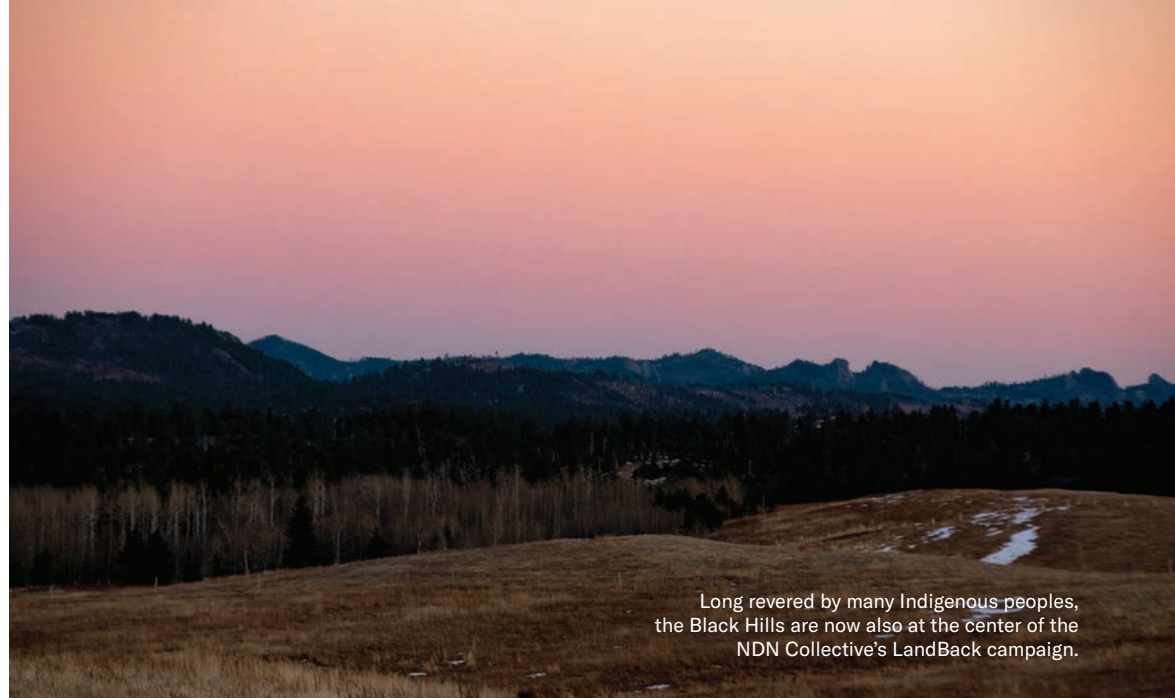
FROM HER HOME in Oglala on the Pine Ridge Reservation, Ten Fingers watched the George Floyd protests erupt in Minneapolis and spread across the nation. "The momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement also created (a space) for Indigenous sovereignty," she said. Inspired, she and her friends put out the first call to protest Trump's visit.

Trump's visit to Mount Rushmore — like his rally the day after Juneteenth in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the site of an infamous race massacre in 1921 — was part of a series of raucous campaign rallies aimed at firing up his base and provoking his political opponents.

"Our nation is witnessing a merciless campaign to wipe out our history, defame our heroes, erase our values, and indoctrinate our children," Trump warned the crowd at the base of Mount Rushmore, the day before Independence Day last year. He blamed "cancel culture" — which he called "the very definition of totalitarianism" — for the recent toppling of Confederate statues and monuments and other controversial historical figures. A week earlier, he signed an executive order that condemned the destruction as the actions of "rioters, arsonists, and left-wing extremists," calling for the arrest of vandals who destroyed federal property and their imprisonment for up to 10 years.

"Do you know, it's my dream to have my face on Mount Rushmore," Trump told South Dakota Republican Gov. Kristi Noem when they first met in the Oval Office. "He was totally serious," Noem, who invited Trump to Mount Rushmore, told the Sioux Falls *Argus Leader* in 2018.

Trump's arrival only inflamed the



Long revered by many Indigenous peoples, the Black Hills are now also at the center of the NDN Collective's LandBack campaign.

long-standing tensions between tribes and the state of South Dakota. Lakota leaders saw his visit as retaliation for their opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline and to the state's lack of response to the coronavirus pandemic. That May, Noem had threatened "legal action" against the tribal health checkpoints set up to curtail the spread of the virus, claiming they interfered with traffic. "We will not apologize for being an island of safety in a sea of uncertainty and death," Harold Frazier, chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, wrote to Noem in reply. Her state has some of the nation's highest rates of infection and death. South Dakota backed down.

The Cheyenne River, Rosebud and Oglala Sioux tribal chairmen all wrote letters protesting Trump's visit, citing public health concerns and the continued indifference toward Lakota treaty rights. In separate statements, Frazier and Julian Running Bear, the president of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, demanded the return of the Black Hills. They also called for the removal of Mount Rushmore itself, which Frazier described as a "brand on our flesh (that) needs to be removed," adding, "I am willing to do it free of charge to the United States, by myself if I must."

But history moves on. In November, Trump lost his bid for re-election; the Rapid City Council voted to return 1,200 acres in the Black Hills to the Oceti Sakowin; and in Rapid City, Lakota activists set up Camp Mni Luzahan to house Native people living on the streets so that they don't die of exposure during the harsh winter months.

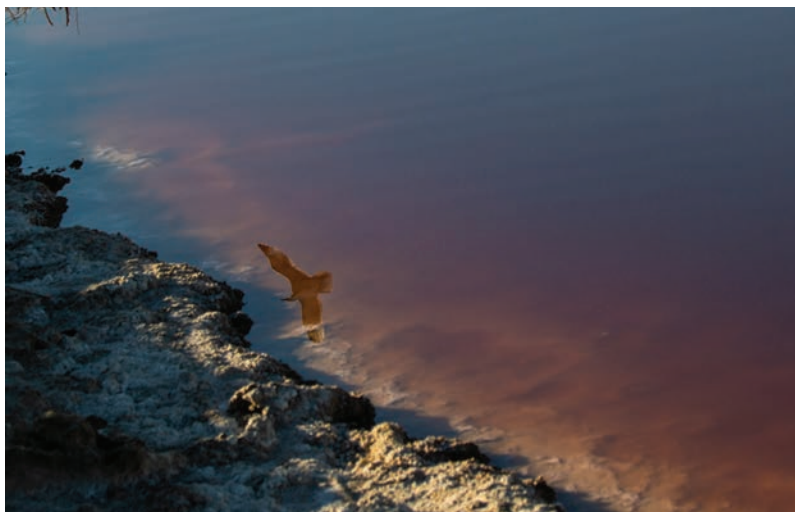
But the pipeline protests have also sharpened disputes between tribes and the state. South Dakota lawmakers feared another massive protest like Standing Rock in 2016. So the Legislature criminalized pipeline-related protests ahead of the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline. Noem introduced a

controversial "riot boosting" law, which would have created civil and criminal penalties for individuals who supported any "incitement to riot," claiming it was necessary to address problems caused by "out-of-state rioters funded by out-of-state interests."

This was the battle Tilsen found himself in. He testified against the law at the state Capitol and was a named plaintiff in the ACLU lawsuit that successfully challenged its constitutionality. "We helped water down the current riot boosting law, to make it as weak as possible," Tilsen explained. He saw it as a win for free speech and treaty rights, as well as the right to legally protest Keystone XL. "It's a reminder," Tilsen said, "as Indigenous people, we're fighting for justice not just for ourselves but also on behalf of millions of Americans." In March 2020, Noem signed a revised version of the law.

IT WAS AT MOUNT RUSHMORE in the early 1870s that Black Elk, the Oglala holy man, had a vision of He Sapa: "From the mountains flashed all colors upwards to the heavens." He was at the center of the world atop Tunkasila Sakpe, the Six Grandfathers. The mountain would be named for Black Elk's vision that day. He saw a great hoop made up of many hoops of a people united. In the center grew a flowering tree, he recalled, "and I saw that it was holy."

In August, a magistrate judge ruled that there was evidence for the trial to move forward. Tilsen hopes his case and the LandBack campaign will have a similar catalyzing effect, not only for the land-return movement but for the restored dignity of his people. "It was powerful," Tilsen said, remembering that day. "There was between 100 and 200 of us. It must have felt like there were thousands of us, because you could feel that spiritual power from the hills. The ancestors were waiting for us to go up there." 🌸



Sea change

Decades have passed and millions of dollars have been spent, yet little has been done to restore the Salton Sea. But California officials say the future is bright.

BY MARK OLALDE | PHOTOS BY METTE LAMPCOV

RED FLAGS FLUTTER outside the schools in Salton City, California, when the air quality is dangerous. Dust billows across the desert, blanketing playgrounds and baseball diamonds, the swirling grit canceling recess and forcing students indoors. Visibility is so poor you can't see down the block. Those days worry Miriam Juarez the most.

This story is a collaboration between High Country News and The Desert Sun, part of the USA Today Network.

Juarez, a mother of three and active volunteer at the schools, often received calls to pick up her 7-year-old son, Lihan, when sudden nosebleeds soiled his outfits. But she couldn't leave her job, harvesting vegetables in the fields that form square oases in the Coachella Valley. So she began packing fresh clothes for him every day, before COVID-19 halted in-person learning. "It's OK. Just go to the office," she'd say. "The ladies will help you change."

The doctor's diagnosis was unclear: Perhaps Lihan had allergies. Then, Juarez's 17-year-old

daughter began suffering headaches and respiratory issues. Finally, Juarez got a runny nose and sore throat that lasted for days when the dust blew.

Juarez blames California's largest lake, the Salton Sea. Only a few miles east of the family's neatly kept house, it's a cobalt-blue patch on Southern California's Colorado Desert, a roughly 325-square-mile oblong oddity that's twice as salty as the ocean.

It's also toxic — a looming environmental and public health disaster. The Salton Sea's





shoreline is receding, exposing a dusty lakebed known as the “playa.” This sandy substance holds a century’s worth of agricultural runoff, including DDT, ammonia, possibly carcinogenic herbicides like trifluralin and other chemicals. Its windborne dust travels across Southern California and into Arizona, but nearby communities — many of them populated by Latino farmworkers — bear the heaviest burden.

The problem isn’t new. Yet California, though largely responsible for fixing it, has barely touched the 27 square miles of exposed

playa. It’s been almost two decades since an agreement was signed in 2003, committing the Imperial Irrigation District, the Colorado River’s largest user, to conserve water that once flowed from farms into the lake and send it to other districts. Knowing the lake would recede, the state committed to mitigating the health and environmental impacts. The state and federal governments have spent more than \$70 million so far, largely on salaries and studies. Meanwhile, the high-water mark has fallen nearly 10 feet, and salinity continues to rise.

Miriam Juarez and two of her children, Lihan and Lissette Lopez, near their home in Salton City, California (*above*). The children have suffered from health issues that Juarez attributes to the poor air quality around the Salton Sea.

A seagull reflected in the discolored shoreline of the Salton Sea. The scum found here can be toxic (*facing*).

“For a very long time, the enormity of the challenge at the sea was frankly overwhelming.”

The politicians admit they’re years behind schedule, but they’re adamant that the course has been corrected, the money is being put to good use and the future is bright. Currently, 16 state employees are planning projects to tamp down dust or rebuild wetlands, and 26 new positions will be approved in the latest budget are filled. They’ve also nearly finished permitting projects that will cover 30,000 acres, a little more than a third of the area that could eventually be exposed.

Assembly Member Eduardo Garcia, D-Coachella, who represents the region surrounding the lake, is optimistic. “I believe 2021 will be a new story of the state of California living up to its responsibility and liability in terms of investing in what it signed up for at the Salton Sea,” he said.

Still, the state must overcome funding issues, disagreements with the feds, permitting bottlenecks and decades of inertia.

FOR YEARS, THE GOVERNMENT stood still.

Over tens of thousands of years, as it meandered across the West, the Colorado River occasionally filled the Salton Sea. The lake’s most recent iteration formed between 1905 and 1907, when an engineering disaster diverted the river into the basin. It has since been fed largely by agricultural runoff from the Imperial and Coachella valleys. It soon became clear that salinity levels would continue increasing. Since then, millions more people have begun relying on the Colorado River, even as climate change threat-

ens the waterway. In response to competing demands, the 2003 agreement diverted water from the Imperial Valley. That meant that the lake’s level was guaranteed to drop. So, in 2007, the state released a sweeping proposal with an \$8.9 billion price tag — unfortunately, just as the Great Recession took hold. “Folks got sticker-shocked and did not really pursue a full rehabilitation-restoration approach,” Garcia said.

Still, the agreement included 15 years of inflows to temporarily control salinity while the state decided on a plan. By late 2020, the California Natural Resources Agency had completed one dust-suppression project covering a mere 112 acres; the goal for the end of that year was 3,800 acres. “For a very long time, the enormity of the challenge at the sea was frankly overwhelming, and there was very little action at the state level

until 2014 or 2015,” said Wade Crowfoot, secretary of the Natural Resources Agency, the lead department tasked with restoring the sea.

That one completed site, the Bruchard Road Dust Suppression Project, looks like someone tried to farm the surface of the moon. Tractors dug long, straight furrows through the white, sandy playa to catch the windblown dust. But more expensive wetland habitat restoration is needed; the lake has long been an important feeding ground along the Pacific Flyway, a migratory bird route on the Western Seaboard.

In order to “fix” the sea, government agencies, led by the state, will need to flood, plough or plant tens of thousands of acres to control dust and rebuild habitat. They’re racing against the clock. An estimated 131 square miles of playa will be dry and exposed to the air by the time the lake





reaches a degree of equilibrium — meaning the inflow from three rivers and agricultural runoff will maintain a smaller lake — in 2047.

For a shallow body of water, the Salton Sea holds a large amount of sunk costs. Years of studies, salaries and office supplies have been purchased, but few shovels have been put to work.

But Arturo Delgado, an assistant secretary with the Natural Resources Agency and the state's Salton Sea czar, pointed out that a portion of the more than \$350 million set aside for the lake — 99% of it from bonds — needed to be spent sorting out permits and access to a complex checkerboard of state, tribal, federal and private land. "The bulk of the funding that has been appropriated to date for the Salton Sea program has not been spent," he said.

As of late November, state agencies had used about \$53 million, most of it going to ledger entries, including "studies and planning activities," "staffing and other design costs" and "annual surveys to monitor bird and fish populations. Glaring zeros marked the "expended" column next to construction budgets.

Years of indecisiveness mixed with land-access and permitting issues have bogged down the process; the state's own efforts to clean up the ecological disaster got stuck in the compliance process. "Frankly, the permitting is probably more expensive right now than the actual projects," said Tina Shields, water department manager at the Imperial Irrigation District, which, separate from the state, completed about 2,000 acres of dust suppression on its own land around the lake.

A dock sits where the water from the Salton Sea used to reach. Now the Desert Shores, California, area has a stagnant pool of water left at the bottom of the former canals (*facing*).

A tilapia skeleton serves as a reminder of the die-offs that have become common in the Salton Sea. As water levels have fallen, salinity levels and levels of toxins have increased (*top*).

Rep. Raul Ruiz, D-Calif., on the banks of the diminished Salton Sea. Ruiz grew up in the area, and has worked to bring lawmakers' attention to the troubled lake since he returned to the area to practice medicine (*above*).

The state is appropriating some funds, but the federal government has been slow to pitch in. The U.S. Department of Agriculture kicked in about \$8 million for dust-suppression projects, and over the past five years, the Bureau of Reclamation spent about \$11 million on water-quality monitoring, wetlands projects along polluted rivers that empty into the lake, and studies on the feasibility of using salty water for habitat restoration.

When the Natural Resources Agency is finally ready for large-scale builds, the budget could get in the way. Individual construction sites are expensive, with one 4,000-acre project set to break ground in 2021 costing an estimated \$200 million. Another 160-acre design will cost \$20 million. Cleanup along the New River, one of three small waterways flowing into the lake, comes with a \$28 million bill.

And while California regularly calls on bonds to fund large projects, that money can't be used for operations and maintenance. Crowfoot acknowledged that the state lacks a mechanism to fund long-term monitoring and upkeep. At the beginning of 2020, Gov. Gavin Newsom promised an additional \$220 million, but that was predicated on a bond. When the pandemic hit, that idea and a parallel measure Garcia introduced in the Legislature both died, although

Garcia said he'll reintroduce his bill in 2021.

For now, the state lacks a better funding plan. "We don't have the reserves that we had prior to COVID-19," Garcia said. "That money has been invested in our emergency response."

IF SALTON SEA RESTORATION were to rein-vigorate the Pacific Flyway, it would likely begin at the wetlands around Red Hill Bay on the lake's southeastern corner, where various agencies are constructing new habitat. An October visit found it far from inspiring. A flat patch of dirt covered several hundred dry acres, dotted with a few dead trees. A sign, complete with typos, showed a hopeful rendering of a functioning wetland and promised: "Estimated construction in 2016."

Rep. Raul Ruiz, D-Calif., introduced the federal Salton Sea Public Health and Environmental Protection Act in November to streamline permitting and unlock additional federal dollars. He acknowledged the delays, but called the Red Hill Bay Project "proof of concept that we can get a shovel-to-ground project started," adding, "My number-one goal was to break ground on a project to rip that inertia to pieces and to start building momentum."

The son of farmworkers, Ruiz grew up just miles from the lake. He returned home to prac-

tice medicine after studying at Harvard, and he still wears gym shoes with his suits, as if he's about to run into the emergency room. Ruiz, who was struck by the high rates of respiratory illnesses in the area, compares the lake to a patient "in need of triage."

A 2019 study conducted by researchers from the University of Southern California's medical school estimated that nearly one in four elementary school children in northern Imperial County, the area nearest to the Salton Sea's exposed and emissive playa, suffered from asthma, about three times the national average. "Exposing this population to more and more poor air quality — in particular, particulate matter small enough to penetrate the lung-blood barrier that also carries toxins like arsenic, selenium and pesticides — would be devastating to the public's health," Ruiz said.

Ruiz said that divergent visions had stalled progress, while egos got in the way. Since entering Congress in 2013, he has tried to rally local lawmakers and called on the federal government to take a more active role. Juarez, in Salton City, welcomes the efforts but believes that if this problem affected a wealthier, whiter area like Palm Springs, it would've been addressed already. It's a sentiment her elected representatives share. So, she asked, "Why is nothing getting done?"

In 2020, the Imperial County Air Pollution Control District slapped the state and feds with notices of violation for failing to complete dust-control projects. The Imperial Irrigation District wants the state to act, too, citing the 2003 water transfer agreement. California politicians argue the federal government needs to step up because the Bureau of Reclamation owns much of the land underneath the lake. The feds insist they occupy a supporting role, and agency heads from Reclamation and Fish and Wildlife refused to attend a September congressional hearing to discuss the government's role in cleaning up the lake.

The people in Desert Shores, Salton City and other towns around the retreating lake are still waiting. For Juarez, who began working in the fields when she was just 15, the clock is ticking on the American dream her family built in the California desert. It's difficult to find hope in stepwise permit approvals while dust fights through cracks in her home. She takes her children to the doctor every six months and worries about Lihan. "I'm nervous, and I'm scared to see my son like that," Juarez said.

She doesn't want to move away but is finally considering it. "I don't want to stay here and see my kids sick," she said. ☀



A man stands near a former boat launch on a canal of California's Salton Sea. A drop in the water level has severed the canal from the sea and left it a stagnant, mosquito-infested pool.

Abandoned boats pose problems above and below the waves

An 80-year-old tugboat in Juneau illustrates the cost of dealing with vessel-littered coastlines.

BY VICTORIA PETERSEN



The *Lumberman* sits in Gastineau Channel at low tide in June 2018.
David Purdy / KTOO

THE LUMBERMAN, a 107-foot World War II-era steel-hull tugboat, has been floating at the quiet cruise ship dock in Juneau for months, awaiting a watery grave. Abandoned for nearly a decade, the *Lumberman* was moored in Juneau's Gastineau Channel in the early 2000s by its last owner, Brenden Mattson. Two years ago, the 192-ton tugboat's anchor line broke, stranding it on state tidelands and creating a jurisdictional hot potato for city, state and Coast Guard officials as they debated how to dispose of the vessel.

Then, last winter, a high tide and forceful winds pushed the

Lumberman from the tidelands. Fearing property damage, the city of Juneau took responsibility for the historic tug and towed it to the cruise ship dock. In late October, Juneau got permission from the Environmental Protection Agency to get rid of the boat by scuttling it offshore, about 170 miles from the city. This spring, weather permitting, city officials will open a six-inch valve on the ship, allowing it to sink 8,400 feet to the ocean floor.

This is an uncommon way to deal with a common problem in coastal areas: what to do with abandoned and derelict vessels.

Hundreds of such boats are strewn along Alaska's coast, where they can become navigational hazards or dangerously alluring destinations: In 2017, two people who were trying to reach the *Lumberman* died when their skiff overturned. Abandoned boats can also damage habitat and leach toxic materials, such as lead paint, asbestos and household cleaners, threatening coastal environments. Each West Coast state would need over \$20 million to handle the backlog, and close to \$5 million annually to address the ongoing problem. On Alaska's remote shorelines, these costs can double.

There are many reasons a boat may be abandoned: The owner can die or become unable to continue the boat's upkeep, or the cost of either maintenance or disposal can be prohibitive. "People generally don't walk away from the nicer boats that have value," said Matthew Creswell, harbor master at Juneau's Docks and Harbors. "They walk away from the boats costing an arm and a leg to get rid of."

The cost of removal varies by a vessel's size and location. On Alaska's expansive coasts, where infrastructure is sparse, prices are particularly high. The *Lumberman*, for example, could be discarded and hauled to a landfill, or transported by barge to Seattle, but either option would cost between \$250,000 and \$400,000, Creswell said. Sinking is a bargain in comparison, but it will still cost Juneau Docks and Harbors over \$100,000, for towing, removing trash and stripping toxic lead paint from the vessel. "It's not a common method," Creswell said. "But in this case with the *Lumberman*, (scuttling) was the most cost-effective method."

Juneau discards about a dozen boats annually. Most are smaller than the *Lumberman* and easier to remove and salvage locally. But long-abandoned boats are piling up: By 2025, Alaska's fleet will include more than 3,000 vessels between 28 and 59 feet long that are over 45 years old — past the

point of a useful life for most boats — according to the Alaska-based McKinley Research Group.

In 2017, cast-off boats caught the attention of the Pacific States/ British Columbia Oil Spill Task Force, an intergovernmental group that promotes coordination in addressing oil spills. The task force labeled derelict and abandoned vessels a "critical, emerging issue" and established a work group to explore the problem. "There is a strong sense from everybody who deals with the issue that it is getting worse pretty much everywhere (on the West Coast)," said Hilary Wilkinson, an environmental consultant in Washington who helps lead the task force and chairs its abandoned vessel work group.

The work group recommends that states look to Washington, which is considered to have a model boat-disposal program — one focused on prevention, owner responsibility and generating funds for removal. Any owner who cannot pay for disposal of a derelict, but floating, vessel that's less than 45 feet long can ask the Washington Department of Natural Resources to remove it for free. The program handles about 20 boats annually, using money collected from vessel registration fees.

Adequate funding is a "major obstacle" for every West Coast state, according to the work group's findings. Aaron Timian, Alaska's abandoned and derelict vessel coordinator, said the state is still developing ways to secure funds. In response to mounting issues caused by vessels like the *Lumberman*, the state passed legislation in 2018 establishing the program that Timian now leads. The law, which requires boats longer than 24 feet to have a title, simplified the impoundment process and added civil penalties and enforcement authority. The paper trail should also make it easier for authorities to track down owners. While it's too soon to tell if it will be effective, Creswell said, "It's totally a step in the right direction." ☀

The Zoom boom

Remote workers are flocking to Western towns.

BY JONATHAN THOMPSON

IN THE SPRING OF 2020, FIS Worldpay, a payment-processing company, sent more than 200 of its Durango, Colorado-based employees home to work remotely, in order to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus. Even when pandemic-avoidance measures were loosened over the summer and many workplaces filled back up, the 81,000-square-foot building remained dark. Then, in November, the Jacksonville, Florida-based company announced that the staff would continue to work remotely, and that the Durango building — the largest of its kind in town — would close for good.

This phenomenon — one-time cubicle workers becoming full-time telecommuters, liberated from corporate headquarters — deprived Durango of one of its largest private employers and has driven up office vacancy rates nationwide. Yet at the same time, it is also fueling housing booms in so-called “Zoom towns,” Durango included, as the born-again remote workers seek out more desirable areas.

Zoom towns are scattered across the United States, but the most popular ones seem to be small- to mid-sized, amenity-rich communities, with plenty of public land nearby, from Bend, Oregon, to Flagstaff, Arizona, along with a whole bunch of best-place-to-live-list towns. In most cases, their real estate markets were already overheated. But they exploded in the wake of the pandemic’s first wave,

driving home prices to astronomical levels and putting homeownership even further out of reach for the typical working-class person.

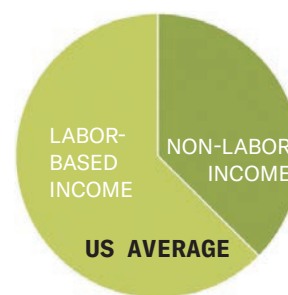
The telecommuter-migration is just one of many reasons behind the current real estate craze. Rock-bottom interest rates have also contributed, along with wealthy investors seeking refuges during tumultuous times. “It’s clear that many buyers are being driven out of large cities by both COVID-19 and civil unrest,” wrote the authors of the *Jackson Hole Report*, regarding the recent uptick in homes priced over \$3 million. “Most have been contemplating a move for some time, and felt that now was the right time.”

The Zoom economy has come at Durango from two directions. The housing market went berserk in the third quarter of 2020, and the median home price shot up to about twice the amount that a median-income earner could afford. Meanwhile, economic development officials are trying to figure out what to do with a giant, empty office building. One option: Convert it into affordable housing. 🌟

Sources: Redfin, a national real estate brokerage firm; Headwaters Economics; National Association of Realtors; US Census Bureau; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities; Jackson Hole Real Estate Report; Durango Land and Homes; Tahoe Mountain Realty; Zillow; Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; University of Wyoming.

Outside money

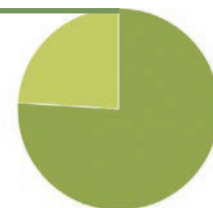
In the most expensive housing markets, a good portion of the money paying for that housing comes from trust funds, investments, and other income from outside the market.



TETON COUNTY, WYOMING

“A tax haven with a view”

► Jackson Hole Property Group’s description of Teton County, Wyoming, which has no state income tax, no real estate transfer tax, and relatively low property taxes.



\$2.18 billion

► Projected overall amount spent on real estate in Teton County this year, shattering the previous record of \$1.6 billion set in 2007.

\$42.3 million

► Amount by which the University of Wyoming had to cut its budget this year due to a statewide economic crisis driven by drops in coal, oil, and natural gas severance tax and sales tax revenues. The university will cut 80 positions, raise tuition and is considering eliminating a number of academic programs.

\$65.4 million

► Revenue that could have been generated in 2020 by a 3% real estate transfer tax on Teton County sales, alone.

SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

9,743

► Approximate number of net jobs lost in Santa Fe, New Mexico, between February and October 2020.

18.9%

► Poverty rate in Santa Fe County.

\$1.36 million

► Average home sales price in Santa Fe for the month of October 2020.

FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA

\$480,000

► Median home listing price as of December 1, 2020.

19.7%

► Poverty rate in Flagstaff, Arizona, metro area

17.4

► Income inequality ratio* in Coconino County, Arizona, home of Flagstaff

TRUCKEE, CALIFORNIA

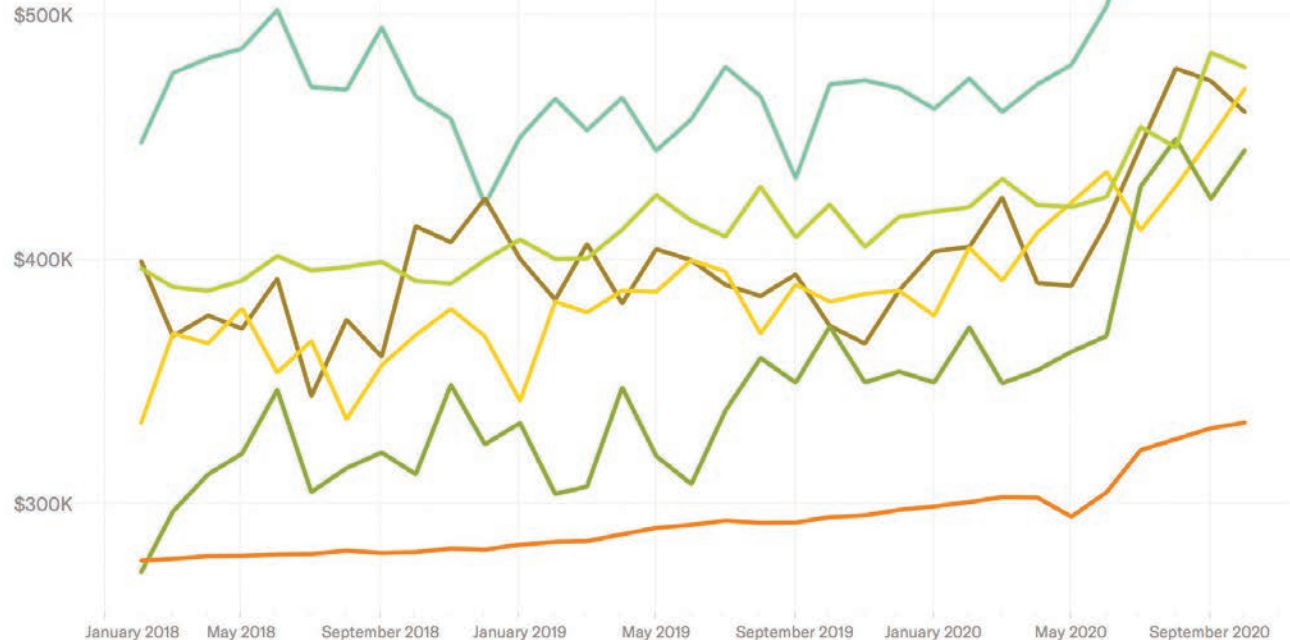
550

► Number of homes sold at prices over \$1 million in the Tahoe-Truckee, California, real estate market during the first 10 months of 2020. The previous 12-month record was 386 in 2018.

15

► Income inequality ratio* for Nevada County, California, home of Truckee.

*Mean income for the highest quintile (top 20%) divided by the mean income for lowest quintile (bottom 20%). The US income inequality ratio is 8.4.



Median home sales price, 2018-2020

- National
- Bend, Ore.
- Bonner County, Idaho
- Flagstaff, Ariz.
- Santa Fe, N.M.
- Truckee, Calif.

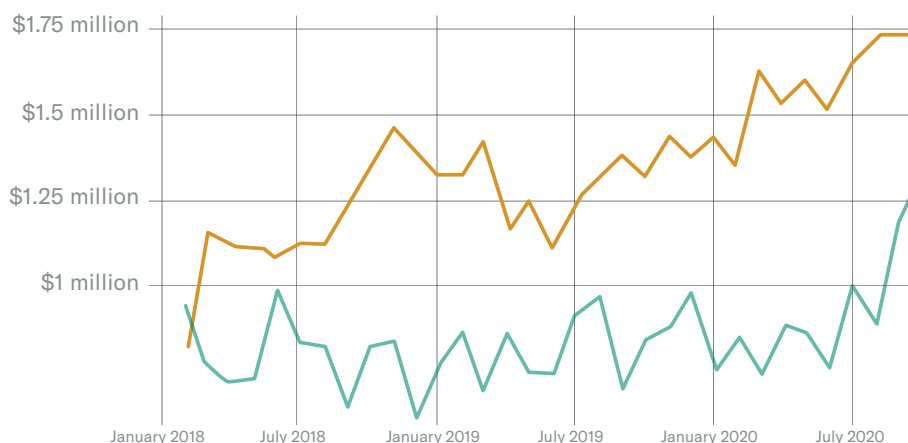
A post-pandemic upswing

Most Western real estate markets were gradually climbing when the pandemic hit. They slumped during the spring and then shot up in the summer. The number of sales fell in the fall due to fewer homes on the market, but prices have continued to climb.

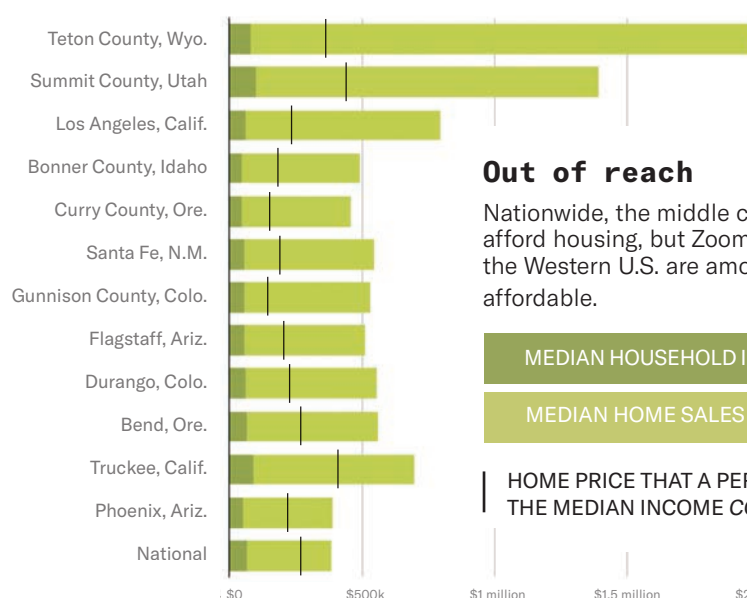
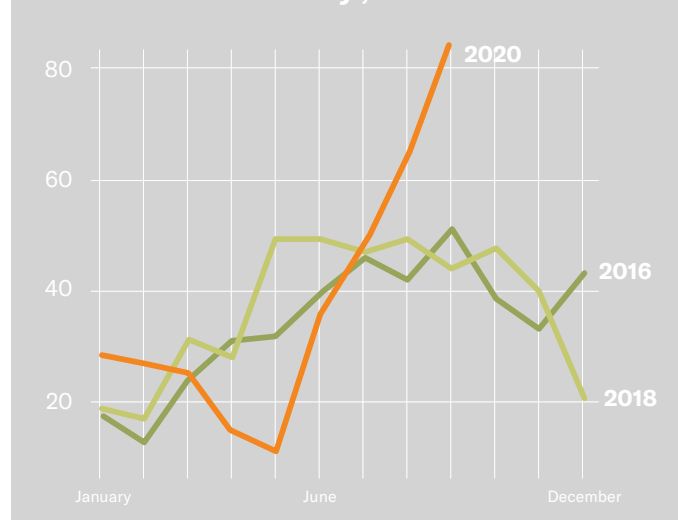
Luxury boom

High-dollar property markets saw the biggest upswing in 2020, with record-breaking home sales and prices in the over-\$3-million category.

- Teton County, Wyo.
- Summit County, Utah



Monthly residential sales, Gunnison County, Colo.



Out of reach

Nationwide, the middle class cannot afford housing, but Zoom towns in the Western U.S. are among the least affordable.

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

MEDIAN HOME SALES PRICE

HOME PRICE THAT A PERSON MAKING THE MEDIAN INCOME COULD AFFORD

HCN in the 1990s

BEYOND THE LORDS OF YESTERDAY

When President Bill Clinton took office in January of 1992, the West's "Big Three" industries of logging, ranching and mining — dubbed the "Lords of Yesterday" by historian Charles Wilkinson — were already in decline. A new service economy based on the region's spectacular scenery began to take hold. In 1993, the Clinton administration used the Endangered Species act to end the unfettered logging of old-growth forests in the Pacific Northwest. That same year, Congress ceased giving away public lands to mining prospectors and increased its support for cleaning up polluted sites under the federal "Superfund" program. In the rural West, cattle and sheep ranchers still dominated local and state politics, despite an increasingly aggressive campaign against public-lands grazing. Though Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt's attempts to rein in grazing and charge higher rates for permits were unsuccessful, the new collaborative committees he created finally offered conservationists a seat at the management table. *HCN* publisher Ed Marston began a decade-long dialogue with progressive ranchers like ranchers like Doc and Connie Hatfield of Brothers, Oregon, who pioneered sustainable grazing practices while selling beef to high-end urban markets.



Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. **Bob Wick / BLM**

MONUMENTAL PROTECTION

The Clinton administration took on a more active role in protecting the West's last wild public lands. In 1996, Clinton used the 1906 Antiquities Act to create the 1.7 million-acre Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah. *HCN* followed the issue closely, visiting the small communities in the area and speaking with both monument opponents and supporters. Despite the vehement controversy the designation aroused, Clinton and Babbitt successfully created a total of 19 new national monuments and conservation areas.

GRAPPLING WITH GROWTH

In the 1990s, it became clear that the West was changing in fundamental ways. The region was becoming increasingly dependent on tourism as wealthy urban refugees descended on its booming resort towns. *HCN* produced groundbreaking stories about the recreational empires of Aspen and Vail, and their growing influence — for better or worse — over vast swaths of the West.

HCN rode this wave of growth, adding thousands of new readers, and, in 1996, creating one of the earliest news websites.

For more information about *HCN*'s incredible first 50 years and to support our campaign, visit: hcn.org/50-years



HCN readers: Funding our work for 50 years

THANK YOU. Readers pay for about 75% of what it costs to produce High Country News. You can join our supporters here by donating \$50 or more. Mail a check to P.O. Box 1090, Paonia, CO 81428; call 800-905-1155; or contribute online at hcn.org/support.

CHAMPION OF THE WEST (\$50,000 AND ABOVE)

Society of Environmental Journalists | Washington, DC

PUBLISHER'S CIRCLE (\$5,000-\$9,999)

Peter & Quin Curran | Ketchum, ID

STEWARD (\$1,000 - \$2,499)

Bill Black & Nancy DuTeau | Fort Collins, CO

Evan & Kim Ela | Littleton, CO

John P. & Laurie McBride | Aspen, CO

John Nixon | Anacortes, WA

Tricia Powell | Grand Junction, CO

Shelby Robinson & Michael Balogh | Mancos, CO

The Bear & Tigger Remembrance Fund |

Tenakee Springs, AK

Burton D. Williams | Fishtail, MT

GUARANTOR (\$500-\$999)

Anonymous (2)

In memory of Elizabeth Elser Doolittle | Mequon, WI

Larry Beaver | Westminster, CO

George & Susan Boehlert Fund | Bend, OR

Jennifer Hulac | Denver, CO

Paul Larmer | Paonia, CO

Robert E. Ordal | Ketchum, ID

Peter & Mary Sue Waser | Lafayette, IN

BENEFACTOR (\$250-\$499)

Anonymous (2)

In honor of Steve Harris & Cookie Perl

In honor of Michael Wolcott | Prescott, AZ

Joe Brazie | Eugene, OR

Bill Cort | Grand Junction, CO

Bruce Driver & Charlene Dougherty | Boulder, CO

Barbara G. Hager | Bremerton, WA

Mary Humstone & George Burnette | Fort Collins, CO

SPONSOR (\$150-\$249)

Anonymous

In honor of Christine Bourdette

In honor of Shirley Dahlin Wunder

Sally Letchworth Bub | Kinnear, WY

Jim Doilney | Park City, UT

Gerald Folland | Seattle, WA

Mark E. Giesecke | Carbondale, CO

Paul & Wendy Greeney | Milwaukee, MI

Paul & Mary Holden Family Foundation |

Providence, UT

Cal & Henrietta Howe | Hayden, CO

Caroline Kauffman | Lafayette, CO

Bruce H. Leland | New Castle, CO

Kenneth & Diane Luttrell | Sacramento, CA

Leslie Wood & M. Edward Spaulding | La Grande, OR

PATRON (\$75-\$149)

Anonymous (13)

In memory of Bernard J. Callahan | Elk Point, SD

Robert Marshall | Cerrillos, NM

Roger & Barbara Mattison | Denver, CO

Shanna McBurney | New Castle, NH

John McNulty | Tulsa, OK

Mary Moran & Dennis Silva | Moab, UT

Jim & Leslie Morefield | Minden, NV

Robert Murphy | Englewood, CO

Will Murray | Boulder, CO

James W. Nollenberger | Hotchkiss, CO

Jim & Tina Oberheide | Salida, CO

Karen M. Ortiz | Hotchkiss, CO

Thomas O'Sullivan | Greenwich, CT

Kerri Pedersen | Salt Lake City, UT

Linda Peer | Torrey, UT

Bruno Pierini | Olympia, WA

Michael Pipp | Helena, MT

John Pitlak | Santa Fe, NM

Jack & Rachel Potter | Columbia Falls, MT

Nelson Reese | Park City, UT

William Reffalt | Albuquerque, NM

Glen Renner | Bluff, UT

Tony Ruckel | Denver, CO

Jim & Carmenza Sarvay | Beaverton, OR

Christianne Schoedel | Baltimore, MD

John & Lucy Schott | McCall, ID

Sue Schulz | Littleton, CO

John & Ruth Sechena | Seattle, WA

Keith & Janet Sewell | Rio Rico, AZ

Steve Siebert & Jill Belsy | Missoula, MT

Charles Simenstad & Stephanie Martin | Seattle, WA

Jose Skinner | Austin, TX

Don & Marion Slack | Tucson, AZ

Alice & Michael R. Smith | Elk Grove, CA

Jerry Smith | San Jose, CA

Leon Smith & Jan Mittleider-Smith | Twin Falls, ID

Sara Smith | Missoula, MT

Ed Snyder | Madison, WI

Daniel & Philippa Solomon | Readfield, ME

Hong Son | Hiawassee, GA

Stephen J. Spaulding | Cascade, CO

Scot Spicer | Garden City, ID

Nancy Stephanz | Port Angeles, WA

Jill Stewart | Woodland Hills, CA

Richard L. Stolz | Spokane, WA

Jeannette Sutherland | Missoula, MT

Martha Taylor | Seattle, WA

Harold Teasdale | Marine on St. Croix, MN

Marilyn Thayer | Los Alamos, NM

P.J. Timmerman | Chimayo, NM

Shelby Tisdale | Durango, CO

Russell Toal | Santa Fe, NM

Tobe & Mr. Dog | Reno, NV

Charles H. Trost | Pocatello, ID

Leland Trotter | Tacoma, WA

Bradley Udall | Boulder, CO

Jim Ulvestad | Wallkill, NY

J. Underdahl | Santa Fe, NM

Bob Wendel | Hillsboro, OR

Dee Dee Wieggl | Fort Collins, CO

Alison Woodworth | Coleville, CA

FRIEND (\$50-\$74)

Anonymous (15)

John Aber | Flagstaff, AZ

Ben Adams | Buffalo, WY

David Amsden | Boise, ID

Chris Andrae | Troutdale, OR

Emma Ansara | Denver, CO

Mehak Anwar | Los Angeles, CA

Kurt Aronow | Eldorado Springs, CO

Katherine & Jeff Ball | Bozeman, MT

Pat Baron | Troy, MI

Margaret Bartlett | Durango, CO

Eleen Baumann | Fort Collins, CO

Geoff & Diane Bedell | Kamas, UT

Ralph Bender | Wellington, CO

Dorothy Bergin | Colville, WA

Kenneth J. Bierman | Tucson, AZ

Nancy J. Bishop | The Dalles, OR

Willard Bissell | Longmont, CO

Noah Booker | Bellingham, WA

Mara Brown | Ogden, UT

Dennis Burke | Oxford, OH

Raleigh Burleigh | Carbondale, CO

D. Robert Cady | Salt Lake City, UT

John S. Campbell | Powell, WY

Justin Cetas | Milwaukie, OR

Cindy Chrisler | Georgetown, TX

Joseph Church | Greenville, CA

Linda Codlin | Burlington, WA

Marilyn Cooper | Houghton, MI

Martha E. Cox | Morrison, CO

Sharolyn Craft | North Las Vegas, NV

John & Kathy Crandall | Colorado Springs, CO

Bill & Sarah Dakin | Bigfork, MT

Janet Davis | Tigard, OR

Tom Delate | Centennial, CO

Jeff P. DiBenedetto | Red Lodge, MT

Henry & Kathie Dodd | Albuquerque, NM

Stephen Dörner | Gladstone, OR

Robert Dozono | Milwaukie, OR

Gregory Eaglin | Laramie, WY

Tony Eason | Denver, CO

Sid & Renee Eder | Moscow, ID

Brad Elliott & Marilyn Bateman | La Center, WA

Frank Evans | Del Norte, CO

Bayard C. Ewing | Denver, CO

Lyman Fancher | Santa Cruz, CA

Christopher J. Fassler | Draper, UT

Gene Faucher | Los Gatos, CA

Ferndog's Finishing | Oak Creek, CO

Mary Jean Fickes | Niwot, CO

Kurt Flaig | Laramie, WY

Shannon Flynn | Los Alamos, NM

Jim & Nancy Ford | Arvada, CO

Dody Fugate | Santa Fe, NM

David Futey | Colorado Springs, CO

Ennis & Susan Geraghty | Columbus, MT

William Gifford | Salt Lake City, UT

Wayne Goin | Montrose, CO

Phillip E. Goodin | Bayfield, CO

James Green | Martin, SD

Gerhard E. Hahne | Sunnyvale, CA

Seth Haines | Boulder, CO

Pam & Joe Hale | Palm Bay, FL

Brent Hall | Las Vegas, NV

Judith Haueter | Torrance, CA

Kathy & Melvin Haug | Indianola, WA

Laura Heller | Longmont, CO

Michael Helling | Victor, MT

R.E. Hickam | Idaho Springs, CO

Maruta Hiegel | Ryderwood, WA

William E. Hine Jr. | Catawissa, PA

John & Kristen Hinman | Bend, OR

Michael Hogan | Tahoma, CA

Judy Hudek | Scottsdale, AZ

John J. Hunt | Madison, AL

John & Judith Huntington | Deming, NM

Dan & Tracy Ihnot | Hotchkiss, CO

Barbara Jefferis | Evanston, WY

Abby Johnson | Carson City, NV

Larry Kallameyn | Spearfish, SD

Guy Keene & Susie Harvin | Del Norte, CO

Mary Kenney | Menlo Park, CA

Faye Keogh | Berkeley, CA

Linda Kervin | Logan, UT

Reida & Charles Kimmel | Eugene, OR

Jesse & Jodi King | Evergreen, CO

Eduardo Krasilovsky | Santa Fe, NM

Paul Krehbiel | Socorro, NM

Gene Krieger | Deming, NM

Christopher & Susan Lane | Denver, CO

Robert Larkin | Santa Cruz, CA

Robert Larsen | Rensselaer, NY

Brent Larwrence | Raleigh, NC

Judy Lawrence | Sattley, CA

John Lawrence | Sandpoint, ID

Chip & Mary Leslie | Stillwater, OK

John & Terri Lesnak | Colorado Springs, CO

Wexman Levin | Port Hadlock, WA

Martha Liebert | Bernalillo, NM

Richard Liroff | Arlington, VA

Dana Lobell | Brooklyn, NY

Eric & Suellen Lodge | Solana Beach, CA

Claudia Lyon | Monument, CO

Ruth MacFarlane | Palos Verdes Estates, CA

James Madden | Bozeman, MT

Beverley Manley | Truth or Consequences, NM

Jennifer A. Martin | Rock Springs, WY

Terry Matthews | Fort Collins, CO

Dorothy McBride | Tacoma, WA

Pat McCabe | Bend, OR

Linda McCarter & Brian Tack | Bellingham, WA

Geoff McGhee | Seattle, WA

Priscilla McKenna | Boulder, CO
Tom & Jane Meacham | Anchorage, AK
Bob Meehan | Portland, OR
Mike & Corky Messenger | Thermopolis, WY
Susan Armijo & Roger Miller | Nathrop, CO
York Miller | Denver, CO
Fred Mimmack | Foxfield, CO
Steve Mimnaugh | Sandy, UT
Angela & William Mink | Napa, CA
Laurie Mitchel | College Place, WA
John Moeller | Duluth, MN
Gina Nania | Rapid City, SD
Jimmie Newton | Apache creek, NM
Geoff O’Gara | Lander, WY
Lee Overton | Paonia, CO
Jerry Packard | Seattle, WA
David C. Parkes | Denver, CO
Sumner Parkington | Seattle, WA
Dwain & Pam Partee | Grand Junction, CO
Sonia L. Perillo | Scottsdale, AZ
G. Ray Phillips | Nederland, CO
Rodger Pollesch | Hartland, MI
Susan Porter
Michael Powers | Berkeley, CA
Dale Quakenbush | Longmont, CO
Erich Rebenstorf | Sherwood, OR
Lee Robinson | Bainbridge Island, WA
Rhonda Robles | Jackson, WY
Don Rogers | Ridgway, CO
Lin Rowland | Flagstaff, AZ
Phil Samuel | Louisville, KY
Bryan Scholz | Terrebonne, OR
Gerald Sehlke | Idaho Falls, ID
Alan & Mary Shank | Snohomish, WA
Patricia Sharpe | Santa Fe, NM
Rich & Gretchen Sigafoos | Windsor, CO
Daniel Silver | Los Angeles, CA
Scott Smidt | Laramie, WY
Gail Smith | Fairplay, CO
Robert Snow | Tucson, AZ
John A. Sproul | El Paso, TX
William Stansbery | Ellensburg, WA
Tyrone Steen | Colorado Springs, CO
Craig Steinmetz & Lisa McVicker | Denver, CO
Mark Sterkel | Kanab, UT
Peter Sullins | Fallbrook, CA
Barbara A. Svik | Broomfield, CO
Toby Thaler & Beckey Sukovaty | Seattle, WA
Thomas R. Thompson | Santa Fe, NM
Lori Thwaite | Bowie, AZ
Candace Tomlinson | Wheat Ridge, CO
Warren Truitt | Fair Oaks, CA
Virgil Tucker | Boulder, CO
Carol Ufford | Deming, NM
Nick Ulmer | Georgetown, CO
Jill W. Upwall | St. George, UT
Linelle Wagner | Hot Springs, MT
Jerome Walker & Marcia Williams | Missoula, MT
Raphael Watts | Ignacio, CO
Bob Watts | Pocatello, ID
JoAnn Weaver | Portland, OR
Janet Wesse & Steve Eibner | Minden, NV
Nancy White | Spokane Valley, WA
Gayl Wiegand | Inkom, ID
Chuck & Janet Williams | Durango, CO
Janet Winniford | Ogden, UT
Victoria Winteringham | Vermillion, SD
Lynn Zonge | Carson City, NV

WELCOME TO THE SUSTAINERS’ CLUB!
Anonymous (2)
Joseph Arabasz | Denver, CO
Heather Breidenbach | Seattle, WA
William Garrouette | Hollywood, CA
Mary Kelly | Vashon, WA
Mark Kennedy | Portland, OR
David Koenig | Sandy, UT
Julie Lechtanski | Fort Collins, CO
John & Diane Reich | Sedona, AZ
Owen Zaret | Easthampton, MA

HCN COMMUNITY

A red pen and rosy lenses

Ed and Betsy Marston featured in a 1990 issue of *Rolling Stone*. **Jeffrey Aaronson / Rolling Stone**

We can’t talk about *HCN* during the 1990s without talking about the Marstons and their extraordinary legacy. Ed and Betsy, New York transplants, ran the paper from 1983 to 2002, a time when *HCN* moved beyond its early years of straightforward environmental advocacy and earned its reputation for fair-minded journalism by covering a much wider range of topics.

Ed, a former physics professor, was publisher. His vision of the West was rooted in the region’s rural communities, yet he also seemed to see the world from 30,000 feet up. He had a knack for capturing the truth of the moment in a simple phrase, as in an interview with the local radio station, KVNF, shortly before his death in 2018, when he quipped that, with forests logged-out and susceptible to climate change, “The Forest Service ... is just a fire department.”

Betsy, who was the half of the duo with a journalism background, became editor. She pored over every sentence that went into the paper, fine-tuning every phrase. Betsy became a legend among the generations of interns who participated in what they proudly described as *HCN*’s “journalism bootcamp,” with many going on to successful literary, media and other careers around the region. Betsy still writes our “Heard Around the West” column. She and her son, David, send out columns to dozens of Western news outlets via the Writers on the Range syndicate, which started as a project of *HCN* and is now its own nonprofit.

The Marstons created a tent that was big enough to welcome environmentalists and ranchers and anyone with an abiding love for Western U.S. They set a standard for tough-mindedness and clear thinking that still shapes the work of *High Country News* today.



“Coming to work for Ed and Betsy was challenging and sometimes scary — the standards, my God! But you NEVER felt like no one was in charge. Those two were firmly in charge. And they really taught me how to tell a story. Not such an easy process, but I’ll always treasure the fact that they were in my life.”

—Lisa Jones, HCN special projects editor ’94-’96, author, writing coach

“After laboring for days over my first 200-word article during an internship in the early ’90s, I handed it in to Betsy. It was back on my desk in less than five minutes, shredded by red ink, with only a few of my original words intact. It was Betsy Marston’s brutal red pen that taught me to write a solid piece without fluff or hyperbole. Ed was no partisan enviro, but he saw the West through a more colorful romantic lens than the rest of us. He simply loved the big, messy grandeur of history and culture and the grand experiment of public lands that defines the modern West. That’s an attitude that we need more than ever in our hyper-partisan times.”

—Ernie Atencio, HCN intern 1993, Southwest Regional Director, National Parks Conservation Association





Archaeology Southwest

with support from

The
SMITH
Living Trust

presents:



From Our House to Yours

The 14th season of Archaeology Café celebrates and shares Archaeology Southwest's current Preservation Archaeology projects with you. Our staff members will bring you in on what we're doing right now to learn more about the past and help protect special places.

Join us on the first Tuesday of the month from now through May at **6:00 p.m.** MST via Zoom. Load up a plate, grab a drink, and tune in!

UPCOMING PRESENTATIONS *in 2021:*

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 1 / 5 / 2021 | Protected Places: Archaeology Southwest's Conservation Properties and Their Emerging Roles in Preservation Archaeology
JOHN R. WELCH |
| 2 / 2 / 2021 | Preservation Archaeology's Role in Responding to Archaeological Resource Crimes
STACY RYAN AND D.J. "DUSTY" WHITING |
| 3 / 2 / 2021 | Should We Stay or Should We Go? Farming and Climate Change, 1000–1450 CE
KAREN SCHOLLMAYER AND SCOTT INGRAM |
| 4 / 6 / 2021 | Just What Is cyberSW? The Potential of Massive Databases for Future Preservation Archaeology Research
JOSHUA WATTS |
| 5 / 4 / 2021 | Was Sells Red Pottery a Marker of Tohono O'odham Identity in Late Precontact Times? Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives
BILL DOELLE AND SAMUEL FAYUANT |

To participate, register for free at: www.archaeologysouthwest.org/cafe



WESTERN
LANDOWNERS
ALLIANCE

Join us.

westernlandowners.org/hcn

ON LAND

THE VOICE OF STEWARDSHIP
IN THE AMERICAN WEST

On Land, the magazine of the Western Landowners Alliance, is the only publication dedicated to the connections between agriculture, conservation, and rural communities in the West.

Subscribe now to be sure you
receive all 2021 issues.

“Wilderness Where You Are” Connecting the rural and urban Northwest

Eastern Oregon University Low Residency MFA
now offers a specialization in Environmental Writing

Wilderness, Ecology, and Community

~ CORE FACULTY ~

Nick Neely

David Axelrod
(Director)

Aliette Frank

Come join us in the Wallowas!

Program in partnership with

Fishtrap	Oregon East
Lost Horse Press	Lynx House Press

basalt
dark-colored, fine-grained



EASTERN OREGON
UNIVERSITY

Visit our website:
eou.edu/mfa

(continued from pg. 9) ... of public health at the University of Washington. “This data provides the novel opportunity to really see, as we change policy, what happens in the short term.”

Peltier has retraced the same path through Seattle roughly every three weeks. The route was carefully mapped out using neighborhood census data to examine how socioeconomic status influences business recovery and neighborhood activity. “We really want to understand what role this pandemic is going to play in either bringing us closer together economically, or pushing us further apart,” said Wartman.

Each drive generates tens of thousands of images, and it will take the researchers years to pore over the details. In addition to clues about economic recovery, they’re hoping to analyze people’s behavior in response to public health measures, everything from compliance with mask mandates to average group sizes in city parks. Peltier has already noticed trends in the various phases.

In May, near the pandemic’s start, Seattle was a ghost town. “I had free rein of the streets,” she said. The researchers looked to landmarks like Seattle’s Harborview Medical Center to observe changes, said Errett. Initially, the area outside the hospital was empty, save a row of triage tents set up to accommodate the potential surge of COVID-19 patients. At the time, local businesses were closed, elective surgeries were cancelled, and people generally avoided hospitals unless they had COVID-19 or an acute emergency, so it’s no surprise that car and pedestrian traffic around the hospital was practically nonexistent. People were clearly abiding by the city’s stay-at-home order.

Over the summer, as restrictions loosened and weather improved, triage tents were taken down and signs of life emerged. In June, pedestrian and car traffic reappeared, and by July, nurses and doctors took breaks outside the hospital, standing alongside people at a nearby bus stop. “You’re seeing people return to spaces around health-care facilities, so one hypothesis is

that they’re more comfortable, or less scared, than they were at the beginning of the pandemic,” said Errett. Peltier noticed that local businesses were reopening and often leaving their doors open — either as an invitation to customers or a means to improve ventilation, or perhaps both.

But over the fall, Peltier noted a new phase of the pandemic: the failure of small businesses. While Seattle retail behemoth Amazon and food delivery apps like DoorDash have seen profits soar during the pandemic, local stores and restaurants don’t appear to be doing as well. Signs reminding customers to mask up or stay distanced have been replaced by closing notices or letters of thanks to loyal customers. In some cases, storefronts are empty and dark. “Maybe they’ve just put things in storage,” Peltier said hopefully. “But maybe they’re not going to open again.”

In mid-November, amid a nationwide surge in COVID-19 cases, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee announced a new set of restrictions similar to the stay-at-home order at the beginning of the pandemic. The economic and social impacts remain to be seen, but the data Peltier is capturing will likely tell us more — and may even help in future disaster preparation. “I would be surprised if this is the last pandemic I see in our lifetime,” said Errett. “I want my community to know more, so that next time we’re advancing our response, it’s based on what we learned in this pandemic.” ☀

“Maybe they’ve just put things in storage. But maybe they’re not going to open again.”

Spread the News, Take Us Higher

Launch *HCN* into the next
50 years of independent
journalism for the West
hcn.org/50-years

High
Country
News





Residences outside of Crested Butte, Colorado.
A 2014 economic report found that 52 percent of all residential units in Gunnison County had non-resident property owners.

SECOND CITIZENS

When the pandemic hit, a rural Colorado county kicked out nonresident home owners. They hit back.

By Nick Bowlin | Photos by Luna Anna Archey





Jim Moran's second home in Crested Butte, Colorado, is a 7,000-plus-square-foot mansion.

A

APRIL 2020, AND THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS was spreading through the United States. As businesses closed and hospitals filled, Jim Moran found himself sheltering in place in Colorado, at his second home. His mansion has dark wood siding and a jutting patio, and it perches on a bluff above Crested Butte, a small snow globe of a town whose brightly painted cottages huddle at the base of mountains at the north end of the Gunnison Valley, a long thin basin high in the Rockies. Moran is from Dallas, Texas, where he managed private equity firms. From his back door, he can ski directly onto Mount Crested Butte, one of Colorado's iconic ski resorts. Moran speaks quickly and passionately and has swept-back silver hair. Housing prices in rural towns have

surged since the pandemic as well-to-do people flee cities. Moran's property, which he bought in 2013, has appreciated: Were he to list his house today, Zillow estimates the value at \$4.3 million.

When COVID-19 came to the valley, the outbreak was so severe that the 17,400 residents of Gunnison County — which includes Crested Butte, the valley and a few outlying towns — faced one of the highest rates of cases per capita in the entire country. The county's response was drastic: On April 3, it directed all visitors, tourists and part-time residents to leave, explicitly banning non-resident property owners, of which there are more than 4,000. The order, signed by the county's public health director, cited the strain on local services: "Non-residents, regardless of whether they own a residence in Gunnison County, are imposing unnecessary burdens on health care, public services, first responders, food supplies and other essential services." Violators could be fined up to \$5,000 or jailed for up to 18 months.

Moran decided to stay put. He was upset, and he was far from alone. The next day, another Dallas resident with a home in the valley created a private Facebook group, eventually called GV2H & Friends Forum, for Gunnison Valley second-home owners in the area to gather and commiserate. The group swelled quickly to several hundred members. The order was divisive, one person wrote in a comment; it made non-residents feel like "outcasts," wrote another. Many questioned the county's wisdom in forcing them to travel during the pandemic. Then there were the legal issues. Moran told me that a key question was: "Can they just tell me I can't use my property?"

Some Texans in the group — and there are many; the Gunnison Valley has been a popular vacation spot for oil-rich Texans since the early 1900s — turned to the office of Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton for help. On April 9, Paxton asked Gunnison County to reconsider,

arguing that the Texans' property rights were being violated. (Soon after, the Associated Press revealed that several of Paxton's associates, including a college friend and high-dollar campaign donors, own houses in Crested Butte. This fall, seven of his senior staff accused him of taking bribes and using his office to favor political donors; the FBI is now investigating.)

About a week after the order, nonresident homeowners received cards in the mail from the county. "While full-time residents of Gunnison County work to weather the coronavirus health crisis, non-resident homeowners are ordered to leave Gunnison County and not return until further notice," the card said. Days later, the county backtracked a bit, saying that nonresident homeowners who had already quarantined in Gunnison could remain. Even so, many felt the county had gone too far. Something needed to be done.

Jim Moran had an idea. Two of the three seats on the board of county commissioners, the most powerful local governmental body, were up for re-election in November. That included Commissioner Jonathan Houck, who had endorsed the ban. Moran polled the GV2H & Friends Forum about creating a super PAC — an independent political spending organization that can receive unlimited donations but cannot donate directly to campaigns — to influence the county races. The response was enthusiastic. Moran and other second-home owners set out to find and support candidates more aligned with their interests, people who, if elected, would not ban them from their property. They thought they might win a majority on the commission. "There has never been a better opportunity for change," Moran wrote on April 29, "and we intend to exploit that to the fullest extent possible."

THE HILLS ABOVE CRESTED BUTTE, which are layered with gold, silver and other minerals, attracted prospectors in waves in



Jim Moran, photographed last summer behind his house in Crested Butte overlooking the Crested Butte ski area.
William Woody

the 1870s. Ranchers and homesteaders followed, motivating the forced removal of Ute tribal bands from land that they had called home for centuries. A coal mine opened in 1894 and sustained many livelihoods for the first half of the 20th century.

In the valley below, and south toward the town of Gunnison, most of the land was devoted to ranching. In the bottomlands near the Gunnison River, ranchers dug ditches and diverted water, irrigating meadows for cattle to graze. In 1901, they held the first annual Cattlemen's Days Rodeo, which has taken place every year since, even during the pandemic. Agriculture endured as an economic force. The coal mine closed in the 1950s, a victim of shifting markets. People found new jobs with the Keystone lead-zinc mine on Mount Emmons, the "Red Lady," a peak that looms above Crested Butte.

In the 1970s, Townes Van Zandt, the brilliant, troubled songwriter, would ride a horse named Amigo across the mountains from Aspen to Crested Butte, over Maroon Bells Pass. The town still had a dirt Main Street and several saloons where the musician played and drank and brawled late into the night. In the end, he was informally banned from town. It was hard to get kicked out of Crested Butte back then, "but Townes did," as Steve Earle, Van Zandt's friend and playing partner, recalled in an interview

"Non-residents, regardless of whether they own a residence in Gunnison County, are imposing unnecessary burdens on health care, public services, first responders, food supplies and other essential services."

with *Boulder Weekly*.

The town that kicked out Van Zandt was changing. The first ski resorts opened in the 1960s, the Keystone Mine closed in 1972, and the town took on a counterculture vibe. In the 1980s, the county airport began receiving direct flights from cities like Houston, Dallas and Atlanta. The area now draws some of the country's richest people, including petrochemical billionaire Bill Koch — brother of industrial tycoons Charles and David Koch, the well-known funders of right-wing political causes — who owns a large ranch in the county, where he's built a full-scale reproduction of an imaginary Old West pioneer town. Today, Crested Butte is clean, bright and shaped by tourism, with colorful shops and posh restaurants, such as Elk Ave. Prime, which serves \$65 Wagyu steaks.

Gunnison County encompasses the Gunnison Valley and vast stretches of land to the West, where the Rocky Mountains tumble into foothills. It is almost 82% federal public land. Most of the private land hugs the Gunnison River and its tributaries, which meet the Colorado River, many miles west and over 3,000 feet of elevation down. The area has some of Colorado's best fly-fishing, mountain biking and big game hunting. For decades now, the county and its businesses have promoted this natural beauty and catered to outside interest in it. But, in 2001, the county instituted a land-use resolution designed to restrain development by giving the county land board oversight of new projects. The goal was to protect resources — especially agricultural land and water — and prevent unchecked change. And still, people and money poured in. Service industries, such as outdoor recreation, retail, lodging and restaurants, became the largest employers. Today, nearly 60% of the county's property tax revenue comes from property owners whose primary residences are elsewhere.

Extremes of wealth and poverty, comfort and labor, characterize the 30 miles between Crested Butte and the town of Gunnison, at the southern end of the valley. For Crested Butte property owners and the hundreds of thousands of annual tourists, Gunnison is often just a stop to buy gas and groceries. But it's also home to most of the valley's low-paid seasonal and service workers, the people who serve the food, groom the trails, run the lifts, and clean the hotels and lodges.

Service jobs often pay poorly, less than the lost mining jobs. Combined with the decades-long influx of outside wealth and investment, this has spawned housing shortages, income inequality and an expensive rental market. According to Headwaters Economics, a nonprofit research firm, Gunnison County's workers devote 32% of their income on average to rent, compared to 19% in non-tourism-based economies. A 2016 county report noted a severe housing shortage and employment imbalance. Jobs are concentrated in Crested Butte, where affordable housing is scarce. Many workers are forced to seek housing in Gunnison, sending rents skyward. An image of this economy is on display early each weekday morning at the Gunnison bus stop, where a free shuttle fills with people employed in the town's swankier neighbor to the north. Many of the valley's Latino residents work these service industry jobs; Gunnison's population is about 10% Latino, including immigrants from Mexico and Guatemala and several hundred Cora, an Indigenous people from northwestern Mexico.

"Members of our immigrant community clean houses, clean rooms at the local hotels, work in the restaurants, also do construction jobs, also work at ranches in the area," said Marketa Zubkova, a legal representative with the Hispanic Affairs Project, a western Colorado immigrant advocacy group that, among other projects, provides legal counsel and hous-



Country Meadows Mobile Home Park in Gunnison, Colorado. During the pandemic, rent on lots has been raised from \$350 to \$425.

ing aid. Gunnison has several sizable mobile home parks on the outskirts of town, where much of the community's Spanish-speaking population lives, according to Zubkova and other housing advocates.

Inadequate housing impacts older folks on fixed incomes, as well as young people in the service industry and families packed into overcrowded quarters, according to Loren Ahonen, recently of the regional housing authority. And Gunnison's cold winters multiply the burden on low-income families. Nighttime temperatures can drop below zero for weeks at a time, causing exorbitant heating bills for people living in trailers with insufficient insulation or broken windows. This creates what Ahonen describes as an "energy justice" issue: According to Department of Energy data, the lowest-income residents spend the most, relative to their income, on utility and heating bills. Gunnison County also has some of Colo-

rado's highest rates of inadequate plumbing, according to *Kaiser Health News*. Ahonen worked with a woman who had no running water in her trailer. She melted snow in a frying pan during the winter and gravity-flushed her toilet by pouring in water by hand.

TOURISM BROUGHT the coronavirus to Gunnison County early. The first official case was recorded on March 10, but many locals think the virus was present several weeks before. "It was the talk of the town," Arvin Ramgoolam, a co-owner of Rumors Coffee House and Townie Books on Crested Butte's main street, said. "But no one was willing to admit they were sick."

Gunnison Valley Health is the only hospital in the county. In March, it had 24 hospital beds, few ventilators and no intensive care unit. An emergency room doctor I spoke to at the time described multi-day 16-hour shifts as the staff struggled to keep control

of the situation. Lack of an ICU meant the sickest patients had to be sent 120 miles over the mountains to a bigger hospital in the city of Grand Junction. Tests were available only to those with obvious symptoms and risk factors. On March 28, Gunnison County had the sixth-highest concentration of cases per capita in the entire country, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Gov. Jared Polis shut down Colorado's downhill ski resorts on March 14, right before spring break, when mountain towns count on earning enough to get through the slow seasons. The closure hurt. The local food bank saw an enormous increase in demand, especially from older people and laid-off service workers. For Ramgoolam, there were more bills to pay than money in the bank. His book distributor required payment for a large order made in anticipation of spring break. Rent was due on the store, which he runs with his wife, Danica, and so was his home mortgage. Ramgoolam feels fortunate that he makes a living talking to people about books every day. But when he closed in March, he wondered if he would ever reopen.

The lowest point for Ramgoolam came in late March, when his friend, Mikey Larson, died — Gunnison County's first coronavirus fatality. A beloved member of the community since the 1980s, Larson owned an eponymous pizza shop in Crested Butte. As news of his death spread, mourners covered the shop's door with memorials and hand-written notes. A former employee remembered Larson as "an easy-going stoner" who treated his workers well. Ramgoolam told me that when he and Danica first opened their shop, Larson let them use his kitchen for prep. Ramgoolam can still picture him in the back, cooking burritos.

"That's how small this town is," Ramgoolam said. "Someone dies, that's not a stranger, that's someone you know."

Jonathan Houck, the county commissioner who backed the

nonresident ban, was also struggling. He was working long days, coordinating the public health response and dealing with business closures, all the while living out of a small camping trailer in his backyard to quarantine from his wife, Roanne, and two kids, who were all showing clear symptoms.

Houck has a salt-and-pepper beard and a crooked smile. He came from Maryland to Colorado in 1990 to rock climb. Eventually, he got into Western Colorado University, in Gunnison, and met Roanne, who was born and raised in Crested Butte. He worked at a coffee shop, fixed bikes at a gear store and did some ranch work. For 12 years, he taught social studies at an alternative high school before he ventured into politics, eventually serving as mayor of Gunnison. His backyard, where he quarantined in March, is an unmistakable homage to Gunnison County: His fire pit is a mine boiler, sliced in half, and his fence is old barn wood. An old sign for Gunnison National Forest hangs nearby.

As commissioner, Houck, a Democrat, became the go-to public official for land-use issues, an important role in a county where recreation, ranching and conservation often collide. The local ranching community appreciates him. He works hard for them, advocates for them. He believes ranching's continued existence is important to Gunnison County. This can make him unpopular with conservation advocates, but, as he told me, his "absolute obligations" are to the citizens of Gunnison.

In late April, Jim Moran and Houck had a tense phone call about the second-home owner ban. According to Moran, Houck said that his hands were tied and asked, "What do you want me to do about it?" Moran accused Houck and the other commissioners of hiding behind the county public health director who wrote the order. Moran says the call motivated him. "Jonathan Houck is the reason that the PAC got started," Moran told me.

Houck remembers their

*One woman
who had
no running
water in
her trailer
melted snow
in a frying
pan and
gravity-
flushed her
toilet by
pouring in
water by
hand.*

conversation differently. He says that he heard Moran out and acknowledged his frustration but stood by the recommendations of public health officials. Houck admits that the tone of the card sent to second-home owners was too abrupt. He values the second-home owners, he said, and sees them as community members, just like the seasonal residents and tourists who visit to hunt, fish or hike, and the college students, who often vote elsewhere. He tries, he told me, to represent that full spectrum, but tough decisions needed to be made. "I stand by those decisions," Houck said.

AT FIRST, COUNTY OFFICIALS received the brunt of the second-home owners' ire, but within weeks of the ban, the Facebook group's sense of grievance expanded to include locals they felt didn't appreciate their presence during the pandemic. Several members reported angry stares in grocery store parking lots, and a few cars

with Texas plates belonging to second-home owners were keyed. Resentment simmered. On April 20, it boiled over after Crested Butte's annual "Townie Takeover," when locals bike around town and smoke weed to honor 4/20, the traditional holiday of stoners everywhere. "Those are the people that don't want the 2nd homeowners in town," wrote one person on Facebook. "It's all fun and games until the Kung Flu rates start to spike again and then nobody will have anybody to blame but themselves for this," responded another.

Not everyone shared this view. Peter Esposito, a resident and property owner in Crested Butte and an energy industry regulatory lawyer, posted a letter in the Facebook group that gently criticized the backlash against the bike ride. A certain funkiness, he argued, separates Crested Butte from more buttoned-up Colorado ski towns. He saw the Townie Takeover and a multi-day pagan bacchanal in autumn called Vinotok as things



A free bus carries workers from Gunnison to their jobs upvalley in Crested Butte. About the only affordable housing in the area can be found at places like the Sherpa Motel, shown here, which offers long-term stays, and the local mobile home parks.

to embrace. Esposito agreed that the county's non-resident ban was more aggressive than it needed to be, and he pitched a collaborative approach to bring part- and full-time residents together. His advice initially got a warm reception, he told me. But then it vanished; Esposito said Moran had deleted it. Esposito concluded that Moran and a few others had already decided on a strategy: "to have a fight," he told me. Esposito was later booted from the Facebook group, along with several other dissenters.

The second-home owners found allies in a group of disgruntled local business owners. Some were angry at the COVID-19 orders, which they saw as heavy-handed, and they feared that restrictions would last into the summer tourist season. In late April, a group called Save Gunnison's Summer and Businesses took out a full-page ad in a local paper demanding a faster and more concrete reopening plan. It included a petition with around 200 signatures from local residents and businesses, including some members of the Facebook group, who were worried their businesses would not survive the shutdown.

Some did not. Gunnison County lost the Majestic, the only movie theater in a two-hour radius. A venerable and much-loved independent cinema, the Majestic had three screens and draft beer. The theater's landlord had raised the rent by 30% the year before, and the shutdown pushed it over the edge. A guitar shop on Gunnison's Main Street closed in June. Ramgoolam's bookstore in Crested Butte teetered on the brink, but pulled back after online ordering kicked in, as locals

made a point to send business his way. Ramgoolam believes that the county made the right decision, but other business owners disagree.

"Our rights to earn a living, travel freely, come to our homes and to make the best decisions about the health, safety and risk to our family is ours," the petition read, "and not your spigot to turn on and off."

SO, WHAT DO WE KNOW about them, these vocal second-home owners? They worked hard for everything they own. They are clear on this. Their critics, they believe, are often motivated by jealousy. "I'm certainly not 'rich.' I've worked for my entire life to have the properties I own," wrote one group member. Like many mountain communities, the Gunnison Valley attracts a motley mix of younger residents — seasonal public-land employees, ski bums who work the lifts, river guides, college graduates who stick around. "Irresponsible, non-tax-paying, bored children who will never plant roots here successfully," one Facebook comment called them. In early April, a second-home owner from Oklahoma City, described "local adult skateboarders and bikers" picking up donated food at a food pantry in Crested Butte. "These takers need to pony up or get out," she wrote. "Sadly," another replied, "there are many entitled 'takers' here."

In a phone interview, Moran dissected the implications of the word "rich." Describing the second-home owners as such was a tactic employed by the media to "divide people by social strata," he told me.

I pointed out Gunnison County's housing shortage to Moran, who, from 2008-2011, was an advisor of the private equity firm Lone Star Funds — the biggest buyer of distressed mortgage securities in the world after the 2008 financial crisis. After the crash, the firm acquired billions in bad mortgages and aggressively foreclosed on thousands of homes, according to *The New York Times*. I asked Moran if, compared to locals who struggle to pay rent, people who own two or more properties should be considered wealthy. "I think that's wrong," he replied.

Over the summer, I obtained access to the Facebook group. Beneath the anger at the County Commission and the exasperation with the local newspapers and adult skateboarders, a deeper grievance burned, one that was expressed consistently in the group. "Our money supports all of the people in the valley," wrote one man. "Where is the appreciation and gratitude for the decades of generosity?" wrote another. According to the second-home owners, Gunnison County's economic survival and most of its residents' livelihoods depend on their economic contributions and continued goodwill. Their donations prop up the local nonprofits. Their broken derailleur keeps the bike shops open. In late April, Moran sent an angry message to a local server who had criticized the second-home owners, posting his note to the GV2H Facebook group as well. Moran, who had apparently left the server a large tip, called her comments "a betrayal of the good people who have been gracious to you." Around that time, there was talk on the Facebook group of compiling a list of locals they considered ungrateful. "People who rely on others for their livelihoods should not bite the hand that feeds them," wrote one second-home owner.

The list, which was posted on Facebook, became known as the Rogues Gallery. It named 14 people described as "folks who oppose GV2H." The list, which was later deleted, included a local pastor and

an artist. Sometimes it noted where someone worked and what they did. Repercussions were hinted at. "One of those big mouths is sling-ing drinks for tips — I'll be sure to leave her a little tip — 'Maybe don't run your mouth so much on social media when you depend on those people to help pay your bills,'" one Facebook commenter wrote.

Amber Thompson, a longtime server at Crested Butte restaurants, was not in the Rogues Gallery, but was mentioned later as a possible addition after several online arguments with Moran and others from the GV2H Facebook group. She gets especially mad, she told me, when a second-home owner cites a big tip as evidence of their authority and value. As a server, she said, her job is simply to deliver food. The demand for gratitude, the resentment when they don't receive it: "It's a way to intimidate people, to make them bow down, and I just won't do it."

The first name on the Rogues Gallery was Ramgoolam, and he, too, declined to back down. His offence was a Facebook post in which he asked why Gunnison County residents were incapable of making their own political decisions — a thinly veiled critique of the super PAC, which Moran had registered in May. Shortly after learning about the Rogues Gallery, Ramgoolam wrote another Facebook post, thanking the community for its support during the pandemic. It included a picture of him in a red bandanna, carrying a Captain America shield. He intended it as defiance.

"I think (the super PAC) spits in the face of the relationship we have with our neighbors in this valley," Ramgoolam said. "Whether you are a primary homeowner or a second-home owner, you respect people's opinions and everyone is welcome to the table, but to overpower everyone at the table and try to take all the chairs for yourself is just wrong."

For many in the Facebook group, opinionated locals interfered with their ability to relax and enjoy the Gunnison Valley. Fun, after all, is what brings them to

"Where is the appreciation and gratitude for the decades of generosity?"

A car with Texas license plates parked outside a luxury real estate office in Crested Butte (facing).

Crested Butte. But fun was hard to come by in 2020. People were irate when the county declared a mask mandate on June 8. “We come to decompress, to relax, to regenerate!” one person wrote. “That’s a pressure we don’t need! Or don’t WANT, which isn’t a crime either!”

This came to a head when local demonstrations were held, prompted by George Floyd’s killing by Minneapolis police. One of them took place on June 27, in Crested Butte. After a short rally, a crowd proceeded up main street, led by the Brothers of Brass, a funk band from Denver. Demonstrators then lay on the blacktop for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, the time that Officer Derek Chauvin knelt on Floyd’s neck. Many diners, who were sitting at outdoor patios on either side of the march, paused their meals for the duration. But on the Facebook group, indignation bubbled up. “People come to the Valley to relax and enjoy nature,” wrote one commenter. “This is made impossible when ‘protesters’ are bused in for a photo-op (not to mention pollution, noise, aggravation, and trash).” Several other commenters also insinuated outside influence. (Other than the band, there is no evidence that the protesters were not primarily local.) The Crested Butte Town Council’s subsequent decision to paint “Black Lives Matter” on the main street prompted another wave of irritation. “Crested Butte has clearly forgotten why people (tourists or second homers) like going to the mountains. It’s about escaping the craziness and the BS of the cities,” one of the second-home owners wrote. A few others announced that they would no longer go downtown.

This hostility came as no surprise to Elizabeth Cobbins, the lead organizer of the Gunnison Black Lives Matter demonstration. The second-home owners come to their vacation properties to “escape the real world,” she said. They forget, she told me, that the valley is more than a ski destination. It includes a college that is home to many students of color, and a



sizable Hispanic community. The second-home owners feel their opinions matter because of their economic contributions, which, Cobbins said, are important, but, “the people who serve them live here, too, and they live here for the whole year.”

At the time, Cobbins was the program coordinator at the multicultural affairs program at Western Colorado University in Gunnison. Over the phone, I read her some of the internal GV2H comments about the demonstrations. “It’s funny and ironic that these people say they feel uncomfortable,” she said, given her own experience as a Black woman in Gunnison. She was often the sole person of color in social spaces.

“People get defensive when they hear ‘privilege’ and ‘white privilege,’ but that’s how privilege works,” she said. “That they feel threatened by these protests, even though they were nonviolent. ... to say ‘I feel threatened’ shows privilege.”

Cobbins grew up and went to school in Mississippi. She told me that she was “not an outdoorsy person” and had never heard of Gunnison when she applied for the campus job. Friendships came slowly, though, in the end, she found “a second family” — others like her who did not quite mesh with the mountain town cultural sensibility. “Not everyone in Gunni-

son likes bluegrass and mountain biking,” she said with a chuckle.

After the June demonstrations, though, Cobbins felt drained. After a few years in Gunnison, it seemed like the end of something. Her lease was up at the end of July, and she decided to move back to Mississippi. “My journey in Gunnison was done,” she said. “It was such a satisfying, bittersweet moment.”

AS THE SNOW MELTED and wildflowers bloomed in alpine meadows, two candidates emerged, intent on shaking up the Gunnison County Commission. Both felt the county treated second-home owners badly when the pandemic started and that the local health order went too far. This prompted cheers in the Facebook group. The first to enter the race was “KOA Dave” Taylor, a garrulous fixture of the Gunnison community. Taylor, who owns the local KOA campground, is known locally as a generous presence. He volunteers at the food bank and drives a public-school bus. He sometimes puts up people at the KOA when they can’t find housing. The campground is full of animals: four donkeys that live in a pen, several free-roaming goats and a few pigs, acquired from 4-H kids he met on the bus. His steer, Norman, is 6 feet, 2¾ inches tall. Without a tape measure, I was unable to verify Taylor’s claim, but Norman is a very tall steer indeed.

Taylor’s political pitch centered on his accounting background and business acumen, something he felt the commission lacked. Many agreed with him: Taylor received more than six times the number of write-in votes needed to make the ballot as a Republican. He was hoping to take the seat held by Liz Smith, an English lecturer at Western Colorado University and, at the time, the chair of the local Democratic Party. A serious college runner, Smith first came to Gunnison for the trails. She’s the sort of person who finishes third in the Grand Traverse — a 40-mile race through the mountains from Crested Butte

to Aspen, with 6,000 feet of elevation gain.

Despite her love of the trails, Smith was often critical of the commission’s handling of tourism, more so than Houck, her fellow Democrat. The summer saw a massive wave of in-state visitors from metro Denver. The money saved many local businesses, but the impacts were extreme. Smith said she got an earful from locals in Marble, a small community north of Crested Butte. “I got yelled at,” she said. She heard about overrun trails, defecation and trash at campsites, RVs lining Forest Service roads for miles, and damage by off-road vehicles. If you market the county as a recreation paradise, that’s what it will become, Smith told me. The tourism economy needs to endure, but the county has to mitigate its effects. “I love trails as much as anyone out here,” she said, “but it’s not about me, it’s about what our community as a whole needs.”

Houck, the incumbent Democrat, was challenged by Trudy Vader, an unaffiliated candidate. Vader, a former public-school administrator, is a fourth-generation Gunnison Valley resident. She grew up working on her family’s ranch, which was largely lost during the 1980s farm foreclosure crisis. That material loss reflects a larger cultural one. She believes the Gunnison community is facing the erosion of its ranching heritage.

Vader is measured and serious in conversation. During the campaign, she nearly always wore a wide-brimmed felt hat. The County Commission’s behavior nudged her into the race, she told me, but that’s only the surface. More than any other candidate, Vader consistently brought up the service-worker underclass, the emphasis on recreation and tourism as opposed to small industry and business with their better-paying jobs. More than 44% of Gunnison County voters, the largest proportion, are unaffiliated, and Vader set her sights on attracting support from those left behind, the “downvalley” residents obscured by Crested Butte’s

economic power. One of the first things Vader did, upon entering the race, was to post a long note on Facebook about a 2015 DUI that caused her to lose her job as a school superintendent. Vader struggled with addiction for many years but is sober now. If nothing else, she told me, she hoped that her campaign would encourage others to seek help and not fight addiction on their own.

Both Vader and Taylor's campaigns received praise and support from the GV2H super PAC. From the beginning, Taylor was more willing to accept this association with the second-home owners. Vader was more circumspect. She told the second-home owners that she governs for the good of the county and would, if elected, make decisions that would upset them. Even so, Vader often spoke to members of the super PAC, meeting with Moran and others more than once and soliciting signatures for her write-in campaign on the Facebook group. Moran, Gunnison Republican Party Chair Jane Chaney and other prominent backers of the super PAC encouraged donations to her campaign.

On July 17, both Vader and Taylor attended a party at Moran's Crested Butte mansion along with Colorado Sen. Cory Gardner, at the time deep into one of the nation's most-watched Senate races. (He lost.) That evening, Moran's street and adjacent roads were filled with Teslas, Porsches and custom Jeeps with lifted suspensions. Two

young men in Trump 2020 masks and ballcaps directed traffic at the entrance to Moran's block. As night came on, music spilled out from the house. Torches lined the patio, while, down in the valley, the lights of Crested Butte winked.

Word travels fast in Gunnison County. Soon enough, Taylor and Vader were defending their relationship with the super PAC, which represents people who would not be their constituents. Both were questioned about it at debates and forums. In an August letter to the *Gunnison Country Times*, "an independent voter," who said he'd voted for both major parties in the past, called Taylor and Vader's attendance "disrespectful" and disturbing. "Who will they represent, if elected?" he asked. "I can assure you that they both have lost my vote already." In the same edition, Taylor wrote a letter stating that everything was aboveboard. "Access to my ears is free to all," he wrote.

THE GUNNISON COUNTY Commission races ramped up after Labor Day. All signs pointed to the widening of Gunnison County's economic divide, and the housing issue quickly rose to the top of both races. All four candidates — Democrats Smith and Houck, and the challengers, unaffiliated Vader and Republican Taylor — agreed that there was an affordable housing crisis. In multiple debates, Vader hit Houck, who was running for his third term, often and hard for the county's failure to meet its afford-

able housing goals. The commission failed to act with enough urgency, she said.

But it's complicated. In 2017, Houck and the rest of the County Commission pushed an enormous housing development called Brush Creek, just south of Crested Butte, which, combined with 76 new rental units in Gunnison reserved for moderate-income workers, would have nearly fulfilled the county's goals. But while the county was onboard, the city of Crested Butte balked at the number of units, in large part due to a vigorous backlash from a group of local property owners, including future members of the second-home owners Facebook group. "Classic NIMBYism," a local housing official called it. I asked Vader how she could run a campaign that emphasized housing while accepting support from people who helped squash a substantial housing project. "I can't help who supports me," she said, adding that the super PAC continued to back her after she made housing her main campaign plank.

Like many alpine areas in the West, Gunnison County — and Crested Butte in particular — has seen a surge of transplants since the pandemic. Wealthy people are abandoning more populated metro areas as remote-work becomes the norm. Jackson, Wyoming; Bozeman, Montana; and Sun Valley, Idaho, among others, have all seen housing-market booms. (See page 24 for *Fact & Figures*, *The Zoom boom*.) By most metrics, Gunnison County real estate had an unprecedented year. By mid-October, rural Crested Butte housing sales had already surpassed all of 2019, and single-family-home sales in the town were up 56%. Housing prices rose, as well: The three-month rolling average was up 19% on July 1, compared to 2019, and up 24% compared to 2018, according to county assessor data. Enrollment in Crested Butte's schools was up, and the county collected a record amount of lodging tax revenue in September, *The Crested Butte News*



reported.

Michelle Burns, a Crested Butte and Gunnison real estate agent with Berkshire Hathaway, called summer and fall 2020 the busiest season she'd ever seen. "People do want to get out of the city," she said over the phone, "whether it's away from COVID, away from proximity, especially if they can work remotely."

In the county commissioner race, the housing issue took a personal turn. Taylor owns a small apartment complex in Gunnison. From the outside, it appears run-down, with broken windows visible from the street during the summer. According to Taylor, the average apartment rent is \$487. He could nearly double that, he told me, and still have tenants. "I have rent-controlled my own property," he said. That's one view. The other is that Taylor is more lax when managing the living spaces of those who have nowhere else to go. "If you are going to make money on other people's living situations, you should be able to meet health and safety standards," said a local county housing official. At a forum hosted by *The Crested Butte News*,

By mid-October, rural Crested Butte housing sales had already surpassed all of 2019, and single-family-home sales in the town were up 56%.

On Election Day, County Commission candidates Dave Taylor and Trudy Vader, with her dog, Eli, stood outside Gunnison's one polling place (above). That night, friends gathered in Jonathan Houck's backyard to watch the results. (facing).



one audience member quoted a newspaper article from 2017, where Taylor had pledged to repair the broken windows. Taylor said he had “no excuse” for the state of the windows and promised again to repair them, this time within two weeks, which he did. He again defended how he runs the apartments. “I am guilty of not fixing those windows, and I am proud of how I have kept rents down on 13 units.”

Jennifer Kermode, director of the Gunnison County Housing Authority, said both sides have a point. Taylor does rent his units at rates not generally available in the area. Still, certain quality-of-life standards ought to be met. “Dave is not the worst” landlord in Gunnison County, she said.

In Gunnison, housing for lower-income workers and families is so scarce that several local motels have essentially transformed entirely into long-term, month-to-month rentals. This shortage can leave low-income workers at the mercy of exploitative landlords, especially if the renters’ first language is not English, or

they lack U.S. citizenship. Devan Haney, from the Gunnison County Health and Human Services Division, described the bind like this: Housing is so hard to come by — especially when you factor in the pandemic layoffs — that anyone who finds an affordable place will put up with a great deal just to stay there. Landlords know this, and this advantage can breed abuse.

Despite a statewide eviction moratorium during the pandemic, Haney received reports of landlords attempting to kick people out of their homes. Haney and several others singled out Country Meadows Mobile Home Park as one of the worst offenders. The owner of the park did not respond to requests for comment. According to multiple park residents, the owners raised the rent from \$350 to \$375 in April and then later to \$425, just as the pandemic’s economic fallout was peaking. One resident who was laid off in the spring and has since found work, spoke to me anonymously for fear of repercussions from the landlord, who has threatened another rent increase. Throughout the fall, the park remained littered with

branches and tree trunks that came down during an early September blizzard. “(The landlord) said, ‘If you have a problem you can leave,’” the resident told me, fully aware that the tenants had few options. Most of the residents own their own trailers, but the trailers are old, falling apart, and would not survive transport. And there are virtually no other places in Gunnison with comparable rent, Haney told me. When we spoke in November, she was still working with several families with no lodging and winter coming on.

IN MID-SEPTEMBER, all four candidates spoke at a small voter forum on a ranch in Powderhorn, a town of 148 people, on the county’s southern edge. A harsh sun beat down from a cloudless sky, and the yellow aspens blazed on the mountain, making the surrounding fir and pine look painted black. Eight voters and four dogs attended the event. A yellow Lab kept nudging my hand as I took notes.

Vader, who spoke first, criticized Houck for favoring recreation and tourism at the expense of other

small businesses. She singled out his 2017 vote, which helped kill a business expansion by a trash and recycling company started by a local couple. “If you look at how this county has handled small businesses if they are not tourism or recreation, they’re not handled well,” she said.

Houck pushed back. He ticked off the sectors that make up the county economy: agriculture, the ski area, tourism, the university and hospital, oil and gas. “It’s a five-legged stool,” he said. “We can’t do without any of it, and we need all of it.” Houck sees his role as someone who can bring together disparate factions and reconcile competing interests. He cited a proposed network of new trails on public land behind the university campus in Gunnison. Houck brought trail advocates, the school, ranchers and wildlife officials to the table, and everyone left with something. The mountain bikers had to pay for rollovers — metal ramps for mountain bikes — and spring-loaded gates to keep the cattle behind the fence line. Wildlife officials approved the trails in return for longer-than-required closures for sage grouse mating season and mule deer migration. The ranchers have to put up with bikers zooming through the rangeland, but their cattle can graze the area when the herds move to summer pastures high in the national forest.

In the other race, Taylor, the Republican, hammered the commission’s decision to ban the second-home owners, and criticized the county budget as bloated and misdirected. Throughout the campaign, he noted that he had personally gone through all of the county budget. “We’ve got to evaluate skill sets,” he said. “I’m an accountant, I’m a businessman, I get along with people.”

In the weeks leading up to Election Day, several large GV2H super PAC signs appeared along the highway, urging voters to balance the County Commission and back Vader and Taylor. Several ads appeared in the paper, and a few

local businesses displayed banners. In June, Moran had celebrated a five-figure donation to the super PAC and set the group's fundraising goal at \$3 million. This startling number soon leaked out into the community. No candidate for the Gunnison County Commission had ever spent more than \$30,000 on a campaign. (Moran spent the next several months denying that he had ever said such a thing, but *High Country News* has reviewed a photo of the post in which he sets the \$3 million goal.) In all, the PAC raised \$47,500. By comparison, all four candidates raised approximately \$70,500 combined.

In late October, Moran told me on the phone that, win or lose, he considered the GV2H effort a success. Back in April, the county rescinded its demand that second-home owners leave the county. "We've been successful in voicing our concerns loudly enough that they have been spoken about in virtually every single newspaper article printed since March," he said. "If our goal was to have a say, then we've certainly had some say."

"Even if they both lose," he continued, "I'm still going to be here with a permanent organization expressing how second-home owners feel about policy."

ON NOV. 3, GUNNISON County voters had their say. It was sunny and unseasonably warm. The candidates were out and about. Taylor sat facing the exit to Gunnison's sole polling location with a sign that said "Thank you for voting." He was in a good mood,



loudly greeting passersby by name and telling stories. He used to be so fun, he told me, that he would get invited to the weddings of people he barely knew. Vader was there, too. She had attached a purple campaign sign to her dog, Eli. Two blocks down, Liz Smith and a few supporters stood on a Main Street corner and waved signs.

The results came in quickly that night, and it was not close. Houck and Smith cruised to re-election, with 63% and 60% of votes respectively. Voter turnout in Gunnison County — as in the rest of the country — was huge. According to *The Crested Butte News*, more than 88% of eligible voters submitted ballots.

When the race was called, Houck was in his backyard, where he had spent most of the early weeks of the pandemic. He smiled and hugged his son. "It felt good that the community acknowledged

that what I'm doing is what they asked me to do," he said.

Minutes later, my phone buzzed with a text from Taylor, asking for Smith's number so that he could congratulate her. I asked him for his response: "My motto is 'no complaining — no explaining,'" he wrote back. "That means no excuses. My life will continue to be good and I do value the experience."

The next morning, I drove east of town out to Trudy Vader's property, the last 40 acres that remain of the family ranch. She's living in a mobile home until she builds a house on the property. Vader breeds a few horses, and when I arrived, she was riding one named Tule. "Horse therapy," she said, "I deserve it."

Vader is proud of her campaign. She stuck up for the low-income workers and pushed Houck on affordable housing, she said. She choked up while talking about the limited economic possibilities for younger generations. Eventually, I brought up the super PAC. She acknowledged that her association with the second-home owners — her willingness to take their support and attend the dinner at Moran's house with Gardner — may have hurt her. She does not regret hearing them out, but, in retrospect, she admitted, "I probably wouldn't have gone to the second meeting."

"In my mind, I just went to listen to everybody," she went on. "And I have been everywhere in this county and I have listened to everybody."

At the candidate forum in Powderhorn, a tall man with a ruddy face and a cowboy hat expressed a common sentiment in the Gunnison Valley. He and his wife are ranchers. He said that the migration of people into the valley "needs to happen, no doubt," but he worries that the new arrivals neglect to learn about the people and practices already present. He fears the valley's agricultural sensibility will go the way of the mines. People who buy second homes here made their money elsewhere, he said. "A lot of people come here because they like what they see," he went on, "but

they are here for a little bit, and then they want to change it."

Change is coming to Gunnison County, fed by the post-pandemic movement of people into the area. The details of this change are murky, even as the economic and cultural divisions in the Gunnison Valley remain vivid. Smith, who emphasized mitigating tourism's impacts during the campaign, acknowledged this point. Reflecting on this sense of an evolving community, she quoted Gertrude Stein on the loss of the writer's own childhood home in Oakland, California: "There is no 'there' there." As a county commissioner, Smith described the central question confronting her as: "How can we steward this thoughtfully?"

I asked Arvin Ramgoolam for his thoughts on the Gunnison Valley. Sitting behind his bookstore, he told me that community is about social bonds between people, where mutual dependence upon and responsibility for one's neighbors link individuals in an interlocking series of relationships. One acquires a place in a community as one shares in those relationships of mutual care and accountability. In gambling terms, he said, all his bets are on Crested Butte.

"I don't have anywhere else to go," he said. "I don't have another home. I don't really have another place off the top of my head that I could even think of."

It's community in this sense — a shared life across time and a shared fate in a specific place — that eludes the second-home owners, Ramgoolam said. By virtue of their wealth, their permanent residency stamped elsewhere, they remain removed from the fate and well-being of the people who live full-time in the valley. They can escape in a way that Ramgoolam cannot. There's an entanglement with the fate of his neighbors, he said, that fundamentally is not shared by someone with the opportunity to pick up and leave when troubles come. What happens to Crested Butte, good or bad, happens to him. ☀

"A lot of people come here because they like what they see, but they are here for a little bit and then they want to change it."

Arvin Ramgoolam at his Crested Butte bookstore (top).

DID YOU KNOW?

Gray wolves aren't always gray.



A gray wolf's coat can be many shades of gray, brown, rusty red, white or black. Black wolves are found almost exclusively in North America.

Around 7,000 years ago, dogs accompanied humans migrating from Asia. Early dogs bred with wolves in the Yukon, introducing a gene for black fur.

In Idaho, black wolves are common. Around half the wolves living in Yellowstone are black, while black wolves are much less common in the Great Lakes region.

LEARN MORE on our blog at:

LivingWithWolves.org

ENCOURAGING COEXISTENCE

Notice to our Advertisers —

You can place classified ads with our online classified system. Visit hcn.org/classifieds. Feb. 1 is the deadline to place your print ad in the February 2021 issue. Call 800-311-5852, or email laurad@hcn.org for help or information.

Advertising Policy — We accept advertising because it helps pay the costs of publishing a high-quality, full-color magazine, where topics are well-researched and reported in an in-depth manner. The percentage of the magazine's income that is derived from advertising is modest, and the number of advertising pages will not exceed one-third of our printed pages annually.

Business Opportunities

Conservationist? Irrigable land?

Stellar seed-saving NGO is available to serious partner. Package must include financial support. Details: <http://seeds.ojaidigital.net>.

Employment

Executive Director — Powder River Basin Resource Council, a progressive nonprofit conservation organization based in Sheridan, Wyo., seeks an Executive Director, preferably with grassroots organizing experience, excellent communication and financial management skills, and the ability to problem-solve complex, environmental and sociopolitical issues. To see a full job description and learn how to apply, go to our website at: <https://www.powderriverbasin.org/prbrc-job-opportunities/>.



Executive Director — Eastern Nevada Landscape Coalition, based in Ely, Nev., is looking for a new Executive Director to replace the longtime Executive Director, who is retiring at the end of the year. ENLC is a 501(c)(3). For the full position announcement, go to the website. 775-289-7974. enlc@sbcglobal.net. www.envlc.org.

Community Organizer —

Organize with Northern Plains Resource Council to protect Montana's water quality, family farms and ranches, and unique quality of life. Starts at \$35,500. Apply now: northernplains.org/careers.

Merchandise

Western Native Seed — Specializing in native seeds and seed mixes for Western states. 719-942-3935. www.westernnativeseed.com.

Professional Services

Expert Land Steward — Available now for site conservator, property manager. View résumé at <http://skills.ojaidigital.net>.

Steve Harris, Experienced Public Lands/Environmental Attorney Comment letters, administrative appeals. Federal and state litigation. FOIA. 719-471-7958. tinyurl.com/y5eu2t6q

OliverBranch Consulting — Nonprofit management professional specializing in transitional leadership, strategic collaborations, communications and grant management/writing. 775-224-0179.



Lisa Mackey Photography — Fine Art Giclée Printing. Photo papers, fine art papers, canvas. Widths up to 44 inches. Art printing by an artist. 970-247-3004. www.lisamackeyphoto.com.



Publications & Books

Chuck Burr's Culturequake.com

Change will happen when we see a new way of living. Thinking to save the world.

Copper Stain — Tales from scores of ex-employees unearth the human costs of an economy that runs on copper. <https://www.oupres.com/books/15051942/copper-stain>.

Ellie Says It's Safe! A Guide Dog's Journey Through Life by Don Hagedorn. A story of how the lives of the visually impaired are improved through the love and courage of guide dogs. Available on Amazon.

Real Estate For Rent

Coming to Tucson? — Popular vacation house, furnished, two-bed, one-bath, yard, dog-friendly. Lee: cloler@cox.net. 520-791-9246.

Real Estate for Sale

Lender-owned fix-and-flip — Two houses on 37-plus acres. Gated subdivision, Penrose, Colo. \$400,000. Possible lender financing. Bob Kunkler Brokers Welcome. 720-288-5258. bob.kunkler20@gmail.com. www.penroseproperty.info.

Great views, small footprint, Arizona — Close to town but with a secluded feel, this eco-friendly home includes solar panels, a graywater reuse system, tankless hot water, solar tubes, and rainwater harvesting to minimize your impact as you enjoy gorgeous

mountain views, wildlife viewing and privacy created by low-maintenance native landscaping. 520-204-5667. bob.prigmore@russlyon.com.

The Crazy Mountain Inn in Montana offers 11 guest rooms with restaurant in a town-center building on seven city lots. Contact j.maslanik@murphy-business.com for more info and a virtual tour.



Tours and Travel

Canyonlands Field Institute — Colorado Plateau natural and human history field seminars. Lodge, river, hiking options. Small groups, guest experts. cfimoab.org. 800-860-5262.

Universities & Schools

HCNU Classroom Program — Help your students unravel the complex issues facing the Western U.S. with this important, FREE resource. Participants in this program receive:

- Free access to HCN's entire website, including breaking news and insights on how COVID-19 is affecting the West.
- Fifty years of online archives.
- An email sent to you, the instructor, on the first of each month with a link to a PDF version of our print magazine for sharing and planning purposes (12 issues a year).
- Access to our librarian for curated stories on specific topics.
- To register, visit www.hcn.org/edu.



GET THE WORD OUT AROUND THE WEST

in these focused advertising
marketplaces:

March 2021

In Search of the West – Travel
Expeditions & Journeys

June 2021

Green Living
Sustainable energy, off-the-grid & grow-your-own

August 2021

Education & Enlightenment
Degrees, certificates & workshops

September 2021

Reading the West
Books, publications, podcasts & blogs

November 2021

The Gear Gift Guide
Clothing, gear, accessories & tech

Reserve at hcn.org/advertising/reserve
or contact laurad@hcn.org.

High Country News

Luna Anna Archey / HCN

Rodeo Is Not Ranching



“Rodeos are legalized animal cruelty ...”
Christopher Berry, ESQ · Senior Staff Attorney, Animal Legal Defense Fund

“If it gets to the point where people think rodeo is inhumane or cruel, they quit coming, and then we’re out of business.”
Tom Hirsig, CEO, Cheyenne Frontier Days Rodeo (July 27, 2018, Wyoming Tribune Eagle)

Watch the prize-winning documentary
Bucking Tradition
www.buckingtradition.com

Info: ACTION FOR ANIMALS, P.O. Box 20184, Oakland, CA 94620; email – afa@mcn.org
www.actionforanimals-oakland.com



**ORGANIC
ANCIENT
GRAINS**

Bluebird
Grain Farms

FROM OUR PLOW TO YOUR PLATE
WHOLE GRAINS. FRESH MILLED FLOURS & DRY PRODUCT BLENDS

LOCATED IN THE METHOW VALLEY, WASHINGTON | 509.996.3526
BLUEBIRDBIRDGRAINFARMS.COM

USDA
ORGANIC



Lauren Crow / HCN

Q&A

AFTER HER MOTHER DIED, Danielle Geller defaulted to what she knew. Tucked away in her Boston apartment, she spent entire days writing about her life — her earliest memories of her mother, sister and father; her childhood and the grandmother who raised her — everything leading up to her mother's final days in a Florida hospital.

Geller wrote 80,000 words, but remained unsatisfied. She still had unresolved questions about her mother. "My mother lived entire lives apart from mine," Geller noted.

So Geller, a trained archivist, assembled her mother's belongings, labeling, dating and describing every photograph, diary and letter.

With this as a starting point,

From boxes of memorabilia, sifting out a life

In her debut memoir, Danielle Geller researches her elusive mother — and the meaning of family.

BY JESSICA DOUGLAS

Geller sought to understand her mother's many lives. It wasn't easy. Both of Geller's parents struggled with substance abuse; her white father was emotionally abusive, and she witnessed him

physically abusing her mother and sister. Geller was tempted, she writes, "to erase the questions and unknowns from my mother's life — to simplify the arrangement — but what kind of archivist would I be?"

She persisted in seeking answers. The result is an honest and powerful meditation on negotiating loss, identity and family.

High Country News recently spoke with Geller about the blessings and burdens of family, reconnecting with relatives on the Navajo Nation and resolving messy stories. This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

How would you describe *Dog Flowers*?

When I first started writing, I would say, "I'm writing a book about my mom." But it's less of a book about my mom, and more about confronting family history — the history that is spoken, and the history that you find under a rock somewhere.

It's for people who are really in

it with their families, who are struggling with familial expectations, and are in close relationships with people who have substance abuse issues and are constantly pushing boundaries.

Your mother's boyfriend told you that she used to call muddy paw prints "dog flowers." Why did you use this as the title for your book?

The image of "dog flowers" came from the trip I took to see my mother when she was in the hospital. At the time, all she owned was at her boyfriend's, and he told me I could go through everything. He was showing me around their place, and he took me to the backyard to see their garden. She had told me about it on the phone, so I was excited to see it. His roommate's dog was out there digging around in the dirt, and as we walked back inside, he pointed to the muddy paw prints leading indoors and said, "She used to call those 'dog flowers.'" Those words kept echoing in my head as I went back to the hospital, back to Boston, and then sat down to write. My mother always looked for the beauty in the world around her, and I try to carry that with me.

Because your mother's visits were infrequent during your childhood, you didn't have a lot of information about her life and her feelings about you or your sister. How did you use your expertise as an archivist to fill in the gaps?

When I first received all my mother's things, I didn't really know how to handle the situation. I defaulted to, "I'm just going to arrange all of this stuff into these boxes, I'm going to label the folders, and I'm going to try to make sense of these objects." I knew some of the facts, but there's a lot of interpretive work that goes into filling in the blanks.

What I went back to do was, "Here's what I remember. Can I find that memory or that event in my mother's diary entries, in her little appointment books or the

letters that she sent to and received from her family? How can I fill in the gaps?"

When I was 5, my grandma adopted me. After my step-grandpa, Don, passed away, my grandma decided to move us to Pennsylvania. But I didn't remember what happened with my mom. I didn't really remember a goodbye. So I went to her diaries to try and figure out, "What did she say about it?"

All I found was two entries. The first was a week before we left: "Grandma and girls stopped by to say they're leaving to Pennsylvania." The second entry was a week later: "They're gone." I was trying to fill in how she felt about it. Did she not want us to go? What was she feeling? And then I'm reading into the lack of information and what I feel like that could mean.

Dog Flowers includes photographs, letters and diary entries — memorabilia from your mother. How did you go about embodying these in the book?

When I incorporate my mother's archive, it's not just placing a photograph on the page. It's not having scans of letters or diary entries stripped of any context, because I don't think a reader is fully able to engage with what I am looking at when I am seeing those documents.

My description of the objects differs from the archival description because it's much more personal. I have my own memories, and what I was trying to do was record everything that I could about it, pointing to the places where I was surprised, or where my experience and my mother's experiences resonated.

Are there any particular passages in *Dog Flowers* that you are most proud of?

There is a passage on this idea of "ghost sickness," that, when I first wrote it, I was like, this is it — this is key to how I am thinking about my relationship with my mother's belongings, with this history and her death. What I say in that section is that I'm not writing

about grief, I'm not writing about losing my mother or those feelings of grief, because I don't think this book really offers you a path through that.

Instead, I'm writing about (how) I feel possessed. I feel haunted by her life as much as her death, and the things that I wanted from that relationship that I didn't get. I felt most proud when I emerged from the writing of that passage, because I was articulating early on what I was setting out to do.

When you returned to the Navajo Nation and your mother's family, what surprised you?

I tried not to have many expectations of flying back to the reservation and meeting my mother's family for the first time. I was surprised by how strong the feelings I had for my cousins and aunts were — that I felt such a familial connection, and how that connection has lasted, even though I don't live close to them anymore.

How do you define family?

I grew up with a definition of the American family that was more like the definition of a cult. I grew up with the idea that your family will always be there for you, and you always need to be there for them, (and) those bonds aren't severable.

Those were all harmful ideas for me growing up, because I really believed them. I carried these ideas with me for a long time, and they put me in a situation that felt inescapable. I gave more than I was given. The abuse I experienced wasn't justification to sever those relationships. I was expected to forgive, forget and move on. So it's difficult for me now to redefine family.

Two winters ago, I attended a weaving class with Barbara Teller Ornelas and Lynda Teller Pete at the Heard Museum (in Phoenix, Arizona). It was a master class for Indigenous weavers, though I was much closer to a beginner

than a master! (Hearing) the laughter in that room, I had this intense feeling of people knew where I came from. They knew what my experiences were, and it felt so comfortable. I think that experience is the closest that I conceive of what family should feel like.

Do you feel *Dog Flowers* reaches a resolution?

I really struggled to find the ending. When Heid Erdrich blurbed my book, she said it "refuses to deal in the tropes of redemption and reconciliation," and I think that captures a truth about the way I have found to write about my family.

Reconciliation requires mutual understanding. It requires two people making their views compatible with one another's. But I will never have that opportunity for reconciliation with my mother. I will never have the validation I am looking for from her.

(But) my relationship with my sister is ongoing, and it's still developing, and that really became one of the most important threads to me in the book.

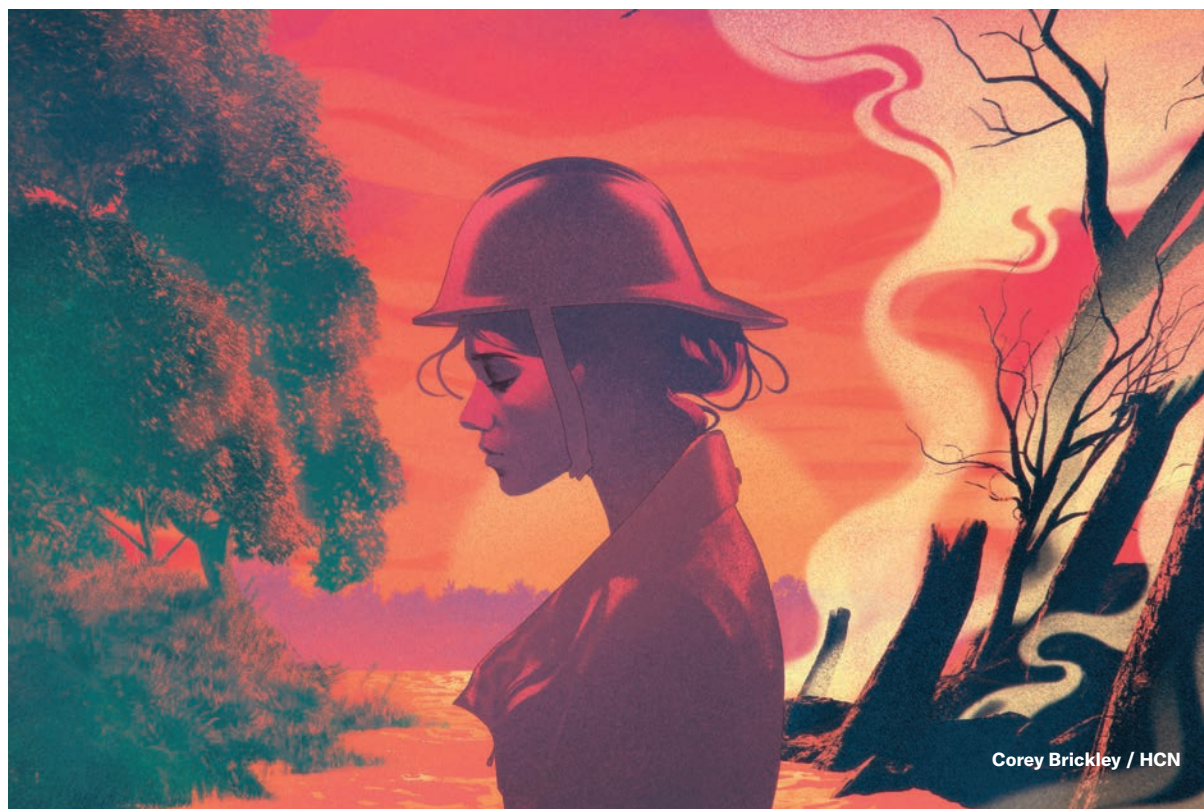
Growing up, the way my sister and I understood the world and our experiences were so different. And it's not as easy as sitting down and having one conversation where we try to hash out the "facts" of our memories, because those "facts" don't exist.

Resolution requires some kind of firm action or decision of some kind. I alone can't resolve to have a better relationship with my sister and expect that to happen. She could decide tomorrow that her life is better without me in it, and I would have to find a way to accept that reality. So a book, which is a very solitary thing, can only reflect my openness to that possibility. I think my book reaches not for an ending, but for a new beginning. ☀

A space to heal

A wildland firefighter finds solace in an unexpected place.

BY KIMBERLY MYRA MITCHELL



I WRITE THIS ON OCT. 25, as another fire-weather watch is declared over Northern California. I can hear the wind screaming past the windows, straining the trees. I know from experience that this wind can make a spark rip through dried grass and brush in an instant. Every time a gust picks up, I feel a knot tighten in my gut.

Westerners try to control fire with chainsaws, fire retardant, bulldozers, and the sweat and blood of wildland firefighters. But in conditions like these, I am reminded of our helplessness against fire's powerful indifference.

For half a century, land-management agencies adhered to the "10 o'clock rule," a requirement that all wildfires be extinguished by 10 a.m. the following day. Now, land managers know that wildfire is a natural part of the West. Good fires prevent bad ones; small-scale burns thin out excess vegetation and dead trees, thereby helping prevent large, destructive megafires. This year, however, our efforts feel insufficient.

In college, I spent the school year learning about wildlife biology and the summers fighting wildfire. The choice to work in the wilderness was clear. My dad taught me to love the

outdoors. My earliest memories are of the snow in the Sierras. At 3 years old, I lay on my back making snow angels, staring up at the pines in wonder. The trees loomed against the gray winter sky, impossibly high and imposing. Even then, I recognized their otherworldly beauty.

My dad was the first to show me the magic of the forest, the majesty of rivers and lakes, the quiet beauty of the desert. When he died, I was a teenager. Those trips to the mountains ended, and for a time, so did my experience of nature.

I was working my first fire season when I read *The Big Burn* by Timothy Egan, which chronicles the story of the U.S. Forest Service. I learned about the history of America's public lands while sitting within their legacy — how Gifford Pinchot and Teddy Roosevelt fought tooth and nail to protect America's wild places from privatization, at a time when there was little concept of conservation.

As a racially mixed kid from the Los Angeles suburbs, many times I was acutely aware of my difference, working on wildland fire crews where most of my co-workers were white men from rural backgrounds. I recognized the exclusionary

nature of Western conservation, even as I studied its heroes. On the surface, I couldn't have less in common with Roosevelt or Pinchot. But I identified with their love of nature, their desire to protect it, and, most of all, how nature served as a balm to their grief.

Both Pinchot and Roosevelt suffered unimaginable losses. Both immersed themselves in wilderness looking for an answer to their grief. Roosevelt lost his wife, and then his mother, within the space of a day. Pinchot's fiancée died young of tuberculosis, and yet he continued to write to his love many years after her death. When he felt her presence, he would record a "clear day" in his journal.

I felt a kinship with their loss; my father's death shaped my adolescence. I, too, ran to the forest seeking a spiritual reckoning. I heard my own answer during my first fire season, and I continue to hear it to this day.

Three years ago, my crew was assigned to a small lightning fire by a lake in Northern California. The burn went through a rocky slope, scorching the ponderosa canopy above. The fire was already extinguished, so our job was to mop up

any remaining hot spots. We went over every inch of its interior, turning over dirt, spraying water with backpack pumps between rock crevices. At the end of the day, I made my way down the slope, exhausted, my legs aching.

The burned rocky slope bordered a stream that flowed into the lake. A small wooden bridge went across the stream, connecting the trail to the opposite side. The land on one side of it was burned by fire, but the other side was untouched.

I crossed the bridge to a lush green forest. Broadleaf trees hung overhead in a dense canopy. Grass formed a thick carpet under my feet. The wet ground sank under my boots, still dusty with ash. Turning back, I sat on the bridge. The setting sun shone down on the lake, reflecting across the water.

At that moment, I thought of my dad. I felt his overwhelming presence. The one thought that surpassed all others was, "It's all right now." I heard a clear answer to my grief and despair, an answer I can hear even now, in this time of uncertainty. I felt a sense of peace in that beautiful place on the water, on a bridge balanced between life and destruction. ☀

Resistance on the gridiron

In a Wyoming wartime internment camp, Japanese American high school students find release in football.

BY REID SINGER

MOST BOOKS ABOUT WAR center on heroes. By choosing a few actors and following their progress, a writer can briefly untangle the decisions that drove the course of events, bringing clarity and purpose to what might have been a senseless trauma. This approach gives tangible freedom and agency to ordinary people who might not have been in charge. It is an innately satisfying way to talk about history, and remarkably similar to the way we talk about sports. Who gets to be the hero, though, remains an open question. In *The Eagles of Heart Mountain: A True Story of Football, Incarceration, and Resistance in World War II America*, journalist Bradford Pearson turns that lens on a group under persecution.

Between 1942 and 1946, the United States War Department imprisoned over 110,000 Americans of Japanese descent under Executive Order 9066, signed by Franklin Roosevelt. Men, women and children were forced to live in “relocation” camps around the Western U.S.; but, despite this trauma, they didn’t necessarily lose all meaningful control over their own lives. By focusing on an obscure but dramatic aspect of one camp, Pearson crafts a rich and dignified portrayal of the incarcerated Americans, the kind many victims rarely receive. We find that while their rights were erased, their humanity was not.

At Heart Mountain War Relocation Center, near Cody, Wyoming, the camp’s high school had a football team, nicknamed the Eagles. And they were really, really good. From newspaper clippings and interviews with surviving family members, Pearson is able to describe practically every pass and run the team made. He is a knowledgeable fan of the game, and his nuanced and occasionally thrilling account allows readers to see the Eagles’ success as a genuine source of hope and strength for other prisoners.

Two star players, Tamotsu “Babe” Nomura and George “Horse” Yoshinaga, first met at a race-track-turned-holding station near Los Angeles. The Nomuras were forced to leave a boardinghouse in Hollywood, while the Yoshinagas had to sell their strawberry farm near San Jose. Their families spent months waiting amid the stables with no idea of their fate, but eventually, they were packed into a train and sent to Wyoming, where they traded the odors of horseshit and hay for dusty air and punishing weather. Like many prisons, Heart Mountain was chosen in part for its remote location and inhospitable terrain. Wintertime temperatures could drop to minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit.

The Eagles played for a school built from converted barracks and heated by coal stoves. Their pads were made from cardboard, and

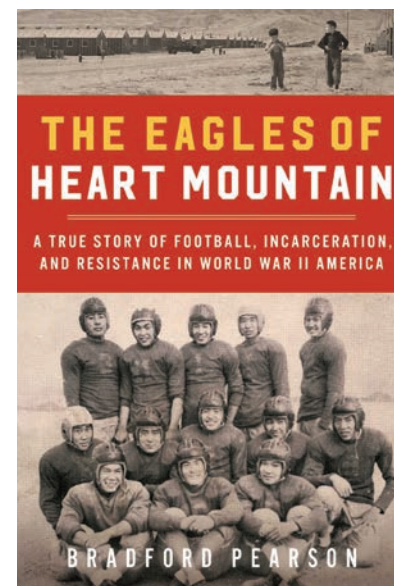
their jerseys drooped loosely over their lean frames. After a coach from nearby Cody High School conducted tryouts and scheduled games against mostly white squads from around the Bighorn Basin, the team had only 13 days to practice before the season began. Few of the boys had previous football experience, but Yoshinaga and Nomura explained the finer details of the game. The players quickly learned to transform their opponents’ fumbles and bottlenecks into breakaways.

“Replace all the bad with all the good, and for those seconds he can be just a boy doing what he loves most,” Pearson writes, describing one of Nomura’s decisive end zone sprints. “Gone from that field, gone from camp, gone from Wyoming.”

The players managed to accomplish this at a time when Japanese immigrants (*isei*) and their American-born children (*nisei*) were being treated like enemy combatants. As Pearson points out, Asian arrivals in America had endured hostility and distrust for centuries before Pearl Harbor and Executive Order 9066. After the camps were occupied, the government handed residents a “questionnaire” to assess their patriotism, and when 434 people from Heart Mountain objected or refused to fill it out, they were sent to an even more appalling facility in Northern California. Given the entrenched

racism of Gen. John L. Dewitt, Col. Karl Bendetsen and the other War Department authorities who approved of the camps, it can be hard to imagine anyone living in them experiencing a moment of contentment, let alone joy. And yet football, gardening, kabuki and other forms of social life flourished.

In an approach that’s common in books about armed conflict, and practically unavoidable in books about sports, Pearson depicts the Eagles as a crew of scrappy entrepreneurs, making the most of what they had. He renders people who are too often flattened by history into full human beings, and the reversal can feel exhilarating — even as it avoids confronting the perpetrators’ enduring power. Most of the people brought to Heart Mountain stayed there until the war ended, and many died before they could be interviewed. Meanwhile, Col. Bendetsen, who defended Executive Order 9066 for decades, enjoyed a long career as a corporate executive before retiring in 1973. In 1989, at Arlington Cemetery, he was buried as a hero. ☀



The Eagles of Heart Mountain: A True Story of Football, Incarceration, and Resistance in World War II America

Bradford Pearson
400 pages, hardcover: \$28
Atria, 2021.

Heard Around the West

Tips about Western oddities are appreciated and often shared in this column. Write betsym@hcn.org.

BY BETSY MARSTON

MONTANA

When you're called out for smearing Vice President-elect Kamala Harris on social media as a "hoe," you ought to apologize. But after Montana Rep. Kerry White, R, an advisor to Montana Republican Gov.-elect Greg Gianforte, called Joe Biden and Kamala Harris "Joe and hoe," he tried to paint himself as the victim, according to the *Great Falls Tribune*: "So much hate that someone actually photoshopped an inappropriate post ... and claimed I was the person who posted it. Don't know who this person is or their motivation but I will pray for them." Later, he claimed he was "misinterpreted": "Hoe," he insisted, was merely shorthand for "someone who had dug in or become entrenched." White concluded with a classic non-apology apology: "If that offended anybody, I am sorry."

WYOMING

Over Thanksgiving, we learned about a turkey's stubborn will to live. Wishbone, a giant, 47-pound turkey in Teton County, Wyoming, was caught in a blizzard and buried under four feet of snow. "We really thought maybe the coyotes got him because we looked everywhere, couldn't find him," rancher Laurie Ward said. Five days later, Ward's grandson, Chase, heard noise coming from under a bank of snow near the turkey pen. Chase investigated and witnessed a "miracle": "Boom! His head popped out right from the hole." Wishbone was alive and well, reported *Billings Q2 News*, though slimmer than before. There's more good news: Chase's grandmother decided "after all that trauma, we can't eat him now."



Armando Veve / HCN

MONTANA

Two women "caught" two years ago speaking Spanish in northern Montana recently won an undisclosed cash settlement from the federal government. Ana Suda and Martha "Mimi" Hernandez said that a Border Patrol agent violated their constitutional rights by detaining them for almost an hour outside a store in the small town of Havre. When Suda, who videotaped part of the encounter, asked Paul O'Neil, a U.S. Customs and Border Protection agent, why, he replied: "Ma'am, the reason I asked you for your ID is because I came in here and I saw that you guys are speaking Spanish, which is unheard of up here." According to the Associated Press, the women were represented by the American Civil Liberties Union. They sued, Suda explained, because they needed to "stand up to the government, because speaking Spanish is not a reason to be racially profiled and harassed. ... I

am proud to be bilingual. ... No one else should ever have to go through this again." Unfortunately, backlash over the lawsuit has forced the two women to leave town, according to *Time* magazine.

WYOMING

The Cowboy State is basically just a large rectangle with a small population, but it does exist, right? Not according to the online forum Reddit, where r/Wyomingdoes-notexist has 24,000 members — almost twice as many as the subreddit dedicated to the actual state, reports the *Jackson Hole News & Guide*. One entry in the online *Urban Dictionary* even claims that if people try to drive into Wyoming, they "will find themselves mysteriously transported to Canada, confused and sans clothing." Site moderator Wyatt Brisbane, 21, said the theory sprang from an "epiphany" he had in high school, about

a big state with very few human inhabitants — "Wyoming, lowest in population last in the alphabet, lowest of all the lists. ... It's not real, it's all a big conspiracy."

OREGON

Before we forget 2020, we need to pause to remember the November day in 1970, when a rotting, 45-foot-long beached whale was dynamited on the Oregon coast near the town of Florence. The legendary fail was preserved, thanks to on-the-scene KATU TV reporter Paul Linnman (<https://katu.com/news/local/the-exploding-whale-50th-anniversary-of-legendary-oregon-event>). It's worth watching to see how good intentions can result in blobs of blubber spewing from the sky. Before the blast, Linnman interviewed a Transportation Department worker, who assured viewers that the half-ton of dynamite would "disintegrate" the decomposing whale, while squads of seagulls would gobble up the smaller bits. "I'm confident that it will work," he said. Instead, the boom was followed by an astonishing amount of large airborne clumps and 100 observers running for cover. Linnman clearly relished the aftermath, calling "landlubber newsmen landblubber newsmen," and marveling that the explosion "blasted blubber beyond all believable bounds." In honor of the occasion, Florence has named its new park "Exploding Whale Memorial Park." Columnist Dave Barry, interviewed on the 50th anniversary, called it "the most wonderful event in the history of the universe," adding, "It's a tribute to what humans can accomplish when they have a dead whale and a lot of dynamite." ☀



Colorado Beyond Organics

Beyond Organic Spagyric CBD

What makes a great CBD product?

It all starts with the soil. Colorado Beyond Organics farms' 50-year, pesticide-free soil, ensures our plants are 100% pesticide-free, and our soil is alive with beneficial microorganisms.

The unique micro-climates of the North Fork Valley of Colorado help enhance the terpene and CBD profile of our hemp. All of our farms are located in the epicenter of organic farming in Colorado - we like to call it the Napa Valley of Hemp. Founder, DJ Petz, has been growing hemp for 10 years and has mastered the art of growing without the use of chemicals. No pesticides, herbicides or flower enhancers. Every Colorado Beyond Organics product is made with our beyond organic hemp, giving you the pure, clean Spagyric CBD you are looking for.

To learn more about our farms visit
ColoradoBeyondOrganics.com/Beyond

To save 25% off CBD Products
use coupon code BeyondOrganic at check out.



Same Great CBD Different Name!

HCN

119 Grand Avenue
PO Box 1090
Paonia, CO 81428

U.S. \$5 | Canada \$6

#IAM THE WEST

HELEN LEUNG

**Community activist, LA Más
Los Angeles, California**

I am a child of Chinese immigrants who met in California, and I grew up in the Elysian Valley, nicknamed “Frogtown,” which, in the ’80s, was a primarily Latino and Asian working-class neighborhood. I left to go to college on the East Coast and worked in D.C. After nearly a decade away, I wanted to be doing work that directly connected with real people in my community back home. Today, my work can be described as undoing our society’s systems of white supremacy that favor the very individualistic and seldom encourage community. My hope is that if you create safe spaces to think about “we” and to move beyond survival and “I” — so much could happen. It’s very special for me to be back, closer to home. Every day I’m thinking about how we reorient the system so that it works better for working-class people of color — like my parents, my Frogtown community.

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

Follow us [f](#) [@](#) [t](#) @highcountrynews #iamthewest hcn.org



Stella Kallim / HCN